

# Tower of Power still what's hip at 30

Turning 30 isn't always the greatest. Take my big day, for example: I had to work, despite having a fever, and when I went to sleep that night the bed felt like it was spinning — that was because of



**sounding board**  
Randy Cordova

the fever, not any weird celebratory substances. This was in addition to the normal, "Oh my God, I can't blame my failures on me being in my 20s any longer" realizations.

It's got to be worse in the record business. Aging gracefully

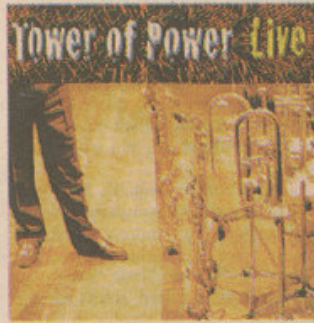
is nearly impossible for music groups — The Beach Boys, anyone? But Tower of Power turned 30 this year in terrific style. The finest funk band Oakland ever produced recently issued two albums to mark

the occasion. Both of them prove that these guys are years away from any midlife therapy sessions.

First up is *Soul Vaccination: Tower of Power Live*, which delivers everything the title says. TOP is known as a concert band, with its five-man horn section that creates a blistering wall of sound. The album captures that succinctly, as the guys plow through a number of classic tracks and newer originals.

Current lead singer Brent Carter doesn't approach the graceful soul of former TOPster Lenny Williams, but he's got a loose, ingratiating style. And few things can equal the sheer joy of hearing bearish founder Emilio Castillo run the guys through the wise and witty *Diggin' on James Brown*.

Castillo lives in the Valley these days. He's interviewed in depth, along with "Funky Doctor" Stephen Kupka and other TOP members past and present, for the liner notes of the superb *What Is Hip? The Tower of Power Anthology*. Coming from



the eternally cool folks at Rhino, this does the band proud. The booklet is 51 pages, painstakingly researched and beautifully illustrated.

This gathers stuff from every phase in the band's career, with material from each label the group recorded for. The hits are here, of course, in the forms of the sublime *You're Still A Young Man*, the aching *So Very Hard to Go* and the title song, perhaps the most bumping

thing TOP ever cut.

Like any good project of its kind, *What Is Hip?* unearths some rarely heard gems. There's *Credit*, which comes from the barely released *Power* album, and *Simple As That*, a smooth R&B ballad later covered by Huey Lewis & the News (speaking of groups aging badly).

Tower of Power is eternally youthful, as members come and go with regularity. It was never driven by personality; it was driven by the concept of soul. That's what it exists as today: A big, brassy soul band that will always be cool. "What's hip today might become passe" goes a line from the classic Castillo/Kupka/David Garibaldi song. It's something Tower of Power never has to worry about.

Happy birthday, guys.

Randy Cordova can be reached at (602) 444-8096 or at (602) 253-3734 by fax. Or write him at *The Arizona Republic*, P.O. Box 2245 NF-19, Phoenix, AZ 85002; or at [randy.cordova@pni.com](mailto:randy.cordova@pni.com) via e-mail.



Emilio Castillo: TOP founder moved from Los Angeles to Scottsdale five years ago.