

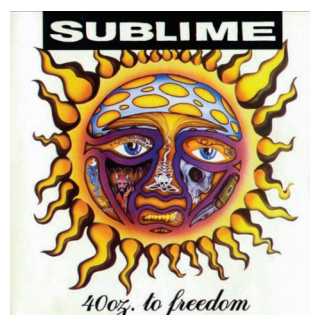
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THE REGGAE RAJAS

If you like
your reggae
shaken up
with ska,
punk, funk
and groove,
then Sublime
is the band
for you

THE FIRST TIME I heard Sublime, the band had already broken up and its talented lead singer, driving force and the man who can be credited for the band, its sound, and its essence, Brad Nowell, was already dead. And, as it happened, the first song by Sublime that I heard and that made me sit up and take notice of the band was not even (well, not fully as we shall see in just a bit) written by the band. It was *Scarlet Begonias*, originally written in 1974 by Robert Hunter (words) and Jerry Garcia (music) for the Grateful Dead. As a long-time Deadhead, I instantly took note, especially because Nowell had added a verse or two to give the song a nice and edgy twist. In the Sublime version of the song – I'd highly recommend Deadheads



OF DELIGHTFUL METAMORPHOSES

Sublime may have had a short run when lead singer Brad Nowell (left) died of a drug overdose at the age of 28, but their albums (above), compilations and a box set still find loyal takers

within a Sublime song – metamorphosing from garage punk to reggae to ska and rock.

Sadly, Sublime had a short run. They launched their first album in 1992 and could manage to record just three studio albums in their career; the first one clandestinely by sneaking into a studio at a California university at night. Their third album, titled *Sublime*, came out just after Brad Nowell's death in 1996. Nowell died from what is believed to be a heroin overdose in a motel in the band's home state of California. He was just 28. Sublime's songs aren't without controversy either. On their debut album, 1992's *40 Oz. to Freedom*, Sublime have a humorous song called *Date Rape* that is about a date-rapist and his victim and ends with jail for the perpetrator who gets sodomised in jail. Many consider that song homophobic – particularly, the last verse where Nowell sings: “Well, I can’t take pity on men of his kind, / even though he now takes it in the behind.” There’s a video of the song in which male porn star Ron Jeremy acts as both the judge who sends the perp to jail as well as the co-prisoner who later... well, never mind.

Besides the three studio albums and some live cuts, Sublime in post-Nowell years have released several compilations and a box set. And loyal fans abound even now. And although the remaining members of the band have regrouped and renamed themselves Sublime with Rome (after Rome Ramirez, guitarist and singer, joined them), their fare hasn't met with the kind of following Sublime still has. If you like your reggae shaken up with ska, punk, funk and groove, it's the band for you. And if you're a Deadhead, I've already told you the song you could listen to before you dive into the rest of their catalogue.

TAILPIECE: Confused by the barrage of music blogs, reviews, year-end lists and so on? Want to try something different? Writer/artist Chris Prunckle does a review and music blog all in six-panel comic m. *Wannabe* is the name of his music blog, which es even has an interview with a musician. Head wannabethecomic.tumblr.com. And don't forget to at his recent post on 2015's best 11 albums. His take, e. All in comic panel form.



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who haven't to listen to it – Nowell references the “Summer of Love”, a “microbus”, a hippy lifestyle that involves a bit of dealing in mushroom, ecstasy, nitrous oxide and sundry other, um, psychotropic substances, as well as a not-so-happy brush with the law. As a bonus, the band also sampled James Brown's *Funky Drummer* on the song. That was enough to hook me.

Sublime's music is categorised by some writers as a genre they call ska punk – ska originally being a form of Jamaican dance music that pre-dates reggae. But the influences that shaped Nowell (guitar and vocals), Eric Wilson (bass) and Bud Gaugh (drums) go beyond those genres. You can add to that list of their influencers garage rock, rap, blues and psychedelia, especially psychedelia. Sublime's songs have a very robust bass line (a characteristic of ska music); blistering guitar solos that could be blues-rock influenced; and the danceability of reggae. It's incredible how things can evolve

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