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SONIC LIFE - A MEMOIR By Thurston Moore - Faber & Faber

The first 150 pages of *Sonic Life* detail Moore's immersion into the underground music scene of New York's late 70s/early 80s. It's some of the best writing about New York music I've ever read.

Moore and his school friend make the drive from their hometown of Bethel, Connecticut into Manhattan to catch gigs at the downtown venues Max's Kansas City and CBGB's. They soak up the punk and post-punk scenes; witnessing gigs by Patti Smith, The Dead Boys, The Heartbreakers, Television, Talking Heads, Ramones and loads more. His description of Alan Vega's antics at a late '76 gig in Max's by Suicide and The Cramps is thrilling: "He walked on top of our table, picked up one of the Long Island girls' drinks and threw it in her face. She sat there with her mouth open, in total shock and disbelief. Alan proceeded to step on the glass, shattering it, and then, picking up a shard, started slowly cutting his chest as he looked wide-eyed around the room." Punters scattered under tables to escape.

As the 70s give way to the 80s he quits college, moves into Manhattan, forms a band and plunges himself headfirst into the emerging No Wave avant-garde scene. These are exciting chapters; Moore's first hand witness accounts are spellbinding. He meets Kim Gordon (whose own *Girl in a Band* is an essential read), and slowly after several stop-starts and different line-ups Sonic Youth - named for Fred "Sonic" Smith and, "attaching youth to it was inspired by my intoxication with reggae and dub music, the word consistently appearing in lyrics" - emerge.

By 1986 Moore gets a call from Black Flag's Gregg Ginn asking if SY would like to release records on SST. This was the stuff of dreams: "for

Sonic Youth to be labelmates of Black Flag, the Minutemen, Meat Puppets, Husker Du, and Saccharine Trust - it was the wish come true without parallel."

Constant gigging ("Mike Watt's dictum rang in my ears: When you're not playin' you're payin'.") bring the band to the attention of major labels. They're wined and dined and have to grapple with the indie vs major moral quandary: "Husker Du and The Replacements had already signed deals with Warner Bros. and Sire, respectively." They ultimately sign with Geffen in late 1989. Shortly before this Moore and Gordon catch a train under the Hudson over to Maxwell's in Hoboken to catch the latest Sub Pop signing: "Kurt's voice, like a swarm of bees buzzing around a hive tucked into the eaves of a suburban garage." The small crowd in attendance are captivated by Nirvana: "Everything I had adored in hardcore was on display that night, fused with a sense of melodiousness I had rarely found in that music."

Two years later Goo is out and Nirvana, with new drummer Dave Grohl, are opening for SY on a European tour: "Standing on the side of the stage that night at Sir Henry's in Cork, I was taken aback anew by the group." We rattle on through the

90s - we get album-tour-album, a new millennium, 9/11, and 5 more albums in the 00s. We know how it's all going to end: the break-up of Moore and Gordon's marriage and the end

of the band. It's a fantastic memoir, a passion for music and popular culture shines through. I'll be shelving *Sonic Life* next to Azerrad's *Our Band Could Be Your Life* and Hermes' *Love Goes to Buildings on Fire* - it's that good.



MY #SONICYOUTH TOP 5



1. Goo (1990)
Still my go to SY album. The band's first for Geffen contains some of their greatest tunes: 'Tunic (Song for Karen)', 'Dirty Boots', 'Kool-Thing' (ft. Chuck D) and 'Mildred Pierce'. Essential.



2. Evol (1986)
Where I came in. In 1990 a friend made me a C90 with *Sister on Side A* and *Evol* on Side B. Contains the single 'Starpower' and the 7-minute incendiary 'Expressway To Yr. Skull'.



3. Daydream Nation (1988)
'Teen Age Riot', 'Silver Rocket', 'Candle' and 'Providence' were all released as singles. Seeing the band perform the album in its entirety at Primavera Sound in 2007 was bucket list stuff.



4. Dirty (1992)
Now the band were reaping the awards of constant touring and big label money. This double album contained a couple of MTV-era hits: '100%', 'Youth Against Fascism' and 'Sugar Kane'.



5. A Thousand Leaves (1998)
The band's tenth album - another 70-minute+ double opus. Harmony Korine directed the video for 'Sunday'. They would release five more albums.