

## Americans have a hard time taking San Francisco seriously.

BY ADAM BLOCK



San Francisco is a queer mecca, but most Americans have a hard time taking the city seriously. They see it as an urban playpen on the fringes of the real world. It's an Armistead Maupin reverie. It is where Jerry Brown lives, for Christ's sake.

Likewise, it has been tough for musicians based here to find a national following. Despite the massive success of Bay Area locals M. C. Hammer and Metallica and big hits from Digital Underground, Paris, and Chris Isaak, the bands most associated with the city 25 years after the Summer of Love remain the Grateful Dead and Jefferson Starship.

But, in fact, two decades of queer immigrants have made a real impact on the San Francisco music scene, and it is showing up in music that promises to reach far beyond the local fishbowl. So if I risk lapsing provincial with this column, it's in the name, to paraphrase Brown, of "thinking globally, listening locally."

There is probably no pop event more self-absorbed and silly than the Bay Area Music Awards (Bammies). But this year, Sister Double Happiness, America's only major-label hard-rock act with an out queer lead singer, turned in a searing set that briefly enlivened the soporific show.

*Entertainment Weekly* recently singled out Sister Double Happiness's *Heart and Mind* (Reprise) as last year's most promising and passionate overlooked rock disc. Now, with a recently added rhythm guitarist and bass player, the band is touring Europe on the heels of its newly released CD single, "Hey, Kids," a pointed and poignant indictment of homophobia. The CD also features an unreleased song, the incandescent blues "Lightning Strikes"; a wicked acoustic version of "Sweet Talker"; and the terrific "Wheels A Spinning."

The Disposable Heroes of Hiphoprisy

provided the other breath of fresh air at the Bammies with a fiercely focused set. Then the group headed down to Los Angeles to shoot a video for their new single, "Language of Violence" (4th & B'way Records), the first hard-rap song to attack queer bashing. Director Ian Fletcher (who is also slated to shoot videos for Ice Cube, Cher, and M. C. Hammer) promises a dramatization of the song in the style of *The Elephant Man* and *Blue Velvet*.

Hopefully, Fletcher will play the Heroes' disc to Ice Cube, who hasn't gotten the news on bigoted epithets. He recently told *Spin* that when he rapped "true niggas aren't gay," it had "nothing to do with being gay or straight." The performer went on to explain, "It's saying you can't fuck true niggas out of their manhood or their land. It's a metaphor. It's not like saying, 'You're not a true nigga if you're gay.' I don't have a problem with gays. . . . I don't know any gay people."

Mr. Cube needs to get out a little more; maybe visit San Francisco; meet Marlon Riggs; hear about Bayard Rustin, Alvin Ailey, Sylvester, and others; and drink long and deep from the goblet of African-American homo history.

There was a vivid taste of history in the air when Romeo Void performed two nights last month in San Francisco, headlining a sold-out benefit for their sound man, Louie Beeson, in the wake of his AIDS diagnosis. Despite their long silence, the group's 1983 landmark club hit "Never Say Never" is still ricocheting irrepressibly across dance floors.

Beeson expertly manned the boards as Isaak (who rewrote "Louie, Louie" for the occasion), John Doe and Tony Gilkison of X, Wire Train (who were joined by Pearl E. Gates for a cover of "Here Comes the Night"), and Exene Cervenka (who read dryly hilarious poems while decked out in a WOMEN ACT UP/L.A. T-shirt) all performed graciously.

Romeo Void ruled, however. The band sounded superb; their tunes were fresh and timely throughout a generous 16-song career-spanning set. The band is history, but Epic Records is shortly to release *Warm in Your Coat: A Romeo Void Collection*, a compilation of some of the most powerful, haunting music of the postpunk era. The album ends with an unreleased grace note, "1,000 Shadows," a song about survival penned years before President Bush made it so creepily prophetic with his cynical invocation of "a thousand points of light."

One beacon of courage and compassion arrives with U2's release of the CD single



Irish rock group U2

Royalties from their new single, "One," are pledged to AIDS research.

*One* (Island/PLG). The disc is graced with a cover photo by David Wojnarowicz of buffalo being driven off a cliff. The liner notes applaud the artist for "uncompromising depictions of his homosexuality, his infection by HIV, and the political crisis surrounding AIDS." They also promise that "U2's royalties from the single will go to AIDS research."

The CD includes a stunning steel string remix of the band's cover of Cole Porter's "Night and Day," a cover of Lou Reed's "Satellite of Love," and a deliciously fierce and psychedelic "Girl With the Spinning Head." The title cut is a song about the wages of love at a time when it's obscene to try to place blame. It closes with a plea, as lead singer Bono cries, "We've got to carry each other."

And that's a message everyone has got to hear. ▼