

FRONTBUTT :: PRESS

UNDER COVER

The Hook, 03.07.02, by Mike Parisi

LET'S say it's 1989. Unless you're part of a small group of college students, Seattle doesn't mean squat, and grunge equals dirt, if you're in the right age group, you dig pretty fiercely the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles. Out of George Lucas's trilogy you've seen only Return of the Jedi in theaters (and you liked the Ewoks). Paula Abdul leaves you flat, though that video with the cat's not too bad. Still, you need something a little harder. You need rap.

A decade later, you might need Frontbutt. The guys in Frontbutt— six white boys who thrash in Navel, T.O.W, and Olive when they're not wearing sun glasses, track suits, fake hair, and silly a.k.a.'s— sound like they remember that delicious, illicit feeling of getting their hands on a DJ JazzyJeff & the Fresh Prince CD and hoping mom doesn't find out.

Their tastes run from one-hit wonders (Tone Loc, Young MC, Naughty By Nature) to just below radar survivors (De La Soul) to sorta old-schoolers (Run DMC, Doug E. Fresh). Though Snoop Dogg gets his pocket picked, this time capsule stops before gangstas bum-rushed the airwaves. Back then, parents might not have been able to understand House of Pain, but nowadays lots of choosy moms let their kids choose Jay-Z.

With names like Munny Shot, Infamous L.O.G., Fakebeard the Pirate, and Double Iced Mocha, the group mostly avoids the Beastie Boys, those NYC funky white boy prototypes. A good move. Like karaoke (which the project isn't too far removed from), Frontbutt's act can be silly, inspired, compelling, and tedious, sometimes simultaneously. But it's never serious. Covering "Fight for Your Right (To Party)" is a little too predictable, and besides, after that, the Beastie's actually got good.

In a group that performs only covers, choice becomes paramount; and with a standard rock lineup, skewing heavily toward rap tunes that feature sampled guitar riffs is wise picking. Tone Loc's "Wild Thing" (almost indistinguishable from "Funky Cold Medina," which is why it's neat to hear them play the pair as a medley) uses a riff from Van Halen's "Jamie's Cryin'"; De La's "Me, Myself and I" uses a guitar line straight outta the George Benson songbook; and Run DMC practically invented the hard rock riff as rap hook.

Luckily, Frontbutt never fronts with the irony that made country club poseurs Dynamite Hack's poker-faced N.W.A.-isms so grating. if you surf by their web page (www.frontbutt.com), you can read random and witty bios of each member. When they bring the noise, though, cleverness has no place. They can be seriously fun because they know that nothing else is serious about it.