



Dope Poet Society's Sage MacPherson (left), Belladonna, D. Sajnani and DJ Spinister are quick with a hip-prop response.

music feature

## Protests on the down-low

Anti-war statements left up to Dope Poet Society By MATT GALLOWAY

**WE CAN STOP THIS WAR** with **DOPE POET SOCIETY**, **WARSAWPACK** and the **COUNTER CLOCKWISE ORCHESTRA** at Reverb (651 Bathurst), Friday (March 28). \$12. 416-504-0744.

WHO KNEW THAT AN AIRBRUSHED new-country starlet would become the music world's loudest voice of dissent in the midst of war?

No doubt Dixie Chick Natalie Maines didn't intend to become an anti-war poster girl by telling a London audience she was "ashamed that the president of the United States is from Texas," but so starved are people for moving, meaningful protest music in 2003 that Maines might have

earned herself a lifetime subscription to the Socialist Worker.

The music world has been slow to respond to the current warmongering. The recently released anti-war compilations are actually hastily cobbled together collections of older songs with vague anti-authoritarian, anti-violence messages. Billy Bragg's **The Price Of Oil** is topical, but like Paul McCartney's post-9/11 lament, **Freedom**, sounds as though it was written in 10 minutes on the back of a sandwich bag.

The **Beastie Boys** broke their five-year silence with **In A World Gone Mad**. It's a terrible song, even by their standards, and provided a nice lead-in

for stories about work on their long-delayed album, but the effort, especially the move to release the tune online for free at [www.beastieboys.com](http://www.beastieboys.com), is appreciated.

So desperate is the need for an anti-war statement that even John Mellencamp's softball rewriting of Woody Guthrie's **Baltimore To Washington**, simply titled **From Washington** and available at [www.mellencamp.com](http://www.mellencamp.com), is being hailed as a grand statement. It's unfortunate, especially since some of the hardest-hitting anti-war music is being made right under our noses.

Toronto's **Dope Poet Society** have a reputation for responding to crises

with timely rants. The election of the Conservatives in Ontario was greeted with the no-nonsense song **Fuck Mike Harris**. September 11, 2001, spawned the **9-11: World Trade EP**, while February 15's massive worldwide anti-war demonstrations saw the release of the latest Dope Poet Society missive, **War Of Terrorism**.

There are no subtleties or half-statements in the work of MCD and DJ Spinister, in part because they're shit-disturbers first and musicians second.

"We call what we do hip-propaganda," D explains. "I took that quote of Chuck D's that hip-hop is the CNN of the streets really seriously. When all of the major media is so one-sided, it's really important to have other means to express these issues."

"It's not like I have this secret information that no one else has — what we're expressing are the opinions of many other people around the world. But because we're so bombarded by the one-sided media, these opinions end up sounding radical."

The Beastie Boys and Chuck D aside, the response to the war from the hip-hop community has been particularly muted except for artists signing their names to an anti-war ad. Perhaps it's no surprise that pop MCs like **Ja Rule**, **Jay-Z** and **50 Cent** haven't weighed in on Larry King Live with their thoughts on war, but you might expect so-called conscious MCs like **Talib Kweli**, **Common** or **De La Soul** to speak up.

"Hip-hop is revolutionary music and protest music," D insists. "That's what created this music, from rebellious slavery songs to foundation reggae. Hip-hop is supposed to be our voice in the struggle, and I wish more people would realize that."

"There are a lot of artists out there who would be conscious if they considered it viable but are terrified of the backlash. People like **Nas** and **Busta Rhymes** have incredible potential to influence the masses, but they see what happens to groups like **Public Enemy** and **Dead Prez** when they speak up. You're not going to get the same video play and airplay from major corporations if you're 'controversial.'

"We're a group that sells 5,000, so we go under the radar and we can get away with it. We printed up these T-shirts that say 'George Bush Is The Real Terrorist,' and people loved it. We sold them here in Toronto and in New York, walking up and down Broadway, and people were coming up, shaking our hands. It takes guts, but it's worth it." @

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