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Music



A3
"Exile on Coldharbour Lane"
Geffen
Grade: A

A new religion has sprung up around the recent revival of electronic music, and one group of techno artists has even built a church founded on the principles that built the temple of rock 'n' roll: love, music, soul - Elvis.

The First Presleyterian Church of Elvis The Divine is the newest rock cult in a history of less-formal forms of musical worship and adorable Christian blasphemy. Founded by gospel-techno ensemble, Alabama 3 is the priest, congregation and choir to this religion of soul, club techno and the immortality of the King.

Spawned only two years ago, Alabama 3 (christened after the divine trinity and the rock 'n' roll holy land) is a London parthenogenesis of American Southern gospel and European club dance music. Its leader is the Very Reverend Dr. D. Wayne Love, the First Minister of the First Presleyterian Church of Elvis the Divine. Other members are vocalist Larry Love, percussionist Sir Real "Congaman" Love, guitarist Mississippi Guitar Love, drummer Little Boy Dope, and keyboardist The Spirit.

The group's first album, "Exile on Cold Harbor Lane," is a densely structured and thought-provoking platter of electronically charged vintles. Providing something to chew on with each new track, "Exile" canvasses American music with universal themes like civil rights, social class and religion.

But the group refuses to turn its art into political posters. Rather the songs are typically bassy and butt-moving pieces. Occasionally a track

will bare its teeth, but usually it just sticks its tongue in its cheek, while the bass and drums continue to bounce.

Actually just a few skinny white boys from a poor, urban background, Alabama 3 has created a fable from their riddled pasts of drug abuse, disenfranchisement and a potentially brilliant future from their love of African-American gospel choir music.

But the mixes are strictly European. Drawing on heavy bass, drums and house/club beats, the group's music is kept perfectly simple and precise, and is used to punctuate the driven, granular vocals. The group's gorgeous gospel ballads and brilliant mixes deserve every accolade that can be heaved on an untried band, but its true legacy will be something far less complex.

Lyrics. A techno group with lyrics.

Although British bands frequently get themselves in trouble when they write (the numbers of Oasis fans thin with every lyrical self-reference), Alabama 3 has forged itself a unique mold as a politically potent and irreverent musical group.

The album's most potent track, "Mao Tse Tung Said," begins with a scathing attack on the "general love" believed in by the great American pacifist, Martin Luther King, Jr. The painful vocals seeth with disbelief as Larry Love rants about racial inequality and popular illusions embraced by so many.

"Exile on Coldharbour Lane" pounds with the bass and drums initiated by house music and reamed by jungle techno, while simultaneously celebrating and questioning the land that gave birth to the recognized king of rock 'n' roll. Thanks to groups like Alabama 3, we can be assured that Elvis will never die.

- Bret Schulte

American Lesion
"American Lesion"
Atlantic
Grade: B

In essence a solo album, "American Lesion" is the product of Greg Graffin, the lead singer of Bad Religion.

"American Lesion" is more sedated than Bad Religion's thunderous

attack. The album is neither self-indulgent nor pompous like other solo releases from lead singers.

Although listed as the work of a group called American Lesion, the self-titled album is completely performed and produced by Griffin, making it essentially a solo album.

The acoustic arrangement of most of "American Lesion" brings comparisons to Bob Mould's solo works. While the volume is turned down a couple notches, the political fire still is intact throughout much of "American Lesion."

The album's lyrical attacks are more metaphorical than on most of Bad Religion's releases. The characters Graffin talks about are beaten down, but the songs rarely address who the perpetrator is.

"Too many decisions/Too much responsibility/And no one is there to hold me/When I fail" is a good representation of lyrics from the album. Though the words tend to be slightly general, Graffin's voice conveys enough emotion to make them sound urgent.

Personal, moody and often reflective, "American Lesion" definitely is not an album for rocking out. Graffin produced, mixed and, more amazingly, played each instrument on the album. Aside from the traditional percussion and guitars, Graffin also played piano on a few tracks.

Most of "American Lesion" is a quiet, reflective listen, but some of Graffin's vocal work could use a jolt. Lacking the diamond-cutting soul-searching vocals of Bob Mould or the anger of some of his peers, Graffin comes off as a passive observer in songs like "Predicament."

Graffin does get funky, however, in "Maybe She Will," where a tight snare beat is combined with horris and piano. Imagine an edgy Steeleye Dan for an idea of the song's sound.


If Graffin can tighten up some of the musical arrangements and make his lyrics more concrete, American Lesion (the one-man group) will be a force equally on par with Bad Religion. With its self-titled release, however, American Lesion comes off as an admirable side project.

You may like what you hear, but you want Graffin to get back into the studio and pump out another Bad Religion album.

- Sean McCarthy

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