

Cracker continues making world safe for rock 'n' roll

So, I've been pretty sick the past few days. Right now, I pity any of my classmates, as they are currently being subjected to all manner of sniffing, snorting and airborne germs.

As a kid, I was sick a lot of the time (in second grade, I actually got bumped down to a lower reading level because I missed three weeks of school), but these days, getting sick is kind of weird. I'm usually not ready for it, and when I began to feel that telltale tickling in the back of my throat last Friday, I knew that I'd be in for a week or so of misery.

I figured that the best cure for what ailed me would be some good music. So, before the depths of melancholy fully engulfed me, I went out and got the new album by Cracker, "Forever."

You've heard Cracker before, but you probably don't know it. Consisting of singer/guitarist David Lowery, lead guitarist Johnny Hickman and an ever-changing rhythm section, Cracker has made it their business to write solid rock songs (à la Tom Petty) with an occasionally humorous, sarcastic bent. They had a really big hit back in 1993 called "Low." It was that song that went "I'll be with you, girl / Like being low / Hey, hey, hey / Like being stone."

Since topping the charts way back when, Cracker has kept a pretty low profile. They released two more albums (1996's "The Golden Age" and

"Gentlemen's Blues" in 1998, both worth buying) but couldn't repeat the runaway success of "Low."

"Forever" isn't going to bring Cracker back to the mainstream, because right now the music industry is preoccupied with cotton-candy superstars and whiny metal-

heads who didn't get along with their dads. That's too bad, because "Forever" is one of those albums that is so good that it frightens me a little.

After using all of my strength to purchase "Forever," I went home and collapsed into my bed with the album playing. Listening intently as I went through a box of Kleenex, I must admit that at first I was a bit surprised and somewhat unimpressed. Previous Cracker albums had been heavy on a bluesy, Southern rock 'n' roll feel. The opening song on "Forever," "Brides of Neptune," begins with some eerie keyboards and what sounds like a gospel choir singing underwater. Then Lowery starts singing about dating mermaids and being guarded by monkeys. What's going on here?



Dave Depper
In Stereo

The answer is that throughout "Forever," Cracker has broadened their sound to a wonderful effect. Sleigh bells and gospel singing permeate the bittersweet "Merry Christmas, Emily," while "Ms. Santa Cruz County" and "Shameless" apply a funk sensibility that on paper should be awful, but somehow they manage to pull it off. The addition of Kenny Margolis on keyboards has had a marked effect on these guys — nearly every song features thick glaciers of an organ or the haunted-house vibe of a well-placed Mellotron.

The shining jewel on "Forever" is undoubtedly "Sweet Magdalena of My Misfortune," which could very well be the best song that Cracker has ever produced. Whenever Lowery sings "So many words / I never found / to make you stay / for just one more day," I just can't help but get a lump in my throat.

So, as I laid low this weekend, doing homework as my body battled a myriad of invaders, I had an excellent soundtrack to my woe. "Forever" is not only Cracker's best work to date, but it's also the best album that I have heard so far in 2002. Buy it and make the world safe again for solid rock 'n' roll with a beating heart.

E-mail columnist Dave Depper at davedepper@dailymerald.com. His opinions do not necessarily represent those of the Emerald.

But John Bartlang, former production manager of the Cultural Forum, said the lack of hip-hop in local concert venues should help spark ticket sales.

"People in Eugene are aching for more hip-hop," Bartlang said. "This is the biggest concert to come to Eugene in a while." Carson said the high price didn't scare her away from what she expects to be a big show worth the money.

"I thought price was a little high, but they probably had to pay to get them to come here," she said.

She said this performance is different than most of the concerts that come to Eugene because it has big hip-hop names and more mainstream types of music.

"It will be interesting to have

more variety, more different kinds of groups coming in," Carson said.

Catlin said other concerns about the concert included ensuring that the audience respects Mac Court. There will be absolutely no smoking in the building, he said, and there will be a strong security presence to ensure nothing is damaged. He said future concerts at the basketball court will depend on how well the building survives this performance.

This concert "has the potential to be the biggest hit at the UO," Catlin said, and he recommended that those attending take the bus, walk or ride a bike to the performance because parking will be limited.

E-mail reporter Jen West at jenwest@dailymerald.com.

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fans from both Portland and Medford. "It's not going to be a small show," Gilbert said. He said there is going to be a lot of excitement, a good light show and a lot of sound.

Gilbert said Sunday's performance will bring a diverse crowd of fans who enjoy both Ice-T's "old school" rap and Nelly's "new school" hip-hop.

"The music has brought a lot of people together," he said. "It's about not being separate, but (about) unity."

He said hip-hop brought dance to the rap genre and a younger audience. "You can't dance to old school rap," he said.

Gilbert said he is confident the artists will put on a good show.

"People are going to leave the show with awe on their face," he said.

High ticket prices seems to be deterring many students from attending the concert, Catlin said.

"So far (ticket sales) are not going as fast as we want them to," he said.

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