

Southern California band has anger, but its music lacks direction, focus

By Bryan Peterson
Staff Reporter

Southern California is churning out more and more "positive" hardcore bands every month. For the most part, they look and sound the same: four or five sweaty guys with almost no hair singing about unity and other positive stuff.

Social Justice is a SoCal band that does not completely break out of the mold but which is more interesting than most similar bands.

These guys are angry and have plenty to be angry about. They are part of a punk scene which is tearing itself apart with punk-skin friction and endless subdivisions within the punk subculture itself.

The problem with Social Justice is that its anger lacks direction or focus. At the same time, the music has more power than that of most "positive" hardcore bands.

The "Unity is Strength" album (Safeside Records) is a crisp, clean recording compared to most hardcore releases. The vocals in particular stand out, and good use is made of backing vocals.

But for an album it is woefully short, being barely twenty minutes in length. Ten songs on an album is standard in the music world, but these are ten short and fast thrashers.

This is pure SoCal hardcore -- two guitars, chanting choruses, and stop-n-start song structures in the tradition of Youth of Today, Insted and Uniform Choice.

These sounds have been made by countless other hardcore bands but here are played with enough energy and drive to interest the listener.

The album's title hints at the cliched, bold-faced slogans these bands love so: UNITY IS

STRENGTH, UNITED PRIDE, POSITIVE YOUTH and so on.

All too often, the songs are just as vague as these phrases. Sample the following from "Youth Unite": "Black, White, it's time to unite/ It makes no sense when we start to fight/ The cycle of hatred must end" or "Rich or poor or color of skin/ What really matters is what is within."

Sure these are noble sentiments, but their expression is hindered by their banality. To really reach people or to change opinions and gain some unity, the members of Social Justice must present a more compelling message.

The band needs more songs like "Left Behind," a more touching call for concern. It reads, in part, "That night you said you loved her/ That night you said you cared/ When you found out she was pregnant/ You were never there/ The child that is born will be left behind."

This is in contrast to the ambiguity which plagues Social Justice on too many songs. For example, the songs "Unity is Strength" and "Walk Alone" are back to back on

See FIFTH on 11

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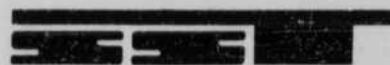


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