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Hip-hop artists triumph in 'Akword Experience'

The Portland-based artists give the genre a good name

By Aaron Shakra
Pulse Editor

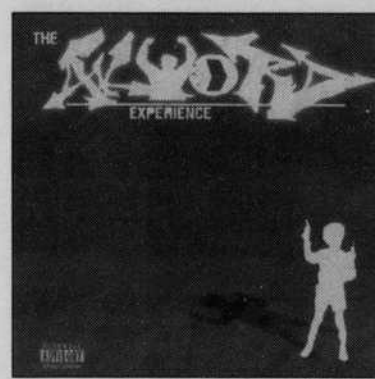
Every genre has its believers and non-believers; those who will praise, and those who will deride, those who will criticize and those who will deny its status. And while hip-hop's birth cannot be traced to any significant event, the best releases now represented by the genre have grown past mere showoff flows, diss-fests and pointless rants about booze, cheese and women. At its best, hip-hop is a tool of empowerment, to inform and promote peace.

CD REVIEW

based hip-hop artists, serves as a prime example.

On the track "Real Thingz (featuring: MyG)," one flow goes, "I give respect and learn to live with my defects / build strength out of my weaknesses to build up this power in humility inherent in my weakness." And then the chorus, "Real things / relevant to our struggle / real things / can't let the cycle crumble / real things."

"The Akword Experience," a recent release from a group of Portland-



Courtesy

"The Akword Experience," released by a group of Portland hip-hop artists, uses music to educate audiences.

The track "Mind CNTRL (Featuring Mic. Crenshaw and Gen.Erik)" tackles the issues of a media-oriented culture that keeps the masses distracted. It opens with a sample of a man saying, "The American people are conditioned by network TV, by local news, to believe their communities are more dangerous than they actually are," before "The most powerful weapons keeping our minds controlled / distracted from the essence so we can't find the soul." And later, "We procure weapons to ensure protection, when the only thing that's guaranteed is death."

"Manifest Destiny (Featuring

Habibullah)" is one of the album's most empowering tracks, with lyrics such as, "We're all equal / not a person who's less than me, let's go ahead and manifest our destinies. We'll fulfill the maximums of our potential / We want to be free but that's all in the mental."

One downside of this release is perhaps the instrumental accompaniment, which seems entirely composed of computerized beats, loops and sampling. More creative use of these techniques would have helped, or perhaps even the integration of live instrumentation. Still, there are notable efforts. "Dreamz (Featuring Beau Bryan w/SNAUFU)" uses a nice Latin loop, but beyond the introduction, the music fails to match the stellar flows. Other interesting tracks are "Maximize" and the all-instrumental "Sacrifice," the album's closer.

Essence is a theme that runs throughout the 16 tracks of "The Akword Experience." More than anything, it is the intention behind the words which must be recognized. This is the hope for any piece of artwork that attempts to move the listener to action.

More information and free tracks from the release are available at the Web site <http://www.spark1200.com>.

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redemptive and a really big deal, because it expressed such deep values. Now, (and I think it's pretty sad), but who believes that? Maybe it's kind of the end of the symbolic thing when people realize it doesn't really deliver as much as we thought. It doesn't stand up to what's going on in society.

Emerald: Is the creation of art necessarily rooted in desire? Or is it possible for art to come from our relationship with nature, or something else?

JZ: Sure, it's possible. I just have this feeling there wasn't a need to represent things, or objectify. Apparently, people were satisfied with just digging nature, just being in nature, and having a real, full communion with nature, if you

will. And I think when you start losing it, then you have to paint it, rather than live it. And, of course, that's a big generalization, but you can kind of chart that progression and see that something is slipping away, and problems are emerging, and then the symbolic is emerging at the same time. One seems to be there in lieu of the other.

Emerald: Do you think there would be fewer artists today if, on the whole, we had a healthier relationship with our environment and surroundings?

JZ: I think so, in a basic way. For example, writing — I look at it the same way. I'm a writer. I've written various books, and I'm not stopping being a writer. I could say "The Case Against Writing" just as easily, and I have, actually. I'm doing it in the same kind of situation. I am cut off from nature; we're cut off from these natural

connections, and that's why we persevere, in terms of art, or writing, or whatever it is. That's why I'm not saying it's bad. But if there was a disalienated world, would we need to do that stuff? That's really the question I'm asking.

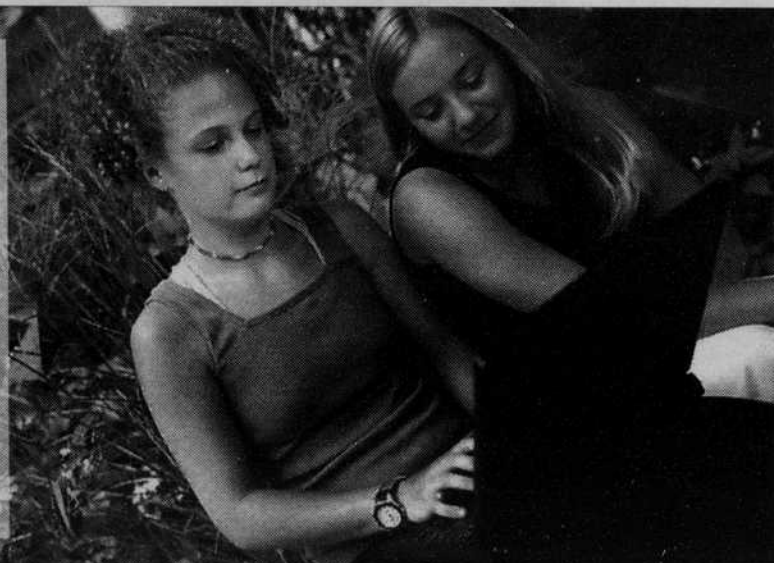
Emerald: So you are writing to find a way to reconnect yourself with your surroundings, nature, and the environment?

JZ: Yeah, as part of a movement to challenge the society and replace the society to where that would be possible again. To stop the destruction of the natural world and be able to reconnect with it, instead of all the piling up the mediation and standardization and all of the rest of the awful stuff that's going on. It's got to be stopped. And that's why I write.

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