

DECIBEL

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[Cockroaches of Hardcore: Top 5 Must-Own Releases](#)

By David Pajo, [Dead Child](#)

In my mind, dropping the following five records as classics is like pointing out that everyone breathes while they are alive. I realize some of my choices are also the most popular of the genre but that's only because they are *fucking awesome*. Some material didn't make the cut. For example, I used to love Scream's *Still Screaming*, but after listening to it again two decades later, I'm sorry to say it doesn't hold up. The records listed below are the "cockroaches of hardcore" and will survive long after nuclear war (as well as any fad genres and dance movements).

Anyone mildly curious about the genre should give these a listen. I've included the year of release so you can see how this style of ferocity clearly predates the sort of tempos and brutality that is customary these days. None of these records reach the speed or mayhem that Napalm Death would achieve later in the decade, and may even seem quaint by today's standards. So keep in mind that all these bands had either broken up or severely tamed their sound by the time *Scum* was released.



Minor Threat, *Out of Step* (1983, Dischord Records)

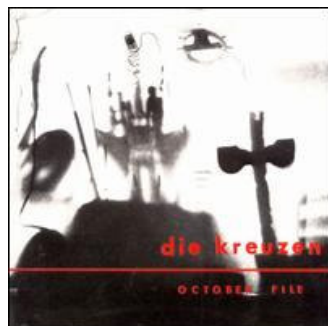
This record was such a huge part of my youth that when I hear those opening chords, even at age 40, my brain immediately starts sending messages to my adrenal glands to secrete enough adrenaline to lift a Hummer from an old lady. Jeff Nelson played a tiny jazz kit, but I still don't know how he managed to make it sound so manic and frenzied. His playing is quite rigid — no cheesy Ulrich affectations here. He just played impossibly hard and fast. His snare arm goes over his head during the thrash beats while his hi-hat arm stays well out of the way. Many drummers keep their range of motion really narrow and close to the snare during the fast parts. There is a term for that style: pussyfootin.' If you're gonna play fast, don't play fast and quiet.

Remember, you can't use drum triggers to give the illusion that you're wacking the fuck out of your drums — in 1983, they weren't even invented yet. Although the Jeff Nelson Beat™ is slower than your average blast beat (and I love me some blast beats), I always found it more compelling due to the volume of attack and the syncopation he would improvise inside the beat. Ian Mackaye's vocals are memorable, preachy and easy to shout along to (which was a big part of any hardcore show back then) but I never cared much for the lyrics or message. I was a skinny, dysfunctional geek and I was all about the music. It was enough to make me shave my head and eyebrows and beat up jocks with a chain I bought at Sears — shouldn't all great music inspire such reactions?



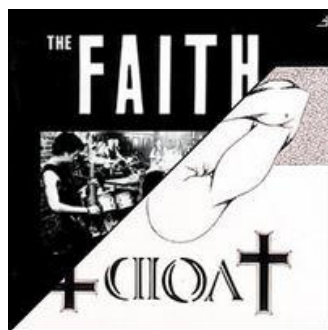
Black Flag, *Damaged* (1981, SST Records)

This record didn't thrash like the others on this list but it's also the oldest record here. Skip the novelty song ("TV Party") and revel in 20 year old Henry Rollins' vomiting delivery of Chuck Dukowski's brilliant lyrics. Ginn gets into some weird "shattered-glass" guitar playing on this album which he takes to the outer limits on 1984's *My War*. Side Wwo is when it really starts kicking in. This could possibly be the most enjoyable record ever made about self-loathing, vandalizing, boredom, getting plastered, cops, suicide, depression, and other good times. Fave line: "I want to live / I wish I was dead"



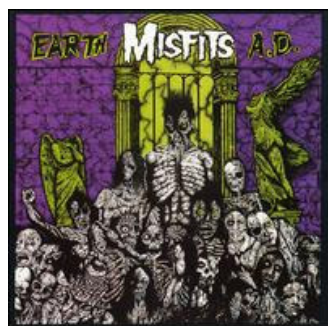
Die Kreuzen, *Die Kreuzen* (1984, Touch and Go Records)

I would go out on a crooked limb and say this is the closest thing to death metal in 1984 — it would be another three years before Possessed would release *Seven Churches*. What else is a spotty teenager going to listen to? Night Ranger? I've never heard a shriek as scary and claustrophobic as Danny Kubinski's on "All White." Additionally, Brian Egeness' asymmetrical, bent guitar technique was probably more of an influence on my playing and writing in Slint than anything else. Gothic, chorus-drenched bass and Bad Brains-like thrash beats (a swinging, double-kick / double-snare gallop) complete the knife edge of Die Kreuzen. FYI: The only way to get this record on CD is to buy Die Kreuzen's *October File*. The album begins at track fifteen with "Rumors." In the early days of CDs, because the space limitations were so much longer than vinyl, it was common to combine albums onto one disc.



Void, *Faith/Void EP* (1982, Dischord Records)

To someone that's never heard this before, one might suspect that Void are Autopsy's older, retarded brother. Ignore the Faith side, drop a copious amount of acid, and take a walk inside the mind of the magnificently insane.



Misfits, *Earth A.D.* (1983, Plan 9 Records)

Surely Bad Brains *Rock For Light* should be on this list but I burnt myself out on that record. It's time to give props to my favorite Misfits full-length. Forget Metallica's cover of "Green Hell" — if you loved Satan in 1983, Venom, Slayer and Misfits were all you had!