

NW Female MCs, Sirens Echo, Drop Skillz

I've been picking my brain for days trying to figure out who Sirens Echo remind me of. The Portland female hip hop duo of Syndell and Toni Hill lay down raps, soulful melodies and spoken word tirades with crisp, calculated and seductive precision.

They're so good at what they do comparing their lyrical prowess to a male MC's in hopes of qualifying their gender and ability is pointless. Their confidence and skill as MCs, as well as the circles they run in (both hold

Something Bigger, Something Brighter

Pretty Girls Make Graves' first full-length release, *Good Health*, began with a rallying cry: "Do you remember when the music meant something?" It was clear from the start this wasn't another tired release packed with ironic detachment, but something different, more intense and heartfelt. The album had a few bumps, but overall it felt like what it was: the sound of five established musicians melding all their best ideas into song.

Last year, Pretty Girls Make Graves re-

leased *The New Romance*, and where *Good Health* was good, this second album is fantastic. It's all bent angles and zagging lines, fiery packets of sound tied together by Andrea Zollo's remarkable voice, which ricochets around the space between Neko Case's clear, soulful tone and The Distillers' Brody Dalle's insolent pack-a-day growl. The boys in the band (guitarist/sample master Jay Clark, drummer Nick Dewitt, guitarist Nathan Thelen and bassist Derek Fudesco, formerly of Murder City Devils) lend their voices to nearly every song as well, roughing up the background for Zollo here, taking the lead there. They sneak samples and synth sounds in with the customary rock instrumentation, and they pack more snippets of melody into each song than many bands deliver over the course of an entire album. What results is angular, semi-art punk music you can dance to; it also makes for an energetic, impassioned live show.

Pretty Girls Make Graves perform with dios malos and Testface at 8:30 pm Wednesday, March 9 at the WOW Hall. \$10.

— Molly Templeton

KRS-One Drops Some Knowledge

KRS-One is not hip hop's messiah here to deliver us from the jiggy/bling hollowness of commercial hip hop or the whack, elitist bullshit of too-underground dictionary rap. He is our teacher. Hip hop's "Teacha."

And with hip hop culture and rap music breaching geographic boundaries, influencing so much of corporate America's marketing and development (you can't tell me Motorola wasn't thinking rap when they created the Sidekick), and dominating, no, slaying global music sales, it may be time to step

back, take a deep breath and listen to the Teacha preach for just a minute.

The Brooklyn-born, South Bronx-raised KRS-One dive-bombed the hip hop scene in 1986 with Boogie Down Productions, a collaboration with his former youth counselor and DJ partner Scott La Rock. Their first release, *Criminal Minded*, heralded by many as one of the first gangsta rap albums, utilized violent imagery and gangsta signifiers to illustrate both the reality of ghetto violence as well as the irony behind its connection to decrepit and racist social institutions. After

you're talking about a man who upon induction into a now purely imagined hip hop hall of fame will stand side by side with people such as Kool Herc, Run DMC, the Rocksteady Crew and Lee Quinones? Besides, arrogance was always suspected as being hip hop's fifth element.

Cultural forecasters, trend mongers, and "new-jack" fans can rave about the next big thing in hip hop, whether it be the lyrical complexity of Sage Francis or the glitched-out beats of Prefuse 73. But unless they listen to Boogie Down Productions' *Criminal*

Where Naked Music lacks serious lyrical content, Sirens Echo attacks and conquers.

memberships with the Old Dominion crew) testify to their greatness.

Their production team, which includes Northwest beat makers Pale Soul, Mr. Hill, Mako and The Chosen, mold a very distinct, clean sound unencumbered by the intentional lo-fi rasp that weighs down a lot of underground hip hop acts. That's not to say that the music of Sirens Echo is uplifting or fluffy. Put simply, female MCs at large don't really buy into a lot of the gender roles and dynamics you see played out in a lot of popular music, and Sirens Echo is no exception.

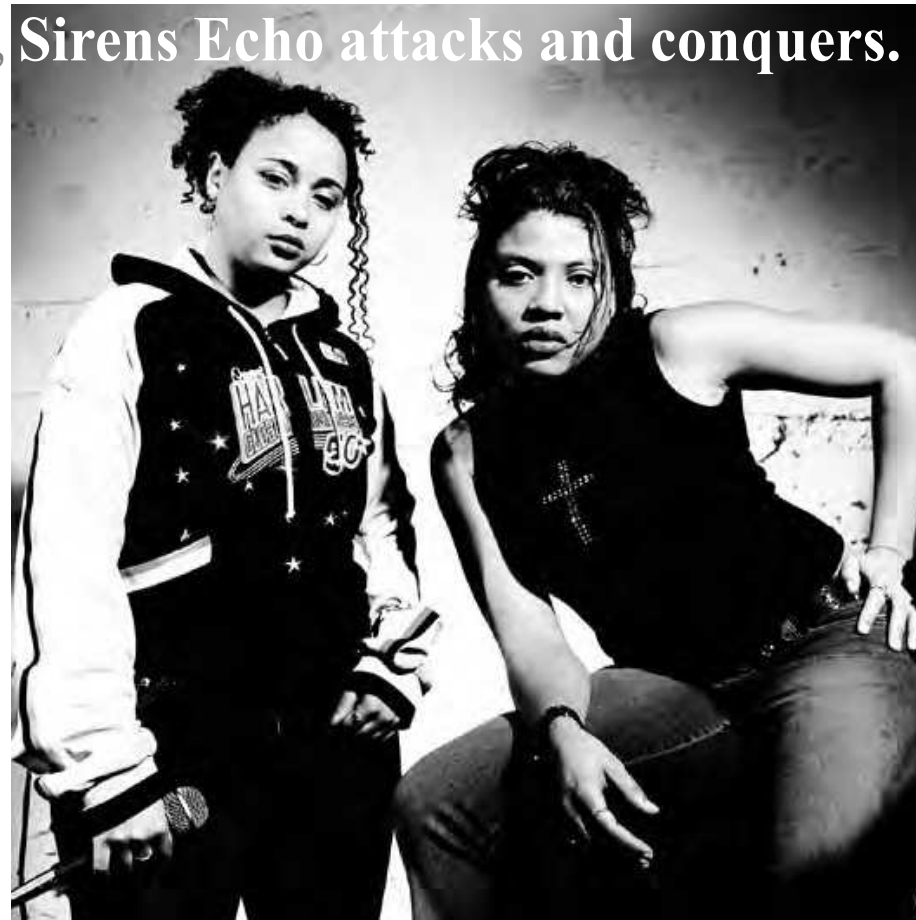
As I continued to plow through their new album, *Psalms of the Siren*, for the sixth or seventh time, I realized the amalgamation of sound my musical memory was trying to scratch at.

First the combined sound, or aesthetic of San Francisco's Naked Music artists came to mind. In terms of the downtempo, broken beat side of things they definitely share that chic, soulful, jazzy sound. And where Naked Music lacks serious lyrical content, Sirens Echo attacks and conquers.

But that still wasn't close enough. Then I remembered the Austrian nu-jazz collective Jazzanova and their remix of Ursula Rucker's "Circe." Syndell and Hill's vocals, especially on songs such as "And All My..." and "Big City" reminded me of Rucker's strong yet sensual lyrical persona. At the same time, on songs such as "Gone Be With You," Syndell and Hill get grimy enough to throw down with the hardest of MCs.

Sirens Echo perform with Cool Nutz, Maniac Lok, Michael K. and DJ Chill at John Henry's, 10 pm Friday, March 4. \$5.

— Steven Sawada



Scott La Rock was brutally slain in 1987, KRS-One continued as a solo MC, founding hip hop's "Stop the Violence" movement long before the death of Tupac or Biggie. If only we had listened.

Because of KRS-One's sometimes incendiary remarks, rappers and critics alike often write him off as arrogant and overly preachy. But if you endure the initial hyperbole, used with the intent to filter out culture spies and confuse Bill O'Reilly-type haters, you can begin to understand the righteousness of his message. Plus, is it really dogmatic when

Minded from start to finish (not just hear but listen), they will never understand the essence behind hip hop culture or rap music. It's like Ziggy Marley said, "don't know your past, don't know your future."

KRS-One is touring in support of his newest album *Keep Right*. With Soundproof, Debaser, the Phormula and Seattle's own Boom Bap Project opening things up, this will be one of the best hip hop shows you will ever witness. 8 pm, Thursday, March 10 at the WOW Hall. \$20.

— Steven Sawada

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