

# BURNING AMBULANCE

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Missing Time (Engine Studios)

by Phil Freeman



Back in 1981, **Black Flag** and their label SST got involved in a lawsuit with the distributor Unicorn (owned by MCA) related to the group's album *Damaged*. As a result, the band was barred from the studio for three years. They went through lineup changes, toured relentlessly (something they'd been doing anyway), and wrote a fucking *ton* of music. When they finally got the chance to lay it on tape, in 1984, it emerged in a mad rush: three full studio albums (the half-thrash/half-dirge *My War*, the proto-metallic *Slip It In*, and *Family Man*, which offered one side of instrumentals and one side of spoken-word material by vocalist **Henry Rollins**) and the cassette-only *Live '84*. They kept up the pace the following year, releasing two more studio albums (the grungy *Loose Nut* and the more polished *In My Head*) and an instrumental EP, *The Process of Weeding Out*.

In a way, it's a shame this material didn't emerge over the course of four years rather than two, allowing people who didn't see them live to keep pace with Black Flag's evolution in real time. It made their explosion of punk rock's rules that much more radical, and caused many listeners to viscerally reject this material. But 25 years later, Black Flag's 1984-85 output has been thoroughly absorbed into the rock

lexicon, as the second CD by East Coast power trio **Many Arms** proves.

*Missing Time* is jarring, punishing instrumental rock that's clearly indebted to Black Flag's skronkier, more experimental work. Guitarist **Nick Millevoi** takes **Greg Ginn**'s misshapen, barbed-wire soloing style as a starting point and injects doses of **Derek Bailey**, **Sonny Sharrock** and **Mick Barr** (**Orthrelm**, **Octis**, **Krallice**) for good measure. He's a fierce player who knows his way around a riff and can tie himself, and the listener, in knots with his contorted, passionate soloing. His entrance at just about the halfway mark of "Enfolded Within a Great Flow" is pure Ginn worship, but the rhythm section behind him—bassist **John Deblase** and drummer **Ricardo Lagomasino**—are rumbling through a complex, ever-shifting series of interactions that recalls free jazz and the post-blues throb of **Last Exit** in equal measure.

It's hard to say how much of this is improvised and how much is composed; the band functions as a near-airtight unit, and never seems to be floundering or vamping to buy time. There are no true standout tracks, because there's no filler, but "Enfolded Within a Great Flow" and the album opener, "Bonding," are powerful statements of purpose and displays of ferocious (in the sense that if this music was an animal, it would be coming straight for your face) technique.

Four of the disc's seven tracks are between two and four minutes long, while the other three ("No Valleys," "Enfolded Within a Great Flow" and the closing title track) pass the ten-minute mark. As with all Engine Studios releases, the packaging is minimal, with the disc fastened inside a simple letterpress sleeve printed on recycled cardboard. I suppose the point is that the music should be the primary draw, and Many Arms' music is part jazz, part punk rock, part metal, and 100% viscerally exciting in a way few records in 2010 have been. You can buy one by [clicking here](#), and I recommend doing so.

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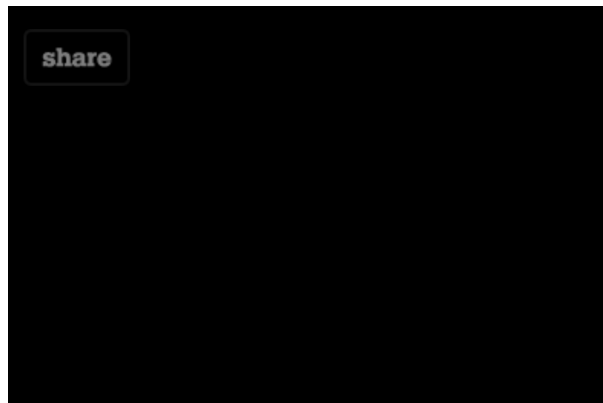
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