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MUSIC: FEATURE

The Locust



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Bug-eyed: The Locust demonstrates just how claustrophobic a roach motel can be

Sonic swarm

By [Omar Perez](#)

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In nature, the locust destroys farm fields and inflicts damage on everything that crosses the insects' path. Similarly The Locust, a San Diego noise grindcore quartet, traverses and tramples on musical pastures and wreaks havoc on any musical normality.

Spitting out one-minute-long songs of full-on rage through toe-curling screams, shredding guitar and manic time changes, The Locust (drummer Gabe Serbian, vocalist/bassist Justin Pearson, guitarist Bobby Bray and keyboardist Joey Karam) spit in the face of the notion of what a band, or music for that matter, is supposed to sound like, because in a world dominated by locusts, song structures are for wimps and 4/4 beats are lame.

On stage, the band's equally peculiar get-ups of green mesh from head to toe on a band whose members are bone-thin in stature often leave spectators bewildered or heckling, to say the least. But love The Locust or hate 'em, the band is not easy to ignore or forget. Take that the way the term "interesting" can mean just about anything to anyone.

"It's funny how people will tell us how shitty we are but yet they paid money to see the show, and they're standing there watching our whole set," says Serbian.

With song titles off its latest album, "Plague Soundscapes," like "The Half Eaten Sausage Would Like to See You in His Office," "Pssst! Is That a Halfie in Your Pants?" and "Priest with the Sexually Transmitted Diseases," it's evident that the acid fairy has waved its wand at The Locust, even as a completely indiscernible Pearson rants socio-political and anti-homophobic sentiments over music that's somewhere between hardcore and noise, although falling distinctly in neither category. It's sheer insanity, yet comprehensible in some warped universe.

"It's lame to be super-serious about something and not be humorous about it at the same time," Serbian says. "You can do or say something and mean it from the bottom of your heart, but at the same time, be comic about it."

Formed by Bray and former guitarist David Astor in 1995, The Locust released its first record, a split 10-inch EP with Man Is the Bastard (King of the Monsters) followed by a split five-inch picture disc with Jenny Piccolo as well as a self-titled seven-inch. In 1999, the band released its proper self-titled debut, a 20-track effort that ran a whole 13 minutes. By comparison, the band's latest offering, at 23 minutes, is by far the longest album that they've released.

While the band's unorthodox approach to music may, at first glance, limit its fanbase to the most diehard of the underground, the band has managed to sell more than 20,000 copies of its debut, as well as peculiar merchandise that includes compacts, soaps and belt buckles. "We try to keep things interesting," Serbian says of the band's choices for its product line. "We do it to amuse each other." Through live shows and a word-of-mouth reputation (see "interesting" above), Epitaph guru Bret Gurewitz took note and offered to sign the band after 2001's "Flight of the Wounded Locust," but the band didn't want to tarnish its reputation as sonic schizos by signing alongside punk-rock zitzos.

"[Gurewitz] was really trying to get us on Epitaph, but we didn't feel that we fit really well. We're not really fans of much music that comes out on Epitaph." After some negotiations, the band agreed to sign to Epitaph subsidiary Anti-, home of artists including Nick Cave and Tom Waits. "[Anti-] is eclectic, and we thought we would fit right in."

The Locust is a band of extremes, and there is no in-between. While there is a method to the madness that the band employs, the point is either insanely brilliant or absurd, depending on who you ask, or what state of mind they're in at the time. Either way it's a moot issue for Serbian.

"We can be interpreted in many different ways," he says. "People can get what they want out of [The Locust]. We play for us. We're appreciative if they like it, and they pay attention to it. But ultimately, it's for us. If people don't dig what we do, I don't really care."