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Heavy Metal Islam: Rock, Resistance, and the Struggle for the Soul of Islam

By Vince Darcangelo, Special to the Rocky
Published July 24, 2008 at 7 p.m.

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Heavy Metal Islam: Rock, Resistance, and the Struggle for the Soul of Islam

* **Nonfiction.** *By Mark LeVine. Three Rivers Press, \$13.95.*
Grade: A-

Book in a nutshell: As a professor of Middle Eastern history at the University of California, LeVine has spent a lot of time in the cradle of civilization and has written three scholarly books

about his experiences, including 2005's *Why They Don't Hate Us: Lifting the Veil on the Axis of Evil*. But LeVine isn't some stuffy old professor. He's also an accomplished rock guitarist who's played with the likes of Mick Jagger, Chuck D and Ozomatli.

Just as there's more to LeVine than academics, in his new book he argues that there's more to Muslim culture than what Americans consume on the nightly news. There are thriving heavy metal, hip-hop and punk rock scenes in places like Egypt, Israel and Iran, and their numbers are growing as Middle Eastern youth listen to musicians as much as mullahs.

LeVine interviews members of this Middle Eastern subculture - people who risk legal prosecution for their musical proclivities - and claims that the success of this cultural movement may be a signifier of hope for democracy in the Middle East. Perhaps peace, he posits, can come through power chords.

Best tidbit: LeVine does a great job of drawing parallels between American metal in the 1980s - when metal artists were accused of practicing Satanism, promoting suicide and were even the subject of a Senate hearing - and Middle Eastern metal's present.

Pros: LeVine deftly showcases both the struggles and successes of Mideast metal artists, including the recent acceptance of concert festivals like the Desert Rock Festival in Dubai, United Arab Emirates; Boulevard des Jeunes Musiciens in Casablanca, Morocco; and the Barisa Rock for Peace Festival in Istanbul, Turkey.

Cons: The author organizes the book by country, and after a while it loses steam as the plights of the artists become too similar.

Final word: This is an excellent and entertaining read for metalheads or anyone interested in a different look at Mideast culture.

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