

PAVEMENT'S TWILIGHT

Margaret Schwartz

I'm going to do something really geeky: ask you to put on a song. I know it can be irritating while you're reading but if you happen to have this particular track, I guarantee it'll do a lot more for you than I can. The song is "Major Leagues" by the rock band Pavement. It is track number five on their most recent and now officially last album, *Terror Twilight*.

I've always sort of hated the concept "my generation." It seemed a sloppy synonym for Me, writ hubristically across history. It also seemed most often associated in the popular imagination with the sixties generation. It seems no spectacle is more mediaworthy than an entire nation barefoot and saturated with color, flowers in their hair and stars in their dilated eyes.

But in my freshman year in college, when I sat on the floor of my dorm and listened to Pavement, I was not alone. It could have been anywhere in the post-industrial world, anytime, but that music was playing. And later, when I had a tragic love affair, the kind that is all walking on wet winter streets and looking at your feet, we both loved Pavement. We listened with the kind of reverence that only the very young can sustain, for there was no outside world to distract us.

We talked about whether Pavement lyrics made any sense. He maintained they didn't.

How can I
How can I
How can I
Make my body
Shed around
Your metal
Scars

I sang. "But what does it mean?" He asked. "I love you but I can't," say I.

Have you got that song playing? What I really want to say is much more wistful. It's not enough to say why I love Pavement, but why they connect with a certain time. This innocence, this inwardness, is part of it.

Their music is aching, it is unfinished and tremulous and low slung. The singer is lackadaisical, and his voice is as uncertain as the rest. His rages are drowned in fuzzy distortion, and his long crooning notes break off awkwardly. I can't explain why when I first heard that voice it was the most sensual thing I had yet experienced. But part of it was never having experienced much. I sat up and listened, as though I'd never had ears before.

They made the music and we listened, we bought the CDs as soon as they came out and stopped everything else to listen, just to feel our bodies humming with the sweet sounds they made. We loved that they were unfinished, perhaps because we were unfinished, too.

Stop for a moment, stop reading and listen. There's that softly ringing guitar, the slightly country feel. It's shape is organic, yet what other landscape could this be but ours?

Keep listening to the guitar. Notice there's only a very small solo. It sings a short meandering line then toggles off into the background. A misshapen arc, it misses all the notes the ear expects, it always pulls back right at the edge of full realization.

The sound is intimate, too, like someone whispering in your ear. But the voice is robed in shimmering synthetic. This is not human, this is electricity. These fields are made of Astroturf.

What I mean to say is that if you're in your body you're here, and if you're here, now, you inhabit this moment in history. There are others, other people, and there are other objects. There are less plows nowadays and a lot more picture tubes. Our time seems to embrace all other times and places, from the Bengal tiger on the Discovery Channel to the Gregorian chant on the stereo. Yet it is still our time. Nowadays we have rock music, forty odd years after Jimmy Hendrix introduced the world to the distortion pedal. Now that Pavement has broken up, the moments to come won't play their soundtrack, not in the same way.

Darlin'
We're up against it
And there is no time for
time times times
GO!

Bring on the major leagues

We used to always talk about whether this or that album would be the last. Somehow we got lulled into a false sense of security by this most recent one, and now look what happened. Of course there's the old adage about quitting while you're ahead. I think it almost always applies with rock music.

So it seems, whoever "we" are, we're growing up. The new Steven Malkmus record came out the other day: with this, the singer's professional departure, the breakup is official. On the album cover his hair is longer than we've ever seen it, and more tousled. He stands sunbathed somewhere outside, wearing a tee-shirt with Rocky and Bullwinkle on it. It's funny that a man who once asked whether he was in a rock brigade or cavalry now aspires to be a postrock diva.

Remember this: the consequence otherwise is silence. I loved Pavement because their music traced the thin edge between thought and action. I loved that the notes trembled and broke. Full realization would have placed limits, just as silence would have been sabotage.