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**music** BY STEVE SAWADA



**Escape From Razorblade City**

Lifesavas ride the *Gutterfly* into Eugene

Up here in the Northwest, whenever the name Lifesavas gets mentioned in conversation, I can't help but feel a welling pride rise from my gut and through my tongue as I chime in, "Those cats are good people."

We can ruminate on the ways in which the group has helped elevate the Portland/NW hip hop scene into the global spotlight, or we can rewind about four years to a packed Hamlin Middle School gymnasium where Lifesavas MC Vursatyl rocked a starry-eyed audience of 12-year-olds with rapid fire rhymes and uplifting words of encouragement. Gracious and glowing, Vursatyl said what he wanted to say, talked with some kids after his performance and then jumped in his car and was back off to Portland. Like I said, good people.

With *Gutterfly*, a blazing new record released in April, the group has further expanded their creative horizons by forging a provocative concept album that pays homage to the great blaxploitation films of the '70s and delves deeper into various pockets of the black experience the group touched on in their debut, *Spirit in Stone*. With *Gutterfly*, purportedly the soundtrack to an unfinished blaxploitation film of the same name, the trio takes on ghetto superhero alter egos in order to rise up and combat the physical, mental and social perils of Razorblade City (aka P-Town).

As I spoke with Vursatyl over the phone, he explained that among the violence and

misogyny portrayed in the blaxploitation genre, the films were still replete with positive images for the black community. "These were black stars, black heroes trying to survive and uplift their community," he said.

He was careful to explain that yes, within the movement there were images that could be viewed as exploitative, but as with hip hop, there were very positive messages mixed in as well. "There are lots of parallels between where hip hop is now and where blaxploitation was," Vursatyl said. "There are lots of negative images in hip hop. But our goal, and the same goes with the blaxploitation era, is to show that positive images can exist in this time of gangstas and hustlers."

Along with the social themes, the group also took cues from the blaxploitation

soundtrack by incorporating funk, rock and R&B into the *Gutterfly* sound. To enhance their efforts, they pulled together an incredible cast of guests who personify both the conscious hip hop movement and these other forms of black inspired music — dead prez, Fishbone, George Clinton and Vernon Reid, to name a few.

"We're reflecting on 30 years of black music," Vursatyl explained. "We kind of played the role of casting directors: finding the perfect theme and the perfect sound for them to fit in to."

With a sophomore effort this strong, not only is NW hip hop in great hands, the future of conscious hip hop is also securely vested with these Lifesavas. **EW**

**Lifesavas,**  
Strange Fruit Project,  
DJ Marc Sense  
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