



HELLO WENDY

Aram Danesh & the Super Human Crew

For some successful thirtysomething executives, playing guitar in a band is merely a recreational activity. For **Aram Danesh**, nothing could be further from the truth. “People say music is a hobby and this is my real job, but that’s totally backwards for me,” says the 37-year-old executive at a San Francisco area real estate investment firm. “I’ve been a musician since I was nine. I’ve always wanted to play music and it’s been the main driving force in my life,” he says. “I do my day job to put money in the bank, but what I really do is play guitar and pull musicians together from all different backgrounds.”

It’s with that drive and unending passion that the Iranian-born guitar whiz put together the multiracial pop/rock/hip-hop collective known as Aram Danesh & the Super Human Crew in 2003. If you assume the band’s name is meant to be ironic, you’re only half right. Inspired by a lyric from Bob Dylan’s “Desolation Row,” Danesh initially embraced the moniker because it aptly summed up the collective skills of his musical co-conspirators. Yet while recording *The Grind* -- the band’s second and latest album -- the name began to take on a whole different meaning. “Working on this record we realized how incredibly human we all are,” Danesh explains. “We had a lot of fights and disagreements. We realized we’re all so fallible, incomplete and problematic.”

That sort of insight runs through all 10 tracks on *The Grind*, which mixes the biting social commentary and rhyming of the best hip-hop with white-hot guitar leads and slamming live drumbeats. From the opening, horn-infused “Fade to Black,” which chronicles the hard-knock life of a college co-ed gone to the dark side, climaxing with Danesh’s guitar pyrotechnics, through the joyous, Earth, Wind & Fire-influenced “Eyes to the Sky,” *The Grind* reflects the diverse tastes, influences and background of Danesh and his band mates.

It was while growing up in pre-revolution Iran that Danesh fell in love with music. First it was classical music. Then, at the age of eight, he stumbled upon an Elvis Presley hits cassette at a local shop. It wasn’t an Elvis song, but a version of Peggy Lee’s “Fever” that somehow appeared on the cassette that hooked into the young Danesh’s consciousness. “I played that song so many times that my sister hid the tape from me,” he recalls.

By the time his family relocated to Germany, Danesh was into heavy metal and playing his own guitar. As he matured and eventually moved to the U.S. to attend college, Danesh tastes moved toward the classic jazz of John Coltrane and Miles Davis.

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On his three self-released solo albums, Danesh focused on jazz and blues influences. It was Talib Kweli's "Get By," the groundbreaking rap-jazz fusion that samples Nina Simone's "Sinnerman," that put Danesh on his current musical path and led to the formation of the Super Human Crew. "I heard that song and it made me feel that this was the direction I want to pursue," he says.

On its first effort, 2005's *The Spot*, Danesh & the Super Human Crew embraced their diversity. "With the first record we really experimented by going in completely different directions," Danesh recalls. "We had a Brazilian thing that was mixed with reggae and dub; we did more of a straight-up hip-hop kind of thing; we had some electronic tracks; and we had this African Cuban vibe going. We learned so much doing that first record, but we really found our voice as a band on this record. We were very clear of what sound we wanted. We knew how to mix it all together and create a unified sound."

For *The Grind*, Adam "Bagel" Berkowitz returned to co-produce with Danesh, and new vocalist Carlos Aguire joined the Crew. Aside from the other Crew regulars, Danesh enlisted several guests on the album, including Blackalicious MC Gift of Gab, who lends his rapping skills on "Money Matrix" over the band's furious live-in-the-studio instrumental attack. "We're not a big thuggy hip-hop band," explains Danesh. "We're just bringing in all the modern influences and creating something I'd consider more of a pop record than a straight-up hip-hop record."

Elsewhere, Danesh & the Super Human Crew mock rampant consumerism with the dueling rapid-fire rapping of Shepherd and Aguire on "em.poor.i.am," and offer cutting social observations in "Someday," which began as a cover of Stevie Wonder's "As" before morphing into the Super Human Crew's own creation, climaxing with guest vocalist Destani Wolf's crooning plea, "Until our children choose a book and not a gun."

But don't get the wrong idea; *The Grind* isn't didactic or heavy-handed. Rather Danesh & the Super Human Crew just provide some food for thought along with the grooves a plenty. In short, *The Grind* will make your own grind – daily, weekly or whatever it may be – a bit more pleasant and inspiring. They didn't call themselves the Super Human Crew for nothing.

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