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STREET SWEEPER SOCIAL CLUB

Truth to power never sounded so good

By DAVE WEDGE

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Remember that feeling you had the first time you heard Rage Against the Machine?

Their politically charged angst and reckless energy made you want to hurl Molotov cocktails at the White House—or least smash beer bottles—but hasn't been unleashed in a long time.

Guitarist Tom Morello has valiantly pressed on post-RATM, but with Zack de la Rocha on the sidelines, his massive talents have veered away from fiery rap metal and into more mainstream hard rock (Audioslave) and coffee house revolutionary (The Nightwatchman).

But that's all changed, now that Morello has joined forces with The Coup's explosive rapper, Boots Riley, on the ferocious debut from Street Sweeper Social Club.

"I was a fan of The Coup, but I was even more impressed with him performing acoustic," Morello, a Harvard University grad, recalled of his first musical dalliances with Riley. "I felt that the world really needed to hear this guy. I said, 'We're going to be in a band, it's going to be called Street Sweeper and it's going to be revolutionary party jams.'"

The upstart duo, which features Morello's signature metal squelch and Riley's Black Panther-esque swagger, got together while both were in New Orleans working on Hurricane Katrina relief. Now they're soft-launching the new project—sort of—as the opening act on the Jane's Addiction reunion/Nine Inch Nails tour. Morello warns fans to "get there early" to witness their headstrong rap-metal revival.

"His rhymes are really dripping with satire as well as venom. That's what drew me to him," Morello says from a tour stop in New Mexico. "And it's the hardest-rocking record I've done in a long, long time."

For the uninitiated, The Coup's 2001 disc, *Party Music*, is a classic, bling-free album by Riley's Oakland, Calif.-based crew that mixes P-Funk's party prowess with linguistic gymnastics, anti-authoritarian themes and a black power mentality. The album's cover was infamously banned because it featured New York's Twin Towers being destroyed, a piece of artwork created just months before the 9.11 attacks. Riley brings that radical, anti-capitalist vibe to SSSC, lacing Morello's chunky Ibanez assaults with refreshingly raw rhymes that focus the crosshairs on corporate raiders, corrupt politicians and the nation's prison system.

They played their second gig Johnny Cash-style at New York's Sing Sing prison, invited by MCS guitarist Wayne Kramer, who runs a jailhouse music program. "We blew the roof off the joint," Morello says. "We actually did a cover of Thin Lizzy's 'Jailbreak' and there were a lot of raised eyebrows."

And with Riley on the mic, Morello's fist-pumping, amplified activist network is back in full effect. "In a country with as much wealth as the US has, to have people living under bridges ... it's not an injustice, it's a crime," he says. "We're not about just advocating charity, but also changing the system in a way that there won't be hunger and homelessness. The motto for this is, 'We're out to feed the poor, fight the power and rock the fuck out.'"

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WITH NINE INCH NAILS