

# Out of Step

P.O.S. effortlessly fuses punk sensibility with his brand of hip-hop

By Billy Jam

**A**S HARD AS it might be to believe that Lil Wayne's influences include Nirvana, as he proclaimed again most recently during the Grammys, it is completely believable and credible that unique Minneapolis hip-hop emcee P.O.S. would consider legendary early '80s DC punk outfit Minor Threat to be among his main influences. In fact, on the guitar-and-drum-driven "Drumroll," a track from his recently released album, *Never Better*, P.O.S. conjures what Minor Threat might have sounded like had it been fronted by a rapper.

"Growing up, really early, I figured out that I didn't really fit in with a lot of people and I discovered Minor Threat through people I was skateboarding with around sixth grade," says the 24-year-old P.O.S. As a skateboarding black teen in Minnesota into punk rock and playing in bands, P.O.S. readily identified with Minor Threat's arsenal of angry songs about alienation. "If you can't figure out anybody to identify with...it's really easy to grab a tape of Minor Threat and go, 'These guys know what's up' and their songs are just so direct," says the artist, born Stefon Alexander, who earned the name P.O.S. when he was barely a teen but already busy making music.

"I was in my first rap group, Room 237, when I was 14, and I got the name P.O.S. It was Pissed Off Stef," he laughs. "My name is Stef. The whole thing is that when people first hear P.O.S. they think 'piece of shit' or whatever. And that is OK with me for the sheer fact that the whole vibe of rap is to be dipped in gold and jewels and the coolest gear ever. And me? I'm just basic like everybody else and let my music speak for itself."

In addition to been a part of both Minneapolis' Doomtree and Rhymesayers hip-hop collectives, the prolific P.O.S. is simultaneously still a member of the group Building Better Bombs. Together since 2000, P.O.S. says that BBB will be soon be breaking away from the hardcore rock sound it's become known for. "A lot of the stuff that we are working on now in the studio with Building Better Bombs is trying to keep that crazy hardcore spazzy feel but add techno like Boys Noize or a harder Justice kind of feel," he explains.

Although he always dabbled in both punk and rap it wasn't until 2003 that P.O.S. released his first hip-hop record, *Ipecac Neat*,



Warped speed: P.O.S

on indie label Doomtree. At this stage he still wasn't part of Minneapolis' best-known hip-hop family, The Rhymesayers crew, a powerful entity to anyone coming up in the city's rap game. "It's tricky for a rapper to get out of the shadows of Atmosphere or the Rhymesayers camp in general," says P.O.S. "But anybody who is persistent or works and does their thing does."

He did just that with his debut album, and inadvertently ended up part of the Rhymesayers. "Myself and Doomtree, we got a lot of attention from my first record. And then Slug from Atmosphere asked me if I wanted to come on the Warped Tour and sell merch for Atmosphere," recalls P.O.S. "So on the rehearsal day, I walked everywhere, every little side stage, and said, 'Hi. I'm at the Atmosphere merch tent and at any given time I can stop what I am doing and come play a set if somebody falls off,' and like within three days I was playing shows all the time. I think they just appreciated my work ethic and my style and they signed me up."

This summer P.O.S. will head out on his third Warped Tour, though fans can check out the same set on his current solo tour. "I think we're going to probably keep the same vibe on the Warped Tour and just hope it works," he says. "Lots of pots and pans and try to get everybody excited."

> P.O.S.

Feb. 21, Mercury Lounge, 217 E. Houston St. (at Essex St.), 212-260-4700; 10:30, \$10/\$12