



WASP — Beasts of metal

WASP stings like a beast

Blackie Lawless is anything but typical of rock musicians. Yet his disturbing message is a sign of the times. While Lawless and others like him may think they are merely entertaining impressionable youth with their shocking rhymes, the country is witnessing more and more reports of youth violence and sexual assaults.

Tipper Gore from Raising PG Kids in an X-Rated Society.

What a review! You can't buy publicity like that.

I have to admit, most of my fondness for Lawless' band WASP is because Tipper and her Parents' Music Resource Center (PMRC) hate them so much.

Promotional material for WASP's latest album, *The Headless Children*, includes quotes from Lawless saying even before Sen. Albert Gore's missive and her influential cartel of Washington wives began using WASP as the best example of the worst example, the band was already hot stuff.

Hogwash. WASP owes PMRC and they know it. Blackie should send Tipper flowers — perhaps a black rose — every Sept. 19. That's the anniversary of the 1985 Congressional hearing when Gore and her friends put WASP's single (*Deletive Deleted*) *Like A Beast* on the charts on Capitol Hill.

But, the PMRC is in for a surprise with *The Headless Children*.

The cover art is classic heavy metal. A skull-shaped cloud hovers above a burning city. Beneath are a number of familiar faces — Hitler, Khomenei, Manson, Jack Ruby, Lee Harvey Oswald, Rev. Jimmy Jones. It is like a Sgt. Pepper's *Lonely Hearts* 25¢ April 15, 1989

Club Band for the criminally insane.

However, on various songs on the new album, Lawless comes out squarely against gang violence and drugs and in favor of parents spending more time with their PG kids before they are lost to our X-rated society.

Is this more apple pie than you hear in your average City Council campaign? Has WASP lost its sting? Or are they just growing up?

"Can you see the real me, Mother? Mother?" Lawless screeches. The song is a fairly lame cover of an old Who number (though it is no worse than U2's recent version of the Beatles' *Helter Skelter*). Lawless is trying to make a point. In another song he says, "Sometimes I feel like an animal in a cage... But nobody knows what's really going on inside me."

The band is at their best on the title song. It starts out with eerie horror-movie music — Igor Live at Castle Frankenstein. It then goes into a plodding heavy-metal riff that sounds like the entrance music for the pro-wrestling tag-team Demolition.

Finally, WASP attacks the song. "The children that you've made have lost their minds/This monster that we call the earth is bleeding/Cause the children have been left alone too long."

The theme of children corrupted by the evils of the world — the evils Tipper Gore partly blames on bands like WASP — runs throughout the album.

On *The Heretic (The Lost Child)*, WASP sees the true tragedy of gang warfare not as the violence itself, but the fact that kids have turned into bloodthirsty zombies.

"Gangland's alive when mothers cry... It burns on the fuel of shattered lives... You see it in their eyes/They're the lost child."

A socially responsible WASP? Lawless shunning the excesses that made heavy metal in general

and WASP in particular synonymous with wild debauchery?

Thankfully, not entirely. The song *Mean Man* is a full-speed salute to the glory of hard rock.

"A tattooed madman, I am hell on wheels/Born a wicked child left alone in the fields/My father was the wind, my mother was fire/Raised by the wolves and I grew up wild."

It is a bragging song in the tradition of Muddy Waters' *Heavenly Coochie Man*. If the P.M.R.C. gets their wish and record companies have to put warning labels on nasty rock albums, *Mean Man* will ensure it for this album by it's liberal use of some words.

Every rose has its thorn, and it seems that nearly every heavy metal album these days contains one slow syrupy song designed to get "cross-over" radio and MTV airplay.

Forever Free is WASP's stab at commercialism. Mercy, it's bad. Lawless' voice, which sounds like a high-pitched version of Linda Blair about to spew pea soup, works fine on the rowdy numbers. But here it stinks.

Lawless is no Roy Orbison and WASP is no Metallica. That group, one of the finest new bands in any genre, is the yerdick by which heavy metal should be measured these days. The two groups share the same Armageddon rage, but WASP lacks Metallica's innovative ideas about rhythm and minimalist approach.

(Young metalheads probably nicker at such serious, pompous analysis of the music they love. But, head-banging is too much fun to be left in the hands of brainless teenagers.)

All in all, *The Headless Children* is not a bad effort. It is nice to know there are brains behind Blackie's bravado. But it's nice to know the bravado is still there.

Roll over, Tipper, WASP can still do it. Like a beast.

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kevinj_1969

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