

# the alternative

## There's more to life than Hip-Hop and R&B

Reporting by Anthony Q. Casasnovas

### OSLO

**WHO:** The West Coast creative talents of guitarist (and former touring member of No Doubt) Gabriel McNair, bassist Kerry Wayne James and lead vocals/guitarist Mattia Borrani have come together to form the self-proclaimed "Oslo Sound."

**WHAT:** Though each band member has a hard time really placing a finger on their sound, they seem to agree that it would strike a chord with fans of Massive Attack, The Cure, Joy Division, My Bloody Valentine and other like-minded moody and atmospheric bands. "It's very organic and spacey, with a rock edge, an '80s influence and a lot of European influence," explains Borrani, with McNair agreeing that the band has "a very British, dark '80s influence."

**WHEN:** Though their self-produced, self-titled debut dropped earlier this year and earned flattering comparisons to Interpol and Coldplay, Kerry insists that "When we started writing these songs four years ago, those bands were barely even out!"

**WHERE:** Oslo is holding it down for all West Coast rockers. They've received plenty of love on local radio and have become a Los Angeles buzz band who we'll likely be hearing more from in the months to come.

**WHY:** In addition to creating great music as a figurative family who, according to James, "hang out, have dinner together, cook together [and] cry together," the members of Oslo want to wow audiences with their live show. "I definitely want to bring the whole live experience," says Borrani. "Bring back the old days when shows used to be a real production — the whole audio-visual sensory overload."



### GORILLAZ

**WHO:** This four member group consists of lead vocalist/keyboardist 2-D, the dark-souled heavy metal rocker Murdoc, funky-phantom possessed hip-hopper Russell and the ten-year-old wunderkind guitarist from Japan, Noodle.

**WHAT:** In reality, the Gorillaz are an eclectic cartoon band created by comic artist Jamie Hewlett (*Tank Girl*) and Blur frontman Damon Albarn. Though many critics labeled them the "first virtual hip-hop group," they — along with many other musical talents — have put together a "band" that is equal parts rock, funk, punk, hip-hop, dub and electronic. Jabberjaw and the Neptunes or Josie and her Pussycats wouldn't stand a chance against the Gorillaz in a battle of the cartoon bands.

**WHEN:** The Gorillaz came together for their debut EP in 2000, with the lead single "Clint Eastwood" landing on every radio station imaginable. Their campaign was crazy with the band "members" conducting interviews and doing "photo shoots." The videos were completely animated and their live shows consisted of animations playing on a movie screen as the identities of the live band were silhouetted behind a white screen. Their self-titled full-length hit in 2001 and in 2002 they released the *G-Sides* collection and a dub/remix album titled *Laika Come Home*. In 2003 they dropped a DVD, *Phase One: Celebrity Take Down*, which allowed you to take a bizarre tour through their "Kong Studios." This year, they strike again with *Demon Days*.

**WHERE:** Though the Gorillaz may only exist in a fictional sense, the band's creators hail from London, England. Other artists who've contributed their music talents have hailed from all over the United States, Europe and even Cuba. This list will undoubtedly continue to grow.

**WHY:** Since real bands could get away with making bad music and going platinum, the Gorillaz's creators figured they could create a fake band that'd make great music and go platinum. The formula has seemingly worked. By creating a façade, they've already worked with a slew of talented artists such as

Dan "The Automator" Nakamura, Del Tha Funkee Homosapiem, Miho Hatori, D12, Kid Koala and Ibrahim Ferrer (of the Buena Vista Social Club).

Their latest release is being produced by the now notorious DJ Danger Mouse (the mastermind behind the Beatles/Jay-Z mash-up) and already has the likes of De La Soul onboard. If it takes creating a cartoon band to get solid music on the radio and TV in this day and age, by all means, bring on the celluloid.



## MARTIN LUTHER

**WHO:** As a "Choir Boy-Turned-Rocker" named after the venerated Civil Rights leader, Martin Luther McCoy is a one-man musical army, leading a rebellion in modern soul/rock music.

**WHAT:** Luther is a multi-talented singer, songwriter, musician and producer whose "music is heavily marinated in the sounds of Jimi Hendrix, James Brown, Sly & The Family Stone and Stevie Wonder." He's part funk, part gritty soul and part rock with a hint of modern hip-hop/R&B-styled production values stirred into the mix for good measure. Some may dub it "neo-soul," but that'd be just plain tacky now, wouldn't it?

**WHEN:** It all began after he was exposed to the spaced-out and psychedelic sounds of Parliament Funkadelic by his brother. From that day forward he dedicated himself to rebelling against his classical music training and in 2000 dropped his independently-released debut album, *The Calling*. After receiving loads of critical praise, he was hit up by The Roots to join them on 2004's *OkayPlayer Tour*. Shortly thereafter, he released his sophomore effort *Rebel Soul Music* to even more acclaim.

**WHERE:** The West Coast underground has been on some cutting edge trip in the last couple of years and this cat is no exception. Though he got his start in and around the San Francisco and Los Angeles areas, Martin Luther has already won over fans on a global scale.

**WHY:** The reason Marty does what he does is quite simple — this brother is a rebel at heart. Though he was raised as a choir boy and enrolled in piano lessons by his parents, Luther just knew that the guitar was his rockin' tool of choice. "There are other forms of music that the guitar is exemplary in," he says, "but when it comes down to rock and roll, it's an attitude, it's rebellious, it's aggressive, it pulls

you into an uplifted darkness that only the guitar can bring or can deliver or can make you feel." Who are we to disagree?



## WHOLE WHEAT BREAD

**WHO:** A punk-rawkin' trio consisting of Aaron Abraham (lead vocals and guitar) and brothers Nicholas (vocals, bass, guitar and keys) and Joseph Largen (drums).

**WHAT:** Though the sight of an all-black punk band may quickly lead the uninspired to liken these dudes to the legendary Bad Brains, this is actually straightforward fun-lovin' pop-punk (in the vein of bands like Rancid, blink-182 and Sum 41) complete with melodic hooks and blistering guitars. What makes these boys different is a hip-hop upbringing which shows through both fashion sense and lyrical content. In fact, the trio has been known to perform as their hip-hop alter egos — Nasty N@gg@ Fleetwood, DJ Dirtee Skeet and Mr. Whitefolks — from time to time.

**WHEN:** They've been doing the punk thing for a minute now, with band leader Aaron having picked up his first guitar at a young age. As a band, they've been performing locally and paying their dues, dropping their first single and video, "Old Man Samson" and releasing their debut album *Minority Rules* to critical acclaim earlier this year.

**WHERE:** Aaron is a native of Trinidad and moved to the harshest of ghettos in Miami, Florida with his family at a young age. After graduating school, he moved out to Jacksonville, Florida where met up with Nicholas and Joseph.

**WHY:** "I actually met Nick to pursue a rap career," admits Aaron. "He was making beats and videos, and people were telling me to holla at him. I found out he played guitar, so I asked him if he could play bass. He could. So we decided to forget the rapping." Aaron's love for punk rock began when he first heard the music at the predominantly white school his parents would drive him to every morning. He still loved hip-hop ("I ain't tryin' to wear no tight @ss jeans!"), but the energy and message that he heard in punk stuck with him. Nicholas had a particularly rough life and even spent time in prison, so starting a career was a way for him to get his life in check. Probably most rewarding for this band is the fact that they still get jokes about "looking like NWA but sounding like Green Day." **BB**

