

■ CD review

'Crimes' punk music runs Blood deep

Despite a simpler overall sound, the latest album from The Blood Brothers injects complex lyrics

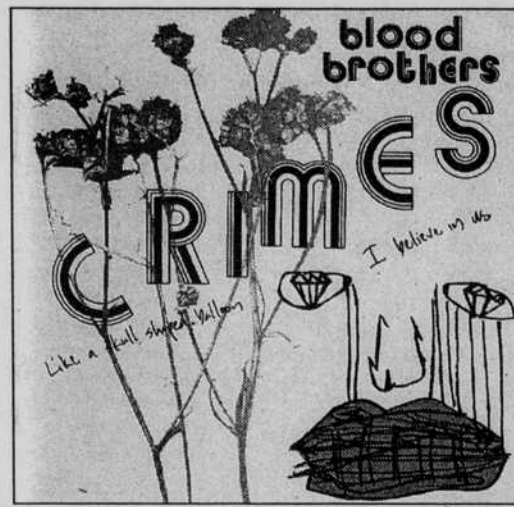
BY RYAN NYBURG
PULSE EDITOR

If you ignore what their music actually sounds like (not an easy task), The Blood Brothers have the surface look of a standard-issue emo band: double vocalists, lyrics about pain and suffering, sudden tempo changes and plenty of high-issue drama. Funny how the look of things can be so deceiving. Actually listening to them reveals that the twin vocal attack sounds like mental ward inmates exchanging bloodcurdling screams between Thorazine doses, that the lyrics deal with the sort of existential and cultural pain usually left to raving street lunatics and that the tempo changes are precision-timed shifts between haunting melodies and the most aggressive hard-core punk currently being put to record.

On "Crimes," their follow-up to 2003's "Burn Piano Island, Burn," The Blood Brothers have made a few variations to their sonic assault. They simplified the arrangements, brought the use of keyboards and Wurlitzer organs higher up in the mix and have even slowed things down on a few tracks. But even though some songs on the album are downright listenable, this doesn't mean the band as a whole has become any easier of a pill to swallow.

"Piano Island" solidified the group as some of the few honest-to-god avant-gardists in modern punk. The abrasive quality of the music hid complex song structures based on damn-near impossible time signatures, and often the arrangements sounded like they could have been written by Captain Beefheart, had he done the appropriate levels of Benzedrine.

The group also borrowed another aspect of the Beefheart canon with its surrealist approach to



COURTESY

The latest from Seattle's The Blood Brothers, "Crimes," is a powerful punk-rock assault that combines surrealist imagery with complex, abrasive music.

lyrics. A head rush of images flowed through each song, as if the words came first and the meaning was attached later. What still separates the Brothers from others who use surrealism for the pure hipness value is that the lyrics actually do contain a discernible meaning.

"Crimes" is basically no different than its predecessor, if only a bit more refined. The band balances out its assaults of guitar and vocal violence with odd melodic moments, which hook listeners just in time to have their feet swept out from under them by the next assault. And while the arrangements might not be as complex as before, this gives the band a little more breathing room to unleash their musical assaults. And even though things are simpler, that doesn't make them necessarily simple. The band still contains one of the most adept rhythm sections in

punk and the production has fine-tuned everything to a razor's edge.

Lyrical, the group still seems to be working through many of the same issues as on previous albums, namely the psychological effects of capitalism and advertising, the various follies of modern human relationships and other random pieces of cultural absurdity. They resemble nothing so much as a sped-up version of the early Butthole Surfers, minus much of the humor. The title track, for example, has the second-person narrator watching an island of garbage burning off of the shoreline while imagining what we could do by committing acts of theft, all while finding odd comparisons between ourselves and the junk surrounding us.

One central difference between "Crimes" and earlier Blood Brothers releases is the slight expansion in the number of styles the band is working in. The voodoo funk of "Peacock Skeleton with Crooked Feathers" is driven by insistent piano chords rather than hammering guitar riffs, while "My First Kiss at the Public Execution" brings the bass forward through most of the song, leading up to the almost anthem-like chorus. "Live at the Apocalypse Cabaret" is what it sounds like, a spooky punk-rock take on 1930s German decadence.

Although The Blood Brothers have long-since proved that they are one of the best bands working in rock music, "Crimes" leaves the feeling that the band is capable of producing something much better than what they have done so far. So while it might not be the masterpiece the band seems perfectly capable of, it is still one of the best testaments to the further relevance of rock music in general. And while it might not be palatable for many listeners, it still deserves a few spins from those willing to give it a try.

ryannyburg@dailyemerald.com

IN BRIEF

Underground band Built to Spill comes to WOW Hall

On Nov. 4, pop rockers Built to Spill will be performing at the WOW Hall. The popular underground act, known for their pop-culture references, complex, guitar-heavy arrangements and fractured song structures, will be playing along with Mike Johnson and Ape Shape.

Formed in Boise, Idaho, in 1993 by guitarist/songwriter Doug Martsch, the band went through a number of line-up changes before Martsch settled on Brett Nelson on bass and Scott Plouf on drums. The success of their first few albums led to a spot on the 1995 Lollapalooza tour and subsequently a record deal with Warner Bros.

Often compared to Modest Mouse and Neil Young, the band made its name playing intricate pop-rock jams. With their initial critical success in the 1990s, the band began to make an appearance on the pop charts with 1999's "Keep It Like a Secret." The band's last album, 2001's "Ancient Melodies of the Future," didn't fare as well but still received some positive reviews.

The WOW Hall is located at 291 W. 8th Ave. Tickets are \$15 in advance and \$17 at the door. Doors open at 8 p.m. Advance tickets are available at CD/Game Exchange, House of Records, Face the Music, Taco Loco, CD World and the UO Ticket Office.

ryannyburg@dailyemerald.com

I want to work where a brilliant solution pops into my head while I'm getting a massage in the office.

Send your resume with an unofficial copy of your transcript (with Software Engineer - UOregon as the subject line) to collegejobs+uoregon@google.com.

Google has multiple openings at all degree levels (BS/MS/PhD) in computer science or related technical fields. Submission deadline is Sunday, November 14.

Google™

© 2004 Google Inc. All rights reserved.

I want to work where a total lack of culture inspires me to escape the office each day at 5:01 sharp.

Send your resume (with your zip code + Cubemeat as the subject line) to unoriginal@technicage.com