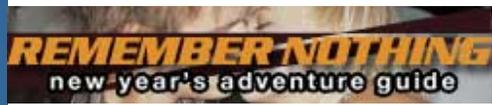


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## Music Recordings

By Gilbert Garcia and Allen Sloan Torpie

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Haggis  
What's Up Haircut?  
(Epixuti)

In a live setting, Haggis is a source of pure astonishment. The group's hard-driving guitar-rock--while taking some influence from punk and the early '90s grunge revolution--initially seems kinda plain and conventional. Before you know it, though, you find yourself bowled over by this band's overpowering sense of command, the way it takes the tried-and-true rock elements and reminds you of why they worked in the first place. In a way, it's somewhat similar to the effect that Urge Overkill managed at its best.

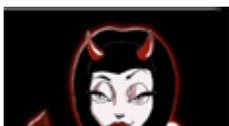
This debut CD--a seven-song, 20-minute harbinger of greater glories likely to come--captures much of what makes this Tempe band so undeniably powerful onstage, although it's essentially a raw, home-studio recording. Lead singer/songwriter Brian Talenti's knack for the killer hook repeatedly insinuates itself, even when, as on "Lori You're a Shark," that hook is taken from the Cardigans' "Been It."

The band's finest moment comes with "Life of the Party," a rocker so instantly hummable that you'd swear you've heard it before. Its push-pull, bait-and-tease chorus is one of those transcendent rock moments that comes along much too rarely. On this and other sterling tracks, Haggis delivers immediate gratification

without any sour aftertaste.

--Gilbert Garcia

Cousins of the Wize  
A Brief Moment in Time's Pocket



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Healthy mind, healthy body --or at least better alcohol

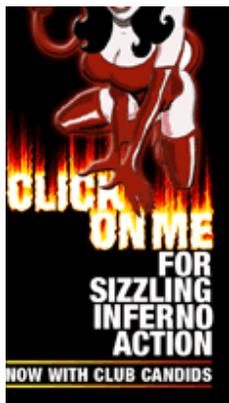
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Who's spinning what, where and when



(Destroyed Public Records)

Given Tempe's restless music scene, local musicians usually strive to carve out a niche that they can not only flourish in, but also call home. With the recent release of its first full-length CD, A Brief Moment in Time's Pocket, Cousins of the Wize has done just that.

Mixing psychedelic jazz, experimental rock and layered rhymes, Cousins of the Wize creates a unique cubbyhole for itself by achieving an urban musical vibe comprising introspective poetry and solid hooks. The CD is anchored in grassroots hip-hop and offers tracks that range from dreamy to unnerving to aggressive. Lyrically, the songs are mature. Throughout the album, traditional hip-hop pretension and attitude are toned down, which work to disarm the listener--there are no quarrels here over who rocks the mike hardest. The CD aims to extend the parameters of hip-hop and does so by borrowing from other musical genres, and by intentionally straying from conventional precepts.

Much to their credit, the debut CD was produced, mixed, edited and mastered entirely by band members and producer Robbie Watson. Given the band's limited studio experience, the recordings are surprisingly polished and well-produced. The tracks themselves are exploratory and roam from crafty to volatile with a subtle emphasis on experimentation. "Chicken Catchatore" and "Never Say Never" were produced in purist hip-hop fashion, with engineered drum tracks and various samples, while the rest of the CD wanders farther into uncharted territory. "Cancerous" and "Momento Mori" are stripped-down tracks that feature impressive harmonies, as the vocals are sung and not spoken.

Toward the end of the CD arrives the apocalyptic crescendo "Disarming the Neighbors," in which riot horns swell amidst a whirlwind of lyrical emotion and chaotic instrumentation. The song achieves its intended level of intensity, indicating that given the chance, Cousins of the Wize can raise the roof.

The album closes with three live tracks recorded at Gibson's in Tempe. The quality of the live tracks doesn't match the standard of the 14 studio tracks, but gives the listener a taste of the band's frenetic stage energy.

Although A Brief Moment in Time's Pocket falls short of fully capturing that live energy, it does convey the band's essence. This is an impressive debut CD, and it confirms that this is a band loaded with potential.

--Allen Sloan Torpie

Looking for Aldous Huxley  
Looking for Aldous Huxley  
(Eldon's Boy Records)

Before you hear a note from this band, you have some idea what's awaiting you. With a name like Looking for Aldous Huxley, you know you're in store for something that's self-consciously literate, a band that takes even its own sense of humor seriously. What you're not so sure about is a musical style, a distinctive sonic aesthetic.

Unfortunately, even after several listens to this debut CD, Looking for Aldous Huxley's musical style remains hard to identify. The quartet falls into that generic trap inhabited by too many contemporary acts vying for a morsel of VH1 airplay. They offer suggestions of folk, but with none of folk's sense of roots. They occasionally let rip with some wanky guitar, but they don't really rock in any satisfactory way (unless you think that Paula Cole rocks). Basically, they're polite and formless, blank pages that rarely get filled in by a noteworthy melody or insistent groove. After enduring nearly an hour of this stuff, you can't help but think that this band is stuck somewhere between Hootie and the Deep Blue Something.



Like Deep Blue Something (whose annoying hit single "Breakfast at Tiffany's" seemed more about showing off their knowledge of cinema than actually expressing something worthwhile), this group's solid musicianship can make for some mildly pleasing moments. The production, by Robert Scovill, is immaculate and occasionally imaginative. A lovely cello-acoustic guitar arrangement helps "Velvet Elvis" rise above singer Tim McDonald's odd vocal histrionics, and "Descending Line" makes nice use of its subtle, haunting piano line.

But ultimately, Looking for Aldous Huxley shares many of the characteristics of another popular Valley quartet, Satellite. The band's solid execution and good intentions can't compensate for a batch of dull songs that are positively pockmarked with cliches.

--Gilbert Garcia

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