Charles Schulz hated the name given to his comic strip by his bosses at United Features. But Peanuts certainly looks better on a comic book cover than L’il Folks would have. Like most successful newspaper strips, Peanuts had another life as a feature in comic magazines. Reprints ran in titles published by Schulz’s syndicate and subsequently other life as a feature in comic magazines. Reprints ran in his bosses at United Features. But Charles Schulz hated the name given to his comic strip by the industry and had little time to spend on subsidiary projects. So he tapped friend and former Art Instruction School colleague Jim Sassov to turn out the Peanuts comic book stories. Sassov and subsequent artists, whether chosen by Schulz or assigned by Dell editors, followed the mood and style of the newspaper strip. The work appeared as back-up strips for other titles before Peanuts finally got its own book that ran from 1960-1962. The Dell Archive collects those comics in one big, beautiful volume. Readers familiar with the manifold contemplative work of the later years may be surprised by some of the stories. When Peanuts began, Charlie Brown and the gang were much more adventurous like their predecessors in classic kid strips like Skippy and Reg’lar Fellers. Fists are thrown, butts are kicked, and that’s before Snoopy chomps that blanket and drops Linus around the neighborhood. That’s another difference from the newspaper strip. As in the panel right, backgrounds are much richer, more detailed, a lovely panorama of mid-20th Century suburbia. The comic book page afforded Schulz’s stand-ins the space to use larger panels, both double-wide panels like that above and bottom left and quarter- and half-page panels of, for example, Lucy Van Pelt on roller skates hurting down a hill. Lucy looms over the Peanuts comic book like a super-villain in a superhero comic, always the antagonist, always determined to be the boss, to one-up poor ol’ Charlie Brown. Violet (above) plays a bigger role. But as in the strip, she and other original cast members get upstaged by Schroeder, Snoopy and Pigpen. Meanwhile, Snoopy continues to develop the charisma that would make him a global superstar, becoming the fantasy-prone performer we see in the panel top middle. It’s funny, often frantic stuff. Go to lexpublib.org to reserve it!

For years, Tom Hart was a cartoonist’s cartoonist: largely unknown to the greater reading public, but beloved by fellow artists for his funny, loosely drawn work, especially his tales of garrulous grouch Hutch Owens. Hart finally received greater notice for the most heart-breaking of reasons: his graphic novel about the death of his daughter, Rosalie Lightning. Hart slightly shied away from the newspaper strip. The result is a new standard for autobigraphical comics. Now Hart uses his personal experience and knowledge of global cartooning to reveal The Art of the Graphic Memoir (St. Martin’s Griffin). “With more than 30 exercises and examples to guide you,” Hart helps the reader “Tell Your Story, Change Your Life,” from the primal question “Why Comics?” to detailed discussion of storytelling strategies, visual motifs and other aspects of craft. Hart uses examples from not only his own work, but that of other cartoonists. Well-known memoirists such as Will Eisner and Roz Chast, international stars like David B and Lat, and alternative luminaries like Alison Bechdel and Jon Porcellino, plus many more—even the old EC horror artists—are used to show the variety of approaches to autobio comics. Hart is serious about the part that says “Change Your Life.” Using art to deal with trauma is a long-established approach to therapy, its validity and limitations are vividly described in Drawn to Berlin (Fantagraphics). American Ali Fitzgerald spent a decade in Germany. Much of that time, she worked in Berlin as an art therapist as “the Bubble,” an inflatable emergency shelter for refugees. Every day, she tried to connect with traumatized people, simply asking “Do you guys want to draw?” And they did—adults, children, teenagers alike put pencil to paper and revealed their dreams, their nightmares, their lives: drowned kids, cop-captors hovering angrily over wave-swamped boats, lots of guns...and Elise. Good intentions hit a wall as both Fitzgerald and Germany begin to change under the pressure of the migrant crisis. Go to Beau- mont and Central for Drawn to Berlin; go to lexpublib.org to reserve The Art of the Graphic Memoir.
Ah, the Nineties. The Age of EXTREME: Extreme music, extreme sports, and extreme comics! Or maybe just extremes in comics, with the “cutting edge” boys club on one side, the alternative doyennes on the other. Now you can jump into the historical mosh pit with Jason Sacks, author of the latest edition of TwoMorrows’ American Comic Book Chronicles. Available from Central, this deeply detailed tome gives you the lowdown on 1990s comics history. Marvel’s rise to unbelievable heights of profitability and subsequent collapse into bankruptcy; the birth of Image and other imprints led by creators fed up with the bad faith of DC and Marvel; the growing artistic and commercial power of independent publishers such as IDW and Fantagraphics and the resulting diversity of work and artists—all these are covered, along with plot points in the increasingly labyrinthine continuities of popular characters such as the X-men and Batman. It was in the 1990s that the long-frustrated possibilities of comics began to manifest. Even mainstream book publishers got into the game. Like Houghton Mifflin said imprint added “Comics” to their Best American series of collections starting in 2006. As always, The Best American Comics has a guest editor from the field. 2018 was overseen by Phoebe Gloeckner, whose controversial graphic memoir Diary of A Teenage Girl has been adapted to stage and screen. Gloeckner maintains a good balance between slick work by established cartoonists such as Jaime (Love & Rockets) Hernandez and Shaolin Cowboy’s Geoff Darrow and the raw output of outsider artists like Margot Ferrick and Alex Graham. Selections from books such as Rolling Blackouts, Hostage and The Abominable Mr. Seabrook (see previous editions of 741.5) appear next to self-published comics and anthologies like Felony and Nothing Left to Learn. Stand-out pieces include Max Clotfelter’s tale of teenage cartoonist angst, the feminist Fletcher Hanks, fury of Lale Westvind’s