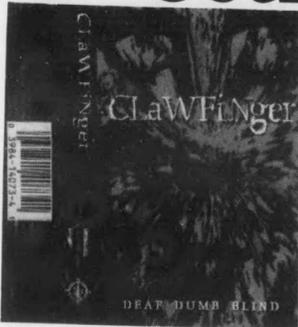


A Couple of Music Reviews



Clawfinger
Deaf, Dumb, Blind
(Attic)
&
Hangin' Tree
Hangin' Tree
(Tone Poem Productions Inc)



It has taken me a long time to get around to reviewing these albums, because I have been choosing my approach carefully. My problem is simple - how do I indicate all the problems with these records, while still being charitable to the kind of music they represent? Both Clawfinger and Hangin' Tree make a hybrid noise - rap/hip-hop mixed with punk/metal. As a genre, the mix was

inevitable. Historically, rap can be seen as "black" street music, while punk as "white". Typically, both express disillusionment with specific aspects of these culture, and styles and techniques have developed as the ways to go about making these sorts of music. The best punk, is light on its feet; it's peppy, not tediously heavy, and the lyrics and vocal delivery are characterized by humour - sarcasm, irony, even a tiny touch of genuine wit. If pushed past the bounds of punk "taste", the music gets boring - slower, dumber, more guitar solos. Rap (not my area of expertise, I should note) has been successful, in relying on speedy delivery of rhyme to keep things hopping. When this delivery is neglected for the sake of a message, the music turns from rap into a sermon - no fun at all! So, when a hybrid of these types of music is attempted, you gotta be careful to keep the good stuff, and avoid the excesses. Beck achieved a moderate success with a hybrid of this sort last year.

Now, to the bands at hand. The syntheses of styles presented, are clumsy and unsuccessful. Maybe it's due to geographic problems; Clawfinger is Swedish, and Hangin' Tree is from Ontario. Neither area has been a hotbed for innovative punk or rap. When these bands exhibit their strength, they're nothing special, but when they try something they're not even moderately good at doing, they stink.

Clawfinger lies more on the punk, "white" side of this music. The guitars buzz along at a Ministry-style clip. The sleeve says there are no guitar amps involved, which I believe is to be taken humourously; this band makes an unholy racket. This half-joke is the only

light touch on the whole cassette. The techno-fried guitars are minimally interesting, but the album as a whole, feels like a finger pointing in one's face. There's a lot of first and second person business involved in the lyrics. Apparently, I did something terribly bad, and this band is here to set me straight, and maybe beat me up in the process. Give me a break. This kind of posturing is unbelievably tedious. There is no humour, no drama, no scene-setting or story-telling. The music merely crunches along, while some nut rants.

The best song is probably the album opener, "The Truth". There is a slight attempt at innovation in the guitar line, that saves the song from the morass of mediocrity the music typically falls into. This song seems to be directed at some kind of political figure, but there are no names named (real brave) in the tirade, so the song appears to be directed at me, the listener. The only other moment worth noting, is the use of limp, Faith-No-More keyboards on "Warfare". The problem with this album is the direction of the anger. The people I suspect this band is angry with, will never hear this music, so the raving falls on the ears of the listener. The listener will only be interested if s/he agrees with the position (if there is such an identifiable position here) asserted over and over again. But the fingerpointing is bound to turn off some people, even if they started out sympathetic. This is an exercise in anger-masurbation.

Canadian Hangin' Tree comes out of the rap corner, and in the process offers the better of the two records. Lyrically there seems to be an attempt at story-telling, but it's still luke-warm material. The delivery is minimally interesting, but the band generally fails to take the time necessary to develop any mood or tension, falling into the

same pointless rage as Clawfinger. Again, the best song is the opener, "Junkie". Before taking off, there's a lone, deep hip-hop bass accompanying a slow vocal line. This beginning sets up a decent foundation for the rest of the song, but then the band turns up the guitars, and ooooo! they're bad. Straight out of the basement without any endearing naiveté. "Junkie" goes from a subtle heartbeat to a dull roar, and nuance goes out the window. The worst songs on this album are like Clawfinger without any attempt at guitar innovation - more noise. "Da Grass" employs a funky guitar - the distortion is off, with some of the best vocal delivery and sound effects on the album to create the only offspeed offering on either album here reviewed. Alas, Hangin' tree also falls into the fingerpointing trap that Clawfinger loves so much. The result is less than satisfying. Along with the first and second person stuff, there's a touch of "gangsta" in songs such as "Hangin' Tree" and "I Ain't Down". The latter is really an anti-violence song, but it all sounds so familiar that it's still boring and distasteful.

The problem with this hybrid, I think, is a lack of maturity. Rap and punk developed recently as alternatives to other types of "mainstream" music making. The acts reviewed here, don't seem to have learned much from their own genres - there's nothing new here, or other types of more mature music. As a listener, I feel like I'm dealing with children and like I'm being treated as a child. A child's anger is often rather empty, and I don't like being treated as a child. In terms of angry music, this stuff fails to reach any significant emotional level. Bob Dylan's "The Lonesome Death of Hattie Carroll" is light years away from this on the emotional maturity scale. Skip Clawfinger and hangin' Tree.

-Andrew Sneddon



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