

The music of The Pop Crisis defies being pigeon-holed. This certainly makes a rock critic's job difficult, because it isn't easy to classify a band which does soaring ballads in the same set as frenzied thrash numbers. Guitarist Bruce Thorson calls it 'sludge rock'. Maybe it's post-punk. Maybe it's post-pop. Whatever it is, the many faces of The Pop Crisis are captivating.

Thorson and drummer/vocalist Rob Westbury first made an impression on the local alternative scene as two-thirds of The Colour 9. They changed their name from their original moniker, Room 101, because "about three other bands had that name." The Colour 9 came to be known for a tight live show, featuring tough, musically adept originals, supplemented with some well-chosen covers (including a hardcore remake of the popular hymn, "Make Me a Channel of Your Peace"). The band issued a demo tape, *Painters, Writers, Gypsies — Love*, receiving a lot of airplay from CJSR. The group's swan-song was the recording of "Nails" on the pink-vinyl compilation, *Don't Let the Fruit Rot on the Tree*. The Colour 9 disbanded last Christmas following the departure of bassist Marc Simao, to the mean-spirited cheers of a local rock scribe, but to the chagrin of discriminating fans who recognized the band as one of the best in the city.

At the beginning of 1989, Rob and Bruce got together with rhythm guitarist/vocalist Kelly McPhillaney and bassist Adrienne Thurston, to form The Pop Crisis. It took the band a while to decide on the name. They went virtually nameless for their first few shows, including their debut gig at the Phoenix with two now-defunct bands, Mind the Gap and Cadillac of Worms. One show at Crackerjack's this summer opened with Rob introducing the group as "the opening band." Now they have an official name, unchangeable because "it's on the cassette," the soon-to-be released demo, *She Was Pop*. The band's name, suggested by Bruce, is meant to be "a comment on the idiom." He admits that it is both a critique of pop music in general and a description of its current state.

While the work of Rob and Bruce is well-known in alternative circles, Kelly and Adrienne are newcomers to the scene. Their backgrounds are widely divergent: Kelly's powerful voice comes from years of operatic training, including a stint in the Edmonton Opera Chorus. Adrienne, on the other hand, has some vocal training. But, like Talking Heads bassist Tina Weymouth when she first joined the seminal new-wave group, Thurston has no bass-playing experience ("I took 3 bass lessons," she explains).

The group's material seems to be a bit softer than the Colour 9's. When asked about this, Bruce says jokingly, "Rob and I have got in touch with our feminine side." They point out that the percentage of ballad material has increased only slightly since Colour 9 days.

The Pop Crisis' new demo tape is a good sampling of their sound. The tape has been in production for several months, a long time by local standards. The delay is attributed to "overproduction" and the fact that "we're lazy." Whatever their reasons, the tape is definitely worth the wait. Among its contents are Kelly's trippy psychedelic number, "With No Feeling," as well as the hard-rocking, anthemic "I Fell into My Apartment." The



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latter fits in well with songs like "One Colour Grey" and "Nails," by virtue of its foreboding, doomy quality, which Rob attributes to "teenage angst." He says, "I like to scream, so I write lyrics which are appropriate." Kelly seconds the sentiment, saying "Rob's a screamer."

In addition to their original songs, The Pop Crisis also cover some songs by the Beatles and the Rolling Stones. These may seem conservative choices, but "not the way we do them." Take, for instance, their version of the Beatles' folksy acoustic-guitar tune, "I've Just Seen a Face," which The Pop Crisis revs up to thrashing velocity. Or take their cover of "Sympathy For the Devil": the conga intro in the original is transformed into a riveting percussion workout from Rob and Bruce, who pounds out a samba rhythm on a thunderous floor tom. When the guitars kick in and Kelly's vocals take over, the band takes the menace and the power of the original to a hair-raising new level.

The band hits the road on Saturday, December 16, playing at the Westward in Calgary. Travel should be made interesting by the fact that both Rob and Bruce write 3 p.m. finals that day, thanks to the University's inexplicable policy of scheduling exams on Saturdays.

While some may think The Pop Crisis' mix of ballads and thrash shows a lack of well-defined identity, diversity is in fact one of this band's principal virtues. It's a testament to musical prowess and originality that The Pop Crisis can mix a number of elements into their style. In a world where popular music sounds increasingly pre-packaged and sanitized, the many musical faces of The Pop Crisis show a daring, uncompromising vision.

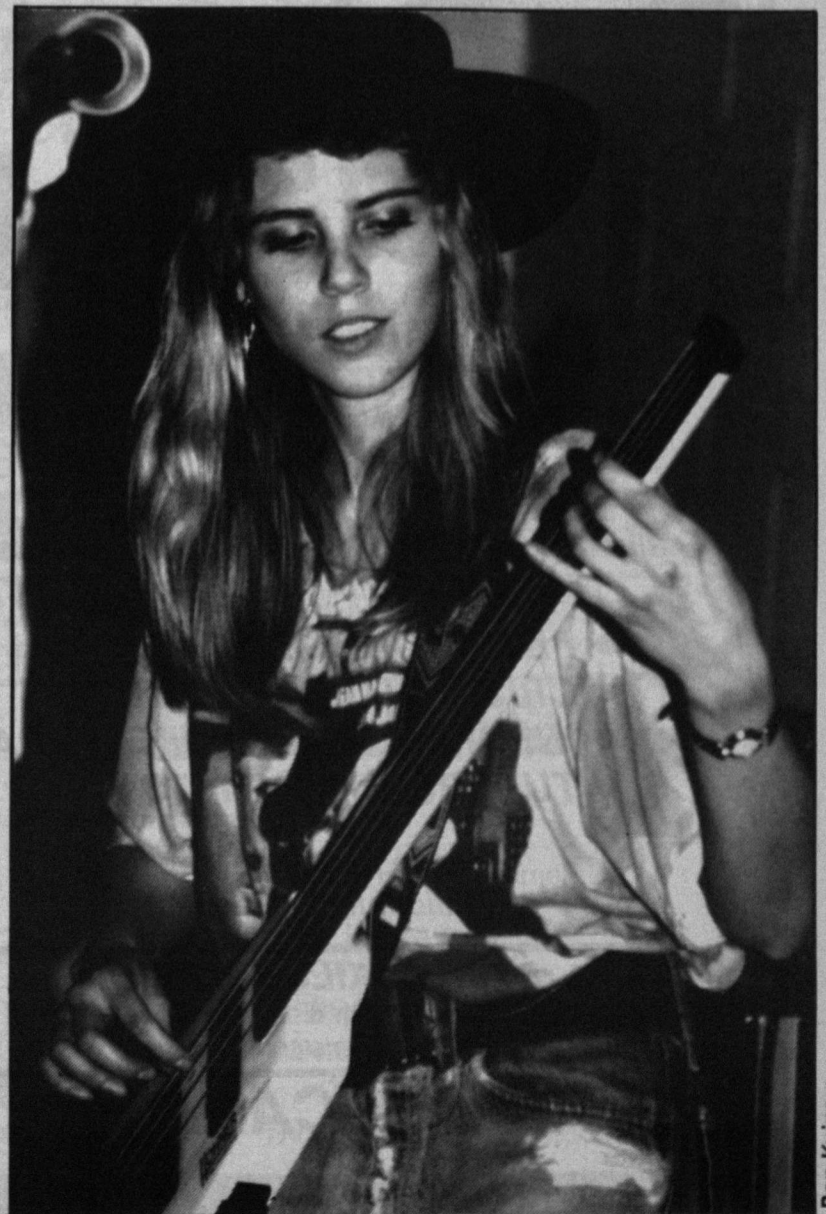
The Many Faces of The Pop Crisis

Interview by Paul Murphy



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The Pop Crisis are (from left to right): Rob Westbury, Adrienne Thurston, Bruce Thorson, and Kelly McPhillaney.



Ron Kuipers