

POSTPLUS MUSIC SPECIAL

Twenty years after the death of Elvis Presley, Post Plus wonders if the music that used to shake, rattle and roll the King is still alive and kicking. Here, more than 20 music-minded types answer the big question.

By TOM ROE

It's finally time to write the obituary for rock 'n' roll?

For more than 40 years, the combination of two guitars, bass and drums has been making a lasting impression on pop culture.

Whole youth movements — slicked-back rockabilly cats in the '50s, long-haired hippies in the '60s and pierced punks in the '70s — have revolved around rock music.

Ever since the first wave of rockers waned in the early '60s, arguments about the vitality of the form have raged.

Were the deaths of Buddy Holly, Ritchie Valens and the Big Bopper in an airplane crash in Iowa coincidental in 1959 the day the music died? Or was it a decade later, when Jimi Hendrix died? Or in 1978, when the Sex Pistols broke up?

Or was it, as the wacky band Ween contends, the moment David Lee Roth left Van Halen? Or did it keel over this year, when Pat Boone made a heavy-metal record?

Rock 'n' roll will never die, claims another contingent, those still trying to find new ways to make three chords and a cloud of dust sound different.

Last year, the music industry's growth rate slowed to 2 percent — the smallest gain since disco attempted to overthrow rock in the late '70s.

Now, electronic artists are attempting another coup, and this time the media are cheering the rebels against the rockers — although there are detractors. Case in point: the "Who Killed Rock Guitar?" cover story in this month's Guitar Player magazine, which rails against "Nirvana clones and techno drones."

So, Post Plus assembled a panel of rock stars, electronic acts and industry experts to find out if rock is alive and kicking or as terminal as Elvis. Our question: Is rock dead?

"Yes, it died when people gave up trying to make something new. All these snotty young kids today just make reproductions of things they've heard before. Let it die, I say." — **John Lydon**, formerly of **Sex Pistols**, currently a solo artist

"It would be hard to support a 'rock is dead' argument. The world is still filled with rock music — it's a changing but still viable art form." — **Moby**, electronic artist who also

makes rock albums and who is currently redoing the James Bond theme

"Yes, rock has been dead since the early '60s and, no, it will never die. There will always be kids discovering the thrill of plugging in an electric guitar, but it will never mean the same thing again culturally. Rockies turned into market." — **Mark Hosler**, leader of the computer-driven collage group **Negativland**

"Political correctness killed rock. It's not so much about getting drunk and turning it up loud anymore. If somebody made a record that rocked, I don't think it would be rejected, but that's not what's going on in music right now." — **Dean Ween**, half of the duo **Ween**

"Rock ain't dead, it just smells funny. And it's swarming with maggots. You just have to look deeper into its bowels to find the good stuff." — **Thirwell** of the band **Foot**

"I believe the idea that 'rock' is dead. At best it was a myth — a catch-all word for a baby-boomer fantasy of a musical development from the late-'50s — and at worst a particularly effective marketing term." — **M. Doughty**, lead vocalist for **Soul Coughing**

"No, I still hear new bands all the time who are doing interesting things in the rock format. The 'rock is dead' talk is just a media creation." — **King Coffey**, drummer for the **Butthole Surfers**

"We live in a neo-tech, so the concept of advancing technology — Scanner, electronic artist who samples cell-phone conversations

"Hell, no, it's not dead. Guitars are still sexy. I'm 22 and I still listen to the Rolling Stones and Chuck Berry. Rock music is always going to be there." — **Ryan Adams**, guitarist for country-rock band **Whiskeytown**

"Rock was the most insular form for the longest time; now it's finally opening up to other influences like electronic and world music — and that's a good thing." — **DJ Spooky**, downtown turntablist just signed to Geffen

"I do think the indie rock cliché of three white guys

in gas-station-attendant jackets is dead. I also have no interest in seeing pigeon-toed, 30-year-old women wearing little baby tees and backpacks, screeching." — **Nicole Blackman**, vocalist for the **Golden Palominos** and independent music publicist

"Rock has just become a classical form. I still believe things can be done with guitars and drums, but it probably won't be called rock." — **Christian Marclay**, downtown turntablist

"No, it's still alive, but a lot of what I hear today isn't very funky." — **Dr. John**, New Orleans barrelhouse pianist who makes a guest appearance on a very electric new record from Spiritized

"Yes, it's dead. It died with

the Sex Pistols — that's what punk rock was about, killing off those dinosaur rock bands." — **Alec Empire**, electronic artist with **Atari Teenage Riot**

"No, it's just sleeping." — **Pete Tyler**, manager of Coney Island High club on St. Marks Place

"It's still a vital artistic and commercial form that's morphing into something different than just boys with guitars, and that's a good thing. It goes through cycles and changes, but I can't quite picture there being something else in youth culture that communicates the way rock does." — **Craig Marks**, executive editor of **Spin** magazine

"No, this is just an argument that comes up again and again. Electronic music has been around forever." — **Art Alexakis**, lead singer, **Everclear**

"Rock 'n' roll is like a phoenix: Every time it's declared dead by the dunderheads, it pulls itself from the ashes, dusts itself off, spits in the eye of the naysayers and invigorates a new batch of kids. Rock isn't dead — hell, it isn't even tired — but it has changed a lot from when Elvis shook the world. As long as there's a kid singing into a hairbrush to his favorite band, making music in the garage with pals or singing three-part harmonies on the stoop of the apartment house, rock is alive and well." — **Dan Aquilante**, Post rock critic

"Just because a new genre of music comes along doesn't mean the old is dead — it's just resting. It's cyclical, and someone will come along soon and do something new with the form — it always happens." — **Cindy Wheeler**, accordionist for **Pee Shy**

"People are still buying it — it's not dead. It's just being regurgitated." — **Beth Narducci**, A & R representative, **Atlantic Records**

"As long as people are strapping on guitars and playing it, rock is alive — there isn't a sharp vocabulary wopped meaning anything a while ago. It's analogous to what happened with jazz in the '60s. When free jazz came along there was a breakdown and a split, and that's what's happening with rock now."

— **Tony Goddard**, guitarist, **Papas Fritas**

"As long as there are people who want to f--- sh--- up, rock is alive and kicking. The rest of it is semantics and details. The sex is beyond the aesthetics of the genre. Rock's energy is ever-boiling." — **Craig Wedren**, lead singer, **Shudder to Think**

"Rock is dead, and has been killed by nerds armed with computers. The Les Paul has been replaced by the three-button mouse, and Bill Gates and Steve Jobs are the biggest rock stars in history." — **Chris Vrenna**, leader **Tweaker** (and former drummer for **Nine Inch Nails**)

"Rock is dead — that's why we play it!" — **Eli Janney**, keyboard player, **Girls Against Boys**

