

Oft-duplicated formula wrecks latest Offspring

'Splinter' offers the same sounds from previous Offspring albums despite attempted style changes

By Ryan Nyburg
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Punk rock, as a musical form, is rather limited. After 25 years of lock-step beats, minimalist chord progressions and endlessly aggressive vocals, it has come to the point that if a punk band is not consistently inventive then there is no reason to care about their music.

CD REVIEW

The Offspring started out being just a tad more creative than the glut of pop-punk bands that infected radio in the late 1990s. Quick, catchy tunes with funny lyrics have been a punk mainstay since the Ramones, and the Offspring made it their own by adding a healthy ska influence to the equation. But after a couple multi-platinum selling albums, the band seemed to pick a format and settle with it. 1998's "Americana" album was an uneven mix of catchy, radio-friendly pop and angst-ridden dirges about emotional pain.

"Conspiracy of One," released in 2000, offered more of the same, and now last month's "Splinter" brings it all back again, merely copying the same old riffs and the same old ideas. While repeating yourself is hardly a sin in the music biz, problems do arise when each copy just becomes a paler version of the original. "Splinter" is about as pale as it gets, bringing hardly anything new to the mix.

The opening track, "Neocon," sets the tone for the rest of the album. A minute and a half of vague statements that never add up to a purpose, the song finishes before it ever really begins. The rest of the album runs at about the same level. What isn't anthemic angst-parades is humorless frat rock like "The Worst Hangover Ever" (which isn't as funny as it sounds). The band is at its most pathetic when it makes attempts at street cred, such as "Da

Hui," an ode to a Hawaiian surf brotherhood. The song falls flat, not even meeting punk's low standards of originality.

To their credit, the band does attempt some stylistic changes, such as the mostly acoustic "Spare Me the Details." But the problem with acoustic music is that more focus is put on the lyrics and in this case the band finds itself once again lacking. Despite the sub-Steve Miller rhyming schemes ("time" and "mind," "eyes" and "knife"), the story of a guy whose girlfriend cheats on him lacks both a point and a purpose, and the whole thing seems like an attempt to recreate their own damaged relationship classic "Self Esteem."

Probably the only worthwhile song on the album is also the first single, the ultra catchy "Hit That." With its simplistic Devo-style synthesizer riff, it shows the band taking a few steps in a different direction. But the next track, "Race Against Myself," jettisons any hope that the Offspring will again become interesting. That song is merely indicative of the problems on so many of the songs on "Splinter." The lyrics run through all the usual depressing clichés, "I've had all I can stand," etc. But the angst is never directed at anything in particular and singer Dexter Holland seems to be depressed for no reason. That doesn't require a song, it requires Prozac.

There has long been talk, mostly among punk rock purists, who tend to be the worst sort of musical fascists anyway, that the Offspring have sold out and have begun pandering to the market. It's difficult to say if this is really true, since the band did some of their most inventive work while still selling millions. They've always been a pop band at the core. But the difference now is that each song feels ready for a demographic, and though the band has grown up, their music is still attempting to work for the same age group. Now it has stopped feeling honest and one day people will stop listening. If their next album is as stale as this one, that day may not be far off.

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