



"We're kind of like too funky for White radio and too White for funky radio."

By SCOTT POLLACK

Music must be Black or White these days. Forget about coming out of the box as a mulatto. Mainly by industry design, bands must neatly stack themselves into rigid categories and genres in order to fit within some label's overall A&R structure. You can't simply rhyme anymore. You must choose your modus from the outset of demo shopping days — Gangsta, G-Funk, Playa, reality, political, party, and bullshit. These confines are even more stifling within Rock. Decide now, young muse, whether you will be creating jangly, hook-laden, college-bubble-power-Pop or angst-ridden, staring-at-fuzzy-navel introspective Prog Rock. But what about the musician or group that simply cannot ignore their seemingly disparate influences and rhythms, thereby entering into commercially alien territories? In that case, you form a band called **311** and plug away relentlessly, hoping that your unique vision of interrelated musical properties will find an audience of open-minded individuals. Since releasing their Capricorn debut, *Music*, in 1993, group members **NICK HEXUM**, **SA MARTINEZ**, **P-NUT**, **TIMOTHY MAHONEY**, and **CHAD SEXTON** have done just that — create music that refuses to narrowly define itself. Music that is constantly changing, evolving, receding. Music that draws its sound from Reggae, Dub, slap-happy Funk, power-chord Rock, and most noticeably, Rap. The end result forms the 311 sound: a thrashy Funk/Rap fusion that ebbs and flows its way through moments of stomping Hardcore throwdown, beat-drenched, head-nodding Hip Hop, and floating ragga Dub. Now, with the release of their self-titled third album finding its way into the hands of an ever-growing legion of fans, the band appears poised for a major breakthrough. Perhaps 311 represent the next stage in popular music: White boys able to lock into the Hip Hop groove through live instrumentation while maintaining a Rock & Roll sensibility.

SECONDS: It seems music is so defined and categorized these days; you have a stew going on...

SEXTON: That sound comes from all of us listening to and enjoying many different types of music. Anything you listen to, you're going to be influenced by if you're a musician or songwriter. We're influenced by everything from Dancehall stuff like **Daddy Freddy** and **Buju Banton** to Reggae, down to old **Frank Sinatra**, down to Classical Music and down to Jazz. Rap has been a pretty big one, too, mostly for **Nick**, **SA**, and **P-Nut** writing the lyrics, it's helped a lot — the first **Geto Boys** album, **Ice**



CATHERINE WISSEL

Cube, **Public Enemy**, **NWA**, down to **Souls of Mischief**, **Method Man**, and **De La Soul** ...

HEXUM: Everything we like to listen to comes out in our music. We really don't feel like we should know any boundaries. Anything we want to do, we throw it in. By changing up the music so often, it keeps it fresh and interesting. You can only do so much within the framework of Rock. We seek to expand that picture by bringing in all these different influences. But the roots of 311 are Rock. The first music I was really into was Punk. **The Clash's London Calling** changed my life, as did **Bad Brains** and early **Chili Peppers**. A little while later I started to get heavily influenced by Rap — **Run-DMC**, **De La Soul**, that first **Cypress Hill** album ...

SECONDS: Is it a conscious decision to blend all of these elements together?

HEXUM: When we first got together as a band, the Funk came out. It was just like, "Yep, that's dope." Looking back, we really had no interest in playing straight-ahead Rock, because we were so excited by being able to slam. We have the energy of Punk when we play a funky groove. We really go off, which is the only noticeable influence of Punk. We don't play the fast, straight-ahead Rock tempos. We usually play Reggae grooves.

SEXTON: I don't know if it was that conscious of a decision to blend everything. The groove of each song helps us mold all the different styles together. Without the groove, a lot of our changes would sound abrupt. Not to say that there aren't bands switching the groove up in songs, but we seem to convey this idea of switching grooves, tempos and melodies up during songs a bit more than most other bands today.

SEXTON: For one, we're interested in exploring the different tempos we haven't used before. Faster, slower ... more up-beat. I don't wanna say **Prince Eighties Rock**

tempos. I think we can still improve on our albums. It's harder for us to carry over the more experimental energy we achieve live on the records. I would like us to get more into Dub Reggae — more of the delays that are associated with Dub. The spacing of the music — but as far as blending other types of music, we aren't really planning anything. We're just getting influenced by what we're listening to right now — what life is throwing at us. Whatever we're feeling at the time is what's going to be created.

SECONDS: Any predictions what 311 may sound like next year? Ten years?

SEXTON: Not ten years. That's way too far away. For our next album we're writing some stuff on sequencers. I've always been interested in Dancehall Reggae. We really haven't mastered it yet. Not on the albums. Live we have ...

I'd like to experiment and master more of the subtle Dub rhythms. Putting the accent of the music in a groove not normally used.

HEXUM: In ten years I see myself maturing into Jazz. In a year we'll still be rocking very hard. I think we'll get into a better blend of heavy music with melodic vocals. We won't be a band that tries to recreate what we were doing now. Maybe if 311 is remembered, people will remember our debut album as being our best. We won't be trying to sound like that and write songs like that when we're forty years old. **The Rolling Stones** at fifty trying to sound like they did in 1964 is wrong. They probably should have evolved more. I have the most respect for people who have had a real noticeable evolution like **Sting** and **Paul Simon**. I like the Stones, but I just see our approach changing as we get older. We have a short attention span.

SECONDS: You mention working with sequencers ... are you willing to embrace technology more?

SEXTON: We've always used technology. There's a lot of sequencing on our first album. We've actually shied away from it. Not by choice, it was simply a progression. We've always loved to use 808s, adding little effects here and there. We love hearing 808s in our music. It adds another dimension, especially when listening to it on a powerful system.

SECONDS: Can you describe the process of creating a song?

SEXTON: There's different ways. Someone will usually come up with the riff, then we'll just jam on it. Usually it's the music, then the lyrics taking shape. As to where the music comes from, I have no idea. We've had long discussions as a group about the source of the music, where the actual melodies come from, how they arise within our brains. A riff is usually floating inside my head, then I'll put it to a guitar.

SECONDS: While the structure to your lyrics may be Rap-based, the band is definitely not coming from an inner-city Black perspective. What are you trying to convey?

SEXTON: Positivity, moving forward. No self-pity. Trying to show a good philosophy. Like if you work hard, you get what you work for. We could choose to talk about negative things and images like most rappers do; we just don't choose to do that. Those rappers are just talking about what they know, their reality. We're talking about ours, or at least what we hope our reality can be.

HEXUM: I just kind of wanted to kick the dope style. I see it as an evolution. I guess if I would have thought about it a great deal, I would have realized that it's much harder for a band that uses a lot of styles to come up and get noticed. We don't fit into any commercial radio formats. They're not playing much Funk on Alternative stations. And R&B radio doesn't want to play stuff with guitars. So we're kind of like too funky for White radio and too White for funky

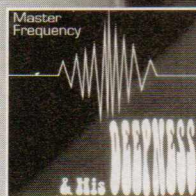


CATHERINE WISSEL

radio. We just wanted to create something dope. Fuck everything else.

I've always felt that I should talk about my perspective, my point of view. I've never really talked about anything I don't know of firsthand. It comes from being alert and honest with our lifestyle. Smoking Weed, being on the road, what makes us happy, relationships. All facets of life. A lot of singers, you can't figure out anything that they think other than that they're alienated. I would like to take a decent, more upbeat stance on life. I would hope that we're always going to express things that other people don't talk about. In this day and age, people are so cynical that they're afraid to express how they really feel. I don't want to ever give into that cynicism. You can do whatever you want if you work hard. We've known we were going to have to work really hard to get where we want because it's a pretty ambitious thing to do — White boys from Nebraska rapping. But that makes it that much more satisfying.

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SECONDS: Do you worry about any street credibility in terms of being a group of White boys who are taking bits of Hip Hop culture, but doing your own thing?

HEXUM: We don't worry about street credibility. We're more of a Garage Band. We're not trying to be from the streets. We're a live-oriented band. A Hip Hop group usually has a hit from a club or a radio hit. It spreads itself through dope singles. We, on the other hand, spread ourselves through playing live. We're judged by the whole of our material, not by a single. Our label puts out singles and that's fine. Radio is like free music for everybody. 311 is more of a Rock Band as far as our approach. It's never been a problem. We know who we are.

"We're clear-cutting forests to make paper when we could be farming hemp fields."

SECONDS: What role does Marijuana play in the whole scheme of things?

SEXTON: A big part of our lives. Me and Tim have been smoking Pot for a lot of years. It's weird to learn things differently when you're stoned. I know when I smoke, I approach the drums differently. I incorporate aspects into my playing that I maybe wasn't thinking of before.

HEXUM: It helps bring us together and put us all in a good mood to jam and work on our music. It makes everything more fun. But, I don't do anything all the time. I do smoke quite a bit of Weed, though. We're not out to change the world into liking Pot, we're just speaking and being honest about what we do. Other people with similar lifestyles can relate.

MAHONEY: The negativity is gone from our organization. It helps people mellow out, not get angry, not kill other people. It's a positive drug. We're Potheads. We smoke every day. Fuck yeah. We have a particular liking for kind buds.

SEXTON: Though we do go through our moments when

we're smoking schwag ...

SECONDS: Would you say Weed has brought on the initial sparks of creativity in your music?

SEXTON: I don't think it's co-related just that much. Not that you need drugs to inspire you, but after you've been playing the same song for six months straight, a normal tendency would be to get bored. Sometimes Pot can provide the inspiration to keep on playing like it's the first time playing that song. But as far as relating our creativity directly with smoking, I can't go that far. If every trace of Marijuana on the whole Earth was to disappear and you could never smoke again, we would still create music. Good music. It might be harder, angrier music, though ...

MAHONEY: I think Marijuana opens up, or the THC opens up, a part of your brain that otherwise remains closed. It opens up a higher level of consciousness. You could probably get there through yoga, but we choose to get there through smoking Herb. Daily consumption has tuned our



reality tunnels in such a way that we live in our own world, adhere to our own laws.

HEXUM: I don't think it's been vital, but Weed has definitely helped shape our style — particularly being into Reggae so much. But if it didn't exist, we'd still be making music. Everybody in the group has their own taste. P-Nut has been stoned for like the last four years, while SA rarely if ever smokes. I've smoked quite a bit today, yesterday, the day before that ...

SECONDS: Is it tough to procure on the road?

HEXUM: No, in fact I usually have a bunch of joints people have handed me.

SECONDS: And you'll smoke those loose joints that people give you?

HEXUM: Yeah

SECONDS: You don't care where the fuck they could have come from?

HEXUM: Well, it depends. If I pull it out, the guys will usually re-roll it to remove any seeds. But I don't fuck with it; I don't give a shit.

SECONDS: You took part in the recent Hempilation album put together by High Times magazine benefiting **NORML**. What is your view on legalization?

HEXUM: The *Hempilation* was something our camp was responsible for bringing together. There's some phat tracks. I always like to see the spreading of awareness about the plant. We're just spreading the message that going after stoners is just a total waste of taxpayers' time and money, when this country should be spending more concentrating on thieves and violent offenders. We're clear-cutting forests to make paper when we could be farming hemp fields. But because the logging industry has such a powerful lobby in Washington, that won't happen until it's probably too late.

MAHONEY: I don't think there should be any laws governing what an individual can and cannot do to their own body. Whether it's abortion or taking drugs. Just the fact that you can make paper from hemp fiber so we can stop cutting down trees, stop unnecessary pollution ... it's

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really what the Earth needs now. I hope *Hempilation* is successful, so it can raise a lot of money for NORML. It's all we can really do at this point for the movement. The Herb needs to be legalized, man. It's a weed that grows in the Earth.

SEXTON: It's a money thing — the fact that certain industries, like the cotton, oil, tobacco, and Alcohol industries, lobby to keep it illegal. You know how deep their power and influence goes. The only issue there should be, "Is hemp and Marijuana going to fucking help people or not?" Everyone knows that it has so many uses that it would make those major industries obsolete. And we wouldn't want that, would we?

HEXUM: I think decriminalization is happening before our eyes. A while ago, I was pulled over by a cop on the freeway. I was sure it was going to be a bust. The cop saw this bag of weed stashed in the glove compartment yet he just said have a nice day and let us drive away. It's happening at different levels as more people begin smoking and as more people who do smoke come into positions of power. Compared to other drugs, it's really safe. People die of Alcohol and tobacco abuse every day. As far as I know, you can't smoke yourself to death ...

MAHONEY: It's so simple. But it's sad, because the people who control our country, who make the laws and govern our bodies, are people that are twice our age and really don't give a shit.

SECONDS: What are some of the problems you have seen first-hand within the music industry?

HEXUM: There's many cool, honest people, but since there's no real rules there's a constant battle of commercial and artistic sensibilities. That balance gets fucked up quite a bit. You run into a lot of weasels and liars looking for a piece of you — you just have to circumnavigate them.

SEXTON: It seems like all of the radio people are getting paid off. It's disgusting. I'm not saying every song on the radio is bad and doesn't deserve to be played, but there are alot of

songs being played for no other reason then being given money to support it. The only people that want to change it are the musicians. Not all of them, because some musicians benefit from their labels paying off record stations.

SECONDS: Are you saying payola is alive and well?

SEXTON: Oh definitely. It's still going on, it's just being masked better. Music seems to be going downhill. When the artform is being dictated by people who control what people see and hear simply because of how much money and power they have, it's fucked up. Music should be judged on one thing alone — music. But that's the industry side of things. I do think there are a lot of good bands out their. The only thing that I wonder about is when **Hootie And The Blowfish** sell twelve million records ... I'm just wondering what the general public is thinking. Not putting down anyone that bought that record, I just get a little confused when I see that band and say, "It's 1996, there's supposed to be some futuristic, advanced spacebands and shit ..."

SECONDS: Does Hootie's success frustrate you?

SEXTON: A little bit. I take a look at the Top 200 in *Billboard* and can't believe some of the groups in there. But I don't have an attitude. I'm not knocking Hootie or the public, it just makes me wonder. Never mad. I'm always thankful for the position that I find myself in. I don't know why we don't sell more. I don't know if we're supposed to sell more. There will be a time when we sell lots of records ... our sales are very steady.

SECONDS: Do you look forward to the day when you're known in every household? Is that the end goal?

SEXTON: I wouldn't say every household. We pretty much have the philosophy that we'd like to touch as many people as we can with our music. We get fan letters all the time. You'd be surprised at what people say our music does for them — that it helped them through a troubling time or something. With bigger sales comes more pressure. Pressure I don't know that we necessarily want.

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