

CITY PAPER

MUSIC

Danzig

4

AMERICAN



Maybe it was having Johnny Cash sing one of his songs ("13," on Cash's *American Recordings*).

Maybe it was his first taste of true crossover success (with a live single of the oddly infectious "Mother," a tune from Danzig's six-year-old debut album). Or maybe it was landing on the cover of *Musician* magazine a few months ago. Whatever the reason, Glenn Danzig, the Tom Jones of heavy metal, seems to be taken a bit more seriously these days. Even by himself.

Until recently, if you recall, Danzig and his eponymous band were considered reliably entertaining comic-book metal stalwarts, all hair and sweat and heaving pectorals, pumping out a turgid but undeniably raunchy brand of doom rock for a culty audience of peevish teens. With Baltimore's own John Christ supplying the meat-'n'-potatoes guitar roar and veteran punk drummer Chuck Biscuits keeping things lean, Danzig was a sorta-brilliant hard-rock mutation, the missing link between Black Sabbath and Black Flag—with a big tip of the hat to Elvis, the Doors, and maybe Satan.

Danzig himself remained resolutely unwinking about all this, even as he primped his uncanny Elvis/demon-barbarian image and hollered out three LPs worth of cartoony sex and sin and mayhem in a strangled baritone that seems equal parts Jim Morrison and Barney from *The Simpsons*. *4* is largely more of same, right down to the visceral Rick Rubin production and the slasher-movie song titles ("Until You Call on the Dark," "Bringer of Death"). But now there's a genuinely frightening undertone of significance to the whole affair, which is not necessarily what you're looking for from the guy who brought heavy metal as close to Vegas as it is likely to come until the next Spinal Tap reunion rolls around.

Still, faithful Danzigers will likely be charmed by the ragged punk overdrive of the opening "Brand New God" and the bellowing overkill of "Son of the Morning Star," while new fans might take to the pop smarts of the catchy "Dominion" and the almost-pretty crooning in "Cantspeak." Christ's mixed bag of sharp Tony Iommi riffs and menacing open-chord strumming is as tasteful (really) as ever, and the gargly, distorted vocals that turn up periodically add a nifty whiff of industrial racket to the pro forma metal proceedings. But Danzig's relentlessly monochromatic vision and increasingly minimalist lyrics become quite a chore before too long. Danzig the songwriter seems to have isolated his main themes early on, careerwise, and *4*'s tunes are little more than sketchy heavy-metal haiku, an endless drab parade of blood and demons and angry gods and screaming souls, blah blah blah. Even when that unholy yawp of a voice works up a decent head of steam, as on the dirgy "Going Down to Die," it's hard to shake the feeling you've been down this road before. (David Dudley)

Danzig will be at Michael's 8th Avenue in Glen Burnie on Tuesday, November 29. *

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