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Metal Confab Draws 2,500 Attendees **Headhangers Take L.A.**

BY CHRIS MORRIS

LOS ANGELES Reflecting the still-burgeoning commercial potential of metal and hard rock, registrations shot up 150% at the second annual Foundations Forum Sept. 21-23 at the Sheraton Universal Hotel here.

Some 2,500 long-haired attendees overran the Universal City site of the metal/hard rock conference, sponsored by Concrete Marketing, a New York-based management, promotion, and publicity firm. Registrants at last year's convention numbered about 1,000.

With the crowd of industry pros, musicians, press, and neophyte headbangers creating gridlock in the Sheraton halls and overflowing out of conference rooms, Concrete president Bob Chiappardi said that the convention would likely have to relocate to another hotel for its 1990 session. "We pretty much have all the room space available, but they're small rooms," Chiappardi said.

Indicative of the health of the U.S. metal scene, the second Foundations Forum convened in a week when three metal albums (by Skid Row, Motley Crue, and Warrant) stood in the top 10 of Billboard's Top Pop Albums chart. Chiappardi expects the trend to continue: "Metal's not going

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to hit a wall next year," he said. "I hear all the product coming out, and it's great."

The label feeding frenzy for metal and hard rock acts is continuing unabated, observed conference managing director Janie Hoffman. "Every major record company is signing anything that looks, sounds, or smells like Guns N' Roses," she noted.

As opposed to last year's Forum, which sought to bolster the credibility and respectability of the genre, this year's session emphasized the growth and nurturing of this highly commercial style.

Indeed, this year's Forum stressed the work of new and unsigned bands. Live showcases featured such new major label acts as Kreator, Forbidden, Bullet LaVolta, Babylon A.D., Soundgarden, and Princess Pang. Included among the conference giveaways was a compilation cassette of unsigned regional talent, while Concrete's CD compilation also included a number of unsigned groups.

Panels were organized to present nuts-and-bolts information to the young newcomers; topics included publishing, merchandising, sponsorship, road management, touring, marketing, management, artist development, and A&R and production. Predictably, the latter was one of the best-attended sessions. (See radio panel story, page 12).

Even more than last year, unsigned bands flocked to the Forum, pressing tapes into the hands of established industryites at every turn.

"There are a lot of wanna-bes here," one jaded industry spectator remarked.

As at last year's convention, Foundations Forum '89 found hard issues taking a back seat to the fundamentals of getting signed by a record label.

The only panel that addressed a specific concern—the local controversy over pay-to-play promoters (Billboard, Sept. 2)—evolved into a shouting match between pay-to-play proponent Jason Lord of Jungle Productions and such adversaries as Mark Mason, organizer of Rockers Against Pay-To-Play, and Dayle Gloria, operator of L.A.'s Club With No Name.

"Nothing got solved because everybody was yelling," Hoffman said. "I don't think anything got accomplished in there. I don't know if you can solve anything in an hour and a half."

In an idolatrously received keynote speech that took the form of an epithet-laden pep talk, Gene Simmons of Kiss reflected on the irony of headbangers getting together for what is basically a business convention.

"I like this music, you think it's crap—that's what makes you a rebel," Simmons said. "So what are you doing at a convention? Aren't we becoming them, the 'suits'? My contention is, we're not. We're picking an alternative."

"The reason to do this is, you guys have got to talk," he added. "You have to fight fire with fire."