

THE OFFSPRING

Ixnay On The Hombre (Columbia)

Rating: *** 1/2

By Chuck Crisafulli

It would be awfully satisfyin' to the snickering cynic segment of the market if Orange County phenoms the Offspring had followed up their smash breakthrough *Smash* with a real stinker of a disc, proving both the power of entropy and the beauty of schadenfreude. No such luck here--*Ixnay* is a steaming, snarling beast of a record, fiercer than its predecessor but packed with even catchier tunesmithing than the quartet displayed last time around (you 'member "Come Out and Play" of course.)

After 10 years of churning up mosh pits, it's unlikely that singer Dexter Holland and his crew would suddenly go all sucky and flat, but their octo-platinum success might have gone to their heads and made them all serious-like. Fear Not. *Ixnay* opens with a psycho disclaimer from psuedo circus barker Jello Biafra warning sensitive types of the evil, danger and sarcasm that lies ahead. As for the subsequent music, the Offspring are, in fact, good enough to be dangerous. "The Meaning Of Life," "Cool To Hate" and "Me & And My Old Lady" take playfully doubtful, smart-ass views of the state of things, and the tunes are ripped out with such bracing rock energy and pop sense that one can't resist being swept away by the commotion.

As for stretches, "Gone Away" is oddly U2-ish, "Way Down The Line" sounds like old Kinks being poked with a cattle prod and master-brew "I Choose" ferments a funky groove, Raspberry-sweet harmonies and references to J.D. Salinger into a monstrously good tune. Awe cripes, it's another thoroughly invigorating, helluva fine record from this bunch. How can you get angry at a band kind enough to include a lounge-cheese "Intermission" break so's you can catch your breath? (For a differing opinion, leave the disc in long enough to hear a surprise dissent from Larry "Bud.")