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Prime new metal finds the cool kids getting serious

By [Jason Ferguson](#)



SERIOUS? Dead Child keeps making that kill-your-mama music

Hipster metal didn't start with Isis, or Earth, or even Neurosis. It all started with Andrew W.K.

In 2002, "Party Hard" became the hard rock anthem of the summer. The Michigan native's performance-artist-as-lunkhead routine had been developed through a series of underground releases (on the same label as Wolf Eyes), which appealed to a certain irony-desirous segment of music fans. But the sheer simplicity and life-affirming *rock* he delivered fit all too easily into the listening habits of ... let's say ... less discerning folk. Andrew W.K.'s bloody explosion into the mainstream consisted of two primary statements: 1) Party hard. 2) It's perfectly OK to party hard. The former was taken to heart by the ball cap-wearing masses, while the latter served as a reminder to crowds of indie-rockers that perhaps there was more to music than chin-stroking and 7-inch collecting.

February 2004: Dave Grohl finally delivers the Probot project. Thick with credibility among the cognoscenti and flush with cash from global stadium tours, Grohl has long been in an unusual position: The cool kids treat Foo Fighters records as guilty pleasures, but fully understand that Grohl has impeccable musical taste. When the drummer not only acknowledged his love of classic metal, but indulged it by recording a straight homage to the genre with guests like Lemmy, King Diamond and Cronos (and released it on acclaimed metal label Southern Lord), thousands of music fans were suddenly reminded how much they used to love the sound of True Metal.

Sure, there have been bands toiling in metal's alternate universes of sludge, doom, drone and crust since before Probot and Andrew W.K. But those acts and others excelled at creating complex, challenging and experimental revisions on the metal template. What "Party Hard" and Probot did was bring unabashed horn-raising, head-banging, *rocking* metal back into vogue. Twin guitars, rhythmic, blast-beat-free drumming, soaring vocals, lyrics about swords and sin – and, most important, melody. With the ground now softened by those unlikely metal pioneers, a handful of bands have emerged who unashamedly traffic in classic metal stylings, only to be greeted rapturously by hipster audiences who have been perplexed (or ashamed) of what metal's become in the last 20 years.

DEAD CHILD

Attack
(Quarter Stick)

THE SWORD

Gods of the Earth
(Kemado)

The audience ratio of indie-rockers to metalheads is way out of whack when Louisville, Ky.-based Dead Child plays. Dead Child was founded by David Pajo, who not only was in Slint, but also Tortoise, a band whose music rocked so little they had to call it post-rock. Dead Child – repeat, *Dead Child* – also

features former members of non-rockers the For Carnation and the Shipping News. It shouldn't be surprising that there are hipster-friendly, ironic markers all over the band; the catalog number for their debut album, *Attack*, is 666; the band's debut EP was called *Headbanging Kill Your Mama Music*; and, again ... Dead Child!

But if this is all a winking joke, then the members of Dead Child should keep right on laughing. *Attack* is a brutal and well-crafted exposition of classic metal's thrashier tendencies. Sounding as though it should have been recorded in some Bay Area studio circa 1988-1992, Dead Child owes more of a debt to Testament than to their stated influences of Sabbath and Maiden. Punishing numbers like "Twitch of the Death Nerve" and "Chariot" (chorus: "Swing low!") are thoroughly and unapologetically rooted in metal's golden age. It's a shame that the heshier metalheads who are turned on by similar-sounding contemporary acts like Warbringer would be unlikely to give Dead Child a fair shot; Warbringer is on a "real" metal label, while Dead Child shares a home with the Mekons and Rachel's.

Sometimes, though, being surrounded by "real" metal bands goes a long way to remind fans of the genre what's been missing. When the Sword played their first South by Southwest showcase in 2005, it was on a bill with Alabama Thunderpussy, Pig Destroyer and Zombi. This Austin group's set, however, set jaws dropping throughout the venue. The Sword breezily evoked all of what was great about classic metal – riffs, melody, fantasy – and, though dressed in the standard-issue thrift-store uniform worn by hipsters everywhere, they did it without a hint of smirk.

Soon after the showcase, they hit the road with Octopus Project and ... And You Will Know Us by the Trail of Dead, and they essentially stayed on tour for three years. The Sword's road-dogging relented long enough for them to pay rent and record a couple of albums, 2006's highly regarded *Age of Winters* and the recently released *Gods of the Earth*.

Opening with that most metal of introductions – the sturdily plucked acoustic guitar blooming into a technicolor, riff-pummeling instrumental – *Gods* clearly states its fealty to True Metal tradition. Though no track here provides the same groove-based crunch that made *Winter's* "Freyja" a staple of *Guitar Hero II*, a harsher, more direct assault is made. The first single, awesomely titled "Fire Lances of the Ancient Hyperzephyrians," is all breakneck, syncopated riffing decorated with frenzied ascending scales. The guitars and vocals are more crisply recorded, stripping away much of the warm, stoner-friendly glow of their previous work in favor of a brisk and menacing vibe. Even the requisite epic number ("The White Sea") that closes the album feels less like a modular, Metallica-style journey than it does a sort of winding down after 40 minutes of bruising metallurgy.

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