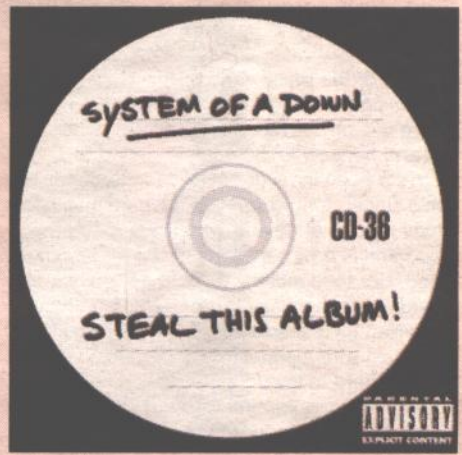


**System of a Down
Steal This Album
American Records**



By Dan Marek
College Times



Growing up in Los Angeles with a strict Armenian heritage, the members of System of a Down reconstructed the groundwork of metal in the late 1990s with a flagrant disregard for traditional song structures dotted with Eastern rhythmic overtones, erratic time changes, and a heavy bounce resulting in a cultural explosion personifying social decay.

Lead singer Serj Tankian's poetic musings and cross-cultural discourse mixed with well-versed political jargon reserves the balance of this titanic schizoid Nu Metal act while guitarist/songwriter Daron Malakian conjures up metal imagery like a creative wizard.

Politically incorrect, incorrigible and incorruptible, their 1998 self-titled debut showed audiences that unorthodox metal with Mediterranean flourishes and political upheaval could pave the way for future acts in the genre.

Released last year, their sophomore effort *Toxicity* was greeted by an onslaught of positive press, hyped by the MTV generation, and took the single "Chop Suey!" to number one on Billboard's charts. Produced by Rick Rubin, *Toxicity* was recorded at Cello Studios in Hollywood where the band mulled over 33 tracks to fill the album with a few left over for future projects.

The evolution of their sound proved monumental as System flexed their melodic muscle on tracks like "Chop Suey!" and the gorgeous instrumental intro to "A.T.W.A. (Air, Trees, Water, Animals)," a song written in a first-person point-of-view of Charles Manson. Still full of emotion, the players didn't let their political messages overwhelm the music and decided to throw in songs like "Bounce," a crude play-by-play reenactment of an orgy, and the groupie opus "Psycho." Though their 'political' beliefs were not as dominant, tracks like "X," a dire tribe of crunch guitar with a thick theme of over-population and "Science," a brutal anti-technology triad, show their beliefs are still strong.

Due to a theft of studio takes recorded during *Toxicity* and their release on the Internet without the permission of the band, System has released much of the remaining songs from the sessions without a cover and with the words "Steal This Album – System of a Down" scribbled on the front referencing political activist Abbie Hoffman while poking fun at the situation behind the release.

Sure to fire up old fans, Steal This

Album is simply put – the b-side of *Toxicity*. With songs that hit the cutting floor during the *Toxicity*'s construction, you may expect to hear a lot of material not fully thought out and mixed together poorly – not the case. Malakian and Rubin reportedly spent a considerable amount of time mastering the tracks to prevail over the inadequate tracks released from the stolen CD-Rs on the net.

With comedic tracks like the opener "Chic N Stu" the band dares to stray outside of their boundaries while keeping the bombastic metal edge that brought them to fame.

Their Eastern melodies are still apparent on tracks like "Inner Vision" and "I-E-A-I-A-I-O" where Tankian takes a R.E.M. "End of the World" approach to the lyrics and intertwines a hearty "Ha-aya, ho, ha-aya, heya, ho" in traditional Armenian pitch.

"Boom" starts off with Morrison American Prayer-like mystical spoken lyrics with manic guitar work as the political message of modern globalization sneaks through. Then the booming chorus comes in and fades into "Nu Guns."

On the simplistic and beautiful introduction to "Ego Brain" the band slows the rhythm down considerably more than in the past and interludes into early 80s metal rolls while Tankian's growling vocals blare over the classic grunge ballad with Malakian's harmonies matching perfectly.

If you're a fan looking for the next big System album you've found it – sort of. Although the album stretches both sides of *Toxicity*, it's obvious they came from the same sessions. Tracks like "A.D.D." borrow heavily from *Toxicity* songs, but the minor melody usages are few between.

With "Steal This Album" we get a sneak peak behind the scenes of System at their most fragile state. We get to hear the songs they didn't want us to hear yet (for one reason or another) and beside having a great b-side, it shows they're one of the few bands with enough balls to take on a project again after they put it on the shelves purely out of respect for their fans and the quality of the music they beg for.