

# arts

## Rollins gets trapped in comedic paper bag

by Mike Graham & Michael Gushue

Henry Rollins has had an interesting ten years or so. He fronted one of the quintessential hardcore bands, Black Flag, for a while, he has dabbled in spoken and published word and he has an ongoing involvement with The Rollins Band. And now he has just released a compilation of some of his spoken word performances. What follows are two views on this (disappointing) double cassette.

**The Boxed Life**  
Henry Rollins  
BMG/Imago

**Graham:** Henry Rollins always struck me as a very intense person with caffeine for blood. The lyrics to My War ("I feel in heart that if I had a gun/I feel in my heart I'd want to kill some/I feel in my heart the end will come") and other songs are incredible in their intensity and delivery. I guess that I was expecting the same sort of thing on The Boxed Life — just without music. Angst ridden, intense, self-degrading, cathartic, and damning horror stories from his troubled life maybe. But no, unfortunately what I got was over two hours of solid boredom; listening to Henry trying to be funny — and failing miserably.

**Gushue:** My memories of the various Rollins projects over the past seven years left an imprint of a man with something to say. His expressway to hell past left what I thought was an intensely bitter human being who channelled that bitterness into memorable anecdotes. I was expecting Henry to once again tell me why the world sucks and scare me with a plan to redeem us all. I thought I might even learn something more from The Boxed Life...I was wrong.

**Graham:** If I hadn't offered to review this I would have clicked the

stop button 2 minutes into it. It was boring, totally and completely uninspired, it provoked no thought whatsoever and I thought it would never end. Henry Rollins told his hokey little stories and got the laughs from the audience. I could not believe Rollins' subject matter: airports, lineups and hatred of U2 (told to a crowd of drunks in Ireland...gosh Henry, how daring and incisive), all of which he talked about at a elementary school level. There were absolutely no insightful, interesting or witty comments made about ANYTHING!

**Gushue:** The material divided itself into two categories; simple standup routines where Rollins spent too much time telling us it what was funny about airports, the battle of the sexes and urine. This brand-x humour failed to make a statement about

**"an embarrassment"**

anything and should stay in his journal. The material that works focuses on life stories, and had a general point to make about hanging in through rough times, good advice, and hating with style and creativity. The double-cassette was too long and should be shortened to one tape.

**Graham:** I'd rather watch An Evening at the Improv than listen to Henry Rollins ramble on and on using tired old comedic devices such as "Don'tcha hate it when..." and "Wouldn't you love to <insert violent fantasy>", etc... It just doesn't work — no matter how thick your neck is!

Although there are couple exceptions, this agonizingly long piece of tape is nothing more than Henry Rollins attempting stand-up comedy and labeling it as "spoken word". The jokes are incredibly tired: "You know, this ad...have you noticed this ad?";

"I've come to the conclusion that all women are evil... and all men are morons". Ho ho ho...Henry, you're too funny and so original. People actually laughed at this drivel! I just wished that he would shut up. In any case, this tape is completely devoid of any intelligence, a waste of time to listen to and an embarrassment. Stick to the music Henry.

**Gushue:** Hearing Rollins wear out tired jokes about everyday life does make the Improv start to look appeal-

ing but I thought the tracks dealing with his high-school years and the lab job proceeding graduation, "Strength" part 1 & 2, and his Lollapalooza memories of Tom Waits, "Good Advice", saved the set for me with their background info on the life of Henry Rollins and his thoughts on the struggle to get through life and how in the end he's just another guy spewing words into a microphone. That may be true, but next time put those words to music, the more intense the better.



"Hi. I'm Henry Rollins - aka comedic schmuck"

## 1/2 way excellent!

by Roland Stone

First impressions can sometimes be deceiving. For example, when the debut release of California's Half Way Home arrived in the Gazette office, there was no pushing and shoving by eager reviewers wanting to get their hands on this cassette. Why is that you ask?

**Half Way Home**  
Self-titled  
MCA Records

Upon first look one sees some very colourful cover art of a landscape with a country road winding its way through fields towards the mountains in the distance. Very serene. Inside, one finds two group photos of a very clean, smiling, good-looking band, who look like they are just a bit too happy. Finally, upon seeing song titles such as "Divine Grace" and "Jesus Rocked the Cradle", we all thought "Oh no, Christian band! Who wants this?" And here, dear readers, begins the lesson of how not to let first impressions deceive you.

This recording begins with vocalist Jennifer Barry asserting "Shh... Shut the fuck up... Thank You." She proceeds to wail out the opening

verse of "Built for Fools", and when the band follows suit, with their frenzied attack, all previous concerns of too-niceness and Christian direction were allayed. Barry's vocals are powerful and melodic, and are similar to the goddess Joplin, without the cigarette and alcohol raunch. Her lyrics are positive and spiritual, and despite the deceiving titles, do not seem to be Christian-oriented.

Musically this band is flawless. Each song is distinct and there is no indication of any of the tunes being conceived as radio singles. True, there could easily be hits, but they will



come from the strong content and integrity of the music.

The main influences detected in this quartet are, first and foremost, Jimi Hendrix's Band of Gypsies. This is evident in the funky-driven "Built For Fools" and "You're So Essential" as well as the slow blues of the aforementioned "Jesus..." and "Etched In Stone." In addition, I would say that guitarist Dean Zuckerman grew up as a huge Eddie Van Halen fan. His chording style and clear solos smoke and sizzle just like that of the golden days of V.H. Finally, the band at times shows some similarities to late 80's alternatives-cum-superstars Jane's Addiction and Red Hot Chili Peppers.

The drums and bass of Kevin Costner (oops, Costigan) and Eddie Fagan respectively are solid and creative and leave little room for improvement.

The band, however, is not all groove and grind, as is evident on the track "Look around Yourself". This song is a much quieter, melodic, sing along type of tune that shows the band's ability to diversify. Unfortunately, I would say that this is also the weakest tune on the album for the mere fact that the chorus is repeated so many times that, by the end, the listener may be ready to smash the tape machine. This little quirk aside, this is a very solid and mature release with a production and sound quality that rivals the talent of the band itself.

