

jenifer convertible

*"I used to be a car, Detroit factory Chevrolet,
new parts and body work, made me what I am today..." (Zenith)*

So begins "The Car Song", JENIFER CONVERTIBLE's quintesseential ode to the transexual experience. One of NYC's few transgendered-led bands, JENIFER CONVERTIBLE was formed in 1994 by **Lenny Zenith** (guitar, lead vocals), **Jim Santo** (guitar, vocals) and **Jamie Pertusi** (bass, vocals). **Eddie Siino** (drums) joined later in 1996.

The band's first single, "Co-dependency" b/w "The Car Song" was released in the Spring of 1994 by Puddle Records. Both songs received unanimous acclaim and heavy air play on influential New York-area radio stations such as **WNYU**, **WFDU** and **WFMU**. "The Car Song" was selected by the trend-setting **SonicNet** BBS as one of the first Action Ready Singles distributed on-line.

A second 45, "SpeedRacer" b/w "Rewind" was released by **Puddle** in Spring 1995. Produced by Ray Ketchem (Melting Hopefuls, Shirk Circus, The Original Sins), the 7" again gained favorable reviews and substantial air play. In its review of the single *Smug Magazine* predicted, "Jenifer Convertible...will be the next great pop band to come out of New York."

The band has since earned a reputation as one of the city's best live acts. They're best known for explosive performances throughout the downtown New York area. Jenifer Convertible plays regularly at **Luna Lounge**, **CBGB**, **Knitting Factory**, **The Cooler**, **Tramps** and **Irving Plaza**. And, the band has been a featured performer at every major music festival in the region, including **New Music Seminar**, **CMJ Music Marathon**, **NYU Independent Music Festival**, **Macintosh New York Music Festival**, **North Carolina's WE (Wilmington Exchange) Festival**, the **Philadelphia Music Conference** and **NXNE** in Toronto.

"Wanna Drag?", Jenifer Convertible's first CD was produced at Fun City Studios with **Wharton Tiers** (Quicksand, Helmet, Dinosaur Jr.) producing. "Wanna Drag?" features "My Boy Bill," "Car Song" and "Big Wheel." The CD was released in 1997 on Yum Recordings.

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www.echonyc.com/~jimsanto/jcweb

"Theirs is the territory of loud, smart and trendy rock that hasn't yet made it to the mainstream in its pure form (unless you count Superchunk). they know not to take themselves too seriously and so keep their songs fit and trim...Lyrics are a strong point for J.C. They can be simple and blunt or they can be ironic and knowing. When they hit with a great hook, there are few better in the genre. There's a lot of power in the noise, whether it's power chords or weird lead lines, and not least in importance is the humor."

— **MUSICIANS' EXCHANGE**

"This likable foursome has been going here for three years, and their new LP *Wanna Drag? (Yum/Beloved)* is the culmination, having built up to it with a few singles. Prolific producer Wharton Tiers keeps the sound dirty as the band's raspy guitars and loose rhythm section makes them compare favorably with Pavement, Archers of Loaf and Number One Cup. Don't miss the inventive, tuneful 'Slide.'"

— **PAPERMAG**

"JenCon will be the next great pop band to emerge out of New York...Their live shows have been explosive lately."

— **SMUG**

"Jenifer Convertible clangs a righteous riot, sweeping gloom under the rug with wooly hooks and scratchy crescendos."

— **VILLAGE VOICE**

"Twangy and fuzzy and a bit abrasive like hardcore pop or something. It ain't way out there in left field but it makes me picture a little kid, standing shyly, shifting his weight from foot to foot, arms crossed, curiously staring out of the corner of his wide eyes at the fine line separating sanity from insanity."

— **WYRD**

"New York power poppers with a twisted twist: nice background vocals. The Replacements meet Mission of Burma."

— **DUMPSTER DIVE**

"'Co-dependency' is an uptempo, rocking ditty with a catchy, Sugar-esque chorus that — this is hard to describe — is almost the reverse of the usual, sing-songy pop chorus."

— **MAGNET**

"Pop-infused tunes with whacked-out, noisy guitar...No fussiness, just a damn good [record]."

— **FLIPSIDE**

"Pretty good indie stuff with enough guts and raw stuff that it wouldn't fall into the 'indie-rock' boring sound. Like a less intense or hateful Touch & Go band with interesting guitar passages recalling Mission of Burma sans effects pedals."

— **CHAIRS MISSING**

"This wicked two-guitar quartet comes rudely smashing down the door with a sound that makes one think of first LP (pre-grungy) Dinosaur Jr. or the younger Shudder To Think with a harsher, more throaty singer. A curious mix of plaintive songwriting and great, tuneful singing with a hepped-up, violent streak in the bass/drums/guitar."

— **THE BIG TAKEOVER**

"These NYC indie-rockers remind me of Teenage Fanclub and Archers of Loaf. In any event, they're great!"

— **SWILL**

"So you like pop, soaring melodies, with a batch of noise thrown in. Get this! These guys (no Jens) will probably be making more waves than Miss America during a parade."

— **FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION**

"I love this band! In my estimation they are one of the best things to happen within the vaguely drawn confines of the New York music community in a long time. They have a talent for juxtaposing the mundane with the even more mundane and coming up with the sublime. Wildly spirited guitar and a strong bass and drum combo kept the audience glued the whole set through."

— **DOWNTOWN**

"Once they get all engines running the quartet purrs and can be characterized as awesome...it was hard to miss the quality of the music and the mayhem of the scene produced by Jenifer Convertible's set."

— **L.A. XPRESS**

JerseyBeat

Issue #61 Winter 1997

Two Dollars

The Happy Go Luckiest Angst Band In New York

By Jim Testa

James Pertusi - Bass, vocals
Jim Santo, Guitar, vocals
Eddie Siino, Drums, vocal
Lenny Zenith, Vocals, drums

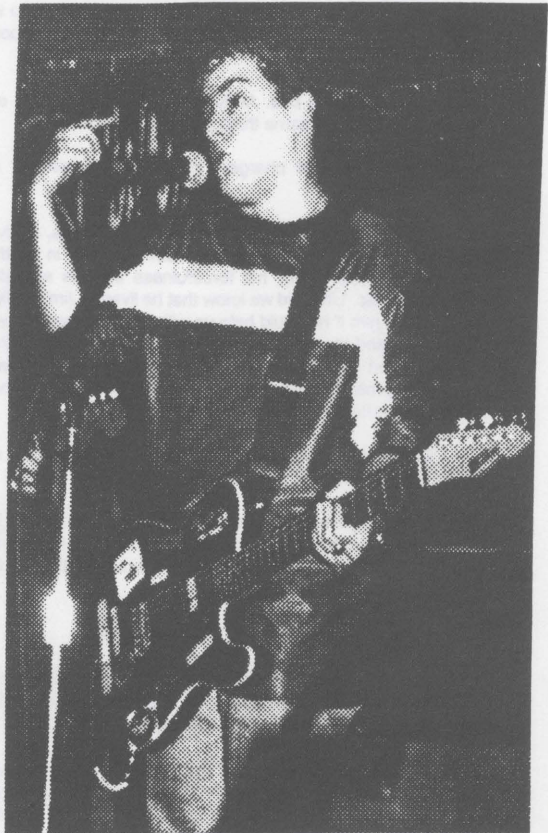
If you live in the tri-state area, you'll probably recognize Jenifer Convertible as the name of a local manufacturer of fold-out beds - unless you're part of that small but fortunate fraternity that has also discovered Jenifer Convertible the band.

My association with the group came as a result of my enormous respect for JenCon guitarist Jim Santo's work as the writer behind *Demorandum*, the demo tape review column which used to run in *Alternative Press* magazine (it's since become known as Demo Universe with a new home on the World Wide Web.) Once, a few years ago, Jim casually mentioned that he played guitar in a band and invited me to a show. I went, checked them out, and suddenly I had two reasons to respect this guy.

Like so many New York City bands, Jenifer Convertible toils in relative obscurity, playing shitty gigs for no money in front of not enough people whenever they can. Earlier this year the quartet released its first CD, *Wanna Drag?* on Yum Records, only to watch the label slowly go out of business. To say they deserve better would be like saying that Michael Jordan deserves to be nominated for the NBA's Hall of Fame someday. In fact, they deserve to be rock stars - or at the very least, earning a living from their music, instead of working mindless day jobs and pouring every spare minute and dollar into keeping the band afloat.

Why? Start with the songs. This is a song band, not a band with a sound. Poignant songs, heartbreaking songs, funny songs. Songs about growing up, about people they know, about places they've been. Songs about fast cars and transvestites. Songs with power and melody and emotion. Good songs.

Lenny Zenith's voice could melt the heart of a I.R.S. auditor. Lenny - let's get this out of the way - used to be a woman. He is now a man. This is a fact, not a gimmick, so let's move on, okay? Jim Santo, like many large men, is as light on his feet as a ballerina. Watching him scamper and prance around on stage, oohing backup harmonies into the mic and taking the occasional lead vocal himself, is like watching a small child running amuck into a big pile of autumn leaves. That's something Santo shares with the rest of this band - a sense of joy in what they're doing that translates into the music and communicates itself to the audience. But let them tell you about it themselves...



Lenny

**jenifer
convertible**

Q: Who are you, where did you come from, why are you here?

Lenny: I'm from New Orleans. And I had been playing in a lot of bands there. I came up to New York to try playing my music in a different setting, and little by little, as my nice pop bands started to disintegrate and I started to become

infected with the New York noise - not the noise scene, but just the noise - I found that my music was taking on different aspects. I was starting to internalize aspects of living in New York. And so I wanted to change my approach, and I started looking for musicians who could bring out what I was hearing in my head. I was introduced to Jim by our old drummer, Andy Moore. Jim started out on bass but we figured out that he would be better on guitar, and so we got another bass player. We got hooked up with James through an ad in the Village Voice. Then our first drummer quit. Actually he was a junkie and we had to physically extricate him from the band. We cleaned him up one weekend so we could go in the studio and record, and he was swearing that he was clean, and then we found out he was on crystal meth during the session. So we got rid of him. And then our second drummer, Andy Moore, took off and moved to Maine.

James: That sounds bad. Andy did the right thing. Any one of us would have done the same thing given that opportunity.

Jim: Facing criminal charges. He needed to get out of state. (everybody laughs)

Lenny: So anyway, Andy left but fortunately for us, Eddy lived in Jim's building and knew him. And I saw him play in another band and was mesmerized by his forcefulness and his animalistic approach to music. Little did we know that he lived in Jim's building and so we asked him if he could help us with a few shows until we found a drummer, and the next thing we knew, he had quit his other band and he moved in. And we've kept him ever since. And we've just built our approach together from there, and it's become more of a collaborative effort than I ever imagined it could be.

Jim: I would really date this beginning of this band really to when Eddy joined, May of '95.

James: Hey, I have a bio that says it really started when I joined! Are you done? My name is James. I joined the band three years ago. I abandoned a career as an architect because this is fun and architecture is not.

Q: Don't architects make a lot of money, though?

James: No. This is a very common misconception. We are ranked in the public eye alongside doctors and lawyers but we don't dress as well and architects make very little money.

Q: Every time I interview a New York band, I wind up talking about how much it sucks to be a band in New York. There are too many bands here, the clubs won't pay you, the local newspapers and weeklies won't write about you. And the kind of music you play isn't particularly trendy at the moment. You seem to be surviving all that, why don't you talk a little about it?

Lenny: We were actually discussing this at our last rehearsal. Just about the time our first single came out, what we were doing was very cool and very popular. But because it took us two years to get our first album out, by that time boy guitar rock had started to fade for the fifth time in 25 years, so we were thinking of changing to a drums and bass, ambient kind of thing. But then we realized we weren't very good at that, so we decided to stick with what we do.

James: We have no rhythm.

Lenny: We have no rhythm or ambience. So we can't be an ambient band. But it is hard, because what we do is just play power pop songs, which goes in & out of fashion every three or five years. So we figure we're (to James,) what did you say we were again? We're so out we're in again.

James: We're in again. We're underground. Again.



Jim Santo

Jim: One thing that has made this much more pleasant is that we do have a patron in Rob at the Luna Lounge. He's one of our biggest fans and he's hugely supportive, and he gives us regular gigs on the weekends whenever we ask. And it's great, because when we play the Luna, we pack the joint and it's filled with people who appreciate what we do. And it's really allowed us to develop as a band in the public eye and let us develop a following.

James: What article was it that said there were at least 4200 bands for every borough in New York City? We just read that. So that's what we're up against.

Jim: Yes, but the vast majority of those other bands suck, whereas we are one of the few who are truly a great band. And I'm not even being arrogant, I'm just being fair to myself.

Lenny: It doesn't help that we're not as thin or as young or as drug-addicted as many of the bands in New York. But we're working on it. We're all trying to turn back the clock, and we've all joined gyms recently. But we just love what we do. And we're so committed to it that we rehearse quite a bit during the week, and we really believe in the songs that we do, and we're not going to change anything. Because we think it's good, and we know there are people out there who appreciate our songs.

James: If there's one thing we are, it's dedicated to doing this. Because we've all lost jobs and lovers and wives and girlfriends and parents to stay in this chickenshit outfit, and fuck 'em all, because we love it and we're going to keep doing it.

Lenny: Things are looking up. Now that we don't have a label, we're talking to a lot of people and we're weighing a lot of different offers. And we're getting a song on a TV show, some special about NASCAR NAPA racers is playing "Speed Racer." And we're getting some money out of that. So part of it we're going to use part of that to do some advertising, because our old label didn't advertise our record at all when it came out. And with the rest of it...

Jim: I think we're going to ring up (producer) Wharton Tiers and see if he's willing to go into the studio with us and record three or four new songs for a single or EP or something. Because we've got a lot of new stuff that's way better than anything on *Wanna Drag?* that *Wanna Drag?* is bad. But the new stuff is even better. We really want to get it on tape. So I think we're going to be recording in the near future.

Q: Jim

(everybody laughs)

Lenny: James is invoking the words of a person who came down to one of our shows and kept saying "I think you guys are ready to take it to the next level."

James: He said it a lot. It started to get creepy.

Q: All my favorite songs on your album seem to be about cars ("Speed Racer," "The Car Song.") Is there a reason for that?

Jim: Pure coincidence. Although Lenny seems to be somewhat automotive obsessed.

Lenny: Well, it's not that, it's just that if you dream about vehicles or cars, or if you ever dreamt about getting on the wrong subway or bus, it's for what gets in your life, and where you're going to be there. So that's what the songs are really about.

Jim: Well, first off, let me say this. I heard this little segment on the news about making it in the music business the other night and they threw out this little statistic. According to the Recording Institute of America, 10,000 records were released last year, and only 7% charted in Billboard. That's charted. Not a big hit, just a little blip that showed up on a chart. Seven percent.

Lenny: I work in the music business peripherally, and I see what goes on with labels and publishing companies, and I think that as soon as people realize that you can't do this and count on making a living, unless you plan on being in a wedding band for the rest of your life. And if you do get a major label deal, then you have to realize that you basically have a year to enjoy yourself and live off the advance you've gotten. And then after that, the chances that you're going to do anything after that are so slim that you can pretty much just count on being a one-year wonder. And then it's over, and you have to figure out what you're going to do with the rest of your life. And if you love to play, then you have to make a decision. This is something we've talked about. We did not start this band to get signed, we started this band because we love to play, and that's why we're doing it. This is not some big career move. This is our lives.

Jim: For a young musician, getting signed is the Holy Grail. But after you've been at it for a while, you start to realize that once you get the Holy Grail, it's actually nothing but a soggy beer cup. And you'd better drink it fast, or the bottom's gonna fall out.

Jim Santo's Demo Universe: www.demouniverse.com/demou/
JenCon Web Page: www.echonyc.com/~jimsanto/jcweb
Email: [REDACTED]

other bands is hugely gratifying and I don't envy anyone else's success. I try to help people as much as I can, even though I can't review my own band.

Lenny: What a lot of people miss is that even though Jim reviews a lot of other bands - and he's very good at that, and very committed to it, and very rigorous about doing the best he can to help bands who are really a lot like us - but a lot of people don't realize that he is a great songwriter and guitarist and showman himself. So here's a guy who's putting it out there and very rarely saying, "oh, by the way, I happen to have a band of my own."

Jim: I don't play it un...
to the exper...
perce...

Jim: That's the funny thing about us. Our songs tend to be pretty sad, but we're such goofballs on stage that no one notices.

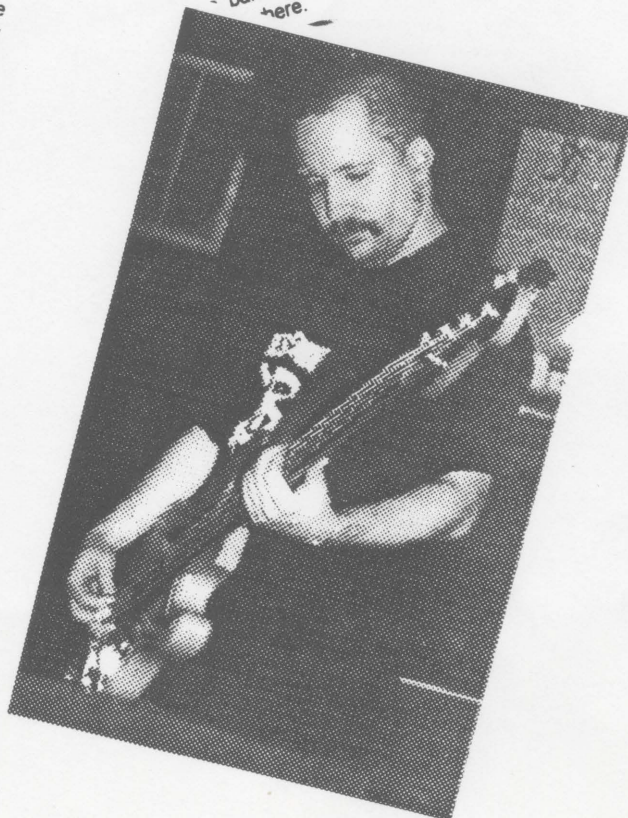
Lenny: Someone said to me once, "your songs are so melancholy and so poignant but you guys goof off on stage so much, and you're so fun and easy going that the angst and the poignancy of your songs doesn't come across, because you don't take yourselves seriously enough, like an American Music Club or something. But I think some of those people take themselves too seriously, and one of the things that we've been able to do is take things that are really painful and write about them, and have a good time singing about them."

James: You get up on stage and you're singing about all this stuff that's bringing you down, and you're supposed to be exorcising demons. It's supposed to feel good. And if all it does is make you relive it all and get all upset, what's the point?

Lenny: I think that whenever we play, we're just so happy and grateful to be in each other's company, as corny as that sounds, and do something that we really enjoy doing, and that we've been doing for a long time... It's like we're just saying, wow, we get to play. And that makes up happy.

Q: You guys seem so well-adjusted...
(Hysterical laughter all around)

okay, relatively speaking, you seem so comfortable with where you're at right now, and so many younger people read *Jersey Beat*, I think if you had any advice for them about what to expect from a band and how to deal with how long it takes to get here.



James

Billboard

THE INTERNATIONAL NEWSWEEKLY OF MUSIC, VIDEO AND HOME ENTERTAINMENT

IN MUSIC NEWS



Matador Takes Indie Route With Chavez
SEE PAGE 10

OCTOBER 26, 1996

The Enter*Active File

MERCHANTS & MARKETING

BITS'N'BYTES: The Web site soap opera "The East Village" has spawned a CD soundtrack, which can be purchased directly at the site (<http://www.eastvillage.com>). Among the independent and unsigned acts on the disc are Jenifer Convertible, Philco Bendyx, and Bite The Wax Godhead . . . To get into the spirit of the presi-

november 1995 volume #1

issue#8

SmUG

Rich's 7 inches

JENIFER CONVERTIBLE - Speedracer

JenCon will be the next great pop band to emerge out of New York, trust me. However, this 7" does them no justice. Distant, cold and mixed with little punch, it sounds as if they recorded this in an icebox. Their live shows have been explosive lately so I bet the next offering will be much better. (Puddle, 12 W. 21st St., 10th Fl, NYC 10010,

V r o o m
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V r o o m

PHOTOGRAPH BY JASON NOCITO

JENIFER CONVERTIBLE

BY SUSAN SCÜTTI

After wandering the evening streets in search of a quiet bar, Jim Santo, lead guitarist of Jenifer Convertible, and I sat down for conversation and beer at the NoHo Star. Santo is self-aware — without being self-involved — and at 39 years old, he continues to grow musically as well as personally (recently, he became a father). Improbability, incongruity, is Jenifer Convertible's strong suit: their lyrics marry "high school" imagery to an adult sensibility, their sound mixes dissonance with pop melodies. Adopting the name of the lead singer's unrequited "crush," the

I don't really like movies that have rock music in them. Let me think about this. Terry Gilliam would be great to work with. Well, my real choice is dead — Fellini. Actually, ESPN wants to buy our music. They've already approached us.

Have you read any interesting books lately?

Yeah, I didn't ask me my favorite artist. I like Anselm Kiefer. MoMA did a retrospective of his work several years ago — his art is really personal, not something you'd put over your couch. Actually, the last book I read was the Calvin Tomkins biography of Marcel Duchamp. For better or worse! I like



band formed in 1993 and includes Lenny Zenith (vocals and guitars), James Pertsis (bass), and Eddie Silino (drums). *Wanna Drag?*, on Yum Records, is available at most major chains.

How has living in the city influenced your music?

Mainly in terms of the records available in stores. New York is a port. It gets everything and gets it first. The other bands here influence us too. Jenifer Convertible straddles the line between pop underground and noise bands — part of the downtown, Lower East Side aesthetic. You could file us broadly under "Indy Rock."

Were you "troubled?" A lot of people who major in Psychology are looking for answers about themselves.

I had a great professor — my family was fine. I'm the last of five kids and the youngest next to me is 11 years older so I felt like an only child.

What music did your parents listen to?

No, much. I was more influenced by what my older brothers listened to: Be-Bop, Beach Boys, early Little Richard. I also listened to all the big groups like the Beatles, Rolling Stones, Talking Heads, really turned my head [laughs] when they first came out.

This is fantasy time: if you could compose a movie soundtrack for any director you wanted, who would you chose?

Noguchi. Great dignity. And Steve Keane. He's the only artist I can afford to collect. He sells his his paintings for five bucks.

Who writes your lyrics?

Mainly Lenny. We collaborate on the music.

You've told me most of your audience is twenty years your junior and your gigs are intense. What do you mean? Do you smash up your guitar, ala The Who?

Yeah, sometimes. I don't have much respect for guitars. They're just tools.

What kind do you play?

A 1965 red Fender Mustang.

You listen to classical music. Who is your favorite composer?

Bach. He wrote the concertos for cello I really like.

How about jazz?

Mingus and Miles.

How old were you when you first got involved in music?

I got my first guitar when I was 12, but I didn't really get serious until I was a senior in college. I'm not a natural. It's just something I wanted and worked hard at — I'm proud of this.



MADE IN MANHATTAN

by Ion Cunningham

Another pleasant diversion was brought to me by Jenifer Convertible. Featuring veteran music journalist Jim Santo (who is also a former alum of this very magazine) on guitar, theirs is the territory of loud, smart and trendy rock that hasn't yet made it to the mainstream in its pure form (unless you count Superchunk). They know not to take themselves too seriously, and so keep their songs fit and trim. They played quite a number of them at the Luna Lounge just a scant few days ago.

Lyrics are a strong point for J.C. They can be simple and blunt or they can be ironic and knowing. When they hit with a great hook, there are few better in the genre. There's a lot of power in the noise, whether it's power chords or weird lead lines, and not least in importance is the humor.



LRG #26 Spring 1997 \$2.50

Inside:

17. Jenifer Convertible - Speedracer b/w Rewind and St. Pete This is my first listen to Jim Santo's nifty little pop band. Produced by the Melting Hopefuls' Ray Ketchem, the A side is a jump, upbeat spare-sounding rocker titled "Speedracer." "Rewind" really shines with ringing guitars and slow, throaty vocals, though i think it would have worked better with female background vocals vs. male vocals. "St. Pete" is the real star here. A tuneful, loping song, it starts with some squeally guitar with a quiet acoustic melody coming in on top and half-lidded vocal ennui, with some louder heavy guitar buzzin' to rouse things. Puddle Records, 12 W. 21st St., 10th Floor, NY NY 10010



NEWS & COMMENT

BY JIM MOREKIS

→ With tasty cuts like Jenifer Convertible's "Car Song" or Eric Neher's crunchy "It's Not Easy," The East Village (East Village Records) will take you to that seedy corner of Manhattan much better than the website ever could. Edgy guitars sulk along with lazy, snare-heavy backbeats while vocalists wax ironic. Yes, it's a genre, but not a bad one.