

REVIEW

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sometimes "basic" can kick as hard as the next guy, as is the case with Blackbird's label-mates, Mother's Finest.

Mother's Finest
Scotti Bros., campus
radio release
Like A Negro
1992

Whoa, boy...Mother's Finest kicks it out with this four-song release. This five-piece setup has a pretty heavy dose of cheeziness as far as their presentation goes, but they put out in the rawk department. Any doubts I had about these guys and girl were gone by the end of the first song.

Some of the lyrics are kind of rudimentary, like "AIDS sucks/crack sucks/being homeless sucks/racism sucks/censorship sucks/pollution sucks..." but at least they're coming from

the right place.

The only song on this CD that isn't on their first album is "Police on My Back," a cover of the Clash song. The promo material that came with the CD makes it seem like the band rushed into the studio and cut this song as soon as possible to make some sort of comment on the Rodney King scene. Fortunately, they rip it up.

This EP wets my appetite for more, and I would recommend picking up the first album by Mother's Finest, titled *Black Radio Won't Play This Record*, because the first three songs on this EP are available on that. If you are the type of review reader that craves comparison, I suppose Mother's Finest sounds like small-town grunge factory hip-hop workers vacationing in the lower east side until the hotel that they're staying at suddenly sucked into a Don Cornelius-induced frenzy served up with a hefty portion of Danceteria-styled towheads all rocking to a funky beat laid down by Bootsy himself with Vernon Reid at the controls.

BABY GRAMPS

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tion that the blues has taught him will always be at the core of what he does.

"It's never been about show-biz. To me, [music] is life and death stuff," Ryan said.

The antique steel-bodied guitar is another aspect that the music of these two artists has in common. Both play Resophonic guitars that were made before the 1930s.

"For blues players, these guitars are part of the historic allure," said Gavin "the Rooster" Fox, KLCC's host for the Sunday "Blues Power" show. Invented before amplification, this type of guitar was designed with resonators within the body, which gives the sound a unique "metallic edge," Fox said.

These National Steel guitars are especially suited for the novelty songs from the 1920s and 30s that are Gramps' specialty. He is also renowned for singing and writing tunes with whimsical lyrics. One such song is an original titled "The Palendrome Song," which contains at least 50 palendromes, or words that read the same forward and backward. The title for Bela Fleck and the Flecktones' album "UFO Tofu" is credited to his song. "I've Never Seen a Straight Banana" is another playful Gramps tune.

"He inspires hysterical laughter," said Eric Peterson, the regional concert coordinator for the EMU Cultural Forum, which is bringing this event to Eugene as its first annual concert. "He's like a

giant, oversized cartoon character. It's incredible to see the crowd's reaction," said Peterson, who has seen Gramps at the Oregon Country Fair.

Gramps' stage persona is partly attributable to hokum, "a theatrical way of experimenting on the audience like they did in vaudeville," Gramps said.

Another element of his style is his own exaggerated version of ragtime, meaning "ragged-time," or synchopation. For those of us who are not music majors, this is when a tone is begun on the last half of a beat and then continued through the first half of the next beat. Ragtime dates back to before the turn of the century, but it became more polished later when classical musicians such as George Gershwin adapted it. Gramps uses it in the original spirit of the word.

Gramps said he admires and has been influenced by Gus Cannon, Gobel Reeves, Joseph Spence and Bob Dylan, among others.

Gramps performed in the Academy Award nominated movie *Streetwise* and he gave Jeff Bridges music lessons for the upcoming movie *American Heart*. He has been recorded on eight album compilations around the country, such as at the annual Northwest Folklife Festival in Seattle and for one cut in the Victory Music Review's 20th anniversary edition, *Northwest Songwriters*. The latter recording is available by sending \$11.50 for a CD or \$9.50 for a tape to PO Box 7515, Bonney Lake, Wash., 98390. Ryan will have two of his

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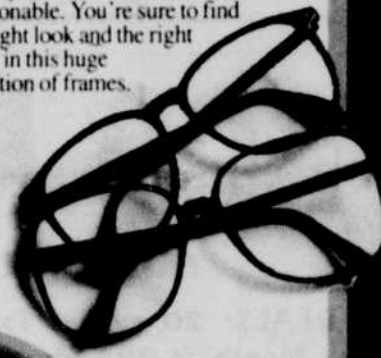
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