

## Group's High-Powered Hits Come Out Of The Cult Closet Was (Not Was) Could Be (Are) Pop Stars

BY CHRIS MORRIS

LOS ANGELES "If someone in 1980 could have foreseen a day when a guy like Tone Loc would sell 2 million albums talking over a groove, they would have seen that Was (Not Was) could have been a pop band," says Don Fagenson, half of the writing/playing/producing team that formed Was (Not Was) nearly a decade ago.

It appears that public tastes are finally catching up with Was (Not Was). The group, which recorded such eccentric cult dance favorites as "Wheel Me Out" and "Out Come The Freaks" for the Island-distributed Ze label in 1980, has finally notched a pop hit in '89 with its Geffen Records album, "What Up, Dog?"

The album, a bracing amalgam of jazz, dance, and pop influences, is in

the top 100 on Billboard's Top Pop Albums chart this week and is still climbing after nearly six months in release. The critically acclaimed LP—the band's third—has spawned a second popular single, the dance-oriented "Walk The Dinosaur," currently in the top 30 on Billboard's Hot 100. The single is also a club favorite, and the video is in heavy rotation on MTV.

The band's current pop sizzle is a sign of changing times, Fagenson says: "People didn't see dance records [as pop hits]—it was a pigeonholed, esoteric corner. It happened to be where the real excitement was in 1980."

But Fagenson also admits that the group's own outlook on their music may have forestalled their progress.

"We were probably our own worst enemies, in terms of defying being a pop band," he says. "If we'd just

stayed with our original impulse, we probably would have been successful sooner."

Adds David Weiss, Fagenson's partner in Was (Not Was) and a friend since their boyhood in Detroit: "However, it's not as if you operate in this weightless aesthetic environment. Who was to know that we'd go to the head of the class—to a Geffen Records—before we'd learned how to spell a word."

Geffen issued the group's second album, "Born To Laugh At Tornadoes," in 1983; the record peaked at No. 134 on the Top Pop Albums chart, spending only nine weeks there.

Weiss continues, "We belonged at some label that supported this pan-ethnic dance sensibility. David Geffen, he's a class act, he's used to delivering hits, and that's what he wanted from us, and in a way, we tried hard to adapt. That's what our second album is—trying everything we could possibly do to hit it. While it satisfied our desire to be different and wildly eclectic, it wasn't exactly

(Continued on next page)

### TALENT IN ACTION

NICK CAVE & THE BAD SEEDS  
The Ritz  
New York

IT HAS BEEN ALMOST 10 YEARS since Nick Cave's violent performances with the Birthday Party made the Australian band a punk legend, and what a difference a decade makes. At this sold-out Feb. 10 show, Cave walked onto the stage looking as dapper as Robert Palmer.

Actually, Cave's affinities are more with Johnny Cash or Leonard Cohen. For an encore, he performed Cash's "The Singer," interrogating the audience, "Did you forget this... singer so soon, and did you forget my song?"

If they had, they wouldn't be forgetting them after Cave & Co.'s thrashing that night. The gaunt singer method-acted his dark allegories while pianist/composer Mick Harvey led the five Bad Seeds—including Einstürzende Neubauten's Blixa Bargeld and the Gun Club's Kid Congo Powers on guitars—through arrangements heavy on cascades and crescendoes.

The material covered most of Cave's solo career, including "Tender Prey," his recent Mute/Enigma album. Containing some of his most accessible material to date, the album (aided, no doubt, by his appearance in the Wim Wenders film "Angels Of Desire") has clearly helped Cave expand his audience beyond the death-rock crowd. The diversity of his fans was apparent at the Ritz: Along with the celebrities and young industryites, a group of Hell's Angels sat at one of the balcony's coveted reserved tables.

For his part, Cave seemed to regard his self-transformation with typical irony. He ended the evening

(Continued on page 74)

ALB		BOXSCORE TOP CONCERT GROSSES			
AMUSEMENT BUSINESS®					
ARTIST(S)	Venue	Date(s)	Gross Ticket Price(s)	Attendance Capacity	Promoter
NEIL DIAMOND	Palace of Auburn Hills Mich.	Feb. 1-4	\$1,547,856 \$18.50/\$16.50	84,892 sellout	Ogden Allied Presents Eric Chandler Limited
NEIL DIAMOND	Nassau Veterans Memorial Coliseum Uniondale, N.Y.	Feb. 22-24	\$1,056,294 \$20/\$18.50	52,981 54,000 sellout	Ron Delsener Enterprises
NEIL DIAMOND	Centrum in Worcester Mass.	Feb. 13-15	\$742,826 \$18.50/\$16.50	40,978 sellout	Ogden Allied Presents Eric Chandler Limited
NEIL DIAMOND	The Coliseum, Richfield, Ohio	Jan. 19-20	\$708,537 \$18.50/\$16.50	38,853 sellout	Ogden Allied Presents Eric Chandler Limited
NEIL DIAMOND	Market Square Arena Indianapolis, Ind.	Jan. 26-27	\$632,849 \$18.50/\$16.50	34,939 sellout	Ogden Allied Presents Eric Chandler Limited
NEIL DIAMOND	Civic Arena, Pittsburgh, Pa.	Jan. 29-30	\$619,535 \$18.50/\$16.50	34,250 sellout	Ogden Allied Presents Eric Chandler Limited
NEIL DIAMOND	Hartford Civic Center Hartford, Conn.	Feb. 20-21	\$588,145 \$18.50/\$16.50	32,850 sellout	Arch Angel Concerts
BON JOVI SKID ROW	Dean Smith Center Univ. of North Carolina Chapel Hill	Feb. 19	\$329,360 \$17.50	19,376 sellout	C & C Entertainment
LUTHER VANDROSS KIM COLES	Westbury Music Fair Westbury, N.Y.	Feb. 17-19	\$324,275 \$27.50	13,034 14,310 sellout	Music Fair Prods.
BON JOVI SKID ROW	Rupp Arena, Lexington, Ky.	Feb. 26	\$270,748 \$18.50	14,635 18,000	Sunshine Promotions
BON JOVI SKID ROW	Birmingham-Jefferson Civic Center Birmingham, Ala.	Feb. 14	\$267,545 \$17.50/\$16.50	15,500 sellout	New Era Prods.
CONWAY TWITTY MERLE HAGGARD GEORGE JONES	Patriot Center George Mason Univ. Fairfax, Va.	Feb. 26	\$265,203 \$18.50	14,349 15,000	Jayson Promotions Music Centre Prods.
POISON TESLA	Market Square Arena Indianapolis, Ind.	Feb. 19	\$261,858 \$17.50	16,250 sellout	Sunshine Promotions
BON JOVI SKID ROW	Thompson-Boling Assembly Center Univ. of Tennessee, Knoxville	Feb. 23	\$238,000 \$17.50	13,600 14,672	Sunshine Promotions
PATTI LABELLE DESIREE COLEMAN	Valley Forge Music Fair Devon, Pa.	Feb. 17-18	\$233,643 \$32.50	8,203 8,796 sellout	Music Fair Prods.
POISON TESLA	Charleston Civic Center Charleston, W.Va.	Feb. 24	\$188,496 \$16.50	11,424 13,118	Sunshine Promotions
ENGELBERT HUMPERDINCK WAYNE DOBSON	Fox Theatre St. Louis, Mo.	Feb. 24-26	\$173,846 \$21.90/\$9.90	9,237 12,897	Fox Concerts Steve Litman
NEW EDITION BOBBY BROWN	Mid-South Coliseum, Memphis, Tenn.	Feb. 19	\$167,248 \$17.50	10,116 12,065	Al Haymon Enterprises
UB40 PAGAN BABIES	Neil S. Blaisdell Center Honolulu, Hawaii	Feb. 17	\$133,105 \$17.50	7,606 sellout	Greg Mundy Presents
RATT BRITNEY FOX KIX	Hirsch Memorial Coliseum Louisiana State Fairgrounds, Shreveport	Feb. 25	\$128,433 \$17.50	7,709 8,000	Beaver Prods.
GEORGE STRAIT BAILLIE & THE BOYS	La Biella Real Convention Center McAllen, Texas	Feb. 24-25	\$127,930 \$40/\$30/ \$25/\$20	4,900 sellout	Promotions of America
THE JUDDS RESTLESS HEART HIGHWAY 101	Barton Coliseum Arkansas State Fairgrounds Little Rock	Feb. 26	\$127,908 \$17.50	7,842 8,000	Pro Tours
THE JUDDS HIGHWAY 101 SKIP EWING	The Oil Palace Tyler, Texas	Feb. 24	\$123,480 \$17.50	7,372 7,500	Pro Tours
SAM KINISON THE OUTLAWS OF COMEDY	Nassau Veterans Memorial Coliseum Uniondale, N.Y.	Feb. 15	\$120,250 \$18.50	6,500 8,000	Ron Delsener Enterprises
AMY GRANT MICHAEL W. SMITH GARY CHAPMAN	Sioux Falls Arena S.D.	Feb. 15	\$116,775 \$16.50/\$15/ \$14.50	7,540 sellout	West Central Prods.

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