



MINUTEMEN

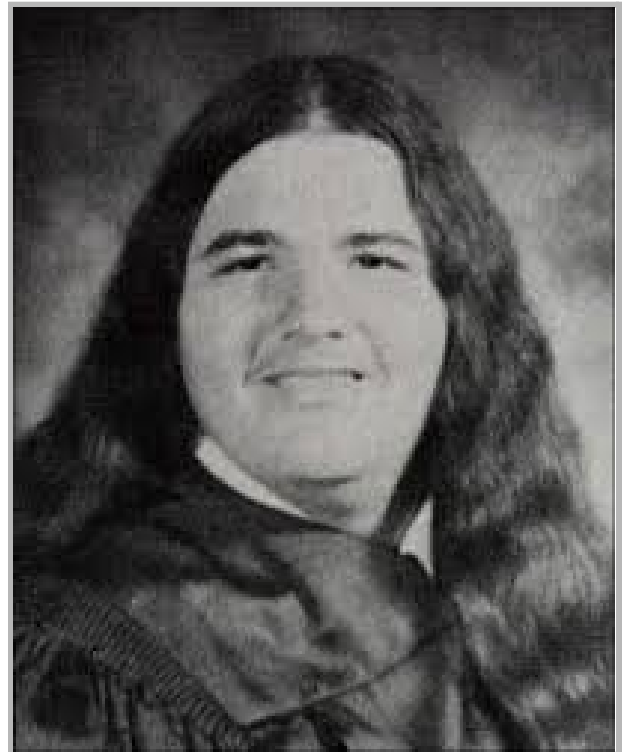
*Double
Nickels
On the
Dime*

Album Review By Gage Blaus

Double Nickels On The Dime

When first thinking about what music would come out of the easy glam and warm sunny beauties of California, one is not mistaken to imagine a clean-cut, conservative, phony band. This, however, would not be the case for the punk rock coming out of the area. As brit punk was flourishing in 1970s America and a new generation of disgruntled youths became larger, a new kind of American punk would start to emerge out of southern California, Hardcore Punk. This new Punk would be pioneered by one LA band, in particular, Black Flag. They would set a precedent for Hardcore that would include things like politically charged lyrics, fast, and aggressive music. Soon after Black Flag, an overload of Hardcore Punk bands started to seep out of California. This rapidly growing scene of bands like Circle Jerks, Fear, Vicious Circle, The Adolescents, and the Descendants would allow one of the greatest Punk Bands to explode onto the pages of music history.

Like most great things a chance occurrence, that quite possibly could never have happened, would be the genesis of genius. At the age of 13, Mike Watt would be walking through a random park in the town of San Pedro, just on the outskirts of LA, when Dennese Boon would come crashing to the ground right in front of Watt. Getting up to the ground D. Boon quickly realized that his friends had ditched him while he was hiding in a tree, striking up a conversation he would immediately become friends with Watt. With D. Boon's mother learning about the love of music both boys shared, and in an attempt to keep them off the streets, she would push Boon to learn the guitar and Watt to learn Bass. In 1973 Boon and Watt would form their first band, a high school cover band called The Bright Orange Band. The band would be short-lived, breaking up in 1976 after D. Boon's mother died. The death of his biggest supporter and inspiration left D. Boon broken, but Boon also found new salvation in 76, Punk. Two years later D. Boon and Watt would meet George Hurley, a small local drummer, and quickly form a new band called The Reactionaries with former classmate Martin Tamburovich on vocals. D. Boon, Watt, and Hurley were fast friends, but when tensions started to rise in 79 with Tamburovich the band disbanded. Now again without a band and nothing else to do D. Boon and Watt formed The Minutemen with Frank Tonche on drums. Frank Tonche however, proved not to be a good fit after a live performance Tonche had a panic attack due to the intense audience and quit. Without a drummer, Watt and D. Boon asked Hurley to again join a band with them and the sequential lineup became permanent until the Minutemen's disbandment in 1985.





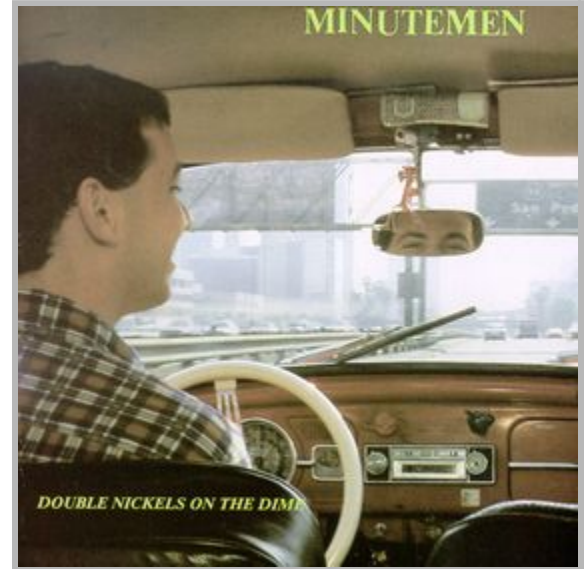
With the members of Minutemen finally set in stone and following intense practices they were finally ready to come into their own. This is when their relationship with Blag Flag, who they had previously opened for, began to take shape. Greg Ginn, the leader of Blag Flag, had started SST Records to release his first EP *Nervous Breakdown*, and following the success of the label, he would agree to take on Minutemen. Minutemen would record their first EP *Paranoid Time* in 1980 and quickly became an underground success. This relationship with SST would carry on, eventually releasing 7 Minutemen albums.

Making Double Nickels

Following *Paranoid time*, each subsequent Minutemen album would be largely an underground success and began to cement their position in the rapidly growing Hardcore Punk scene. Upon returning to California after touring Europe with Black Flag in 1983, Minutemen would set out to record a new album. To record and mix their new album Minutemen decided to change things up a bit, instead of recording with SST's Spot, they would choose Ethan James who had impressed them with his work on *Buzz or Howl Under the Influence of Heat* (Minutemen's latest Ep which he recorded a few songs for) The Band would enter Jame's Radio Tokyo Studios to begin recording what would become *Double Nickels on the Dime* in November of 1983. Despite their original tracklist already being around 20 songs, Hüsker Dü's new double album, *Zen Arcade*, would inspire them to write more and turn the original recordings into a double album. This inspiration would have a colossal effect on the album, doubling the tracklist and spawning a loose concept album. Minutemen would go into recording sessions for April of 1984 having over 40 songs ready to record. One night and \$1100 later *Double Nickels on the Dime* would be finished.



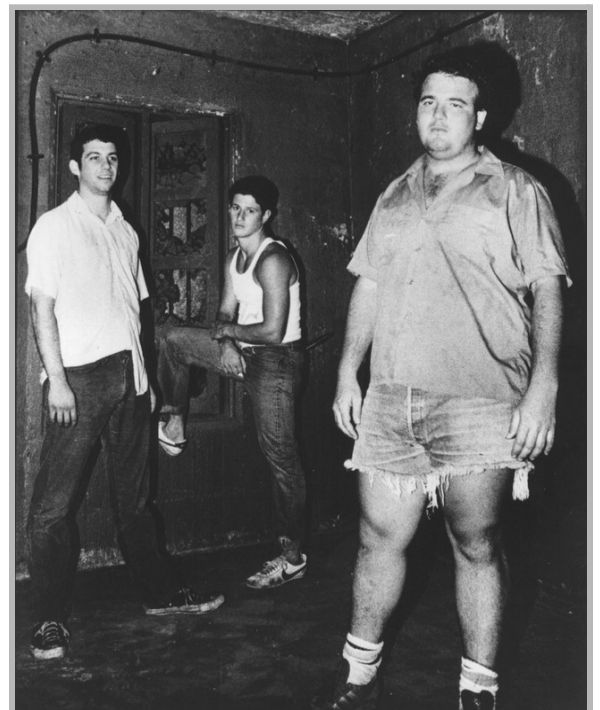
The album's cover and the title came out of the band's reaction to a Sammy Hagar song "I can't drive 55" in which Hagar complains about the new national speed limit of 55 Mph. Minutemen decided that driving the speed limit was not really the height of rebellious punk culture, and instead, they would be punks by following the speed limit, but at the same time creating "crazy music". This idea is where the title comes from, Double nickels is trucker slang for 55 Mph and on the dime refers to how they are going exactly 55 Mph. To complement the title the album cover shows D. Boon driving his Volkswagen Beetle, to the band's hometown San Pedro, at exactly 55 miles per hour. This photo would take around 5 times to perfect. D. Boon, never being satisfied with the position of the San Pedro sign and his glare in the rearview mirror, would demand another photoshoot. Ultimately he got a photo to his satisfaction, but when fighting the photo to the cover at SST a mistake would be made cutting off part of the San Pedro Sign.



When deciding how to structure the massive 45-song project, the band drew heavy influence from Pink Floyd's *Ummagumma* giving each member their own side, plus a fourth for leftovers. Much like the original idea for The Beatles *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Heart Clubs Band* of a concept album created around songs with a general theme, *Double Nickels on the Dime* was planned to be a collection of songs based on the band members' cars. Although this idea never really took shape it can still be seen in a few songs throughout the album.

Minutemens' Minute Songs

Minutemen's sound proves to be like pinning down a fly's wing, every time you seem to figure it out it just effortlessly moves out of the way. They have been described as Hardcore Punk, Experimental Rock, Alternative, Funk Rock, Country, and Indie. All these labels I would have to agree with, Minutemen really were all of these genres, and especially on *Double Nickels on the Dime* can they be seen. One distinct feature of all Minutemen's work is their sharp biting electric guitar sound, this was created by D. Boon when he messed with his equalizer so that only treble could clearly be heard. This guitar distortion can be jarring at first but plays brilliantly with D. Boon's unconventional voice. Mike Watt's bass playing in the band was nothing but funky. Mixing funk and jazz bass playing with the sharp staccato punk style gave him an odd sound for the punk scene at times, most distinct is how high this made his notes. Finally, George Hurley's drumming is simply insane and he is definitely one of the most underrated drummers out there. Being technically brilliant allowed him to have near-absolute freedom on the drums, resulting in short bursts of crazy fills followed by an off-kilter beat that doesn't really stay the same.



(Started on the left, Watt, Hurley, D. Boon)

Track List (Original Vinyl Release):

Side 1: D.

1. Anxious Mo-Fo
2. Theater is the Life of You
3. Viet Nam
4. Cohesion
5. It's Expected I'm gone
6. #1 Hit song
7. Two Beads at the End
8. Do You Want New Wave or the Truth?
9. Don't Look Now (Cover)
10. Shit from an Old Notebook
11. Nature Without Man
12. One Reporters Opinion

Side 2: Mike

1. Political Song for Michael Jackson to Sin
2. Maybe Partying Will Help
3. Toadies
4. Retreat
5. The Big Foist
6. God Bows to Math
7. Corona
8. The Glory of Man
9. Take 5, D.
10. My Heart and the Real World
11. History Lesson-Part II

Side 3: George

1. You Need the Glory
2. The Roar of the Masses Could Be Farts
3. Mr. Robot's Holy Orders
4. West Germany
5. The Politics of Time
6. Themselves
7. Please Don't Be Gentle With Me
8. Nothing Indeed
9. No Exchange
10. There Ain't Shit on T.V. Tonight
11. This Ain't No Picnic
12. Spillage

Side 4: Chaff

1. Untitled Song for Latin America
2. Jesus and Tequila
3. June 16th
4. Storm in My House
5. Martin's Story
6. Ain't Talkin' 'bout Love (Cover)
7. Dr. Wu (Cover)
8. Little Man with a Gun in His Hand
9. The World According to Nouns
10. Love Dance

Songs:

Due to the fact that there are 45 songs on the album, I will not be touching on each one, instead, I will point out some highlights from the album.

Side One

["Theater is the Life of You"](#) 1:30

This is the second song on the album and really gives a fitting introduction to what Minutemen is. The song opens with a sparse bass line over top of some ambient drumming from Hurley. This peace, however, is instantly cut when the bass switches to a more upbeat and dissident line that is accompanied by the beginning of a complicated beat. As the song progresses the music ramps up finishing with a short guitar solo, all while staying ocean deep in the pocket. The lyrics tell a simple story of a man that can see a revolution coming, but knows that he won't be able to agree with the new revolution. Despite all senses losing him his logic still tells him that the revolution will get him and he must make a stand.

["Viet Nam"](#) 1:27

With "Theater is the Life of You" being a subtle political song, "Viet Nam" would set the precedent for Minutemen's more overt and serious political songs. Despite the song only coming in at 1:27 and having 7 lines of vocals, the condemnation of the war in Vietnam would be loaded with a thought. The opening lines, "Let's say I got a number -- that number's fifty thousand, That's ten percent of five hundred thousand", are a prime example of this. Around 50000 Americans died in the Vietnam war whereas about 500000 Vietnamese died, lines like these were changing the scene of a political punk song.



The musical content in the song matches perfectly with the amazing lyrics, by creating a confident in-your-face sound, Minutemen are able to stab their ideas home. "Viet Nam" is one of the greatest examples of the gift that George Hurley possesses. His drum part opens with 4 sets of shots accompanied by the guitar, all of which have insane swooping fills that are effortlessly smooth in between them. After this he launches straight into a funk-like beat that is so full of feeling it alone makes the idea of funky punk a reality.

[“Cohesion”](#) 1:55

“Cohesion” may not be one of my favourite songs from the first side, but the fact that they included it on the album, in general, makes it one of the most memorable songs of their whole discography. The song has no lyrics, no drums, no bass, and no electric guitar, instead, all it has is the unexpected talent of D. Boon. Never, in any sense, being trained in music D. Boon is able to create a classical fingerpicked piece that floats over any of their more hard political songs. This strange moment in the album is immediately broken when the next song, “It’s Expected I’m Gone”, comes rolling in with Hurley’s drums shouting out an amazingly well-felt beat. The transition leaves you taken aback at first, but upon listening to the album again it’s one moment you’ll find yourself waiting for.

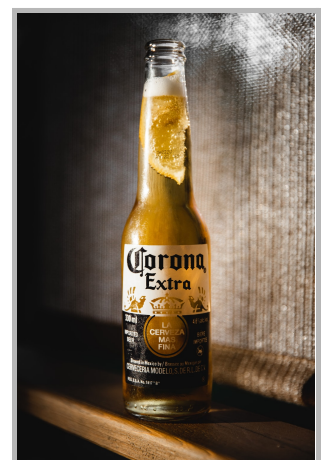
[“Shit from an old Notebook”](#) 1:35

Loosening the high hat, lowering the bass tone, and shouting the lyrics would make “Shit from an old Notebook” one of the hardest songs on the whole album. With the early parts of the album having more funk influences, “Shit from an old Notebook” serves as a nod towards the band’s beginnings of touring with Black Flag. This heaviness isn’t just present in the instrumentation, but also in the content in terms of lyrics. The lyrics are a scathing demonstration of D. Boon’s loathing of advertisement, lines like “Fuck advertising, commercial psychology Psychological methods to sell should be destroyed” make this abundantly clear. However, the song isn’t just a negative hateful outburst, in the last line, “Let yourself be heard”, D. Boon is calling the audience to action and make some positive change.

Side Two:

[“Corona”](#) 2:25

“Corona” is probably the most well-known song of Minutemen’s without most people knowing it. This is because of the use of the song as the theme of the world-renowned show Jackass. With the members of Jackass being fans of Minutemen, and pretty much all hardcore punk, the opening riff of “Corona” fits the show perfectly. Despite the widespread use of the song most people don’t actually know where the theme song comes from and its background. The song would come out of a day trip to Mexico that the band took on July 4th, 1982. During this trip, D. Boon became deeply touched by the ruin and pain that exist in poor parts of Mexico. Upon seeing a woman wandering the streets looking for bottles to deposit for money, the band decided to give her their large stack of empty Corona Beer bottles. Using this experience as inspiration he would write “Corona ” as a protest song for the Mexican people. This inspiration from the Mexico trip would not just be lyrics deep, drawing directly from Norteño and Polka music would give the song a more Mexican feel.



“Take 5, D.” 1:39

With Hurley dropping the sticks and picking up a tambourine, “Take 5, D.” is loaded with oddities that fit Minutemen’s aesthetic better than some of the more conventional songs on their album. Originally the lyrics were written by Mike Watt, but when D. Boon complained about how “spacey” they were and Watt started to search for new ones. This search came to an end when Watt decided to use a letter, full of promising lyrics, that a friend had shown him. The letter came from his friend’s landlord and included gems like, “Tub has to properly caulked prior to any shower” and “Don’t use shower, don’t use shower”. D. Boon agreed to the new letters and the song was put onto Watt’s side.

“History Lesson Part II” 2:12

“History Lesson Part II” serves as a song to “humanize” Watt and D. Boon by simply telling their story. In a bid to avoid confusion with one of the band’s previous, and completely unrelated, songs, “History Lesson”, they added the “Part II” to the title. The song’s lyrics would be a simple telling of the Watt’s and D. Boon’s friendship and their journey with music. In the first verse the lines “Me and Mike Watt played for years” and “Punk rock changed our lives” speak to the friend’s upbringing, playing for years in school bands and more personally the effect punk music had on D. Boon after his mother died. For Watt the song was a plea to stop idolizing them, later saying, “People thought we were spacemen, but we were just Pedro corndogs – our band could be your life! You could be us, this could be you.”.

Side 3

“This Ain’t No Picnic” 1:57

“This Ain’t No Picnic” would be born following a slew of, racist, verbal abuse from D. Boon’s boss, caused by an argument over D. Boon playing jazz at work. This altercation almost made D. Boon quit his job on the spot, but due to his need for work, he instead decided to sit down and write a song to calm down. The song that emerged was “This Ain’t no Picnic”, a scathing comment on both racism and working conditions. The lines “Punch in punch out, eight hours, five days a week” and “Sweat, pain and agony, on Friday I’ll get paid” show the crux of the issue, the speaker’s job is appallingly damaging, but because of the money at the end of the week, they deal with it time and time again. The speaker wants to rise up and “...refuse to be a slave” both from the job and from society which is forcing him to stay at the job. In the end, the speaker is reduced to only complaining, repeating “This Ain’t No Picnic”, and will never be able to rise up and free himself.

The Song would go on to be turned into Minutemen’s first music video, using live and public domain footage the video would only cost the band \$600.



“Jesus and Tequila” 2:52

With guest writer Joe Carducci and staple writer D. Boon “Jesus and Tequila” stands out on the album, probably because it has more the 5 lines. The song’s content is very reminiscent of early blues songs, having themes of wallowing in sorrow and dealing with them through drinking. In the song, the speaker’s wife leaves him and he loses his job, this leaves him with nothing but Jesus and Tequila to numb his pain. However, like in Pink Floyd’s “Comfortably Numb” the speaker has gotten used to the numbing agents, saying “My life - Jesus and tequila, I’m satisfied, And I can’t deny it”. The final verse of the song is the speaker giving advice “You better listen to me, ‘Cause I’m gonna tell you, son, Don’t give away your love, And don’t give away your sweat, Because a girl can’t know you, And a boss can’t afford you”. This advice is saying to give up on the conventional wants in the life of a good job and a wife, and instead, because it all leaves you in the end, give into the only true source of happiness Jesus and Tequila. The song is D. Boon’s and Carducci’s views on what middle/upper-class life is like, never finding true happiness in anything meaningful because of the societal push for the good job and a beautiful wife, and instead finding hollow pleasure created to distract in the form of drugs and religion.

Rating

I give *Double Nickels on the Dime* an 8.5/10. The album, to me, is the height of what Minutemen are, pushing the music scene around them and making music they are truly happy with, never minding what other people think. The Whole album somehow flows together, meshing Funk, Country, Classical, Punk, and nearly every mainstream genre into one cohesive unit that never leaves you too confused. My biggest problem with the album, however, is the fourth side. Being set aside for the leftovers on the album the fourth side suffers from being mainly covers of other bands and instrumental tracks. This weak side gives the album a slightly disappointing finish. Despite the small problems, Minutemen were able to capture over an hour’s worth of the true meaning of music, having fun with friends. That’s truly all that Minutemen were three high school buddies that put out music for the love of what they were doing.

Due to the fact that Minutemen were really just a group of friends, what would come after the album hurts even more. On December 22nd, 1985, D. Boon at the age of 27 would be in the back of a van going down interstate 10 when the rear axle broke. The van quickly started rolling off the road, and being thrown out of the vehicle D. Boon’s neck snapped, killing him instantly. After too short a time of Minutemen jamming Econo, D. Boon’s death would spell the end of the band, and any hopes of further albums. *Double Nickel on the Dime* serves as a testament to D. Boon’s raw talent, being some of his and the band’s best work.



