

Black Flag: a six pack and nothin' to do

by Michael Brennan

I loved this record the moment I put it on: raw, loud, fast and ripping, it knocked me over like a machine gun. I'm talking about Los Angeles' Black Flag and their album **Damaged**, the best new punk group around and maybe the best record this year.

I just wasn't expecting such a wonderfully refreshing punk rock sound; manic changes in pace and circus-like guitar breaks. I loved it, and not only the sound but the vocals were great too; frantic, loose and straight from the gut, expressing an honest frustration, humour and fucked-up defiance all at once. There is a personal edge to their music that's as brash and sincere as **The Stooges**. Black Flag have no political, social or romantic prettiness, their songs come right out of a bunch of fucked-up suburban kids having fun. They may take their down-and-out hedonism to excess at times but what the hell?

Black Flag's brain damaged, teenage depression ethic may sound a bit trite and old now, since the incarnation of Iggy Pop, Sid Vicious and the Ramones, and indeed many of the new hardcore punk groups take this mentality to a ridiculous and silly extreme. But their expression is honestly personal without ever sounding overly serious. It's always themselves they're screaming about, whether in pain or pleasure. There's no smug, conceited indictment against the middle-class, society, the government, etc., etc. that most of today's moralistic punks push so easily. The Dead Kennedys (another L.A. punk group) anti-establishment act is often hateful, ugly and blindly narrow (though of course "Nazi Punks Fuck Off" is a great song) and breeds so much punk rebellion, a rebellion that has nothing to do with true rebellion at all.

I had similar vague ideas about Black Flag until I heard this record. Maybe the sheer honesty of singing only about themselves and not projected ideas about others was what struck me so much. It's their existence you get; squandering, boredom, T.V., beer and cheap thrills looked at with an indifferent and sometimes comic eye. X, the other prominent new group from L.A., try to be personal as well, yet much

of their stuff comes off as arty, poised imitation of love and suffering. With Black Flag you don't get much talk about sex, women or "love", probably because they don't get it often. It's honest.

Vocalist Henry Rollins and guitarist Greg Ginn are to me the heart and spirit behind the band. Rollins sings like no one else, his voice tough, strong, and off-the-wall. He half talks and half sings, usually with an air of cool detachment, often sounding pissed off or just plain pissed, and yet he does it so freely. It's the voice of every frustrated hip punk, but one you'd never expect to get on record. Ginn is a great guitarist, firing the songs with wildly chaotic guitar outbursts and feedback like no other guitarist. He writes most of the material also and the sudden changes in pace he creates jar you excitedly. It's like Ornette Coleman dancing in your head sometimes. This band attacks all out.

Damaged works as a cohesive, powerful piece but there are certain songs, in particular certain lines, which I really love. In fact it's the one liners that make the album.

Much of the lyrics become overly neurotic and burdening in a selfish, play acting manner, but with these hard shots it's no great matter. "Spray Paint" is a viciously fast song with mostly incoherent lyrics. Anyway, it knocks me out when Rollins screams, "Spray paint the walls, Uh!" There's a wonderful release to it. Then comes "Six Pack", "I gotta six pack and I got nothing to do/I gotta six pack and I don't need you." Zoom, the guitar takes off. Again there is that freedom and purity of expression. Another great line is, "I wanna live/I wish I was dead", a real frustration and funny as hell, especially the way Rollins delivers it.

But the best number is "T.V. Party", a great satire, self parody and a good laugh all in one, and it rocks like mad. Rollins comes in talking, or singing I guess, about having a T.V. party with the boys, having a couple of brew and turning off their minds. He sounds partially in desperation about his T.V. addiction and partially like he's going to break-out in laughter. "We don't wanna talk about anything

cause/We don't wanna know! /Yeah, we're gonna have a T.V. Party tonight/ALRIGHT!" It really is a great song, not only a good slap at television but a healthy laugh at themselves. They

watch T.V. too. We all need a good dose of T.V. for a sedative sometimes. Hey, let's forget our problems, let's forget our MINDS.

Let's have a T.V. Party with Black Flag! ALRIGHT!



Book examines baby boom generation

The Big Generation
John Kettle
McClelland and Stewart
264 pages (including notes)
by Geoff Martin

In Canada today there is an explosive situation developing which has the potential to completely transform our society and way of life. Nuclear war? Maybe, but the answer is much simpler, and according to John Kettle in his latest book, **The Big Generation**, it is a sure thing: The 'Baby Boom'.

To most people in Canada, the baby boom was a sort of myste-

rious, sudden increase in the number of children born in the period immediately after the Second World War until some time in the mid 1960's. And of course, it has ended (case closed).

Unfortunately, this scenario is not the case. What Kettle has done is produce the first substantial work on what he calls the 'Big Generation', the seven million Canadians who were born in the period from 1951 to 1966.

continued on page 16

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