

Ozomatli Delivers Politics, Latin Fire on Chaos

BY ASHLEY ATKINSON
Senior Writer

Forget about Ricky Martin and J. Lo. If you're looking for the real Latin invasion, you'll find it in the L.A.-based Ozomatli — a party band with a political agenda.



While Ozomatli's sound is rooted in salsa, the group is as diverse as the city that spawned it: Ozomatli counts blacks, Chicanos, Cubans, Japanese, Jews and Filipinos among its nine members.

Its music, likewise, is a cultural medley. Many of the tracks on *Embrace the Chaos* wouldn't sound out of place at your favorite Mexican restaurant. But Ozomatli doesn't stop there, throwing the classic Latin sound for a loop with turntabling, hip-hop lyrics, impressive guest appearances and innovative touch-

es. The band formed in L.A. in 1995, starting out with gigs at political benefits and soon earning a rabid local following.

Its music is intended to promote social change, although English-only listeners might not get all of the message — the raps are in English, but the sung lyrics are in Spanish.

And Ozomatli doesn't just talk the activist talk; its members walk the walk as well (bassist Wil Dog Abers once staged a three-month sit-in to protest the treatment of L.A. Conservation Corps workers).

But Ozomatli doesn't let the serious nature of its agenda get in the way of a good time. Each track is packed with energy and exuberant brass, and if you throw this on at your next party you better be ready to switch between salsa dancing and booty-shaking.

The album gets the party started with "Pa Lante," whose energetic chorus is

punctuated by trumpet blasts. "1234," featuring Pos and TruGoy of De La Soul, deftly mixes hip-hop rhymes with hot horns and a beat that's all funk.

Other tracks are more characteristically Latin, with group choruses and blazing brass. But the band throws in unexpected elements that keep the sound contemporary — the salsa of "Dos Cosas Ciertas," for example, slides into a rhyme undercut by an electronic drum-and-bass beat. Indian tabla drumming is featured prominently on a couple of tracks, as is the kora, an African stringed instrument.

The smooth rhymes of "Vocal Artillery," provided by Will.I.Am of the Black Eyed Peas and underground hip-hop tune Medusa, are laid over a trumpet riff that's straight out of a New Orleans rag. And the jazzy "Pensativo" sounds like the soundtrack to a mystery movie.

Ozomatli's ideology becomes clear on "Embrace the Chaos," which fea-

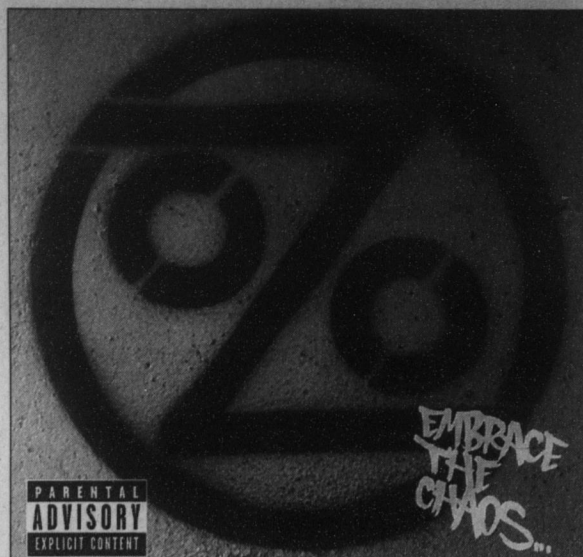
tures lyrics from hip-hop impresario Common.

The track begins with a recording from a protest, at which Ozomatli performed, of the 2000 National Democratic Convention in L.A. The police pulled the plug on the band after one song, and then fired rubber bullets into the crowd as it tried to peacefully disperse — all while then-President Bill Clinton gave a speech on America's greatness.

The song encourages listeners to "embrace the chaos;" recognize what's wrong in society and act upon it. This positivity flows throughout Ozomatli's music, even as it addresses social ills and the hypocrisy of the establishment.

This country needs a band that makes you want to change the world as much as it makes you want to dance — and Ozomatli is it.

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Los Angeles-based Latin outfit Ozomatli mixes world music influences, political ideology and good time grooves on *Embrace The Chaos*.

Pittsboro Native Delivers Solid Guitar Lines; Jump Little Children Returns to Indie Roots

Randy Whitt
So It Goes
★★★★☆

N.C. country boy Randy Whitt began strumming his guitar at an early age to escape the boredom of his hometown of Pittsboro.

With his first album, "So It Goes," his excellent guitar performance reinforces the old adage of "practice makes perfect."

His guitar playing overshadows his vocals. They aren't bad, maybe just a little less polished and practiced than his guitar playing. When he sings the title track, he belts out the chorus as earnestly as a kid trying to impress the crowd at a talent show.

There are also occasions when you can't help but feel like he's winking at his audience. He sounds like an unoriginal mixture between Elvis and Chris Isaac in "Hip Cat," but when he literally meows into the microphone, that personal touch makes you smile.

There are other times when he channels a countrified version of Counting Crows' front man Adam Duritz. The opening riff of "G Street" seems like it's straight out of "Angels of the Silences," from "Recovering the Satellites." On this track, his vocals finally get an edge — something missing over the course of the relatively short album (at 37 minutes).

But while his vocals may prove somewhat inconsistent, his guitar playing is excellent throughout.

Whitt switches back and forth between electric and acoustic, and both play well. His electric guitar has a bit of a jazzed-up Santana feel to it, but his acoustic guitar really lays the foundation for some powerful, serene tracks.

The only time the album ever falls flat is at the end of some tracks. "Breadcrumb Lullaby" fades out with a long stretch of out-of-place a cappella singing then ends to the sounds of conversations at a cocktail party. Was the point to make the album seem longer than it really is?

While Whitt plans a cross-country tour next year, he's playing around the Chapel Hill area until then. Check him out before he hits the road.

By Allison Rost

Dredg
Leitmotive
★★★★☆

With their 1989 masterpiece, *Paul's Boutique*, the Beastie Boys changed hip hop forever with their reinterpretation of the style; California-based rock outfit Dredg aim to do the same thing to rock by infusing it with styles ranging from instrumental-jam bands to hard core.

While *Leitmotive* falls far short of revolutionizing anything, Dredg's first full-length release shows enough promise and emphasis on innovation to make their larger-than-life aspirations seem possible, though unlikely.

The album seems to be the answer to age-old question — what would happen if a bunch of artsy-hippie types who really like hard rock made an album? *Leitmotive* is mish-mash of hard rock songs, slower guitar-driven instrumentals, a pinch of hard core and a smattering of R2D2-inspired bleeping, blooping transitions.

The most entertaining and easily accessible parts of the disc are the rock sections of the songs which sound like a more intelligent version of Silverchair. It's interesting to see how Dredg attempts to integrate the rock sections with the instrumental and hard core ideas.

"Yatahaze" and "Movement II: Crosswind Minuet" both begin as simple rock songs that then crescendo in emotional intensity to hard core, then fade away into instrumentals. Few bands could competently cram as many feelings into a five-minute song as are sardined into "Yatahaze."

With track listings like "Penguins in the Desert" and liner notes that seem to include a drug-induced travel log rather than lyrics, Dredg appears to be the kind of self-important, pretentious band critics love to abuse. Fortunately, the band backs up its eccentricities with

catchy, interesting music that pushes to the edges of the rock genre and gets better with each additional listen.

Leitmotive was recently re-released in an attempt to drum up public interest for Dredg's first effort on its new record label — Interscope Records. It will be interesting to see whether increased attention from the public eye will result in Dredg becoming more "radio-friendly." One hopes it won't.

The strength of the band is its neurotic fear of sounding like one of the generic groups who currently populate the airwaves. The day Dredg starts making albums that don't include seamless transitions from emo-rock to hard core would be the day that Dredg fails in its mission to expand rock's horizons and recedes into anonymity.

By Trafton Drew

Jump, Little Children
Vertigo
★★★★☆

Oh, the sweet sounds of freedom.

Jump, Little Children has returned to its independent-release roots after parting ways earlier this year with former Atlantic Records imprint Breaking Records.

On Sept. 25, the acoustic-funk popsters will officially release *Vertigo* — its first album in three years — on their own label, EZ Chief Records.

And this one is worth the wait. *Vertigo* takes listeners on an emotional rollercoaster ride through the personal experiences of the Charleston, S.C.-based quintet since the 1998 release of *Magazine*, the band's only major label record to date.

The band has abandoned much of the blues and Celtic-tinged sounds of previous albums in favor of a more pop flavor, but they still manage to stay distinct and fresh. *Vertigo* meddles with guitar effects and smooth arrangements to create a sound that is all its own.

From the pulsing rhythm of "Too High" to the melodic refrain of "Words of Wisdom," the fivesome will remind you why they have earned such a wide

grassroots following, despite performing on street corners and in clubs.

While the guys are talented songwriters in their own right, there's something operatic about listening to Jump, Little Children tunes — understanding the lyrics isn't mandatory for understanding the emotion behind them. Just like past performances, lead vocalist Jay Clifford fills in any gaps on *Vertigo* with his sometimes-haunting, always-passionate delivery.

Clifford, also the chief songwriter of Jump Little Children, uses his careening vocal delivery to add shades of emotion

to the broken imagery of his lyrics. His songs focus around love and all its various effects on life. "Lover's Greed" speaks of the lengths that love will take people, conjuring images of fat birds feeding on spring blossoms. Elsewhere, "Angeldust" dreams of oceans on fire, signalling the impending end of a love affair.

But versatile vocalist and musician Matt Bivins will disappoint those Jump, Little Children fans who have come to expect at least one fun, funky rap number from him. His dark, introspective performance of "Singer" seems more

suited for open mic night at a local coffeehouse.

Despite one starkly out-of-place tune, Bivins and his bandmates maintain their success with this eclectic mix of mournful ballads, thoughtful mid-tempo tunes and driving high-energy tracks.

It's as if Jump, Little Children has seen the ugly world of major record labels and has matured both musically and lyrically from the experience.

Welcome back from the dark side, guys.

By Harmony Johnson

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The thoughts of everyone at Council Travel are with the victims of September 11th's events and their loved ones.

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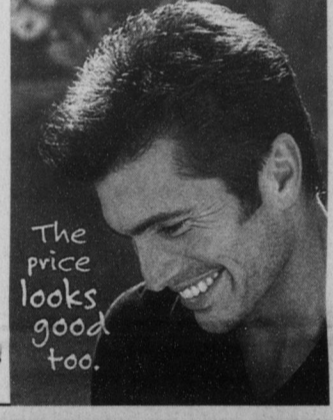
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