

# Daring new rap artist offers sage commentary

BY STANTON KIDD  
STAFF WRITER

Words must take a higher precedence in rap than in any other genre.

Although criticism often is leveled against them, the lyrics are the heart of rap. Even if content is lacking, a rapper still has to use more imagination and lyrical fortitude than the average rocker — there could never be a Gary Glitter in rap.

It is surprising, then, that one can be taken aback when a rapper uses words inventively and actually takes the potential of the genre to its full extent in regard to his lyrics.

Sage Francis has carved out a niche as one of the increasing number who makes his name not for tales of braggadocio and shouted hooks, but as one who is willing to trip over polysyllabic words and grand metaphors. Artists like Francis strive for artistry not only in terms of traditional genre con-

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SAGE FRANCIS  
A HEALTHY DISTRUST

★★★★

siderations such as flow and rhyme, but also in purely linguistic terms, becoming what would have been called in simpler times "a poet."

Considering that Francis did start in slam poetry, it's not surprising that he is able to use words not just as something unwieldy that goes over the beat, but as a weapon, tool and shield. Francis jumps all over the songs with his words, using them in a way that few are able.

The lyrical content covers a huge amount of territory, but most of it is a crusade against transparency and shallowness.

"Gunz Yo" is vicious anti-gun screed that goes above just "guns are bad." It investigates the symbolism inherent to guns and violence and the psychosexual territory they occupy. This depth keeps it from being bogged down by tired aphorisms.

He takes on commercial rap radio on "Dance Monkey," going for the jugular of that person who "loves repetitive music songs that keep on playing." More directly, the first track, "The Buzz Kill," starts the album with a clattering call to attention, saying, "I used to think that rappers had it figured out/Brass Monkey, St. Ides, Old English and Guinness Stout." But this album would be lost if

it was just words. The production work is what makes this album truly engaging. While sometimes Francis is forced off-beat or is just tripped up by his complex words, the beats that throb underneath bind it all together. At the same time, they never distract from the words. They inhabit a happy in-between space where they bolster and prop up the lyrical meat.

On a song like "Lie Detector Test," under a rolling litany of typical complaints, the beat similarly rolls with a looped electric piano hugging and rubbing gently with the words. It's one of the most effective songs on the album.

But with an album that deals with as many words as this one, there are bound to be some missteps, though they are surprisingly few and far between.

Francis is usually able to step back from a poorly placed metaphor or half-thought-out simile and lay down a great line that saves the track.

That is what makes Francis so good. His experience as a slam poet and battle MC are on full display here as he takes on the world, making a song like "Slow Down Gandhi" seethe and spit, making his anger all the more real. When he takes on the politics of this age, he is able to do what few have done lately: not seem didactic but still broil the song in his anger.

Sage Francis lays down quite a challenge to not just underground hip-hop, but also to culture in general. One can only hope that enough will hear him to take him up on it.

# 50 Cent comes up short on new LP

BY JACKY BRAMMER  
STAFF WRITER

Music is different from most everything else, because it's the talk that should matter more than the walk. If it was about the walk, 50 Cent might be the best ever.

Picture him behind the guise of double-breasted pinstripes with a matching fedora and a Tommy gun, and he resembles a Prohibition-Era mafioso. His rhymes backed up his image on his debut album, but with *The Massacre* — things have changed.

This record will inevitably sell a ton of units and be judged a commercial success. That proves just one thing: Rap is about a name.

No one listens to lyrics anymore. If they did, one would recognize that "Fiddy" wrote these rhymes in about 20 minutes.

"You wanna spray at me? Go 'head/The last ... that tried/Got hit, keeled over and bled till he died/Ya little sister callin' you stupid/Reason why?/Her and ya momma in the livin room now hog-tied."

This would make sense if it fit into an overall motif, but it doesn't. The effort sounds like someone went into the studio, took *Get Rich or Die Tryin'* and massacred it.

The album's problems don't stop with lyrics. Its guest appearances are weak — Eminem emerg-

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50 CENT  
THE MASSACRE

★★

es from the Slim Shady batcave to provide a couple of mediocre cameos.

But the Game, who recently has been at odds with Fiddy, remains the most dynamic member of G-Unit as he owns "Hate It or Love It Remix" with another hot verse.

Thanks largely to a few slow, soulful beats courtesy of DJ Hi-Tek, the production manages to keep you interested. But there are hardly any stand-outs and few worthwhile singles.

"Disco Inferno" is a decent attempt at a party anthem, but C. Styles and Bang Out should be arrested for blatantly lifting the beat off Lloyd Banks' "On Fire."

"Candy Shop" is a rare strong track because it shows Fiddy in his forte of being a no-nonsense playa: "Soon as I come through the door, she get to pullin' on my zipper/It's like it's a race who can get undressed quicker/Isn't it ironic how erotic it is to watch 'em in thongs/Had me thinking 'bout that ass after I'm gone."

But 50 Cent outruns his own flow as he starts throwing out

jabs he can't back up on the diss song "Piggy Bank."

He holds nothing back, assailing Fat Joe and Nas about record sales and relationships.

He might be outselling the Bible, but he still isn't putting it down like God's Son. Fiddy needs to drop a classic like *Illmatic* or even *Stillmatic* before he challenges the current king of New York.

In the end, 50 Cent's second effort is all flash and no substance. He appears to try hard to get his talk to catch up with his walk, but in all that verbal chicanery he forgot the two most important words: sophomore slump.

Contact the A&E Editor at [artsdesk@unc.edu](mailto:artsdesk@unc.edu).

## DIVERECOMMENDS

■ "The New Biographical Dictionary of Film," David Thomson

All movie lovers eventually make their way to David Thomson, whose fat encyclopedic masterpiece approaches 1,000 pages.

For his cool and adult articulation of cinephilia, he can be placed on the short list of our best film writers.

His sentences are often as beautiful as anything James Agee wrote, and with the fullness of his prose, he has developed a body of work that sustains that fickle infatuation with the screen.

What we find in his book is inexhaustible conversation. His brief assessments of film careers glisten with intelligence and accumulate in a tone of praise, even when they provocatively question the merits of masters.

His discussion of cinematographers, editors and new directors might be scant, but it's the rare critic who gives us a yearning for art and builds such a temple out of words and memory.

Thomson evokes the heft of a whole history through his singular voice, guarding and sizing up our treasures.

■ "A Problem from Hell: America and the Age of Genocide," Samantha Power

Power's 2003 Pulitzer Prize-winner is a revelatory book that reaches its passionate position through serious, clear-headed journalism.

The multilayered narrative moves beyond partisanship, sifting through the ruins of eight genocides and America's consistently disinterested responses.

It is devastating to sense the rhythmic repetition in this history and to understand how comfortably we can live through an era that suggests the limitlessness of violence.

Power's research and arguments clarify our moral obligations in the modern world, but they also illuminate the political obstacles that promote inaction.

Contact Andrew Chan at [awchan@email.unc.edu](mailto:awchan@email.unc.edu).

# Simplistic rappers speak volumes on party culture

BY JIM WALSH  
ASSISTANT ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT EDITOR

Just because it's easy doesn't mean it's bad.

There are plenty of things in life that, while not intrinsically artistic or particularly multifaceted, are nonetheless enjoyable.

Placeholders are what make the world go round. They drive commercial radio, gorging America's appetite for risk-free beats and surefire choruses.

So it is with Atlanta's El Pus, suppliers of the world's most digestible rap-rock. The band paves the way for revelers everywhere who just want to have a good time. Never mind depth. This stuff is just plain fun.

On the band's major-label debut, *Hoodlum Rock, Vol. 1*, recycled beats abound and the lyrics leave something to be desired, but still something is there.

One's response to the album is similar to viewing a car accident: It's nothing pretty, but you do have to investigate.

That's how strong the temptation to fall into the groove of El Pus (read "El Poose") is. Infectious bass lines and campy samples combine forces to the extent that one can't help but — in the words of those crazy rap-rock enthusiasts across the nation — get up.

And perhaps it's not a bad temptation to satisfy. El Pus combines the best of The Fugees, 311, G. Love

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EL PUS  
HOODLUM ROCK, VOL. 1

★★★

and 2 Skinnee Js, adding to that formidable pop catalogue their own twists. Nothing sounds ripped-off, but everything calls to mind projects that have already been done before.

Don't misunderstand. *Hoodlum* definitely is an album to pick up. At its core are the very niceties that have propelled similar acts into the mainstream for years.

And as far as the genre to which it ascribes, one often polluted with crap-rock or the like, it sounds a lot better than most.

Perhaps the El Pus appeal is more abstract than lyrics or design. Certainly, these elements are not what have earned the band a respectable seat at the wedding of rap and rock. Rather, it is the energy of its members that solidifies the album.

It says something when a studio album sounds like a live concert recording. One can almost see the band bouncing on stage, screaming into the microphones. These are what concertgoers love, and they are things that can be found on *Hoodlum*.

Bring on the Pus.

Contact the A&E Editor at [artsdesk@unc.edu](mailto:artsdesk@unc.edu).

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Public and academic debate over boom-and-bust cycles in industries and financial markets focus largely on the deleterious effects of hasty entrants or overvaluation. Ruef proposes "entrepreneurial inertia" — that is, the lag time exhibited by organizational founders or investors entering a market niche — as a major contributing factor. He contends that slow, methodical entries into an organizational population or market may pose far greater threats to niche stability.

Ruef's work explores this proposition analytically, considering the development of U.S. medical schools since the mid-18th century. Findings underscore the importance of timing in micro-level organizational activities, such as entrepreneurship, and their impact on macro-level outcomes, such as industry evolution.

Martin Ruef is associate professor of sociology at Princeton University. His research and teaching focus on organizational theory, economic sociology, network analysis and the sociology of culture. His current work addresses the social context of entrepreneurship from both contemporary and historical perspectives. His book, *Institutional Change and Healthcare Organizations* (co-authored with W. Richard Scott, Peter Mendei, and Carol Caronna), won the Max Weber prize from the American Sociological Association.

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