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## Metal Health

The freshest stuff is underground

By [Brendan Joel Kelley](#)

Published: May 24, 2007

In e-mails and comments on my blog, Ear Infection, I've gotten into it with the metal kids in town. They've criticized me for my opinions about metal or for my not paying attention to it. It's generally people like Marshall Beck, a musician in several metal bands who got butt-hurt last year when *New Times* didn't want to run a review of an album by his band Rebirth (see *Heavy Issues* by Michele Laudig, April 27, 2006). Beck's even promised to offer three dollars off the admission fee for Rebirth's next CD-release party if fans bring along three copies of *New Times* to burn.

I'll admit that I never was a huge metal fan. Hair metal didn't appeal to me when I was a tyke in the '80s. I

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Local metal fledglings John Wayne Jefferson have a spazz.

**Details:**

For more insight into Phoenix's music scene, visit [Beck's newest band](#), [Reign of Joel Kelley's "Eas Infection"](#) [blog](#), or [Vengeance](#). Most of it just bores me.

**Subject(s):** [Metal](#), [Marshall](#)

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Lately, I've heard some demos and songs online by locals that I dug a lot, so recently I ventured out to a five-band show in Phoenix and discovered a metal underground that's exciting and compelling. It's a new, developing scene with the bands doing non-linear takes on the evolution of metal.

Before I went to the show, which was at the Casa Blanca Lounge on Van Buren Street, I recruited a friend with a far broader knowledge of underground metal than me, a local musician named Sassy Britches. The show was supposed to start at 8 p.m., and we hitched a ride with a friend and rode in the bed of a truck, hauling ass down the freeway to make it in time. Turns out we needn't have worried. When we arrived at the club around 8:30, the first band, Malo De Dentro, hadn't even set up yet.

Casa Blanca is a pretty new venue — half of it is a sports bar, and the back half is for shows. On the sports bar side, it was Chicano

dug Guns 'N Roses but never Metallica, and for modern incarnations of metal, I prefer bands like Dillinger Escape Plan (whose complex, mathematical playing blows my mind) to death metal like

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karaoke night, and when bands or music weren't playing on the venue side, you could hear people belting out Al Green and Selena covers. While we waited for Malo De Dentro to start, Sassy Britches managed to piss off the bartender by complaining about the amount of bourbon in his drink.

Malo De Dentro finally went on around 9:30 and ended up being the only disappointment of the night. Other than sounding pretty generic ("If you like Pantera, you'd love this, but Pantera still sucks," Sassy Britches said), the frontman kept talking up local music, saying "Fuck you if you don't support local music." The band promptly left after its set.

With that out of the way, the throwdown commenced. John Wayne Jefferson, a three-piece with guitar, drums, and a vocalist came on next and blasted out the spazziest set I've seen in ages. Forrest, the guitarist, looked like he was having seizures, dancing and falling on the ground, while Kyle, the singer, paced frantically and struck Rob Halford poses ("It's like Halford meets Blag Dahlia [from the Dwarves]," Sassy Britches said). Meanwhile, Deacon, the drummer, blasted his kit as fast as I've seen anyone play, alternating between sitting on his stool and standing up while banging the skins. It sounded like Pig Destroyer or old Cattle Decapitation, with minute-long songs. The songs couldn't have lasted any longer; you could see how exhausting the performance was. Promptly after the set, Deacon pushed Forrest out of the way on his way out the stage door, and vomited onto the asphalt.

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The next band was Regan MacNeil, a four-piece that Sassy Britches described as "crust brutality, anarcho-bliss." By this point, the bands were taking a cue from John Wayne Jefferson by placing only their drummers onstage. The rest of the band was in front on the dance floor with the audience right in their faces, banging their heads, drumming on their knees, and dancing. There were no mosh pits, no slamming, no violence, no attitudes, and no fashion kids — just the way I like it. Actually, more of the audience looked like me — very short hair, shorts and T-shirts — than what most people think a metal fan looks like.

Tomorrow the Stars went on next, blending melodic sections with screaming metalcore. At this point, Sassy Britches and I took a break (the eardrums needed it) and went next door, where he sang "Don't Worry, Be Happy" for the 20 or so people over there. We were the only white boys, but everyone in there was clapping and dancing, even when Sassy Britches switched into barking mode.

Back on the metal side, Sassy Britches didn't enjoy Tomorrow the Stars as much as I did ("The Revenge would eat them," he told me). I think he was being too much of a purist. The band incorporated Fugazi-ish interludes into its metal, which were the only midtempo moments of the night.

The headliner was One Thousand Mournings, a band I already dug from the demos I'd heard and whose bass player had disappeared earlier in the evening. Tony, the singer, immediately called out the Malo De Dentro dude who'd talked so much about local music and then disappeared. Everyone was exhausted at this point (sometime between 1 and 2 a.m.), but all the bands had stayed. OTM busted out a blend of metal and hardcore that managed to keep my head banging (and that doesn't happen often, believe me).

"We'll make our own scene," Tony said between songs, and I think that's exactly what I saw developing. I rarely care about people rehashing or trying to perfect music that's come before. What I saw this night showed me that there is a vital and inventive metal underground happening in the 'Nix. You just have to dig a little to find it.

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