

Music

Beck
"Midnite Vultures"
DGC Records
Grade: A+

Freaks"
10. "I'll let you be my chaperone
at the halfway home" -
"Sexx Laws"

Top 10 Pickup Lines from
Beck's New Album

1. "Touch my ass if you're qualified" - "Get Real Paid"
2. "I said lady, step inside my Hyundai" - "Debra"
3. "You look good in that sweater and that aluminum crutch" - "Peaches & Cream"
4. "I stepped to you with a fresh pack of gum, somehow I knew you were lookin' for some" - "Debra"
5. "I'll feed you fruit that don't exist" - "Nicotine & Gravy"
6. "Satin sheets, tropical oils, turn up the heat till the swimming pool boils" - "Hollywood Freaks"
7. "We're on the good ship menage a trois" - "Peaches & Cream"
8. "I'll leave graffiti where you've never been kissed" - "Nicotine & Gravy"
9. "Touch it real good if you want a piece" - "Hollywood

Beck has made the last great party album of our beloved 1990s, but never mind the millennium. "Midnite Vultures" is what happens when Beck parties like it's 1975, 1984 and 2525 at the same time.

The rhymes are silly, the lyrics are laugh-out-loud funny, and the music is more suitable for rump-shaking than armchair brooding, but the album hardly lacks substance or depth.

That's because Beck is an original rock 'n' roll weirdo, a deeply strange artist with a singular vision who has actually been able to resonate with the mainstream.

With his sixth great album in a row, Beck has joined the company of other rock weirdos with huge audiences, such as Little Richard, John Lennon, Bob Dylan, James Brown, David Byrne, Michael Jackson and Prince.

Beck has never sounded more assured and confident than he does on "Midnite Vultures." On previous

albums, Beck seemed a little uncomfortable when he kicked the hip hop, funk and soul. It was almost as if he was a little insecure at appropriating black culture, the skinny white boy gate crashing the soul revue.

But Beck has always been in love with all music, and the soul and hip hop he heard growing up in Los Angeles are just as important to his sound as the classic rock, punk, folk and country elements. And this time around, he dives full-on into his soul jones.

Beck is no longer the loser, baby, who wants you to kill him. He's a swaggering, cocky loverman who says "there is so much to do before you die" on "Get Real Paid."

Beck has been exploring the different facets of sound for much of the '90s, sometimes all at once. He's got both a minimalist and maximalist aesthetic, alternating between his acoustic folk and everything-but-the-family-dog styles on every other album.

Just taking apart all the pieces of a song like "Broken Train" can be a chore. A John Lennon melody rests on a Motown bassline and techno drumbeats, bolstered by funky '70s clavinet that escaped from a Stevie Wonder album, with a Dylan harmonica floating around.

"Milk & Honey" surprises with a chorus that sounds like a cross between the Steve Miller Band and Grand Funk Railroad, but Beck's deft touch makes the song airy and light, unlike the oafish clumsiness that Miller and Grand Funk would have used to destroy it under their leaden dinosaur rock boots.

"Beautiful Way" is a country rock ballad, and "Pressure Zone" is great straight-ahead guitar rock, but the rest of the album is straight-up party music.

The first half of "Vultures" is loaded with an R&B vibe. "Sexx Laws" has Stax horns and soul grooves, "Nicotine & Gravy" kicks it disco-tastic, and "Mixed Bizness" is



COURTESY PHOTO

pure funk. "Get Real Paid" brings to mind late '70s/early '80s electro-pop pioneers such as Kraftwerk and Devo as well as "Dirty Mind"-era Prince. "Hollywood Freaks" is a parody of Master P and gangsta-rap that actually works as a real song, and "Peaches & Cream" and "Debra" are fat slices of soul, sung in a falsetto.

The slow jam, "Debra," which Beck has been performing live for years, has some of the best lines on the album. "I saw you at JC Penney/I think your name tag said Jenny," Beck croons. "I wanna get with you

and your sister/I think her name's Debra."

"Midnite Vultures" gives shoutouts to the Manthing, b-boys, lesbians, Norman Schwartzkopf, Old Navy and Hollywood nuns before the album is even half over, so everyone is invited to the party.

Beck, the musical king of post-modern pastiche, has delivered an album guaranteed to remove the Y2K bug from your ass.

-Josh Krauter

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Minorities ponder TV boycott

LOS ANGELES (AP) - Anne-Marie Johnson, who has a recurring role on the television show "JAG," says she has had repeated casting difficulties because of her light skin tone.

"I'm very tired of being too black for a white project and too white for a black project," Johnson said Monday at a TV diversity forum organized by the NAACP.

Minorities have complained about a perceived lack of progress and even indifference to improving the depiction and employment of blacks, Asian-Americans, Hispanics, American Indians and other ethnic groups on TV.

The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People said it will decide by the end of December whether to follow through on threats of boycotts and demonstrations if the largest networks don't quickly put more

minorities in front of and behind the cameras.

"They then run the real risk of a sustained, focused and continuous consumer action in the form of repetitive boycotts, picketing and large-scale demonstrations in front of their network headquarters, the offices of network-owned affiliates and in front of the offices of their major and largest advertisers," said Kweisi Mfume, the group's president.

Boycotts and other action would come during television's critical ratings sweeps period in February, which is used to set broadcast advertising rates, Mfume said.

The NAACP invited top executives of the four big networks to the forum, but only CBS Television President Leslie Moonves showed up. ABC, NBC and Fox all sent broadcast content and

standards executives.

Moonves touted CBS's success at improving its depiction of minorities, including producer Steven Bochco's upcoming series, "City of Angels," about an inner-city hospital. The cast and crew are mostly minorities.

"This show is an important effort in bringing down barriers in Hollywood," Moonves said.

However, actor Blair Underwood, a star of "City of Angels" who was a regular on "L.A. Law," told the panel the issue goes far deeper than minorities' on-screen roles. Putting more minorities in decision-making jobs is critical to improving the situation, he said.

"When we are not seen in front of the camera, it's just the tip of the iceberg," Underwood said. "It's almost like 'The Wizard of Oz.' When you pull back the curtain, you see it's a much bigger problem."

Moonves said CBS is trying to improve its percentage of minorities in the top ranks.

While 21.5 percent of the network's employees are minorities, only 14.8 percent of its executives are minorities, "an area where we clearly need to improve and where we will improve," Moonves said.

Esteban Torres, a retired congressman, said if network minority hiring doesn't improve, findings from the hearing would be turned over to the U.S. Justice Department and the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission for investigation.

Actors at Monday's panel discussion said the problem even goes beyond employment numbers to racial stereotypes that have persisted in Hollywood for years.

Calvin Jung, a Chinese-American actor whose TV credits include "Cheers" and the movie "The Day After," said Asian actors usually are asked to do accents at casting calls.

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