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What's wrong, right with modern rock

CD review

Ryan Nyburg
Freelance Reporter

It's amazing how two different releases can so accurately point out what is right and wrong with modern rock.

Mudhoney's latest "Since We've Become Translucent" represents the former, while Coldplay's "A Rush of Blood to the Head" rounds off the latter, each presenting the highs and lows of today's music trends.

One of the survivors of the Seattle grunge farce of the early '90s, Mudhoney has always been the first and last word in that musical offshoot. They so embody the term "grunge" that you might believe they spend all day in flannels, drinking beer and not shaving. Doubtful, but nice to think about.

On "Since We've Become Translucent," the band puts together a trash compactor of rock 'n' roll history, mixing blues, country, garage, metal, psychedelia and just about everything in between, all linked by the band's rollicking energy, all distinctly their own.

Mudhoney also adds horn arrangements to their slash-and-burn take on music, but while this might come off as overproduction in the hands of other bands, it fits perfectly here. The horns add a '50s flavor to some of the tracks, making some of the straight-out rockers sound like more like Eddie Cochran on Benzedrine.

The whole album seems to have been driven at the frenzied, gritty pace of a Russ Meyer film — which is appropriate, considering they got their name from one and often employ the same delightful exploitation. Mudhoney remembers a time when rock could be powerful, moving — even sexy — and their music expresses that.

Now for those who prefer the more whiny, weepy side of rock music, Coldplay brings us "A Rush of Blood to the Head." These guys are already holding benefit concerts for fair-trade practices, so you know they've lost touch with reality.

The only band in recent memory to mix politics and music was Rage Against the Machine, and it worked because they were venomous and angry, two descriptions which could never be applied to anything by this band of Brit-pop purveyors.

There is hardly a track on this album that doesn't suffer from overproduction. Whereas Mudhoney's horn section worked with the music

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and wasn't overdone, the string arrangements on "Rush" are worthless, and the songs could have been improved by simplifying the production. They actually add sitars on one track, for no conceivable purpose other than, apparently, to annoy me personally.

All the songs are the same kind of pop-ballad garbage that defined their hit single "Yellow" this past year. The only exception is "A Whisper," where the amps are cranked up a tad, making this track sound, comparatively speaking, like Metallica. The lyrics give little if any indication of the band's political slant, and songs like "The Scientist" are nothing more than collections of break-up clichés and "oh-my-weeping-heart" sentiment.

It's good to know that there are still bands like Mudhoney to add some life and soul to modern rock, and to combat the bland, melancholy stylings of Coldplay. If not, we would be headed down a dark, sitar-strewn road from which few of us would ever return.

Ryan Nyburg is a freelance writer. His opinions do not necessarily represent those of the Emerald.

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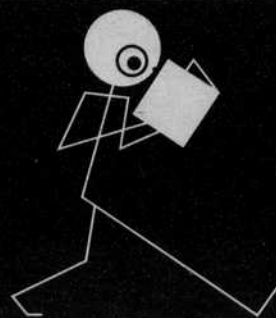
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