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# A DIFFERENT DRUM

## ALTERNATIVE ROCK BLOSSOMS IN SPRINGFIELD

By **TOM ALESIA**  
STAFF WRITER

**M**inutes before midnight, Friday: An all-ages crowd packs Skank Skates, a wood-paneled, storefront rec area with several U-shaped funnels for indoor skateboarding. Tonight, it's a mini-concert venue, with Springfield teens moving to the relentless, exhilarating beat of alternative rock music.

Onstage, Springfield thrash/funk/grunge band NIL8, part of a double bill with St. Louis' Sinister Dane, has delivered enough edgy guitar jams and fiery vocals to make rock pioneer Bill Haley turn over in his grave.

After performing its original material throughout the set, NIL8 tears into a cover of Soft Cell's decade-old, spit-shined, techno-pop hit "Tainted Love." NIL8, pronounced like "annihilate," puts the song in a blender and then pours it out.

During "Tainted Love," a mosh pit forms, with people pushing against each other. A few concertgoers leap safely from the stage into the arms of a dozen fans. The scene seems to border on chaos, but it's decidedly controlled bedlam.

NIL8 singer Jeff Williams, shirtless with lengthy dreadlocks and boxer shorts creeping out of his jeans, prowls the stage. He's in his element, loving the music's power.

"When we first started (in 1986)," Williams said

before the Friday show, "we played fast and raw. We didn't want our distortion to sound like Bon Jovi. Bon Jovi doesn't really challenge anybody. I'd rather challenge people a little bit rather than playing mainstream rock that if you get the right chord progression, you've got a better chance of a hit."

In a nutshell, that's the credo for alternative music — which in itself is "a catch-all (name) for everything," lamented NIL8 drummer Lance Reynolds.

Still, alternative rock is a suitable tag for a growing number of Springfield bands: NIL8, They Came In Doves, Dead Reckoning, Soul Pudding, The Ingrates, The Dark, The Stifs and Aquavelvets.



**Jeff Williams leads NIL8 in an energetic performance at Bruce's Tavern.**

They're getting more local gigs than ever before and releasing a flood of cassettes and CDs.

Small but vital, an alternative rock scene is growing here, amid central Illinois cornfields and a state government workforce that's more apt to have a Kenny G or Eric Clapton CD rather than the debut of Pearl Jam.

Consider this:

■ More than a dozen Springfield nightclubs and bars have booked alternative bands in the last two months.

■ Soul Pudding's repertoire of alternative covers by such groups as Soundgarden, Primus and Fishbone has helped them quickly become one of the city's most popular bands.

■ They Came In Doves released its second album, "Hundred Acre Wood," this week. The band will tour the Midwest for two weeks this month before its record release party at On Broadway June 21.

■ On Memorial Day weekend, the Ingrates and St. Louis' Belinda Chaire attracted large, enthusiastic crowds to shows at three different Springfield venues.

"You've got to tip your hat to some of the bar owners who are taking the chance to let these bands in," said Keefer, WYMG-FM disc jockey and host of the alternative rock show "Vinyl du Jour" at 11 p.m. Sundays.

"They're willing to let local bands and St. Louis and Champaign bands in. You're starting to see a bit of a scene. For the most part, people are willing to go and check out these bands. And the music community here has supported each other. You'll see members of the groups at each other's shows."



At a time when alternative bands Nirvana and Red Hot Chili Peppers rub shoulders on the album charts with Bryan Adams and Mariah Carey, you know the public taste is broadening to different styles of rock. "Lollapalooza '92," a seven-act lineup of alternative bands and a rapper, is expected to be one of this summer's most popular tours.

And MTV's "120 Minutes" show exposes viewers to alternative rock that previously had been the domain of college radio stations.

"It really does seem like there's an audience now," NIL8's Reynolds said. "People come back from college and they've grown up a little bit" in terms of musical tastes.

Regardless, it's unlikely that alternative bands ever will top the popularity enjoyed by other Springfield bar staples who mix originals and cover material.

They Came In Doves, perhaps, best exemplifies a band that's determined to push its original material in hopes of attracting attention from a record company. Although it performs an enticing blend of Cure/U2-like rock, They Came In Doves tries to reach an audience that's willing to listen to unfamiliar tunes.

"We're kinda like this underdog band," said Doves' bassist Mark Finney. "I notice that other bands get bigger crowds than we do. But we're making contacts, traveling everywhere, sending out CDs. We did a musical showcase for some record companies at the Avalon (in Chicago) recently."

"When you play original music, unless you're



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signed (to a record contract), your guarantees are low and you're playing for the door (admission). Money is tight, because we made the decision to put everything back into the band. We'll work part-time jobs to pay bills. We're basically broke, but we paid for our CD, and we don't owe anything."

Brief Midwest tours also help expose They Came In Doves.

In Kalamazoo, Mich., "We came out all fired up and we hit it hard, and everyone sat there (wondering), 'Where are these guys from?' But afterwards, we had a lot of people sign the guest list. In Iowa City, we opened for the Gear Daddies and the crowd flipped out for us."

NIL8 — one of Springfield's first alternative bands (with Backwards Day, now of Chicago) — also has opened for national acts, including a Chicago gig with Faith No More at a sold-out show in the 1,000-person capacity Cabaret Metro three years ago.

A common response for NIL8, whose members range in age from 23 to 29, is the one it received at Skank Skates last Friday. A full mosh pit indicates that the music is connecting with the audience.

"It's good interaction," Williams said, "as long as people keep it in perspective."

## WHO'S WHO

A sampling of Springfield alternative bands:

**NIL8** — Jeff Williams, Bruce Williams, Eric White and Lance Reynolds. Album releases: "Six Inch Extension," 1992; "Mind Evulsion," 1990. Next gig: Bootleggers, June 12.

**THEY CAME IN DROVES** — Ted Bannon, Gary Hawthorne, Mark Finney and Glenn Dillman. Album releases: "Hundred Acre Wood," 1992; "Songs of Songs," 1990. Next gigs: The Mansion, Friday; Marina, Sunday afternoon; Davy Byrnes, Sunday night; and record release party (with Disappear Fear) at On Broadway, June 21.

**SOUL PUDDING** — Howard Freitag, Troy Cunningham, Doug Kirk, Damon Soper and Bobby Bryant. Album releases: none, working on original material. Next gigs: Lake Club II, tonight; Santa Fe Cafe, Friday.

**DEAD RECKONING** — John Conour, John Francis, Tom Jirgal and Richard LaBonte. Album release: "Dead Reckoning," 1991; new album scheduled for fall release. Next gigs: The Mansion, Friday; Marina, Sunday

**THE INGRATES** — Bill Pinney, Rodney Patterson, Mike Prehoda, Greg Patterson. Album release: "Left Out," 1992. Next gig: Davy Byrnes, June 14.

**THE STIFS** — Wade Wilson, Chris Carr, Ted Magos and Bill Jackson. Next gigs: Bruce's Tavern, Wednesday; The Mansion, June 12.

**THE DARK** — David Curry, Wes Phillips, Colin Brewer, Brad Boston and Chris Thomasmeyer. Album release: "Mark of Humanity," 1992.

**AQUAVELVETS** — Matt Dietrich, Dan Dietrich, Joe Patkes and Tim Harte. Album release: Four-song vinyl EP will be out in July. Next gig: Santa Fe Cafe, Wednesday.



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