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The THRASH-FUNK scene

proudly presents PRIMUS, along

with a host of others. Go for

the funk, don't get your dreds

stomped in the metal mosh pit.

Thrash is on its way out. Red Hot Chili Peppers and Living Colour are makin' money. So what's a hip white boy to do? Lose those Slayer T-shirts, dig out the old Parliament records, and slap that bass. All of a sudden there's a virtual army of funk-metal bands, primarily centered in the San Francisco Bay Area. They range from thrashers, who lend an occasional funk edge to some of their material (Mordred and Death Angel), to straight-out funkies (Primus, Psychefunkapus, and Limbomaniacs) to those who defy categorization (Faith No More).

At its best, thrash funk is a genuinely new sound: funky bottom and wailing, reverby guitars; funk's house-party vibes with metal's nasty edge. At its worst, it's just another case of white people ripping off black culture (a rock'n'roll tradition since Elvis).

"That's a simplistic way of looking at it," retorts Limbomaniacs front man Butthouse. "It seems very superficial to seal people off and say, 'Look, you were born this color, and this is what you have to play.'"

"Funk and blues and rock have been around forever," says Mind Funk guitarist Louis Svittek. "It's just that now they're coming together as one." But Primus singer and bassist Les Claypool admits, "That pretty much could be, but rock'n'roll has always stemmed from black culture. This is just another phase."

To monitor the temperature of any music scene, one only has to look toward the record company A&R execs who start baying at club and rehearsal space doors when they hear that a "hot new sound" is about to explode. Primus is getting a strong dose of that right now, although the band is starting to outgrow the constraints that the thrash-funk sound, which has sprung full-grown from the belly of San Francisco, has put on them. Besides being damn fine musicians, Les, guitarist Larry LaLonde, and drummer Tim "Herb" Alexander play in Technicolor. Primus's lyrics traverse the terrain of pudding, squirrels, and toys, while Les's onstage persona has been com-

pared with a litany of cartoon characters.

When Primus packed San Francisco's Warfield Auditorium recently, there was a healthy mix of fadeheads and skinheads rounding out the mosh pit. The kids sang and slammed and showed their love for the band in a unique way: They shouted, "You suck!"

"At the beginning," explains Les. "We'd be onstage and say, 'We suck,' and then the audience would yell it back, and it stuck."

"Yeah," adds Larry, "you'd be walking down the street with friends who didn't know that, and someone would point and say, 'You suck,' and the friend would go, 'Did you hear what that guy said?' like, surprised."

"The kids are our hometown homies," says Les. "All-age crowds are where the audience is. At 21-and-over clubs people just stand there, but kids, they freak out, jump all over the place, and stage dive. That's the cool part."

Primus emerged from a thrash background, but abandoned it five years ago for a "King Crimson, Talking Heads, obscure college-radio type thing," according to Les. "Our drummer's into Eastern music and our guitar player's a Deadhead, so we have a lot of different influences. Between the three of us we're able to come up with some weird shit."

Since media acceptance for most things new takes a while to get off the ground, many of these bands were faced with the prospect of putting out their albums independently in order to garner themselves some attention. Primus put out *Suck on This* in 1989 (it was

Peering into the future: Primus members, from left, Larry LaLonde, Les Claypool, and Tim "Herb" Alexander are baiting their musical hook with thrash-funk sounds fresh from the San Francisco Bay Area.

recently rereleased by Caroline Records). "The whole idea was to put the first one out on our own," explains Les, "then take the money from that and record *Frizzle Fry*. We figured then we would have enough clout to deal with major labels and keep our artistic control."

The band's combo of groove and grunge has brought it attention at a time when a growing number of bands sound like a marriage between George Clinton and Metallica. "People have a tendency to want to put things in one category," says Les. "We always try to stay out of that. With record companies they go, 'What do we do with these guys? How are we gonna market it? The production of *Frizzle Fry* doesn't sound like whatever the mainstream sound is.'"

Primus's first video from the album, "John the Fisherman," is in regular rotation on MTV. The band would love to do a video for every song on the album and Les adds with a laugh, "In the next one we want to drop a piece of cherry pie in Barbara Bush's lap."

But record companies are quickly realizing there is a huge market for the thrash-funk sound and the majors are falling all over themselves to get a piece of it. Mind Funk has yet to emerge from its New Jersey practice space, yet the band's already signed to Epic. Composed of ex-members of thrashers M.O.D. and Celtic Frost, and hardcore band Uniform Choice, Mind Funk welds metal's wall-of-sound guitar firepower and funk's rhythms.

Ironically, the guys in Mind Funk don't really consider themselves funk-metal musicians. "Everyone's jumping on that bandwagon," says vocalist Pat Dubar. "We may have funky parts in our songs, but as far as playing straight funk, forget it. We couldn't do it as well as the guys who originated it. We take a lot of different elements from rap to the Doors and jazz and mix them together."

Another Bay Area outfit, Limbomaniacs, emerged from jazz fusion through two of the region's previous hip sounds—ska and world beat. Their music is the most rap-oriented among that of the current batch of funksters. Thrashers come to their regular shows, but once they were mistakenly hired as a Caribbean band, played Latin and reggae covers, and insist they went over great.

America isn't the only place to put this musical hybrid on the map. The Electric Boys are from Sweden and signed to Atco Records. They came by their funk-rock sound through a process of elimination, running through blues, pop, roots rock, and hard rock. "In the beginning, it sounded really corny 'cause we didn't know what to do," says front man Conny Bloom. He thinks the funk-metal thing's happening because "hard rock is, well, boring."

So is hardcore/thrash, says ex-Cro Mags vocalist John Joseph, now with the brand-new band Both Worlds. "So many bands came out that sounded the same," he says, "it kind of burned itself out. Funk is fun music to play, and it's good to see girls having a good time up front, not just dudes with spikes on their arms."

DAINA DARZIN AND LAUREN SPENCER