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Noise Pop: Blag, guts, and pussy

The Dwarves' star shines punkly, 24 years along

BY DUNCAN SCOTT DAVIDSON

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> duncan@sfbg.com

Love 'em or hate 'em, the Dwarves are as close to punk rock royalty as San Francisco is ever gonna have. They've been in the game since emigrating from Chi-town in the '80s, with nary a letup for soul-searching acoustic meandering or trips to rehab.

"What you wanna do, B? What you wanna do?" a voice queries in "Demented," from 2004's *The Dwarves Must Die* (Sympathy for the Record Industry).

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"I wanna fight, fuck, and destroy like they used to" is vocalist Blag Dahlia's answer.

Dahlia, born Paul Cafaro, and the ever-naked (except for a Lucha Libre mask) Hewhocannotbenamed on guitar have been the

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core of the Dwarves for longer than some of their audience members — and dates — have been alive and got the band booted from Sub Pop in 1992 for engineering a Hewho death hoax. Living in San Francisco, one can count on good burritos, high gas prices, and experiencing six or fewer degrees of Blag separation at all times. I made out with a girl who claimed he'd stolen her spiked belt when they lived together. On a snippet from *Thank Heaven for Little Girls* (Sub Pop, 1991), an audience member at a Dwarves show says, "The lead singer's a fucking shithead, man. He broke a fucking glass onstage. I get bumped by the crowd. The next thing you know, my hand's fucking *sliced*." I could swear this happened at a show I was working security for at Slim's.

While Dahlia has certainly created an impressive myth, just how worthy of their legacy — or relevant — are the Dwarves in 2007? *The Dwarves Must Die* has the middle-aged Dahlia rapping, of all things, to hilarious effect on "Massacre," on which he spouts the line "This one goes out to Queens of the Trust Fund: you slept on my floor, now I'm sleeping through your motherfucking records," which led to a much-publicized dustup with Queens of the Stone Age's Josh Homme at a Hollywood club. I've even spotted Dahlia playing around town as MC Blag. He takes swipes at "fake punkers" Good Charlotte, but he's apparently cowritten songs with them, as well as produced more than one Offspring album.

"I don't ride a skateboard and love what you hate for / And don't give a fuck about punk-rocking no more," Dahlia raps on "Massacre." To me, it's this willingness to *not* be punk rock that makes the band even more so. Musically, things took a turn for the poppy on 1996's *The Dwarves Are Young and Good Looking* (Epitaph), and that's when they got interesting. Far from being merely a glass-smashing nihilist, Dahlia is also a frustrated romantic, a '50s protorock crooner like Dion or Del Shannon in fingerless leather gloves (see *Must Die*'s warped piss take on Shannon, "Runaway #2").

According to one of Dahlia's ex-lovers, "He's very mellow and affectionate. ...

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Posted by: suburbanstain
Thursday, February 22, 2007 at 08:19 PM

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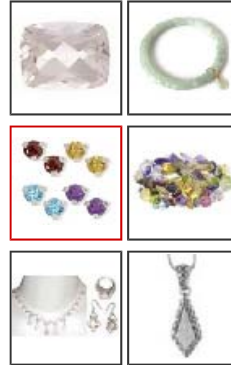
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