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Devo Now, More than Ever

February 23, 2010

By [Tim Anderson](#) |



On February 15th, Devo's Facebook page began soliciting collective input for what they should play at on February 22nd at the Winter Olympics at Whistler. As such, "Devo Communications" musical concert will serve notice that it is vying for a return to mass relevance. And this time, according to the band, Devo enters into a new era where "de-evolution is real and Devo is normal". Which is why Devo's inclusion at the Olympics is simply an inspired choice for important times. Given the American tendency to avoid irony at all costs for anything "National", Devo's selection is yet another reason to look to the Great White North for inspired ideas. Lord knows we could use a few of those. After 2009, a year where millions of foreclosures and hundreds of billions spent on bailouts and lies about health insurance reform have both flattened the middle class along with much of the Hope from November 2008, Devo has returned with a message: [De-Evolution is a prophecy fulfilled](#).



Formed in the wake of the 1970 Ohio National Guard shooting and killing of four students who were protesting the Vietnam War at Kent State, Akron, Ohio's Devo has long held the perspective that humankind has regressed. Their most damning evidence has been that the corporate groupthink that has dominated US style management and has been the target of most of Devo's artistic barbs has metastasized over the last thirty plus years to too much of the globe with disastrous effects (see global recession, a particular two-term US President with a MBA who managed the country into the ground, Windows Vista, etc.). Devo's latest solution to the problem of corporate idiocracy: join em. Later this year Devo and Warner Brothers will release their first LP in 20 years, their first no major label since 1984. Twenty six years later, Devo's energy domes have been recharged as they ride the crest of a fairly successful return to action. Last year's national tour took Devo across the US as they played back-to-back nights where, in select cities, they performed the entirety of their two most popular albums, *Q: Are We Not Men? A: We Are Devo* and *Freedom of Choice* one night at a time to sold out clubs and theaters. The Devo renaissance is in full force.



For me this comes not a minute too soon. A year removed from the eight-year horror story which was the beginning of this decade, the party responsible for this frightfest has never (and probably will never) admitted any guilt for driving the US into the worst set of crises in my lifetime. Worse yet, the new party in power has wasted a year trying to forge a politically-impossible middle with a group of ideologues who don't believe in science and have contempt for any kind

of rational governance. Given this equation, I don't know which party is dumber. However, I do know that in 2010 it feels like de-evolution is now a fact of life. As Devo puts it, it is "a prophecy fulfilled". And Devo's new image fits the times perfectly: a corporate, focus-grouped driven set of artists that will happily produce collective art ala capitalism. In a [recent interview with Billboard](#), Devo's leader, Mark Mothersbaugh, the magazine noted that "the band is taking a consciously ironic ultra-corporate approach to the release, including focus-grouping every aspect of the album's marketing." The stupidity of "focus testing the future" is promoted in their most recent [YouTube missive](#) and Devo's latest flash-based send up of online testing, [The Devo Color Study](#). That latter example asks questions such as "Which color for the car makes you dislike the man more?" and "What color ink is this man writing his ransom note in?" in a voice that can only be described in an absurd computer/euro accent. You can't help but finish the survey, receive your "Devo Color" (mine was red) and you are asked to share it on your social network of choice. It's both a joke, an art project and a business strategy. It's something Warhol would applaud. It may even show up in Devocom's bottom line. Whatever it is, Devo appears to be moving themselves and their audience someplace new. As band member and co-leader Gerard Casale [puts it](#), "We feel like all our dire predictions have come true." Casale continues, "Now, that it's real, it's time to move on." In other words, Devo has re-engaged our culture once again right at the time when we need them most. Duty now for the future, indeed.