

Whip it good! Devo founder speaks next week at FSW



CHARLES RUNNELLS, CRUNNELLS@NEWS-PRESS.COM

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(Photo: AP Photo/Jill Connelly)

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People didn't know what to make of Devo when they hit the music scene in the 1970s. They were weird. They were edgy. And this was *before* they started wearing bright-red flower pots on their heads.

"It was shocking to people, and you were either really pro-Devo or really anti-Devo," says band co-founder Gerald "Jerry" Casale, who will lecture next week at [Florida SouthWestern State College](#). "It wasn't a middle-of-the-road aesthetic.

"It was laying down the gauntlet. It was drawing a line in the sand."

Not everyone "got it," of course. And some people got mad at the punk/new wave band's politics and satirical worldview. The name itself is short for "devolution," the idea that humankind is getting worse instead of better.

"People called us Nazis. They called us clowns," Casale says. "So we ended up making jokes about it. We went, 'OK, let's be Nazi clowns!'"

Casale will talk about Devo, music and the value of education when he speaks at FSW on Thursday, Feb. 11, as part of Bob Rauschenberg Gallery's [ArtSPEAK@FSW](#) lecture series. Gallery director Jade Dellinger co-wrote a definitive book on the band, "We Are DEVO!" (2008, SAF Publishing).

Education has always been important to Casale, he says. In fact, the members of Devo met at art college.

"I respect the education I got," Casale said. "It changed my life, and Devo wouldn't have existed without it."

Casale sang in Devo, co-wrote its songs, played bass guitar and synthesizers, created much of the band's look and style, and directed the band's videos, including the infamous 1980 hit "Whip It."

"When we introduced ourselves, we were the modern version of agit-prop artists," Casale says. "We were intentionally polarizing because we were putting forth a complete new worldview, a gestalt, combining art — in the form of graphics and press releases and videos —and, of course, the music, and theater onstage with costumes and characters. And, obviously, politics."

Devo also broke ground by combining electronic music (then often perceived as cold and sterile) with funky dance and rock grooves. "We were [Kraftwerk](#) from the waist up," Casale says, "and [Elvis Presley](#) from the waist down."

Like anything cutting edge, though, Devo slowly got less shocking, and its influence has been absorbed into the mainstream.

"Then it becomes like your favorite tunes that you get married to," Casale says. "You know, I've often said that Devo is just the house band on the Titanic."

As for the concept of "devolution," Casale says he believes in it now more than ever. Just look at the [Republican presidential candidates](#), ISIS and what's happened to the water supply in [Flint, Michigan](#), he says.

The concept started as kind of a provocative joke, he says. But now it's coming true.

"It's not something we're happy about or proud of," Casale says. "It turned out to be not so funny."

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What: Gerald "Jerry" Casale of Devo. His keynote speech is part of the School of Humanities and Fine Arts' "[Humanities Colloquium: Education for a New Humanity](#)" series

When: 7 p.m. Thursday, Feb. 11

Where: The Rush Library Auditorium (Building J, Room 103) at Florida SouthWestern State College, 8099 College Parkway, Fort Myers

Admission: Free

Info: fsw.edu/newhumanity