

PHAROAE MONCH

On the Edge of *Desire*

BY JESSICA KOSLOW

PHAROAE MONCH IS PLAYING Coachella this year for the first time. Pretty cool, huh?

As if that weren't surprising enough, two days prior to his musical debut, he has a speaking engagement at UCLA. Say what? The Queens, N.Y.-bred MC has partnered with Guns 4 Cameras, a not-for-profit organization run by Hezues R, and the duo are spreading their message across the U.S.

"Hezues was involved in a drug, violent gang thing and he wound up getting shot three times and shot at 22 times," Monch explains. "He turned his life around and founded this non-profit organization behind that."

Guns 4 Cameras urges kids to turn in their weapons in exchange for video cameras.

Monch continues, trying to help me make sense of his UCLA campus stop. "I had a song that I shot a video for called 'When The Gun Draws.' (In his song, Monch rhymes from the perspective of a bullet.) I think we've become desensitized to violence in general, and we thought we would partner up. It made sense and ever since, we've been doing speaking appearances on gun violence and the violent mentality of the youth in today's day and age."

"When The Gun Draws," the sequel to his former group, Organized Konfusion's "Stray Bullet," is the first track leaked from his second solo album, *Desire*, to be released on June 26 through SRC/Universal.

It's been eight years since the one-time Rawkus rapper released his solo debut, *Internal Affairs*, featuring the monster smash, "Simon Says." In the interim, he has guested on hits like Styles P's "The Life" and dropped the futuristic anthem, "Agent Orange," but no full-length followed.



Pharoahe Monch

Commenting on the drawn-out wait for his album's release, which has been further compounded by several push backs of the actual release date, Monch answers matter-of-factly.

"It's due to label politics and previous label issues," he relays. "On the artist side, anything that has integrity takes patience. We're trying to do it right since it has been so long. With this last movement of the release date, so many

heads are just ready for it to drop, but at the end of the day, we had to put more marketing behind it. With this type of album, it's about getting people that are not aware of Pharoahe to be aware."

His Coachella appearance aims to do just that. He guesstimates that about 60 percent of his audience will be people that happen to stumble onto the stage where he's performing.

And when they do, fans are in for a treat. This is Monch's first time on the road promoting tunes from his yet-to-be-released CD. Songs like the Alchemist-produced title track and his Erykah Badu duet, which "deals with relations with dark skin women in American and within the culture," he shares.

Then there's the trilogy of tracks which unravel like a murder mystery, all produced by Denaun Porter, a.k.a. D12's Kon Artist, who also co-executive produced the entire album.

Monch relishes his mic skills and knows that in the end, it's the reason his fans have stayed loyal throughout his hiatus.

"Not too many artists have done a song from the perspective of a bullet," he points out. "When you are blessed and able to put out songs like that, it brands you, and the fans know they can go to you for that sort of subject matter."

"Sort of like filmmakers, like Tarantino, you know what to expect when you see one of his films. It helps that there's a standard of quality you know you'll get when you pick up a Pharoahe album."

His words paint vivid pictures. His rhymes inspire deep thought.

So what inspires Monch?

"My love for it," he says. "Never being satisfied. Being a perfectionist, wanting to do better. I'm never really satisfied with the last rhyme or the last song. I'm constantly pushing."

At the end of his Coachella appearance, Monch hopes fans walk away savoring their experience, thinking, "Very energetic. Very enthusiastic. Rock soul." ■

Desire will be available June 26. Pharoahe Monch will speak April 26 at UCLA and perform April 28 at Coachella. For more information, visit www.pharoahe-monch.com.

music

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FOUNTAINS OF WAYNE

Traffic and Weather

(Virgin)

Anyone expecting "Stacy's Mom" part two is going to be disappointed with this new album. *Traffic and Weather* employs the swirling mix of '60s to '80s pop music that permeated the group's previous releases, with a wink and a nod to everyone from the Beatles to Billy Joel.

This time the songs are far more personal and confessional. The hopes for a better future that bolstered earlier outings have been replaced by cynicism, pessimism and characters devoid of faith.

There's the lonely couple who never connects in punchy "Someone to Love," the Department of Motor Vehicles romance that never occurs in the otherwise zippy "Yolanda Hayes," but most particularly there are the bitter recriminations of adultery that pepper "This Better Be Good." Even the cheerful vibes of psychedelic nugget "Planet of Weed" seem false, hazy rather than reality-induced.

Traffic and Weather is the perfect pop music companion for anyone who has felt the stings of self-doubt or the pitfalls that can doom a relationship.

Grade: B

—Doug Simpson

Traffic and Weather is currently available.

music dvd review

MAKING THE GRADE | A EXCEPTIONAL | B WORTHWHILE | C MIDDLCRE | D SAVE YOUR MONEY | F WILL BE ON HELL'S JUKEBOX

THE CHARMS

Easy Trouble: Bird's Eye View of a D.I.Y. Band
(Red Car)

This band has been tearing up the East Coast, the Boston area in particular, for quite a few years now, and those efforts have put it at the forefront of the "garage" or "underground" movement on that turf. As such, the band members are pals with the genre's current ringleader, Little Steven Van Zandt, and one of the few performance pieces here features the group playing at one of Van Zandt's battle of the bands shows.

There are a few other interesting bits of music like an in-studio run through of "Easy Trouble" and "the making of" videos

for "Gimme That Shot" and "The Wish Song," but mostly, this documentary is a commentary — from lead vocalist Ellie Vee, guitarist Joe Wizda and those who stoke the machinery behind the scenes, Van Zandt, manager Steev Ricardo and rock 'n' roll impresario Kim Fowley.

The gist of the conversation is about the struggle to break the Charms on a national basis, presented matter-of-factly, warts and all. Fans of the Charms will really enjoy this film, but it should also be mandatory viewing for bands that are just getting started.

Grade: B

—Kevin Wierzbicki

Easy Trouble: Bird's Eye View of a D.I.Y. Band is currently available.



EVERYBODY ELSE

Everybody Else

(Militia Group)

You know there's something going on when a young band takes their name from an obscure song by an old band as this trio did with the Kinks' "Everybody Else." These guys have clearly spent lots of time dusting off vinyl and listening to oldies radio — a great place to turn for inspiration when so many contemporary groups are beating the same old sound to death.

Everybody Else pays tribute to the big daddies of dino-rock, the Beatles, with an opening cut called "Meat Market." Carrick Gerety has a very strong, flexible voice, and he sounds miraculously like a young John Lennon on the energetic cut.

From there on out though the lads craft their own modern sound that showcases well-written songs and Gerety's vocals. The singer has the ability to throw his voice into tremolo mode whenever he wants, a trick that he puts to good use on "Born to Do," and that sets the band's signature throughout.

Grade: B

—Kevin Wierzbicki

Everybody Else is currently available.