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ABSOLUTE UNDERGROUND

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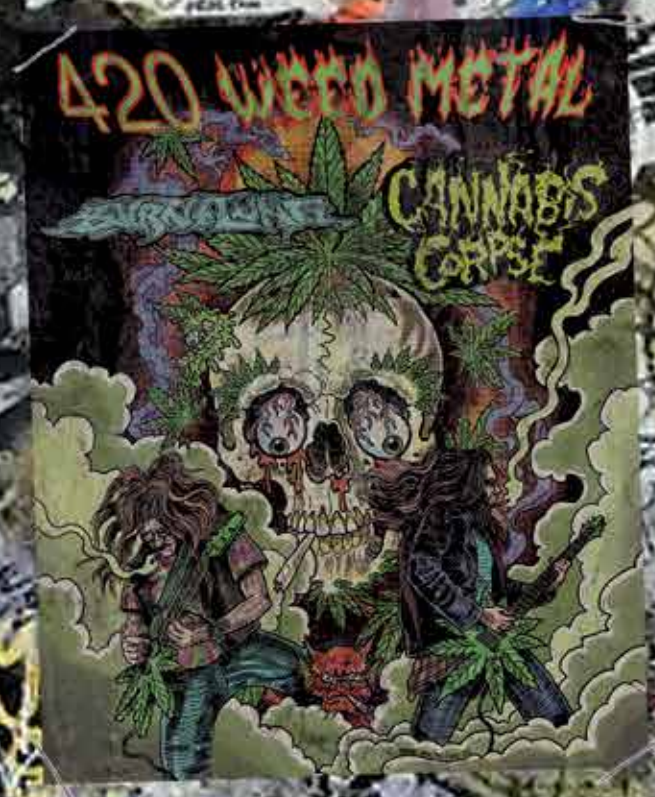

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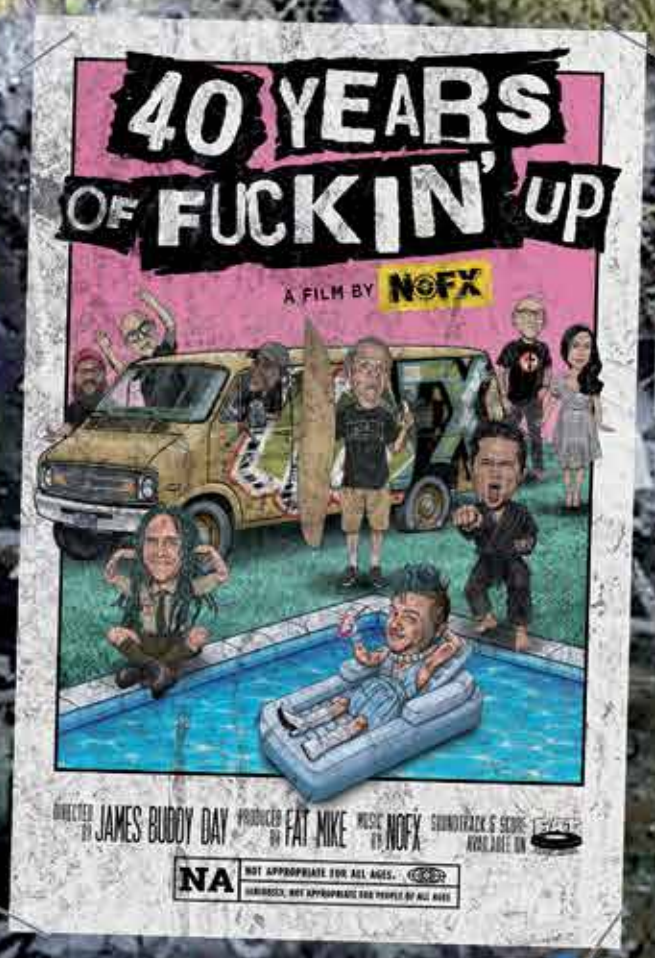

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COVER DESIGN - CHADSOLUTE
420 Weed Metal Poster Art by Jamie Macpherson
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Writers - *Ira Hunter, Dan Potter, Ed Sum, Vince D'Amato, Chuck Andrews, Jason Flower, Dustin Jak, Clark Mantei, Jason Lamb, Erik Lindholm, Jon Asher, Raymond MacKay, Claude Montreuil, Billy Hopeless, Demonika, Ryan Dyer, John Carlow, Brydon Parker, Ty Stranglehold, Steve Earles, Aeryn Shrapnel, Sheldon Byer, Daryl Baryl, David Eugene Everard, Brian Clement, B.A. Johnston, Dylan Rhymer, Alia Synesthesia, Jimmy Miller, Hatchetface, Liam Crocker, Nick Gibas, Daniel Van Netten, Jerry Cordeiro, Scarlett Rose Stewart, Dustin Jak, Kip Phillips, Bowser Tabarnak, Lily Fawn, Rae Chatten, Jamo Lorswal, Nick Workman, Peter Illing, Malcolm Quick, Josh Schafer, Mike Croy, Laurie Storrie, Johnny Bandura, Mike F., Cody "No Teeth" Cook, Sadie 'Miss.Gory' Rae, Hank Pattison, Ary Vogelaar, Alia Synesthesia, Dennis Lightheart, Brains Desfosses, Ross Hansen, Dre Calderon, Peter Barret, Ted Smith, Glenn Mendoza, Ted Gilbert, Jean-François Gosselin, Luke B., Mayo, Chris Walter, Lochlan Smyth*

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Absolute Underground
PO Box 48076, Victoria, BC V8Z 7H5
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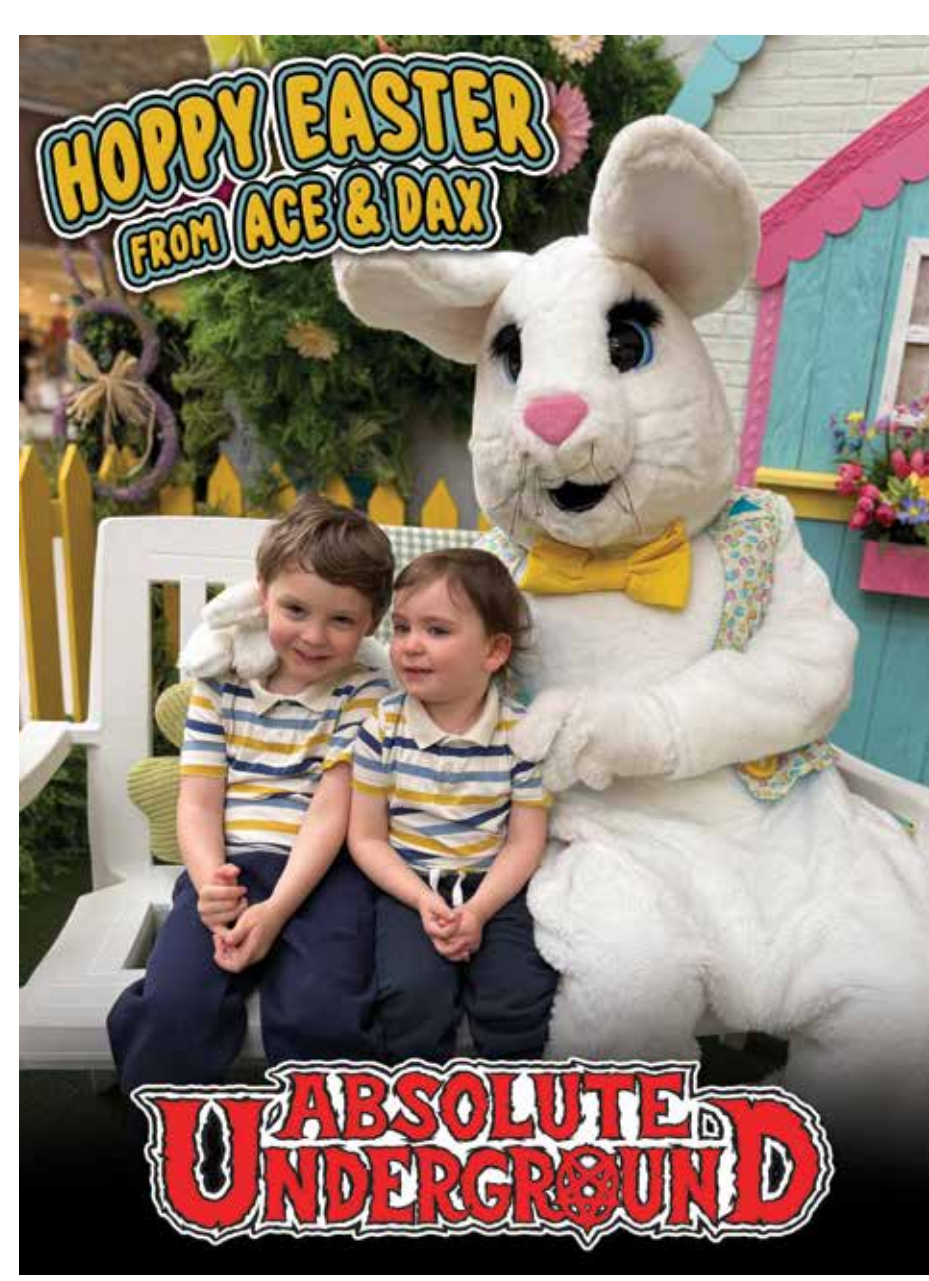


LIVING EVIL

Interview by John Carlow / Finding Charlotte Photography

Absolute Underground: Introducing themselves is always fun—who's in Living Evil?

Living Evil:

Blacklung – drums

Argus Bulldozer – bass

Abraxas – lead guitar

Executioner – vocals/guitars

AU: Tell us how the band came together.

LE: I played bass in friends' bands in the past and wanted to play in a band like this. I started playing guitar during corona times in 2020. Summer 2022 was the first time I jammed some early Living Evil material of mine with a drummer. It took a few more years and a couple more drummers until I got one to stick around. This one's a keeper.

We recorded the demo and released it in June 2025. Not long after, our friend Jason Flower of Supreme Echo offered us an insane first show opportunity, opening for Canadian legends Witchkiller. We quickly recruited the talented young shredders Abraxas and Argus to help us round out the lineup. Ever since, they've stuck around, played some more gigs, and started contributing evil hymns of their own to the band!

AU: The story behind the name?

LE: I was working nights as a care aide. Being the upstanding health care professional I was, I practiced guitar and listened to music between doing rounds and on my breaks. I was listening to the Exciter album *Unveiling the Wicked* and looking at the track listing—Track 7, "Living Evil"—it just felt right!

AU: If someone asks what kind of music you play…

LE: To your average person I'll just say "heavy metal band" and to everyone else "evil heavy metal band." Our sound falls around first wave black metal meets trad/speed metal. I won't call us a speed metal band because not all our songs are fast.

AU: Bands that inspire your sound?

LE: Mercyful Fate, Venom, Bathory, Slayer, Destruction, Running Wild, WASP even! I've had people notice the WASP influence twice now, wooo!

AU: Creative process?

LE: Either just from noodling or it starts with a riff or melody idea. They usually come to me on a walk or just as I am comfortably drifting off to sleep.

AU: What are your songs about?

LE: Usually whatever is on my mind at the time. The various evils of living! Or just old, stolen, reused cool metal stuff.

AU: Have you recorded anything lately?

LE: Yes, we have a demo out. Presently working on a split, and we are aiming towards a full-length before we all get nuked.

AU: You have a certain image. How important is that to you?

LE: It is an overlooked and essential element in live music. Having an established look sets the tone for your music and offers another layer of mystery and memory. The average man doesn't think about how he looks in his day-to-day life. And then he brings that same lack of thought to his local band's stage performance! Hiking boots and track pants—fukk off!

AU: Shout outs in the local scene?

LE: Pillagery, Empty Chalice, Conjure Hand, Nefarious Scorn, Heliophage, Coerce, Heidenland, Fully Crazed, Debt of Nature, Bootlicker, Disposal, Hedonist, Altered Dead and Torrefy.

AU: Unusual/funny story from a live show?

LE: People/other bands keep getting our name wrong. "Living Dead" has been the most common and "Evil Dead" is another. There have been a few other variations. We think it's funny!

AU: The road ahead?

LE: Wherever the evil takes us! I want at least one full-length for this band, but not more than three!

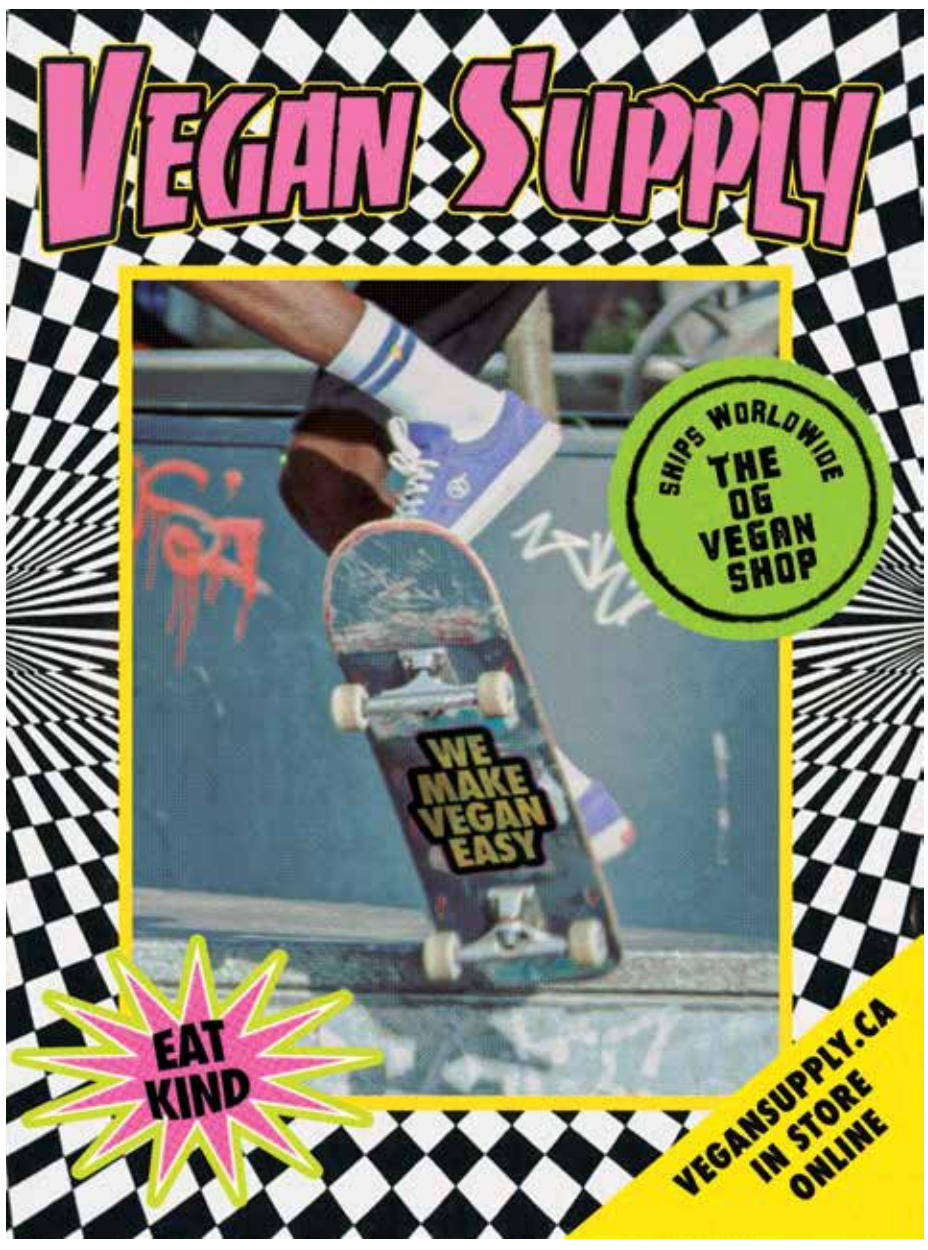
AU: Any final thoughts?

LE: Thanks for reaching out to us, *Absolute Underground*. I have been reading this magazine for 15 years now. Fuck AI, read a book and start a band. And EVIL LIVES.

AU: Where can readers find your music?

LE: YouTube or Bandcamp: livingevil666.bandcamp.com

If you feel like paying a little more than two beers' worth at the Phoenix, **you can buy our physical demo cassette *Curse the Cross* from our label in the Netherlands—Wolfkult Religion: wolfkultreligion.com**



DIPLOMACY AT 120 DECIBELS

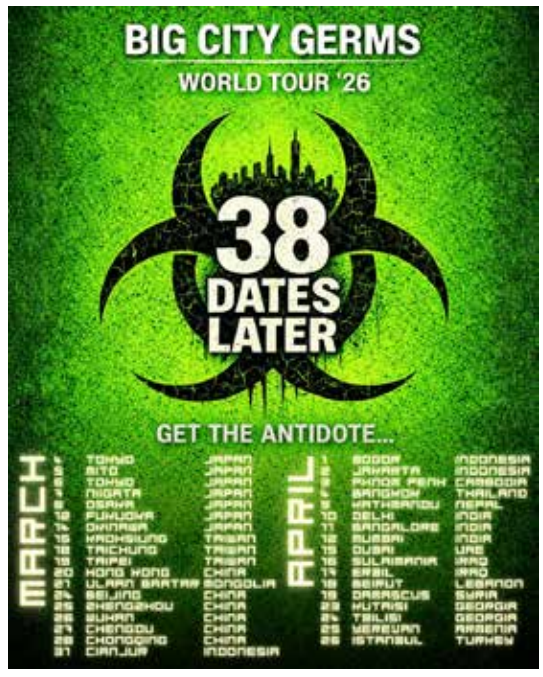
BIG CITY GERMS Take Punk to the Edges of the Map on the 38 Dates Later World Tour

By FLORA

Vancouver punk band Big City Germs are taking DIY touring to a global level with their ambitious 38 Dates Later tour across Asia, the Middle East, and Europe. Known for relentless touring and a philosophy they describe as "weaponisation of joy" and "diplomacy at 120 decibels," the band continues to push beyond the usual touring circuits. Big Germ spoke with *Absolute Underground* about global touring, punk rock and bringing music to places most bands never reach.

AU: For fans who might not be familiar, who are Big City Germs and what drives the band's relentless touring energy?

Big Germ: Hi, Kevin McCauley here, AKA Big Germ. For fans who may not be familiar, Big City Germs is an experimental punk band based out of Vancouver, BC. What drives our relentless touring energy is really a shared love of travelling, meeting new people, making new friends, and sharing our art with the world. To us it represents the highest plane of existence. Having the privilege to bring your art to people in other places is a really special thing.



AU: Your upcoming 38 Dates Later tour spans Asia, the Middle East, and Europe, including stops in cities that few Canadian bands have reached. What inspired such a geographically ambitious route?

BG: We had always known we wanted to hit some places that are a little more off the beaten path. Cities that punk bands don't usually make it to. We wanted to break trail and explore some new territory for an unknown Vancouver punk band. We started by booking a few shows in Japan, then I reached out to some old contacts in China and managed to secure a few shows there. After that the whole thing just snowballed. Soon we had inquiries coming in from Nepal, India, the Middle East, the Caucasus. Places we are really excited to travel to and perform in.

AU: Many of the cities on your tour have only recently seen punk and alternative shows become possible. How does it feel to bring your music into these new and sometimes politically complex regions?

BG: We are obviously excited to bring our music to new markets and new audiences. But the reality is that the world is complicated right now. On February 28, the United States and Israel attacked Iran. Two days later our flights left for Japan to begin the tour. We are monitoring the situation closely because airports like Dubai, Erbil, and Beirut have either been closed or are operating with extremely limited service. That could obviously complicate things. The safety of my bandmates comes first.

At the same time we are looking at it with a mix of caution and quiet optimism. Governments sometimes fight with each other and sometimes even with their own people, but at the end of the day we are all just people. Music is a global language. Our goal is to bring our voice there from Canada and also hear the voices of people in other places and bring those perspectives back home. That exchange is something people often forget about.

AU: You've previously toured Canada and Europe independently. What did you learn from those tours that shaped your approach to this unprecedented 38-date journey?

BG: The biggest lesson came from our European tour where we played 21 shows in 25 days. It was a breakneck schedule. We would arrive in a city, unpack, set up, soundcheck, perform, tear everything down, and then get back in the van and drive all night to the next city. By the end of the tour we were exhausted and we had barely seen any of the places we played. For this tour we wanted to slow things down and smell the flowers a bit more. We are doing about four shows a week on average and making time to explore places, spend time with the local musicians and people we meet along the way, and actually experience the cultures we are visiting.

AU: Your philosophy is described as "weaponisation of joy" and "diplomacy at 120 decibels." What does that mean in the context of a live show?

BG: Those phrases are really about the idea that music can connect people instantly. You can walk into a room full of people who don't speak your language, hit the first chord and suddenly everyone understands each other. A punk show is chaos, joy, sweat, noise. But it's also people coming together. When that happens across cultures and across borders it becomes its own kind of diplomacy.

AU: How does the band prepare mentally and physically for a tour that pushes not just distance but cultural and political boundaries?

BG: You prepare by accepting that you're about to step into the unknown. Physically it's simple: sleep when you can, eat when you can and protect your ears. Mentally you just stay open. Every country has its own rhythms, customs and ways of doing things. The worst thing a touring band can do is arrive with assumptions.

AU: Streaming numbers show over 143 million cumulative plays. How do you balance building a global digital audience with the intimate live experience of punk shows?

BG: Streaming is great because it helps people discover the band in places we have never been before but punk music really lives on stage. A thousand people listening online is cool. 50 people losing their minds together in a tiny club somewhere in the world is something else entirely.

AU: What's the most exciting or unexpected experience you've had on the road so far, either on tour or while exploring new cities?

BG: Honestly, it's the people you meet. You'll show up in a city where you don't know a single person and by the end of the night you've got new friends who are taking you to their favourite noodle spot at 3:00am. Music opens doors that would otherwise stay closed.

AU: After years of independent touring, what keeps Big City Germs motivated to keep pushing further instead of taking the easier path?

BG: This is the easier path. Do what you love, you'll never work a day in your life. Getting a job, toiling in obscurity, that's the hard path. Avoiding that keeps us motivated to keep pushing it further.

AU: What still drives the band to keep pushing into new places and new experiences?

BG: Curiosity. There are still so many places in the world where touring bands rarely go. The idea that a band from Vancouver can show up in those places, play a loud chaotic show, and make some new friends along the way is exciting to us. That feeling keeps us moving forward.

AU: If you had to pitch one show from this tour as the ultimate Big City Germs experience, which city or venue would it be and why?

BG: Probably Erbil in Iraqi Kurdistan. It's not the first place people imagine when they think about a punk show, which is exactly why it's exciting. Bringing loud, chaotic music into a place that rarely sees international touring bands feels like the purest expression of what we're trying to do.

If punk means anything in 2026, it means showing up where nobody expects you.

bigcitygerms.com

instagram.com/bigcitygerms

Photo credits: Braden Rhys

ATOMIC YETI

Prairie Fuzz Rock

Interview by Ray MacKay

ATOMIC YETI are flying the flag for riff-heavy, fuzzed-out hard rock with a sound rooted in 70s and 80s influences but built for modern stages. With big guitars, loud drums, and a growing catalogue of heavy rock anthems, the band continues to carve out their place in Western Canada's underground rock scene. *Absolute Underground* caught up with guitarist and vocalist Richard to talk about the band, their album *High Road*, and their upcoming Heaviest Of The West tour.

Absolute Underground: Who are we talking to and what are your skills to pay the bills?

Richard: I play guitar and sing.

AU: For our unfamiliar readers, please give us a brief history of ATOMIC YETI.

Richard: Damian (the drummer) and myself have been playing in bands since around 2012. We were in a stoner rock band for eight years. We went our separate ways on that one, but I decided to get something going again and reached out to Damian. We started working on some new song and band ideas and started writing songs with big fuzzy guitars and big drum sounds. When that got further along and we had enough material to start looking at shows, we found Clay through Damian's uncle and recruited him to play bass. From that point on we have been playing, writing and recording.

AU: Who is in the band?

Richard - Guitar and lead vocals.

Damian - Drums.

Clay - Bass.

AU: We know words can barely convey the total radness that is ATOMIC YETI, but if possible, try to explain your sound to our readers.

Richard: We are what we like to call greasy stoner/fuzz rock with influences from 70s and 80s rock, with riff-based, down-tuned guitars and big drum sounds. Like an old-school hard rock band that really brings it live every time with sound and volume.

AU: What song or album should we check out first?

Richard: would say check out "Shut Me Out" or "Come Feel the Hard Rock" from *Galactic Jesus*, or "High Road" and "Here's To You" from *High Road*.

AU: Your album *High Road* was released in December 2025. Any plans for a new release?

Richard: I am always working on new material. We had a bit of downtime during the summer of 2025 after recording the material, but during that time we mixed and mastered it for release. We are finally getting around to working on new material and presenting some of it at shows when we can. We hope to be working on recording something new later this summer.

AU: Tell us about the creative process behind *High Road*.

Richard: The process is pretty simple — just me playing guitar at home and coming up with what I think are good riffs and ideas, and sometimes complete song structures. We will play through it and make changes as a creative group from there. After that we come up with lyric and title ideas. Sometimes I have a title and story idea ready and just need to expand on that.

AU: If you could hire anyone to do your album art, who would you pick?

Richard: Ha ha… that is a tough one. I have no one in mind really, but Les Claypool would have to have some pretty crazy drawings sitting around.

AU: What's your favourite song to perform live?

Richard: I know we all have our favourites. I look forward to "High Road" and "Sweet Smoke" myself. Those are some, but I really enjoy playing all of them. We have hit that point where we have enough songs that we can start leaving some out and mix things up.

AU: What can you tell us about your upcoming "Heaviest Of The West" Tour with PINERIPPER?

Richard: We have been friends with PINERIPPER since we played with them last year after they reached out to us, and it has been a good time since. They were putting this together and asked if we would like to come along, as we are kind of the same group of guys that like to play and have a good time. Our blend of music works super well together live, and they are great performers, so this will be a great opportunity to get out there and introduce ourselves to a new audience.

We are **starting in Saskatoon at Buds on Broadway on April 29th**, then heading to **Calgary to play Vern's on the 30th**. **May 1st will be The Vat Pub in Red Deer**, then **finishing off on the 2nd in Edmonton at Blak Bar**. If you keep an eye out for us, there will be more info coming up. We are also working on some new songs and possibly some live ideas for this, so to say the least we are pretty pumped to do this.

AU: Anything else to promote or final words for our readers?

Richard: Thanks for taking the time to answer these questions — epic appreciation.

AU: How do people find you online?

Richard: Find us at **atomicyeti.bandcamp.com** for songs, and **facebook.com/atomicyetirock**. We are on Instagram also. We are trying to get better at the social media thing.

Untimely Demise

Interview by Hatchetface

Absolute Underground: Who are we talking to, and what is your role in Untimely Demise?
My name is Murray Cuthbertson and I am the bassist, manager and lyricist for the Saskatoon-based Thrash/Death Metal act, Untimely Demise.

AU: You have had some incredible line-ups over the years. Who is UD currently made up of? How are you feeling about the present lineup and the recent addition of Mike Menza (Endless Chaos - Guitar) to the band?

Murray Cuthbertson: Untimely Demise currently features original members, Matt Cuthbertson (Lead/Rhythm Guitar, Vocals and Composer) and Murray Cuthbertson (Bassist and Lyricist). Bryan Newbury fills out the lineup on drums and Mike Menza, our newest member, is handing guitar duties for the ensemble. We are very optimistic as to what can be achieved with our current lineup. The timely addition of Mike Menza has augmented the band's stage show and brings some killer energy and enthusiasm to the group. We have been friends with him for 18 years now and it is a pleasure to have him shredding it up with us.

AU: The new EP *Killing Authority* was recently released in December 2/25 digitally and physically on February 28/26. Can you tell us a bit about the release?

MC: Our new EP *Killing Authority* is the 7th studio release for our group (5 LPs and 1 EP preceded it in our catalog). We released it independently in late 2025 and now have physical CD copies for sale as of Feb 28th. It is available worldwide on our Bandcamp and we are excited for people to hear the progression in our songwriting and playing evident in this recording.

AU: Many critics have described your sound as sophisticated thrash metal likened to bands such as Death, Megadeth, and Obituary to name a few. Your new EP comes in hot with high-tempo arrangements, memorable choruses, and face-melting solos in true UD fashion. Were there any specific inspirations for the songwriting on this new EP?

MC: We have always garnered a great deal of inspiration from the originators of Thrash and Death Metal, such as Death, Megadeth and Obituary. Bands like that are always a starting and end point in our songwriting process. Essentially, if the song we are writing isn't strong enough to survive one of their audiences then it surely will not be suffice for us and our stringent songwriting standards.

With this EP we had just come off playing some big shows, such as a sold out Manitoba Metalfest with the legendary 3 Inches of Blood headlining, as well as a killer Alberta run with our pals in Striker, and we set out to write some more concise and crushing material then we had in our previous release, Maverick (2022 LP). The track 'Demon Grief' had already been written by Matt before those shows but the rest was just coming into the recording process with a blank slate.

Basically, Matt would come over to my place every Sunday afternoon for a month and we would solidify a track per session. Usually we would pick out some tempos and some dummy drums and then try to find 3-5 killer riffs that flowed together cohesively. The goal was to write some fast, shorter songs that didn't sacrifice technicality and were ultimately fun to play and listen to. After each writing session the song, musically, would be about 75% done and then Matt would take that product and refine and add to it whatever seemed to be missing. We wanted to have the EP out within a year of the project onset, which I'm happy to say we achieved.

We then had our drum genius, Bryan take the slave tracks and write, arrange and track the percussion parts at his home studio with Justin Bender (ex-Untimely Demise and Into Eternity). I then wrote the lyrics for the 4 tracks (other than Demon Grief) and brought them to Matt to lay down. Like all seminal thrash bands, the lyrics are a classic case of art imitating life, speaking to the terrors of modern conflicts in Ukraine and Gaza, as well as delving into CIA programs, black ops and covert operations.

All of the rhythm, lead and bass guitars were then recorded at Matt's home studio. At this point, with the album pretty much complete, we invited Mike to join the band and had him lay down a couple sick leads on the final track, Face Reality (you killed it brother). From there the album was mixed and mastered by Justin and then we had our longtime local shirt designer, Chad Cruthers (aka Bluto) from System Grafix create some stunning art inspired by the lyrical and sonic content. We are quite pleased with how it all turned out and it positions the band nicely for our next full length release.

AU: How has the new release been received locally and/or globally?

MC: So far it has received unanimously positive feedback. The album has had 1000's of listens on UK thrash sites and 100's of likes on youtube which we are stoked about. It has received a lot of radio play on Rock 102 (Saskatoon's Major Rock FM station) which is opening up some big doors for the band and disseminating our music to a whole new market of listeners that otherwise would have never heard our material. Media from as far away as Chile have given extremely kind reviews of the EP and we a very grateful for all of the attention it is receiving. We have fans and distributors from all over, especially in Germany, Denmark and UK that want the physical CDs which we are happy to finally have ready for public consumption.

AU: This is your 7th release to date; there is quite a long legacy to the band, over 25 years, wow! Can you briefly touch on some highlights and accomplishments from the last decade?

MC: Yes, our little band that wouldn't give up is seeing a lot of pay off from sticking to our guns this long. Too many highlights to list but some notable ones would be supporting Obituary and The Black Dahlia Murder in 2018 across Canada. Winning a Sask Music Award for Metal/Hard Music act of the year in 2018 was also a big boon for the group. Finally, getting back to Europe and playing at Headbangers Open Air in Hamburg, DE in 2019 with Exciter, Queensryche and other genre-leading acts will be a fond memory that we won't soon forget. There is something surreal about going from the basements of Saskatchewan and being across the Atlantic opening up for our heroes that makes all of the blood, sweat and tears seem worth it!

AU: You were recently a part of The Saskatchewan Music Metal Summit (Saskatoon Sask, Feb 28/26). Can you tell us a bit about that weekend and your involvement?

MC: The inaugural Sask Music Metal Summit was a killer time! It was a first-of its kind, 3-day metal fest and conference that took place in Saskatoon from Feb 27th to March 1st. It featured 10 of the province's brightest and brutalist bands on 3 different stages. On top of showcasing the diversity and quality of our local heavy acts (UD included) it also featured a professional conference aimed at augmenting the profile of our music on worldstage and featured panelists and speakers, which included Nuclear Blast representatives, booking agencies/ promotors and Ash Pearson from 3 Inches Of Blood/ Revocation as a keynote speaker. We played at the Coors Event Centre on the second night to a packed and fiery house and would definitely call it an overwhelming success. Props and gratitude to Kaelen and everyone at Sask Music and Creative Saskatchewan for knocking it out of the park with this one. Fingerscrossed that another one is in the works for next year!

AU: What are some future plans UD has in the works for 2026 and beyond?

MC: The band is working on getting some support slots for bigger bands in the near future. We will be playing some Western Canada shows this touring season and are about to begin composing the band's next full length. Returning to Europe in 2027 is a goal that we are currently taking steps towards solidifying as well. Who knows what is next for UD? Stay tuned haha,

AU: Any upcoming shows/events you'd like to plug?

MC: We are playing in Saskatoon at the Black Cat Tavern on May 16th with From Beneath (WPG/ CGY), Rivers Of Ash (WPG) and Raven Witch (SKTN). Then we are playing the Sidestage in Winnipeg with Tyrants Demise and Raven Witch on July 25th.

AU: Anything further you'd like to share with your fans and supporters?

MC: To our old guard fans, thank you for being with us and continuing to support us over the years. We are grateful and truly blessed to have your unwavering metal support. To the new fans, thank you for coming to our shows, buying merch and listening to our music. We appreciate you and look forward to chatting with you at our next live performance. Bands are nothing without their loyal fans and we will do everything in our mortal power to continue writing balls-out thrash and delivering incendiary live performances.

untimelydemise.bandcamp.com/music

facebook.com/UntimelyDemiseMetal

instagram.com/untimelydemise

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CALL OF THE REAPER

Prisoner Keep Canadian Metal Loud

Interview By Ray MacKay

Prisoner are part of a new wave of Canadian heavy metal bands doing things the old-school way — touring hard, building a following city by city, and putting the music first. Fresh off their sophomore album *Kill the King* and preparing to hit the road for the Call of the Reaper Tour, the band is quickly making a name for themselves across the country alongside a new generation of Canadian metal acts. *Absolute Underground* caught up with Prisoner guitarists Murray Emery and Marco Cioffi to talk about the band, the new record and the tour that's bringing Canadian metal fans together from coast to coast.

Absolute Underground: Who are we talking to and what are your skills to pay the bills?

Prisoner: We're Murray Emery and Marco Cioffi, and we play guitar in Prisoner.

AU: For our unfamiliar readers, please give us a brief history of Prisoner.

Murray Emery: I had been thinking about Prisoner since I first started playing guitar at 15, but the band didn't really officially start until 2020 when I was in London, Ontario for audio production school. We played a bunch of shows in and around Ontario and recorded our debut record. After I finished production school, I ended up moving back home to Calgary, Alberta where I found Prisoner's current lineup and we've been going hard ever since. We've toured the country, released a ton of music and we have no plans to stop any time soon.

AU: Who is in the band?

Marco Cioffi: We got Murray and I on guitar, Trevor MacDonald on bass, and Karl Pflug on drums.

AU: We know words can barely capture the breakout metal madness that is Prisoner, but if possible, try to explain your sound to our readers.

MC: We've always kind of been against painting ourselves into a specific subgenre, so we like to say that our sound is sort of a bridge between old school and new school heavy metal. We all grew up listening to legends like Black Sabbath, Megadeth, Judas Priest, and Iron Maiden and all those guys, and I think it's pretty clear when you listen to our stuff, but we also love a ton of modern bands. Bands like Black Veil Brides, Architects, Motionless in White, and a bunch of others have also been huge inspirations for us. When you come to a Prisoner show we can guarantee three things: it'll be loud, it'll be heavy, and there'll be something for everyone.

AU: Your most recent release was your sophomore record *Kill the King* last year. What can you tell us about this album?

ME: *Kill the King* was a major step forward for us both individually and as a collective. Essentially every Prisoner project prior to this record was the work of myself as a teenager. I had written a lot of the first album/*House of Cards* EP when I was still learning my instrument and figuring out my role as a vocalist, and while I'm still incredibly proud of all those songs and we love playing them live, getting the opportunity to work collaboratively on *Kill the King* was a huge benefit. I think this project also shows how we've all matured as songwriters both lyrically and musically. It's safe to say that the songs on *Kill the King* are pretty complex, and our lyrical content is starting to explore deeper themes of freedom, personal growth, and questioning reality. *Kill the King* is bold, unapologetic, visceral, and a perfect encapsulation of who we are as a band in 2026 and going forward.

AU: Tell us about the creative process behind *Kill the King*.

MC: The process of actually creating *Kill the King* was pretty different for us. The timeline for this record was definitely a little bit of a time crunch, but I honestly think it ended up benefiting us in the end. The album process was about five months from start to finish, and because the album was written and recorded, mixed and mastered in such a short time span, we had to make a lot of big decisions in the creative process fairly quickly, and we didn't really have time to overthink or make unnecessary changes to the tracks. If a part felt good to us immediately, then we knew it was right for the record. It was super collaborative and everyone felt free to share their opinions, and I think working together in the room allowed us to end up with a project that we're all super excited and proud of.

AU: Any plans for another album anytime soon?

ME: I wouldn't say we're on a strict timeline for Prisoner III as of right now, but we're jamming stuff out and I think I can speak for all the guys when I say we're starting to get pretty excited about the new songs we're writing. Right now we're mainly focused on getting ready for the Call of the Reaper Tour, which we can't wait to start, and we plan on getting started on a new album more seriously once that wraps up.

AU: If you could hire anyone to do your album art, who would you pick?

ME: I think we would continue to go back to our current artist John Garrett, who has done almost all of our artwork by hand, painting each piece and digitizing it later. We pride ourselves on authenticity and originality with every facet of the band.

AU: What's your favourite song to perform live?

MC: "Stress Fracture" is an absolute blast. Every riff in that song is super fun to play (not to mention the solo), Trev's bassline that starts the song always hits extra hard live, and Karl crushes it every time. It's also pretty cool seeing people's reactions to our cover of "Children of the Grave", so I'll give that an honourable mention.

AU: If someone had never heard of Prisoner, what single song and/or album would you recommend to them as introductions?

ME: I think "Double Vision" would be a great place to start. It's definitely one of our heavier songs but I feel like it perfectly showcases who we are as a band both musically and thematically.

AU: What can you tell us about your upcoming Call of the Reaper Tour in May/June of this year?

MC: We're gonna be heading out on a national Canadian tour from Vancouver to Quebec City and everywhere in between. We had a great time on the Kill the King tour last summer, but we wanted this next run to be bigger and better, so we revamped the setlist a little bit and added a few cities we didn't make it to last time. We're all stoked and can't wait to get out and start playing some shows for you guys again.

AU: Anything else to promote or final words for our readers?

ME: Tickets are available now on our social media for all our shows on the Call of the Reaper Tour, and keep streaming *Kill the King* wherever you get music. Thank you to everyone doing their part to keep the Canadian metal scene thriving, let's keep it going.

AU: How do people find you online?

MC: We're **@prisonerbandofficial on Instagram, @prisonerband on TikTok and Facebook, and go to linktr.ee/prisonerband** for anything else you might need.

LYSERGIC

Interview with Kyle Ball

By Ryan Dyer

Kyle Ball has been a fixture in Calgary's extreme metal underground for years, from Kataplexis to WAKE and now Lysergic. With *Towering Altars of Misanthropy*, Lysergic sharpens that trajectory into something fully his own. Ahead of the project's upcoming show with Spectral Wound at Dickens Pub, *Absolute Underground* spoke with Ball about leaving WAKE, building Lysergic's live lineup and where Lysergic is headed next.

Absolute Underground: Since parting ways with WAKE, is it fair to say Lysergic is your main project now?

Kyle Ball: Yeah, Lysergic is definitely my main project now. I'm always working on projects, but this will be my main focus for the foreseeable future.

AU: In 2026, your first show will be with Spectral Wound, NächtLich, and Nocturnal Departure on May 13 at Dickens Pub. What is the current live iteration of Lysergic? Has it changed, or is it still evolving? What feeling do you get performing these songs for people?

KB: Currently there are five of us: myself, Ryan (Direwinds, Mind Mold), Sergey (The Weir), Josh (Tension, Spaewife), and Cian (Da'at). The only thing that's really changed since our first live performance is the addition of Sergey on lead guitar, and I hope we are done evolving for now because I'm very content with this lineup.

I would say playing these songs live elicits the same feeling playing live always has… emotion, tension, and release. The songs Lysergic writes are a lot more relentless and chaotic than what I've been focusing on over the last while, so I suppose there's a lot more release for me, personally.

AU: The more you live, the more influence you gain. The music shows this influence. How do you feel that plays out in *Towering Altars of Misanthropy*?

KB: There's a lot of hatred and disdain, mixed with an overwhelming disgust influenced by the world around us, and I use that to forge a raw and brutal soundscape that reflects those feelings. While certain bands and genres have been crucial in shaping the idea of Lysergic's sound, it's the combination of all these influences that meet in a confluence of brutality. All of these elements were present on past releases, but on this EP I feel like they're a lot more focused and realized within the chaos.

AU: How long did you take putting together the electronic textures and samples on the album?

KB: Those textures probably take the least amount of time out of everything. I moved from manipulating sounds through a single analog drone synth and software to a fully modulated setup with a sampler. I had one improv session on my setup, chopped it and dropped it where I needed, and it was done. Modular is like learning a new language, so it definitely took me longer to learn how to use the equipment than it did to record the textures.

AU: The EP strangely gave me slight flashbacks to your early days in Kataplexis. Not in sound, but in a feeling of conviction and momentum. What are you feeling, as the creator?

KB: I think that's a pretty fair comparison. Kataplexis was wrought from brutality and chaos, just like Lysergic. It's the sonic equivalent of the killdozer… an absolutely relentless pulverizing force that can't be slowed down. The final song on the EP is a cover of Blasphemy's "Atomic Nuclear Desolation," and it somehow sounds like it would fit on the last Kataplexis album or EP that I had come back for.

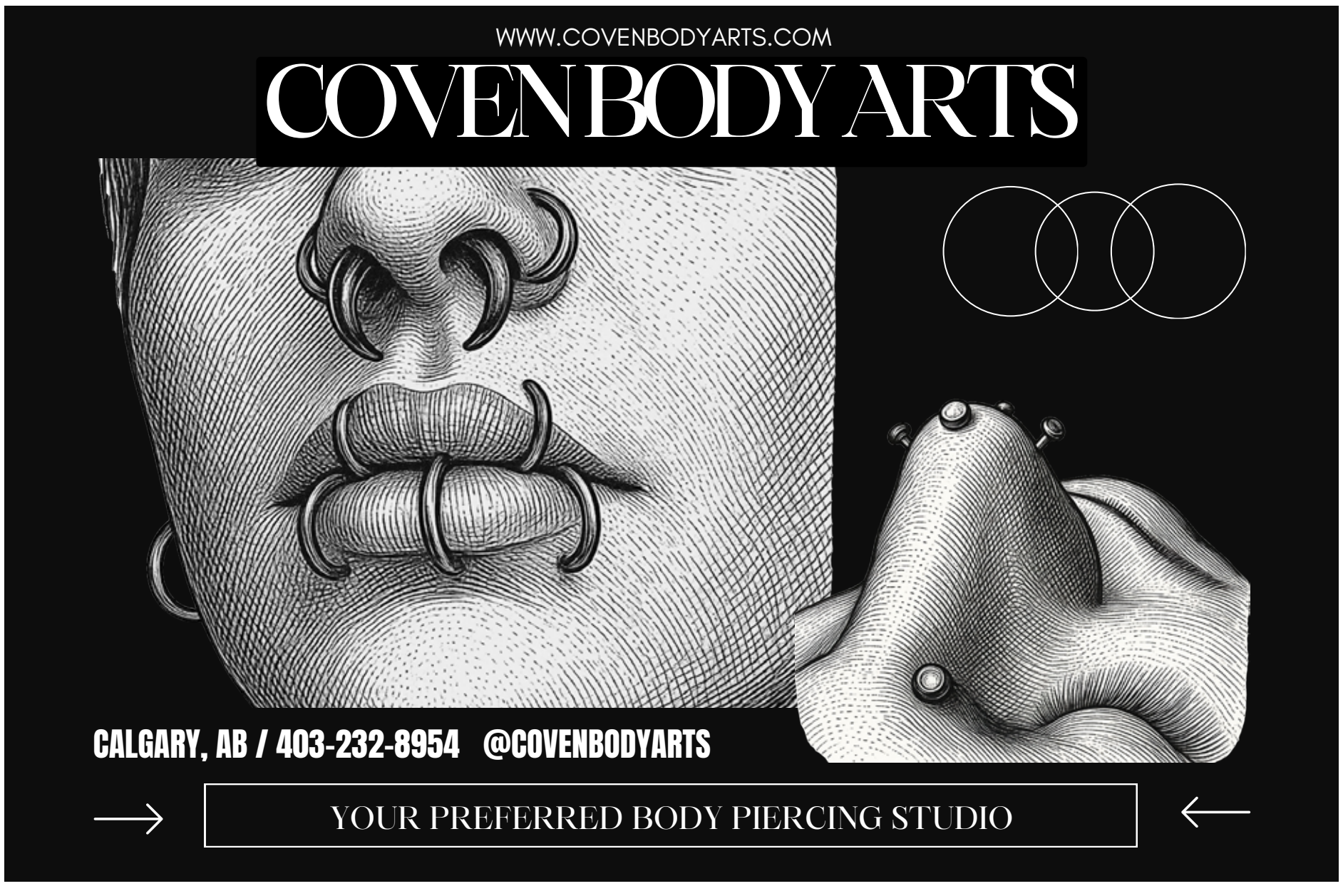
AU: Are there things you want to try next with Lysergic that you haven't yet?

KB: The next release will be a collaboration with the live band. I think there's going to be a lot of ideas that get thrown around between us and, while I will always make sure Lysergic stays in the black/death/grind wheelhouse, these different influences are going to shape a new and unknown sound. All the members are fans of the genre and understand what this project is about, so I don't think we'll stray very far from what's going on right now. This EP is the last as a solo effort, for now… you never know what the future holds.

AU: At this point, do you think people are following you as an artist, regardless of the project name?

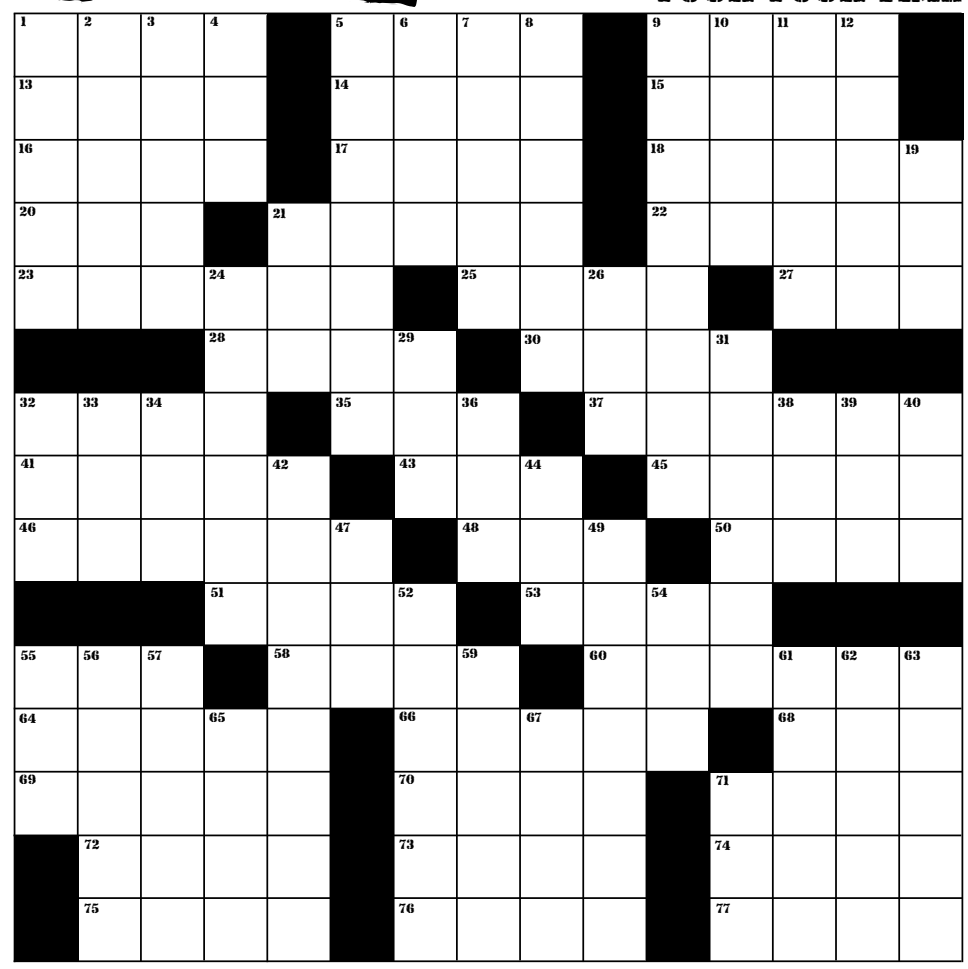
KB: There absolutely is, and I'm beyond grateful to have so many supportive and dedicated maniacs that are always there, no matter the project.

lysergicblackdeath.bandcamp.com



RIPCORDZ

FOUR-FOUR TIME



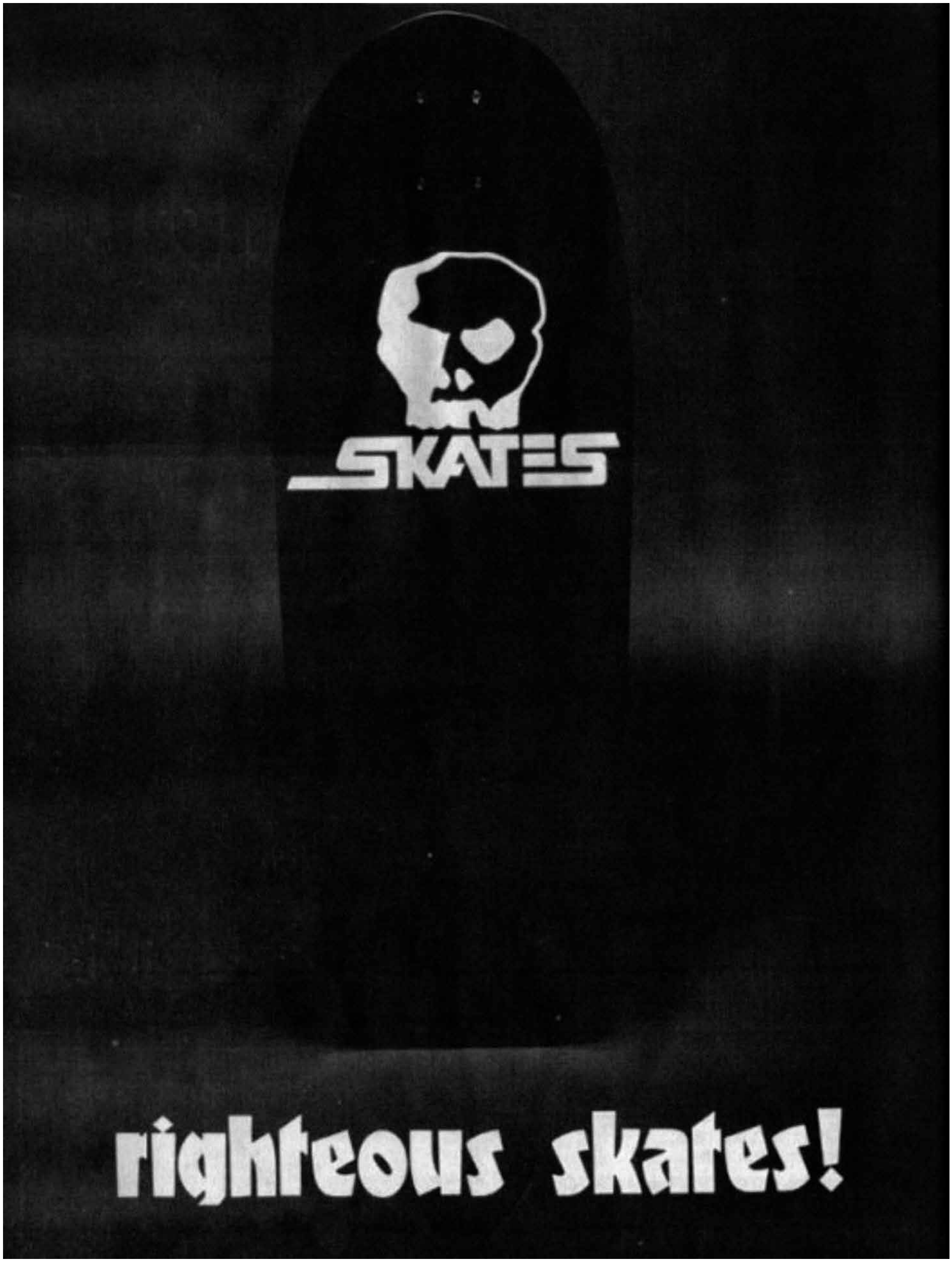
CROSSWORD NO. 122 **SPRING, 2026**

ACROSS

1. With 9-across, it's covered by Absolute Underground
5. Cinema canine of the 1930's
9. With 15-across, Random Killing's "Big _____"
13. Yours in Ypres
14. With 25-across, a Marvel-lous character
15. She's Enchanted in cinema
16. "_____ life!"
17. "____ Old Story" by Pennywise
18. Fruit of an oak tree
20. Sexy prefix
21. Recurring element in art
22. Not a fighter
23. Fast food, Halifax-style
25. With 32-across, boss around
27. Tolkien tree
28. Pro ____
30. Scubadiving area
32. With 50-across, excessive
35. The sun
37. Alt and Kane
41. _____-o-fish
43. Five-across
45. A Grey on "Grey's Anatomy"
46. Less true
48. A fanzine is one
50. With 53-across, performed well, colloquially
51. Star Trek counsellor Deanna
53. With 58-across, "It's a _____ _____ to Die"
55. A friend from France
58. With 70-across, Rancid song
60. 21% of Earth's atmosphere
64. It's spoken in the MidEast
66. Accept a decision, with 'by'
68. Love in Rome
69. Beginning of a chorus?
70. With 75-across, film about a Punk killed in a hit and run
71. 20th century king of Norway
72. _____ about: Approx.
73. Skin care company
74. Et ____: Latin for 'and the rest'
75. With 77-across, them there urbanites
76. Wild it ain't
77. With 1-across, Days N' Daze

DOWN

1. Contacted a drug dealer?
2. Nirvana album "In _____"
3. "Ain't happening"
4. Maker of the Sorento
5. Classifies
6. "Right now!" in the ER
7. Language of southeast Asia
8. "Trix _____ kids"
9. Genuine, with 'the'
10. Montreal-based gas company
11. Nail-shaped spice
12. She wants to see the manager
19. Common way to quit smoking
21. A casualty of war: Abbr.
24. Stop
26. Letters on a VCR button
29. 80's Punk band from Jersey
31. He lives on Elm Street
32. LA Punk supergroup
33. They keep Canadians on track
34. Common building addition
36. Golden Age film star Herbert
38. Losing game line
39. Director Justin
40. It's Holy in Vatican City
42. Not even the second choice
44. Brantford's ____ Order
47. Many a Louis
49. Word before "Norma Jean" or "Mr. Chips" in titles
52. Honest statement from an AI?
54. Black Ops org. in Marvel's "Thunderbolts"
55. Not fore
56. It was once a French Protectorate in Africa
57. Speaker of 64-across
59. Deadly virus
61. Big name in California wines
62. Modern messaging
63. Tennis's Djokovic
65. Word with machine or car
67. Muslim cleric
71. Klutz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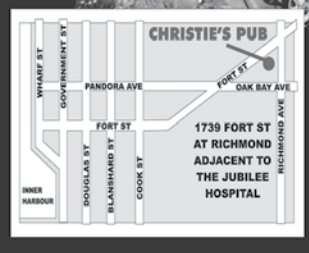

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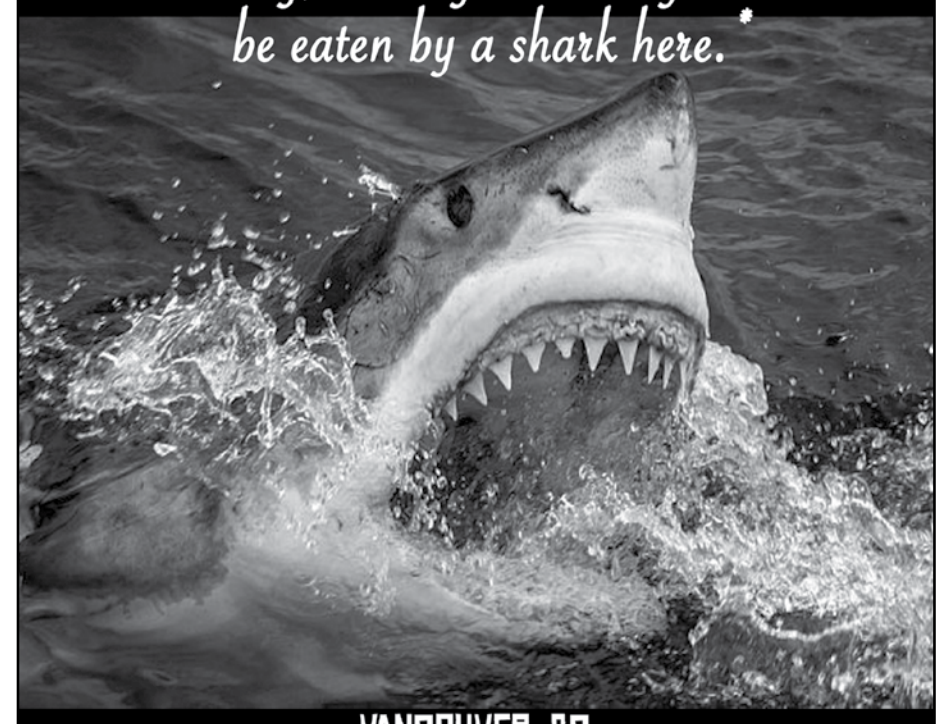

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AN SLUA — Oi! From the West of Ireland

Interview by Chuck Andrews

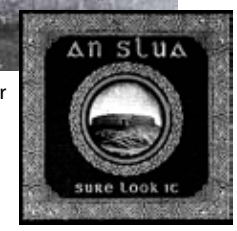
Hailing from the west coast of Ireland, An Slua blend Oi!, anarcho-punk influences and a strong DIY ethic, shaped partly by time spent in British Columbia. With their debut LP *Sure Look It* making waves beyond Ireland, the band continues to carry the spirit of working-class punk across borders and scenes.

Absolute Underground: Who am I speaking and what are you responsible for within the confines of An Slua?

Mic: How are ya now, this is Mic — pronounced Mick but I just spell it the Irish way! Haha. I played bass on the first two releases and sang, but realized I'm shite at doing both, so now I'm just focused on singing.

AU: Where is the band based?

Mic: We started off all in Galway on the west coast of Ireland, but my brother Shane and our bassist Bernard, aka Dregin, both live in Dublin. Dave is in Athenry, which is in Galway. I'm currently moving up to rural Mayo, which is about an hour and a half from Galway. Eugene, our drummer, is travelling Australia with his wife for the year, so we have our good friend Gary filling in.



AU: What is the relationship of An Slua to British Columbia, Canada?

Mic: I actually married a Canadian from B.C. and lived in Vancouver for seven years. My brother Shane also lived there, but just for two years until he moved back to Ireland. I'll always consider B.C. as a second home and a place that I feel very comfortable in. The punk/Oi! scene in Vancouver is amazing. It was a huge influence on me seeing how militantly DIY it all is and it really shaped how I set up gigs or do bands now.

AU: How would you describe the sound of your band?

Mic: I'd say at our core we're an Oi! band, but often the songs will definitely have a big anarcho influence through bands like Toxic Waste, Exit-Stance, Oi Polloi, etc., fused with The Press, The Oppressed and others.

AU: You have a full-length record out on Longshot Music? Tell us about it!

Mic: It's called *Sure Look It*, which is a very west of Ireland phrase that kind of means "that's just how it is", but can be used in many different ways. It was released August 25, 2025 through Longshot and Distroy (Ireland). Mike and Alex did such fantastic work at getting this released and heard by so many people. We can sometimes be isolated in Ireland, so for anyone to be hearing An Slua outside of the island still surprises us.

AU: Any stand-out tracks you are excited for people to listen to?

Mic: I'd say "Agrarian Agitation" or "Mountain of Rubbish" are good representations of An Slua. I'm really proud of that whole record though!

AU: Does the band have any other planned releases in the near future?

Mic: We're actually nearly done with our second LP. We just have to go in and finish vocals and then it's done. I'd say it won't be out until next year, but it's very similar to *Sure Look It* in every aspect of art, lyrics and riffs. We don't change all that much haha!

AU: Where have tours taken you lately?

Mic: We've done Germany and France and played all over Ireland.

AU: Where do you plan on touring in the near future?

Mic: We're heading to the UK in May and Paris as well. Once the second record is out we'd love to do a Japan tour, which would be epic. I'd love to play the Basque Country too. And hopefully when things chill out in the States we'd love to get over there as well.

AU: How is the punk rock scene in Gaillimh, Ireland?

Mic: It's always great. It's a very small scene made up of a couple bands, but every show we set up is always enthusiastic with zero egos. My favourite thing about the Irish punk scene is because it's so small you don't get away with acting like an arsehole or having any notions of ego like you would in larger scenes.

LONGSHOT MUSIC

AU: Who are some of your favourite local acts?

Mic: Rural Hate are a fantastic new hardcore punk band out of Galway. But for all Ireland I'd say check out Runnin' Riot, United Bottles, Sympos, Takers n Users, Easy Company, Surge, Special Branch, Rant, Grit, YOP, Section 4, The Jollars, Ructions, Skint, Topper, and Steel Caps and Allegiance are two new bands I'm well excited for.

AU: Who are some of your favourite up-and-coming bands in the world in general?

Mic: There's so much gold right now. Slugger, Liberty & Justice, Bullshit Detector, The Slads, Vaxine, No Time, Gewohnheitrinker, Collaps, Bomber 19, Claimed Choice, Cran, The Buzzers, Grem, Ultra Sect, Lost Legion, Cantona FC, Phane, Battery March, Reckless Upstarts, First Attack, No Heart and The Chisel of course!

AU: Is there anything else you would like to add?

Mic: Thank you so much for even considering us for *Absolute Underground magazine*! Animal Liberation / Human Liberation and keep up the fight, but don't forget to have the craic at the same time!

AU: Thank you for taking the time to answer these questions! How do people find you online?

Mic: We have a Bandcamp and sadly still an Instagram. I tried to delete it many times but have been outvoted by my band members haha!

anslua.bandcamp.com

instagram.com/ansluaeire

THE GLASS CAGE

WHERE DID THE SUNSHINE GO?

Wayne Harbord – guitar & vocals

Doug Hastings – drums

Clayton Millan – bass & vocals

Terry Morrison – organ & vocals

Norm Roth – guitar & lead vocals

In the early 60s, teenagers in Nanaimo picked up all the Vancouver radio stations from the mainland, and in particular CFUN, which had hired a crop of fresh young DJs and started playing the new British Invasion rock & roll, starting in December 1963 when they were the first Vancouver station to play the Fab Four. Nanaimo's physical isolation couldn't stop the worldwide Beatlemania virus, which was infecting everyone 15 and under. Island high school boys hit the music stores, snatching up all the Jaguars, Stratocasters, Voxes & Precisions. Seemingly overnight, garage bands were popping up everywhere.

NANAIMO, 1968

CM: At that time we were seeing a lot of bands come out of Vancouver who were playing their own stuff. And so Norm decided he'd give that a shot. He wrote "I Think I Love You" – it was his first attempt at writing a song – and brought it to the band and we said "Sure – why not." That's what we were there for, you know? To play! So yeah, we didn't have any arguments about that.

The Glass Cage was starting to jell. They were playing weekend gigs, three- and four-hour marathons of dance music up and down the island, plus practising Norm's original songs on the side.

So a plan was hatched: on Saturday, August 3 – while 1,500 miles away in Southern California, a hundred-thousand flower children were ushering in the Age of Aquarius at the Newport Pop Festival – the Glass Cage would play a dance at Chemainus' brand-new Fuller Lake Arena. Jack Taylor would come in during soundcheck with his Roberts reel-to-reel tape deck, record the boys, then cut some copies on his record lathe down in his basement.

When it came to the recording itself – nobody really knew what they were doing. Jack set up two microphones in front of the band, mixed into one channel and trailed a series of cables down to the other end of the empty arena. No rehearsal, no check for levels. One take. Go.

And the band was on fire. They led off with the Acetone-driven garage rock fuzz of "I Think I Love You" featuring a blistering solo from newcomer Harbord. On hearing the recording 55 years later Clay remembered with a grin "I could tell who was playing that guitar right away because, you know, Wayne had a certain way, and he didn't venture off this way (pointing left) or that way (pointing right) he went this way (pointing straight ahead) and that was the only way he going to play it.

Next, the band got into a contemplative mood with the West Coast sunshine-drenched epic, "All Alone" then followed it up with "Think It Over" and its sinewy breaks where Clay and Terry play off each other like a mad game of Snakes and Ladders. "When I See Her" is probably the band's most straightforward song of the set, with Wayne's solo echoing Chet Atkins or Scotty Moore – though the slight key change when Norm wails "You make it all right…" at the end adds subtle interest.

While the fidelity of the physical recording had been smashed down by years of abuse, the space and separation captured is even more remarkable given the inexperience of all involved. The natural reverb of that huge empty space becomes like an extra track when the band members start snapping their fingers on the off-beat before the vocals come wafting in… "Where Did the Sunshine Go?" indeed. It was right there.

Again, the two new guys Terry and Wayne trade solos, just like they had been playing together their whole lifetimes, leaving Clay to hold down the melody before everyone converges for the chorus. The set closes out with their only non-original track – "Outside Woman Blues," a 1929 song recorded by Blind Joe Reynolds, and later covered by Cream on 1967's Disraeli Gears. Clay was quite surprised to hear, 55 years later, that it wasn't one of theirs. He said with a laugh "I'm sure Norm said that was one of his…" For his part, Norm says that is 'lost to time', also with a smile and a chuckle. The recording ends with the 27-second raveup the band used to signal they were taking a break at their dances. And that was it. 22 minutes and six and a half songs later – it was over.

After the recording, life went back to normal – there was no real plan for the demo, at least not for the band. They played a battle of the bands at the Memorial Arena in Victoria – their only show down there – and also one in Vancouver. Though they didn't win either of them, the results were encouraging. Everyone in the band had now graduated high school so there was nothing really keeping them in Nanaimo.

VANCOUVER, 1969

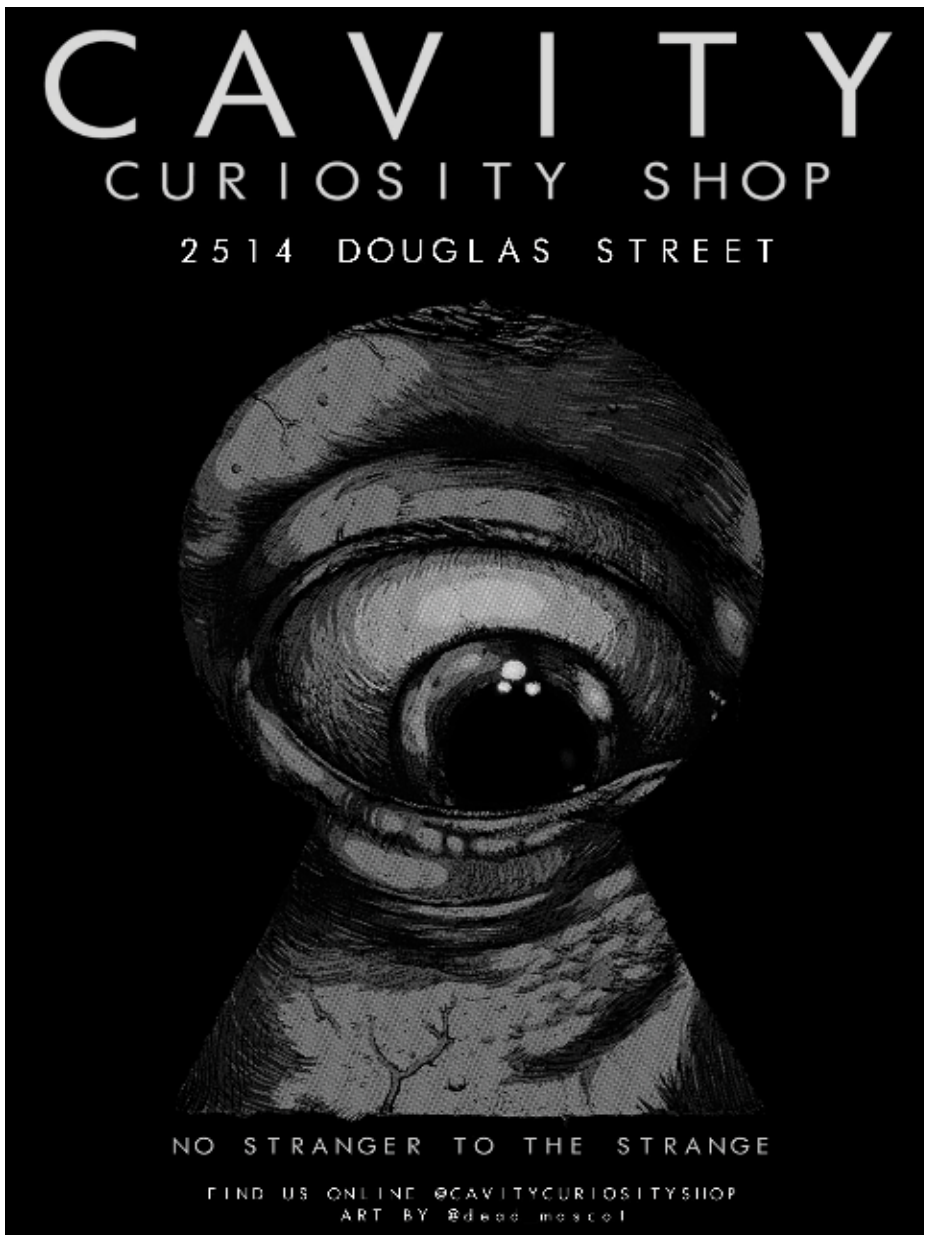
CM: We were getting better all the time. And I mean, we got lots of comments from people saying, "You guys are great." And we WERE getting better and better. It wasn't like we thought we had something that nobody else had, but because so many fans were telling us, we believed them! So we thought – why don't we give it a shot?

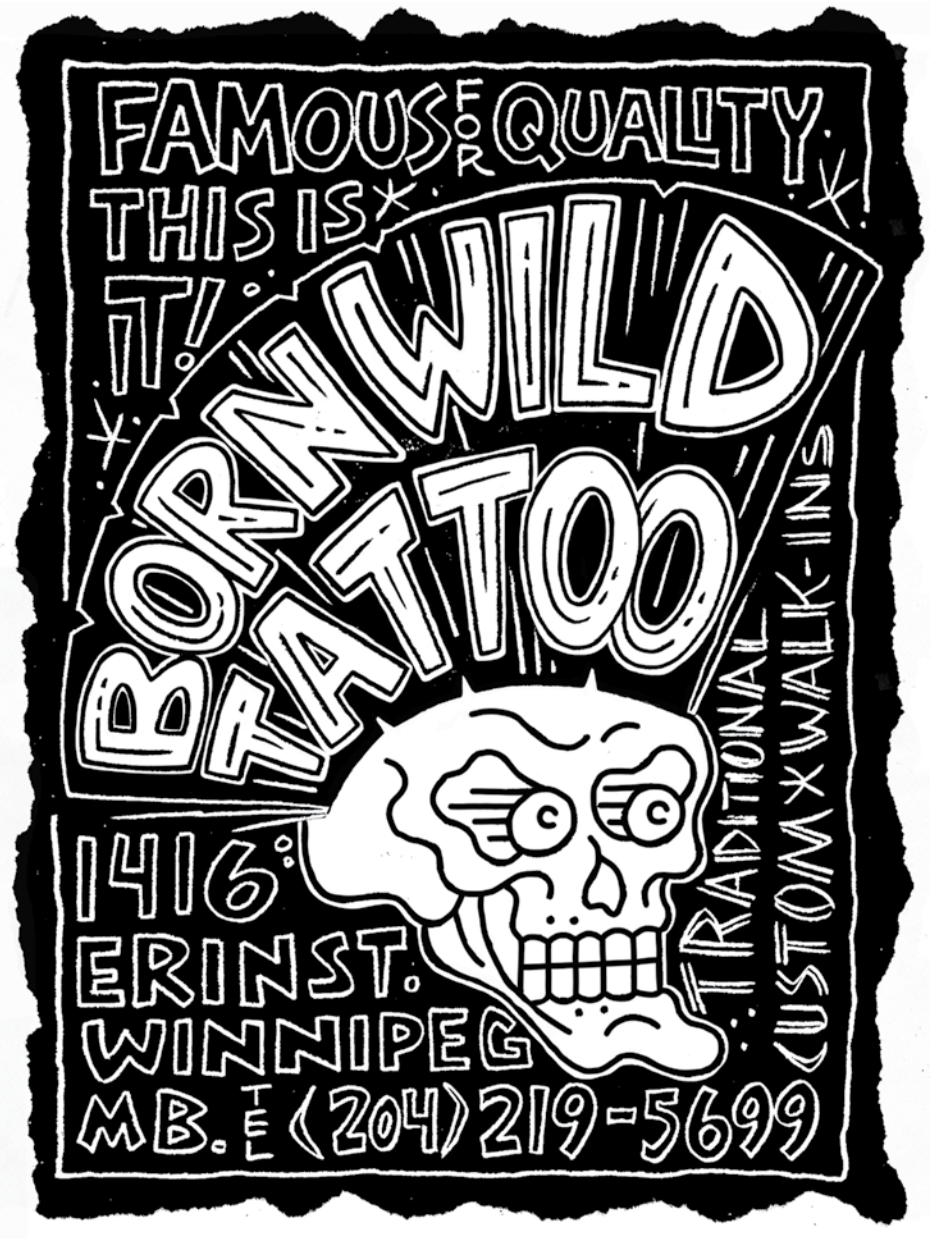
TM: Our parents struggled to understand what it was all about, but I think they were pretty impressed that we could actually support ourselves for a year in Vancouver doing what we love doing.

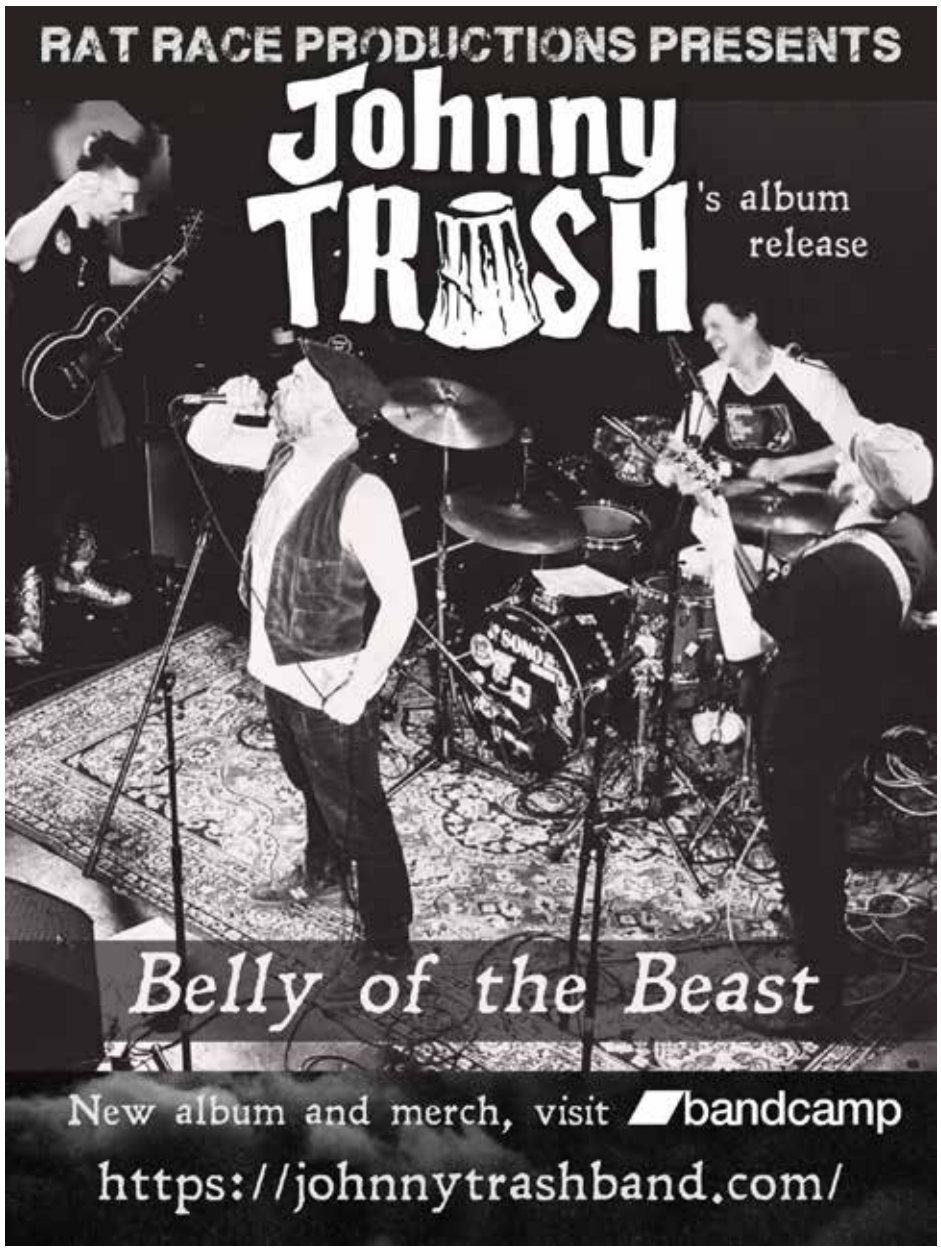
CM: We lasted about a year over there, maybe less. We were having trouble paying the rent and stuff because the money wasn't coming in, so I was wondering how much longer it was gonna last. There wasn't really a point where we said "Okay, this is it" and BOOM … no more. It wasn't a big breakup, it just kind of faded away. But, you know, it was always fun.

Interview & story: Marcus Pollard

Savage editing: Jason Flower







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PAPA REUBEN

Looking back at remainameless 20 years later

Interview by Jonathan Sohn

It's been twenty years since remainameless released *Saving The Planet One Song At A Time*, and Papa Reuben is still writing, recording and playing music. AU caught up with him to talk about the band's history, songwriting and the Toronto scene then and now.

Absolute Underground: Introduce yourself!

Papa Reuben: I'm Papa Reuben. I'm a musician and a father and, I, love, love what I do, which is love and livin' life and cheering you all the time.

AU: This is the 20th anniversary of your band remainameless's record *Saving The Planet One Song At A Time*. How did remainameless come together?

PR: remainameless sort of fell in my lap. I'd been playing lead guitar in bands around the scene. I was just about ready to find my own voice. I met Krazy Rob, the bass player, he showed up at an open mic. It was one of the first open mic's I ever hosted. I met the drummer at that same bar on another night. I had about 6-8 songs. We got together, started jamming and were playing 3 months later.

AU: How long did you play together for?

PR: I think we were together for almost eight years. Probably played 20 shows a year and it felt like more at some point in our career. We did two albums. We've had a couple reunion shows since then.

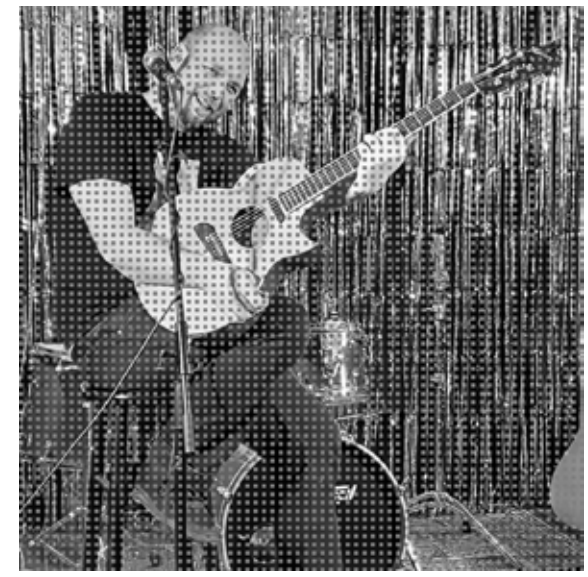
AU: Going back to that 2nd album, *Saving the Planet One Song At A Time*, how does it feel listening back to it after all this time?

PR: *Saving The Planet* is definitely one of my favourite albums that we ever did. It was really well-recorded, well-mixed and really got the sound of what we were doing at the time. It was cool. It's hard because all I want to do is sing along with it and I have a different voice now.

AU: How has your writing process changed compared to back then?

PR: It has not changed at all. My writing process is very, very simplistic. It always has been, There's one song, "Get Up", that was written lyrics first. Everything else I'm just sort of playing my guitar and I'm like, "Oh my god, I'm ready! I'm writing a riff" and then a melody comes and I get out my pad and paper, and I write it down and the song comes out. The song comes out or it doesn't, you know?

cartridge heart



AU: How has the Toronto scene changed over the past 20 years?

PR: The scene itself hasn't changed as much, but it sounds better. I'm all for technology lowering the barrier for entry as far as recording processes go. Now you can just show people, "Here's what I sound like". The main difference is the technology, because the live playing has always been the same. You book a venue. You hope your friends show up. You have a good show, whatever, because you're playing with your band and then you practice. The scene is still the same. The only difference now is that I can capture more. You can see more, see what's going on.

AU: If he could go back in time and give you one piece of advice, what would it be?

PR: Be better with names. I'm someone who has always been bad with names, hence the band name remainameless. I remember people and remember what we did and made connections, but I'm so bad with names that I met a lot of people for the first time… again. They say, "Oh, Reuben, we've met this many times."

AU: In that same conversation with your younger self, do you think he might have some sage words for you?

PR: No, because I don't make those mistakes anymore. I make newer and better mistakes now.

AU: What's coming up next for Papa Reuben?

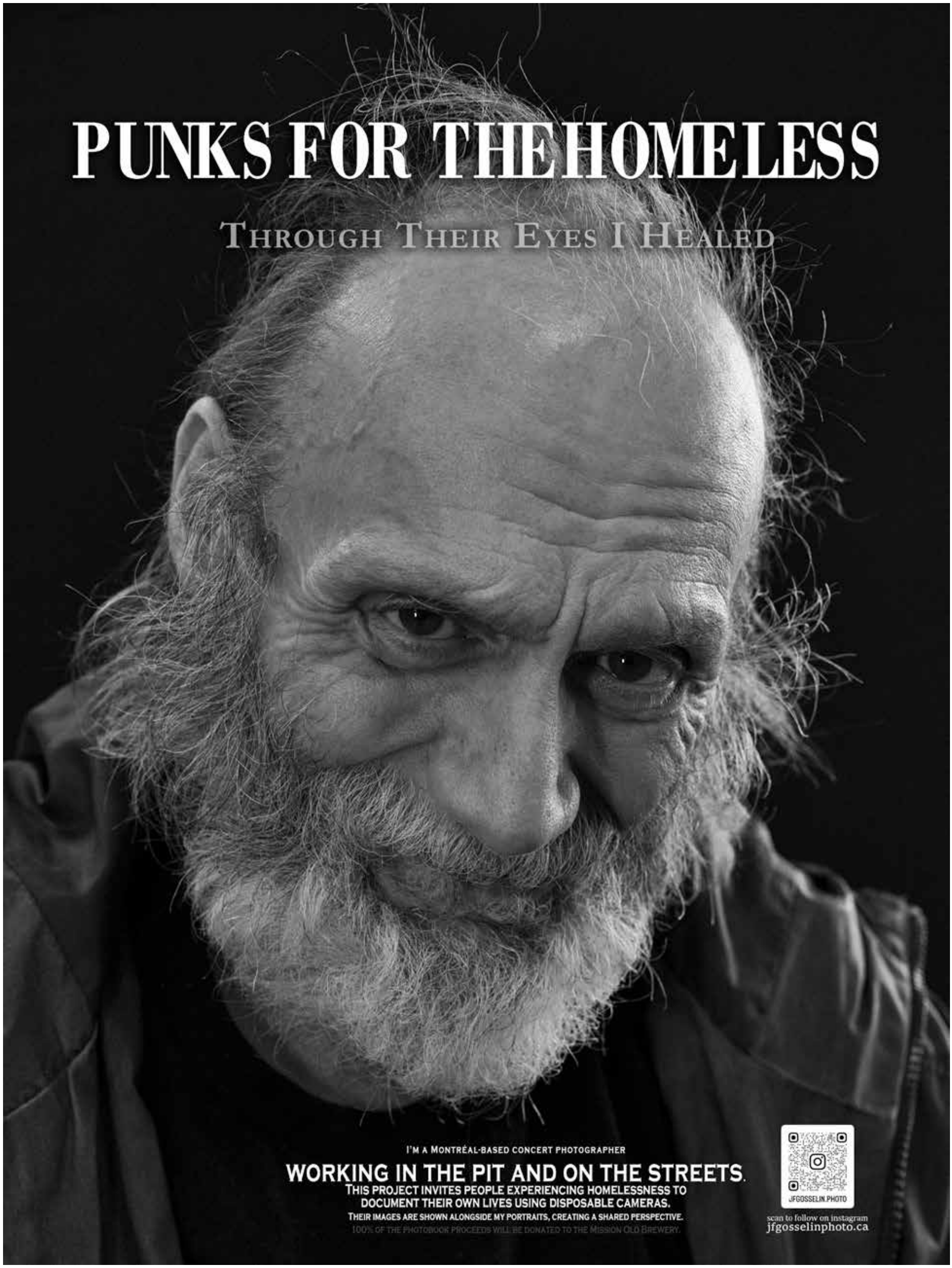
PR: Cartridge Heart is reissuing my back catalogue: both remainameless records and all the Bacchus material on one disc. I'm also releasing my first full-length as Papa Reuben later in the spring. There will be shows to celebrate all of it.

AU: Would you like to shout out any bands or people?

PR: There's so many… Super Not Okay is making some great music. Jody in the Fred Zone is making some great music in the city. A shout out to my friends. It's so hard to make truly bad music, so long as you're out there up on stage, getting albums done, writing your songs and playing them on your couch or at the campfire… keep it up.

AU: Where can people find your music or find you online?

PR: papareuben.com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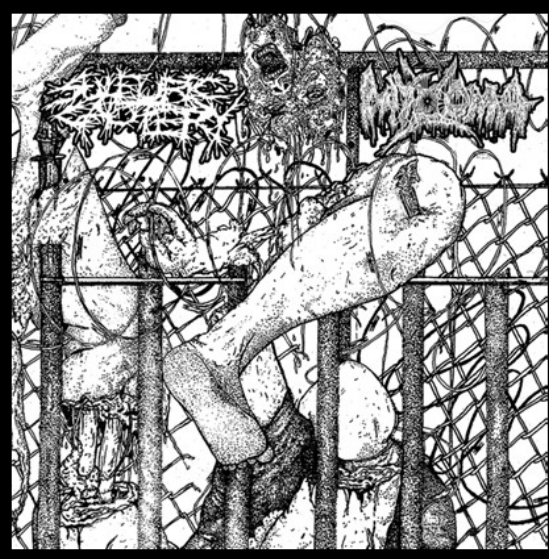

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GET WHAT YOU DESERVE

German thrash legends SODOM re-release remixed landmark 1994 album

By Ferdy Belland

"Back in 2024 we re-released a remixed version of *Tapping the Vein*, which was the first album I ever did with Sodom," says Andy Brings, the former lead guitarist of the beloved German thrash-metal legends. "It was the first professional album I ever did, and it was very successful. I was still in school… it's crazy to think of that now! The re-release was very well received - it seems my era with the band has a special place in the hearts of the Sodomaniacs! So we were inspired to re-release *Get What You Deserve*, as well as the *Aber Bitte Mit Sahne* EP which came out before. It's startling - I was in Sodom less than three years, and in that short time we did two studio albums, an EP, a double live album, and a live home video...these days, bands seem to release albums every five or ten years!"

Sodom is certainly a band who doesn't slack: since their 1982 formation in the German industrial city of Gelsenkirchen, the group (always commanded by bassist-vocalist Thomas "Tom Angelripper" Such) has released no less than 16 studio albums, 3 live albums, 2 compilation albums, and 7 EPs - a staggering and respectable creative output that any band would be proud to boast. Taking initial inspiration from Venom's proto-blackmetal ferocity before veering into their own ever-evolving sound, Sodom is ranked among the Big Four of Teutonic Thrash (alongside Kreator, Tankard, and Destruction), and the eagerly-awaited re-release of their adventurous 1994 album *Get What You Deserve* has them front-of-mind once again with the world's rabid metalheads.

"A lot of people who became Sodom fans are now 40, 45, approaching 50," recounts Andy. "So think about how it was as a 14-year-old kid back in 1991 when you first heard Metallica's Black Album and fell in love with metal. These new young metalheads were asking: what's heavier? Slayer. What's heavier then? Well, for a lot of the European kids it was Sodom! And *Tapping the Vein* might have been their first Sodom album. When they were on school bus trips, most of the other kids would've been singing pop hits by Mariah Carey or "Smells Like Teen Spirit" or something, but the metalheads then wanted to separate themselves from the squares. They wanted to be evil and disgusting and shock the girls by singing "Body Parts" and "Skinned Alive!" Sometimes the girls were drawn to those kinds of metalheads… and I can attest to that! Nowadays there's so much nostalgia for old-school metal, but we believe what we created is still timeless and current to modern ears."

Over the years, Andy Brings learned hands-on recording engineering skills and has gotten pretty damned good at it, and so the olive branches were offered, fences were mended, and formerly estranged bandmates reconnected to commence the painstaking project - but it almost didn't happen.

"Tom and I believed the original multitrack recordings were lost," says Andy. "Nobody could find them! But Tom finally came across them in January 2025 when shuffling through the wrong storage boxes. And so we got to work! Tom trusted me implicitly with the remixing tasks. It was such a cool trip for me to remix the albums I played on. I wanted to strip everything down to three angry, unfriendly guys that musically punched everybody in the guts for 45 minutes! I didn't necessarily want to make the original album *better*, as such - we loved how the original recordings sounded! But we wanted to reduce everything to the maximum. No samples, no overdubs, no modern studio trickery. Just me and my gear and my ears and my taste and my memories of what Sodom was at the time... which was a fucking killing machine."

Get What You Deserve's re-release has been a cathartic and rewarding experience overall for Andy Brings.

"My relationship now with Tom is a good one," says Andy. "We've worked a lot together over the years. He kicked me out of Sodom in 1994, so for the rest of the 1990s whenever we'd cross paths I'd just walk past him without even looking at him. But when the century turned, we had to talk - because he owed me money! Which he didn't know about; our former management fucked up. But he paid me every penny. And we realized then we could still be civil, and work together, which we've done here and there ever since. And I rejoined Sodom to play Wacken in 2007! Tom and I work well together. In the end, Sodom might be Tom's band, but he trusts my instincts and suggestions. If I say I'll do A and B, he'll know that I'll do C and D as well, and oftentimes X, Y, and Z.

"All during the remixing process of *Get What You Deserve* we spent a lot of downtime looking through old photographs and mementos of our time in Sodom together, and it was great to relive the many good memories," says Andy. "It's hard to believe that I joined Sodom 35 years ago! You have to celebrate and cherish those relationships. Tom gave me my first big shot in the music industry. I was at Tom's wedding. I held Tom's daughter in my arms as a baby! Some of Sodom's band members are gone now; we'll never be able to speak to them or create with them again. I'm proud and happy that Tom and I have overcome our past differences."

For more information on the re-released edition of Sodom's *Get What You Deserve*, please visit: sodomized.info

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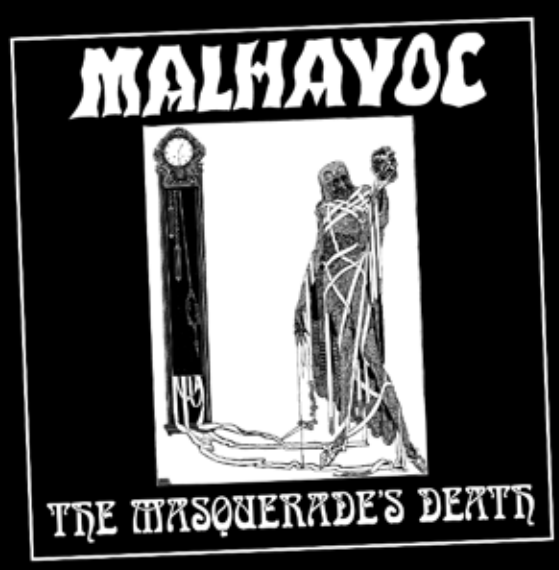

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CURSED BLESSINGS

TED AXE: Canada's Punk Rock Vampire Still Biting

From Canada's First Punk Band to the Count Of Rock

By FLORA

Absolute Underground: For readers who may not know the full story, who are we talking to today and what are you currently working on with the Ted Axe Band?

Ted Axe: Hello! Thanks so much for interviewing me! I'm a Canadian punk rock musician and artist, widely recognized as the frontman for The Action, often cited as Canada's first punk rock band. I'm based in Toronto and I've been performing and creating for several decades now. I'm known for my macabre, vampirish, glam aesthetic — top hats, raccoon eyes, leather trench coats, black nail polish — the whole Count of Rock persona.

As of 2026, I've got a new EP that came out January 1st. It features a rock reimagining of Lady Gaga's "Born This Way" along with original tracks like "Little Vampire Girl" and "The Devil's Candy." The release has actually been getting traction on social media, especially TikTok, which has introduced my music to a whole new generation.

I'm currently touring across Canada and the United States with my latest band lineup — Vlad Vamp on bass, Stefan Sinister on drums, and Derek Dark and Jef Blakk on guitars. We've got more dates coming up and I'm also working on booking a European tour to expand things internationally.

Beyond music, I'm also a painter and visual artist. My work reflects the same gothic style as my music — dark, theatrical, surreal imagery. So I'm always creating, whether it's music, visuals or performances.

AU: You were the frontman of The Action, often cited as Canada's first punk band. What do you remember most about those early days when punk was just starting to explode?

TA: The Action formed in Ottawa in April 1976, and by 1977–78 we were performing regularly and causing a lot of trouble. The most striking thing about those early days was that we were operating in a complete cultural vacuum. There was no punk scene in Ottawa. None. We had to create one from nothing.

I had actually witnessed the explosion of punk in London in 1976 and came back to Canada fired up. I thought, "We're punks anyway — let's make something happen here." Ottawa was a very conservative city at the time, so when we showed up with makeup, glam influences, loud fast music and a confrontational attitude, people didn't know what to make of us.

I remember one guy at a show asking his friend, "What are we supposed to do?" and the friend said, "Throw your beer on them." So they threw a pitcher of beer on me while we were playing. That was the reaction. People literally did not know how to react to punk music yet.

Instead of backing down, I leaned into the controversy. I modelled myself after Malcolm McLaren from the Sex Pistols — I understood that outrage and press coverage could build a scene faster than anything else. So we staged outrageous performances and made sure the newspapers heard about them.

We played a school dance once that ended in total chaos — fake vomit, simulated sex, all kinds of insanity — and the principal wrote a formal complaint to the musicians' union. I tipped the newspapers off myself so it would become a story. Suddenly we were on the evening news as Ottawa's first punk band.

We even filled our rehearsal space with garbage, fake blood, and groupies pretending to be vampires, then invited every media outlet in Ottawa to come watch us rehearse. They had to walk through garbage and fake blood to get to us. They all wrote about it and we were suddenly famous locally.

All that press coverage helped create the scene. Eventually we got a regular gig at The Rotters Den, which became Ottawa's first real punk club. That's where all the misfits from around the city gathered, and the scene started to grow around us.

Our peak really only lasted about a year before the band self-destructed like many punk bands did, but in that short time we went from nothing to touring with major bands and playing legendary venues. It was intense and it happened very fast.

AU: The Action famously toured with the Ramones in 1978. What was that experience like?

TA: Touring with the Ramones in 1978 was one of the biggest moments of our career. We were chosen to open for them on a 20-city U.S. tour, which was huge for a band from Ottawa at the time.

The tour was a whirlwind — long drives, no sleep, booze, drugs, chaos — everything you'd expect from a punk tour in the late '70s. But it was also an incredible learning experience. Watching the Ramones every night was like watching a machine. They were relentless and professional in their own way.

I remember one night in Flint, Michigan, Joey Ramone lost his voice near the end of their set, but the show didn't stop. Dee Dee started singing while Joey kept performing and miming the lyrics. The energy never dropped. That kind of dedication stuck with me.

We were already known for outrageous performances — fake blood, shock tactics, songs like "Do The Strangle" — and we definitely brought that chaos to the tour. Some places loved us, some places hated us, but nobody ignored us.

For a band from Ottawa to share the stage with the Ramones during their prime was surreal. That tour really cemented our place in early punk history.

AU: The song "TV's On The Blink" became a defining track of that era. Why do you think it resonated with people?

TA: "TV's On The Blink" had what critics later called a primal urgency. The funny thing is the lyrics actually came from something very simple — my television broke, and I wrote the song out of frustration. But that everyday frustration turned into something bigger. It tapped into a feeling of alienation that a lot of young people felt at the time.

Musically, we were bridging proto-punk and the newer UK punk sound. We had influences like The Stooges and The Rolling Stones but also the Ramones and the Sex Pistols. So we had raw punk energy but we were actually very tight as a band because we rehearsed constantly — five days a week, all day sometimes.

The record itself also became legendary because of the packaging and the sound. It was a 12-inch at 45 RPM and DJs would often play it at 33 by mistake, so we'd be calling radio stations telling them to speed it up.

That record has become a collector's item now, which is amazing considering how chaotic everything was when we made it.

AU: After The Action ended, you performed and lived in places like London, Los Angeles, and Seattle. How did those cities shape you as an artist?

TA: Each city changed me in a different way.

London was the birthplace of punk for me. That's where I saw the energy, the fashion, the attitude. It was aggressive, artistic and political all at once. That experience shaped my early songwriting and stage persona.

Los Angeles was completely different. That was where I leaned into the theatrical side of rock and roll — glam rock, big stages, big personalities. I played alongside some major musicians there and learned a lot about performance, production and image. That's where the glam vampire persona really started to develop.

Seattle came later and that was more of a rock and alternative scene influence. That period made me rethink things and move toward something darker and more sophisticated musically. I started blending punk, glam and darker themes into what I now call Alt-Glam.

All those cities shaped me, and what I do now is really a combination of everything I learned from those scenes.

AU: Your more recent releases like *Sex, Horror, Violence* and *The Count of Rock* continue that evolution. What drives your music now?

TA: It's still the punk spirit at the core — do-it-yourself, rebellious, honest and theatrical. I still believe in creating your own world as an artist.

My music now blends punk aggression, glam theatricality, gothic imagery and personal storytelling. The lyrics are often very personal — relationships, life experiences, frustration, anger, survival — but also sometimes social commentary.

I've always believed punk was not just about three chords — it was about attitude, independence and artistic freedom. I still operate independently in many ways, releasing music, making videos, finding band members, booking shows — the same DIY spirit that punk started with.

The Count of Rock persona represents that combination — elegance and rebellion, theatre and aggression, glamour and darkness. It's all part of the same artistic identity.

AU: Your EP *Born This Way* has been gaining attention online and connecting with younger listeners. What does that mean to you?

TA: It means a lot to me. Seeing younger audiences discover my music through TikTok and social media is incredible. That song originally started as a Canada's Got Talent audition, and now it's being used by younger people to express themselves and their identities.

That's very powerful to me because punk and glam were always about individuality and self-expression. So seeing new generations connect with that message decades later is very rewarding.

Some of my darker tracks are even being played in goth clubs now, and I'll play shows and see both longtime fans and brand new fans in the audience. That's one of the most satisfying parts of what I'm doing now — the music is still finding new audiences.

AU: With decades of experience behind you, what do you still love most about stepping on stage and performing live?

TA: The stage is sacred to me. I consider any stage to be hallowed ground.

Performing live is about connection — sharing stories, sharing energy, sharing emotion with the audience. It's a transformation. When I step on stage, I become the character, the Count of Rock, and I bring people into that world with me.

I still feel like I have something to prove every time I perform. The hunger never goes away. Music runs through my veins and performing is a cathartic experience for me and hopefully for the audience too.

As long as I can step on a stage and perform, I'll keep doing it.

AU: Where can people find you online?

TA: You can find my latest work on Spotify, Bandcamp and Soundcloud: tedaxe3.bandcamp.com

soundcloud.com/ted-axe-481933120

Follow my social updates on: instagram.com/tedaxe3

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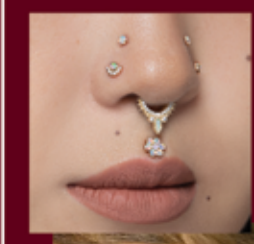

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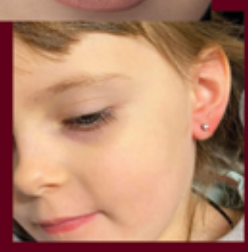

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DEADWOOD: Rituals of a Dying Light

Montréal deathcore bruisers unleash a dark, aggressive EP blending death metal and hardcore.

Montreal's Deadwood released their latest EP, *Rituals of a Dying Light* on January 9th, 2026, via Innerstrength Records. This five-track offering delivers unrelenting aggression, crushing riffs, and haunting atmospheres inspired by historical darkness—from the Salem witch trials to the reign of Jack the Ripper.

Formed in 2020 during the COVID-19 pandemic, Deadwood quickly carved a place in the extreme metal scene with their dark, technical and heavy sound. The lineup features veterans: Fred (ex-The Plasmarifle, ex-Ion Dissonance) and Stéphane (ex-Nova Spei) on guitars, Charles (ex-Dismayd, Discovery Through Torment) on drums, and Derek on vocals. Drawing from the ferocity of Meshuggah, the brutality of Whitechapel, and Pantera's groove, Deadwood delivers deathcore with both precision and ferocity.

Recorded at EMNT Studio and produced by Fred Element, *Rituals of a Dying Light* includes the tracks "Tales of Massacre," "Heretic," "Thirst for Blood," "Whispers of Death," and "Echoes of the Fallen." The EP has already impressed critics:

"Crushing riffs and haunting atmospheres steeped in true dark histories… a no shenanigans, vicious EP that will surely please all fans of extreme music." – *The Headbanging Moose*

On April 10, Deadwood is releasing their new single "Blasphemy", probably the heaviest track they've released to date: **hypeddit.com/deadwood/blasphemy**

Deadwood's previous releases include the EPs *Nemesis* (2022) and *Inhuman* (2023), as well as singles "Straightblade" (2023) and "Djinn Pitts" (2024). Known for commanding live performances, the band has toured Japan with Humanity's Last Breath and DVRK, played U.S. shows in 2025, opened twice for Born of Osiris in Montréal and appeared at Inkcarceration Festival 2025.

Deadwood is gearing up for their first European tour in 2026, bringing their signature deathcore aggression and dark storytelling to international stages. True to their motto, "Make Deathcore Angry Again," the band continues to deliver music that is both brutally heavy and technically formidable.

deadwoodmetal.com

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PUS LAB - Body Horror Slam From Beyond

Interview with Yuru Wei (Everything)

By Ryan Dyer

Taiwan's Yuru Wei is emerging as a new brutal mastermind in the extreme underground. With the one-man band PUS LAB, he approaches slamming brutal death metal like a scientist sealed inside his own laboratory — testing pressure, density, and collapse until the sound mutates into something inhuman. If Emasculated Vituperation is pure violence, PUS LAB feels closer to *The Fly* — a controlled experiment in which Wei and brutality itself have fused into a single grotesque entity.

AU: What do you explore thematically in PUS LAB, and how does it differ from Emasculated Vituperation?

Yuru Wei: PUS LAB explores controlled biological collapse — infection, mutation, organ failure, and artificial manipulation of life within a clinical framework. Emasculated Vituperation is more outwardly violent and confrontational. If that band is blunt force trauma, PUS LAB is surgical dissection. One is impact; the other is examination.

AU: Could PUS LAB exist as a one-man force on the road?

YW: Yes. One-man extreme metal acts like Putrid Pile have shown it's possible. PUS LAB began as a studio project for complete creative control, but it's not limited to that format.

AU: What films, bands, or real-world influences feed into PUS LAB?

YW: Body horror films are my biggest influences, especially *The Thing* and *From Beyond*. The gradual, progressive physical mutation and collapse in these works has had a major impact on my writing. I particularly enjoy body horror films. Musically, it's simple SLAM — no need to worry about extra flourishes, always pure. Conceptually, it's mainly inspired by films and games; I didn't incorporate much real-world influence into this project at the time.

AU: Are there ideas you can push in PUS LAB that you can't in other projects?

YW: Absolutely. PUS LAB allows total structural freedom — longer mechanical passages, a focus on atmosphere, and precise sonic design. There's no compromise or need to balance band dynamics.

AU: Now that the album is complete, what are the 10 tracks about?

YW: The core of this album is simple — body bio-chemical collapse and biological weaponization. The ten tracks depict stages of controlled biological breakdown: infection, mutation, tissue instability, organ failure, and total loss of humanity.

AU: What else is new creatively?

YW: I continue to refine sonic density — making brutality heavier through weight and pressure rather than speed. PUS LAB is a platform for pushing extreme sound design further without limitation.

linktr.ee/puslab.band
instagram.com/puslab_slam

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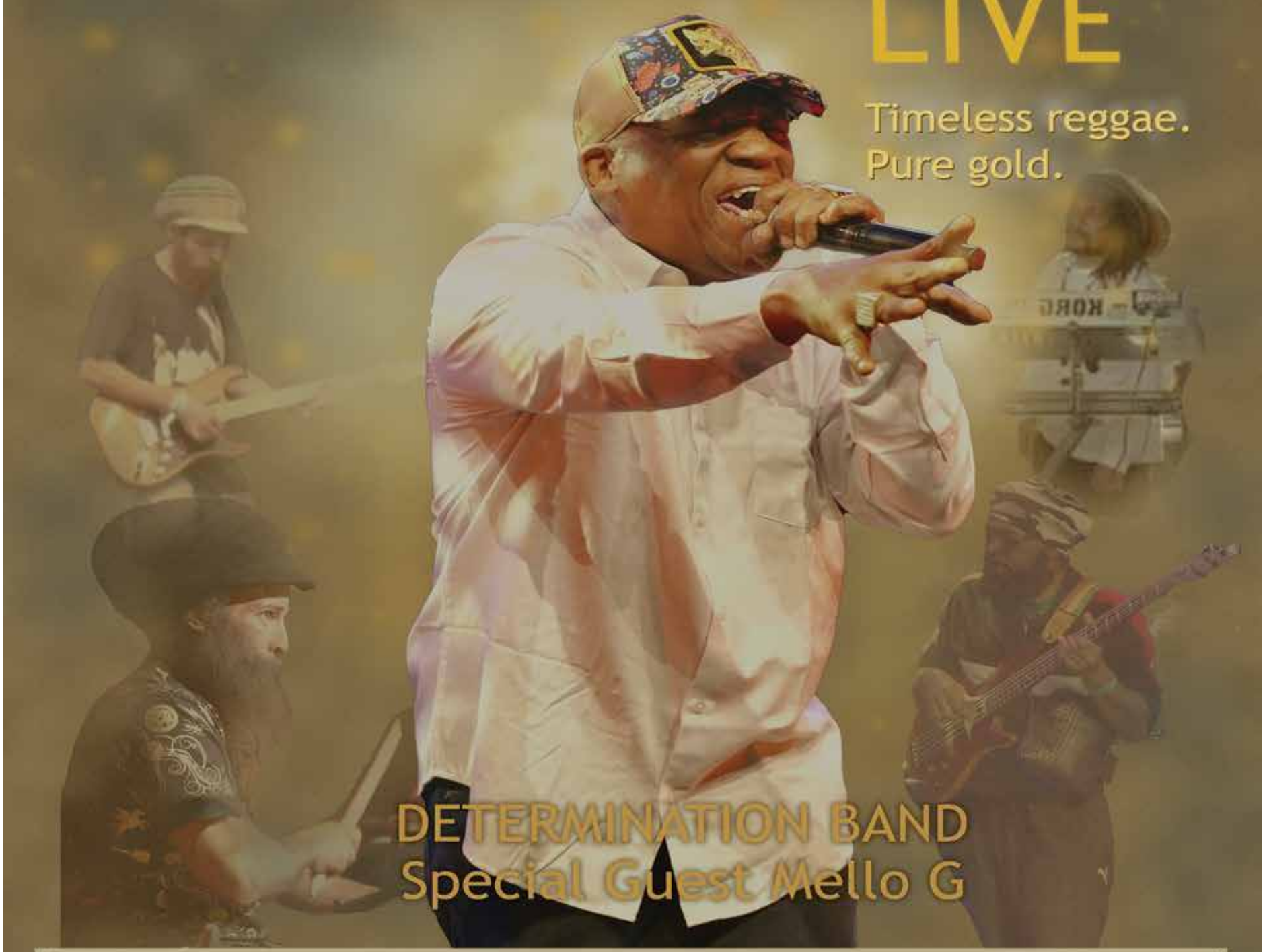

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JanMan of BORN WILD TATTOO

Winnipeg tattoo artist Jan Veldman, also known as JanMan, has been tattooing bold illustrative work for over a decade, working out of Born Wild Tattoo in the city's West End. With roots in traditional animation and a love for classic tattoo styles, his work blends American and Japanese influences with his own traditional(ish) approach. JanMan caught up with *Absolute Underground* to chat about tattoos, music and the wild stories behind his ink.

AU: Who are we talking to and what are your skills to pay the bills?

Jan Veldman: I'm Jan Veldman, AKA JanMan. I'm a walk-in and custom tattooer working in Winnipeg's West End.

AU: How long have you been a tattoo artist? What got you started?

JV: I've been tattooing professionally for over 10 years now, but technically I've been at it since 2006 with friends. I became a tattooer because I'm an artist who's trained in traditional animation, but didn't find the concept of working in that field appealing in the long run.

AU: What style of tattooing are you best known for?

JV: I'm known for bold illustrative pieces both in colour and black work. My work is based on a traditional foundation whether it's American or Japanese. I put the "ish" in traditional.

AU: Where are you currently working and what's the shop's vibe?

JV: I work at Born Wild Tattoo, 1416 Erin St, Winnipeg, MB, Canada. It's a traditional walk-in street shop. From the street you'll notice us by the shop's giant neon eagle sign. Inside you're face to face with hand-painted art, walls of flash and a vintage aesthetic.

AU: Who else works with you at the shop and what special skills do they bring to the table?

JV: The shop apprentice likes to hoard chainsaws in the back room.

AU: What are you most proud of in regards to your tattoo career to date?

JV: I'm most proud that I make a living creating art. I haven't had a typical "job" in almost 15 years. My drawings put food on my table and rent a roof over my head.

AU: Does the shop offer piercings as well?

JV: No, but I'll give it the ol' college try.

AU: What's the craziest request for a tattoo you have ever gotten?

JV: The weirder the better! Weird and different is what tattoos are all about. I did Garfield dressed as a leather daddy once, with his pecker out. Proud of that one.

AU: What tattoo are you still dying to ink in?

JV: I have loads of flash I haven't done yet and I have a ton of tattoos out there that haven't been finished yet too — lined sleeves and back pieces! If you're reading this and have unfinished work from me, call me at 1 (204) 219-5699! Don't be alone! Pick up the phone!

AU: What sorts of music are usually playing at the shop?

JV: Lots of punk, rockabilly, and old country.

AU: Anything else you want the readers to know about you?

JV: Well, I studied traditional and computer animation for five years in Toronto and am a graduate of the Max the Mutt animation cartoony type school of art. I can draw Donald Duck in my sleep.

AU: Any special events planned in the near future or anything else you would like to mention or promote?

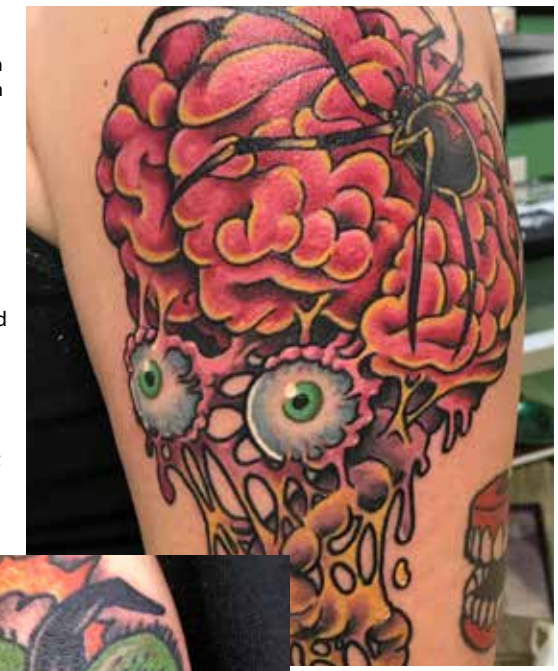
JV: Come see me at the Winnipeg Tattoo Show! May 1/2/3 at the RBC Convention Centre!

AU: Any final words or wisdom to share with aspiring artists?

JV: Don't skip breakfast. It's the most important meal of the day!

AU: How do people set up an appointment?

JV: DM me @Janman_tattoos on Instagram or if you wanna email me: **veldman.janmichael@gmail.com**.



AU: How do people find you online?

JV: Instagram is a good one @Janman_tattoos

If you don't have Instagram just type my name in on Google. You can find anyone that way!

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Absolute Hippies

By Vince D'Amato

Initially, I was planning to write an article about the somewhat off-kilter subgenre of post-hippie horror from the early seventies… that is, until my attention was inadvertently diverted during a late-night research session, which took me down a whole other rabbit hole. It started with, of all things, *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre Part 2*.

Sometimes I get some piece of random information stuck in my brain, which of course nags like a scratched record until I can find some satisfactory confirmation for it. What had been tugging at my mind was, "did the screenwriter for Tobe Hooper's *Texas Chainsaw Massacre Part 2 (1986)* also write the much-celebrated Wim Wenders film *Paris, Texas (1984)* in the mid-eighties? Or was it a different writer with a similar name? The writer of Wenders' poignantly oddball family drama road movie couldn't have been the guy who had Dennis Hopper battling chainsaws with Leatherface… could it?

It was – LM Kit Carson – and it was his and Karen Black's son Hunter who'd starred as the kid searching for his mom in *Paris, Texas* – and who also starred in Tobe Hooper's second of three films for Cannon, *Invaders from Mars*, which co-starred Hunter's mom Karen Black. It was about this point I tripped into the rabbit hole.

LM Kit Carson got his start in the independent movie business back in the sixties when he did a film with Jim McBride, called *David Holzman's Diary*, a weirdly celebrated arthouse-meta fake documentary that played film festivals and cinema clubs in 1967. The movie was shot by cinematographer Michael Wadleigh, who would go on to direct the movie documentary that would define the sixties for over three decades, *Woodstock (1970)*.

Wadleigh's next directing effort would take him straight into the horror genre, to the Whitley Strieber werewolf movie *Wolfen* over a decade later (1981). Along with *The Howling* and *An American Werewolf in London*, I consider *Wolfen* to be in the top-three werewolf films of all time, I think it's one of those horror films that didn't get a lot of attention at the time. Wadleigh starts *Wolfen* off with a wildly *giallo-esque* murder scene before quickly shifting into the mismatched-buddy-cop procedural investigation, with its horror-movie backdrop. It's like the *Law & Order* of werewolf movies. Wadleigh wouldn't direct anything else after *Wolfen*, and was even replaced as director during the film's post-production (Wadleigh had already completed his on-set shooting and directing); he was replaced with seventies horror director John D. Hancock during *Wolfen*'s ADR sessions. John D. Hancock had been the director of the cult horror film *Let's Scare Jessica to Death (1971)* which, incidentally, was actually supposed to be the first film I was going to talk about in the original incarnation of this article. So I did find it a bit strange that the rabbit hole I'd fallen into had still somehow led me back around to Hancock's film. But that and *Wolfen* and *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre Part 2* (and to some extent, *Invaders from Mars*), were not the only horror films that came out of this rabbit hole. Indie director Jim McBride's post-sixties filmography is eclectic, to say the least, in 1983, he directed a remake of Jean Luc Goddard's nouvelle vague classic *Breathless* which was also written by LM Kit Carson, before going on to direct a couple of modestly-budgeted commercial Hollywood movies in the mid-eighties, and them shifting back into auteur/arthouse Sundance-style films in the nineties – but in between all of that, he made the direct-to-VHS vampire horror movie *Blood Ties (1991)*. Unfortunately, if you didn't catch *Blood Ties* back in the VHS / video rental store days, you're unlikely to find it now, as it never received any official post-VHS release.

On the flipside, the most successful contributor to the horror genre from this motley gang of sixties filmmakers would've been Karen Black, LM Kit Carson's ex-wife. The couple had married in the seventies, but divorced in the eighties, just before their son Hunter won accolades as the young performer in *Paris, Texas*. I would argue that Karen Black is most remembered for her horror films over the four decades past her post-hippie-culture & American New Wave oeuvre (*Easy Rider, Five Easy Pieces, Nashville*) – it's impossible to forget Black as the terrorized young woman in Dan Curtis' *Trilogy of Terror (1975)*, but she was always a standout when she was on screen – she'd also worked with *Cannibal Holocaust* director Ruggero Deodato in his Italian gut-muncher follow-up *Cut and Run (1985)*, Tobe Hooper's *Invaders from Mars (1986)*, Larry Cohen's I*t's Alive III: Island of the Alive (1987)* and possibly most famously in Rob Zombie's *House of 1000 Corpses (2003)*.

Larry Cohen started his independent career in sort of an antithesis to the hippie-ness of *Woodstock* – it's not much of a surprise that before he made a splash in the horror genre, he was dabbling in blaxploitation after directing *Bone (1972)*, a movie that had been rediscovered and released by Blue Underground in the early 2000s. Larry Cohen had cast Yaphet Kotto as the Beverly Hills home invader in his exploration of class structure, coming from more of the black character's point of view. The Beverly Hills home that Kotto trespasses into is occupied by a middle-aged white housewife. The movie is sometimes uncomfortably racially-charged, as was obviously the point (but this movie by white filmmakers often leans uncomfortably into exploitation territory, seemingly without a black voice anywhere behind-the-camera), but to its credit it is also a bleak satire on the idea of the very class structure it's disrupting being a fallacy of societal, and to some extent media, engineering. Larry Cohen himself said in a 2019 interview, *"...[Bone] deals with problems we still face today in America. The film is revolutionary because it cuts to the heart of racial prejudice. And some of that is indeed sexual, where the white man has a fear of the black man's sexuality. It's a thorn in the side of the white community."* – or so the filmmaker says. This was Larry Cohen's first film before he jumped swiftly into his short Blaxploitation career with *Black Caesar (1973)* and *Hell Up in Harlem (1973)*, and immediately followed that by shifting fully into the horror genre with his classics *It's Alive (1974)* and *God Told Me To (1976)*. Regardless, clearly *Bone*, *Black Caesar*, and *Hell Up in Harlem* were not the auteur-inspired white sixties culture of McBride's or Wadleigh's films, but it seems that all of these guys had other things to say as the decades moved into the eighties, with Wadleigh's somewhat existential *Wolfen* and LM Kit Carson's rabidly satirical take on Tobe Hooper's post-hippie *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* by turning that film into an over-the-top satire of American excess, which only gelled perfectly (and in the same time period, no less), with Larry Cohen's horror-satire on consumerism *The Stuff*, and his own take on the horror-themed police procedural (also set in New York City), *Q – The Winged Serpent*. It seems that in these filmmakers' hands, the horror genre moved from the post-hippie Vietnam culture of the early seventies to the utterly excessive Regan-era and cop-hero culture of the eighties, brought to you by the hippies themselves.

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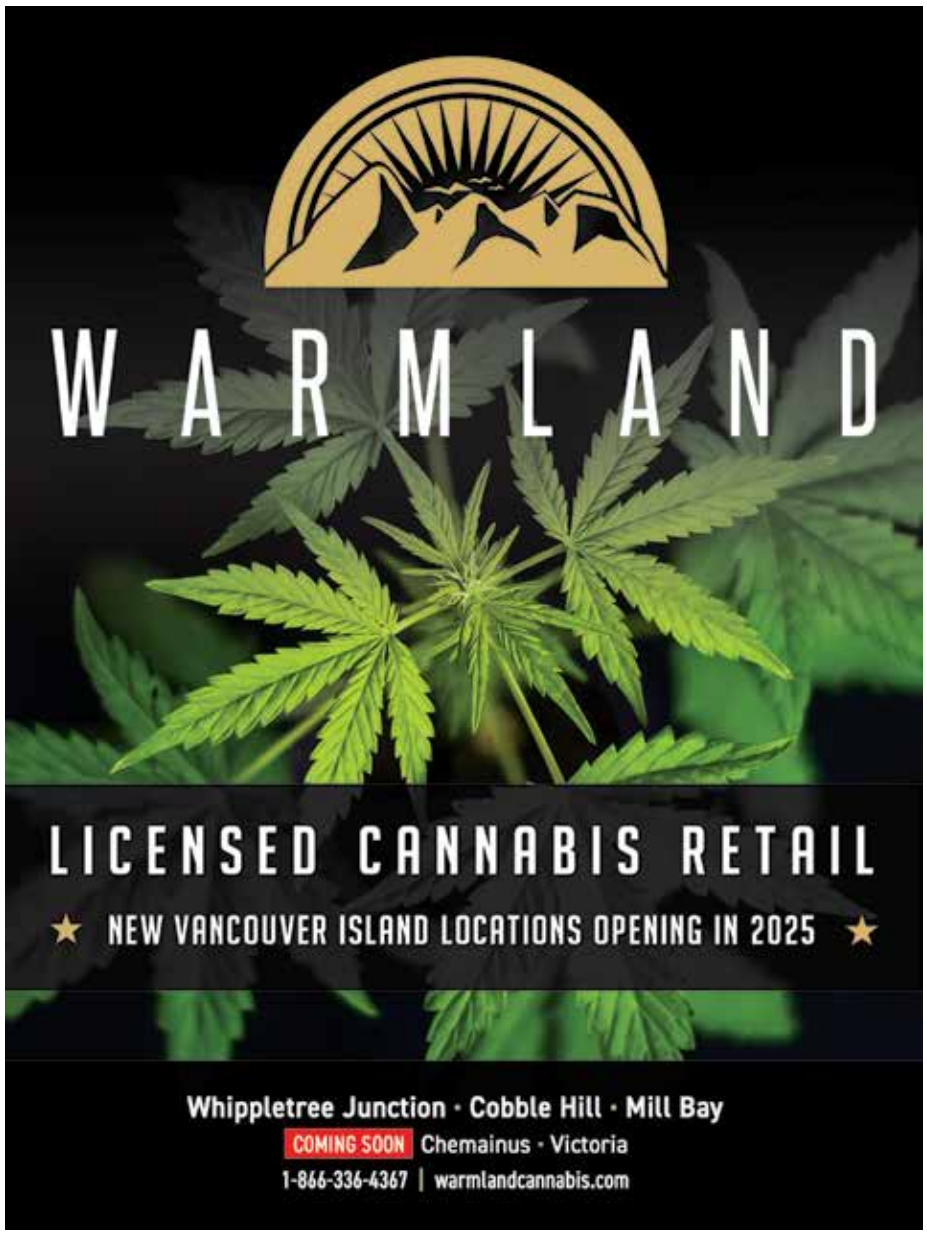

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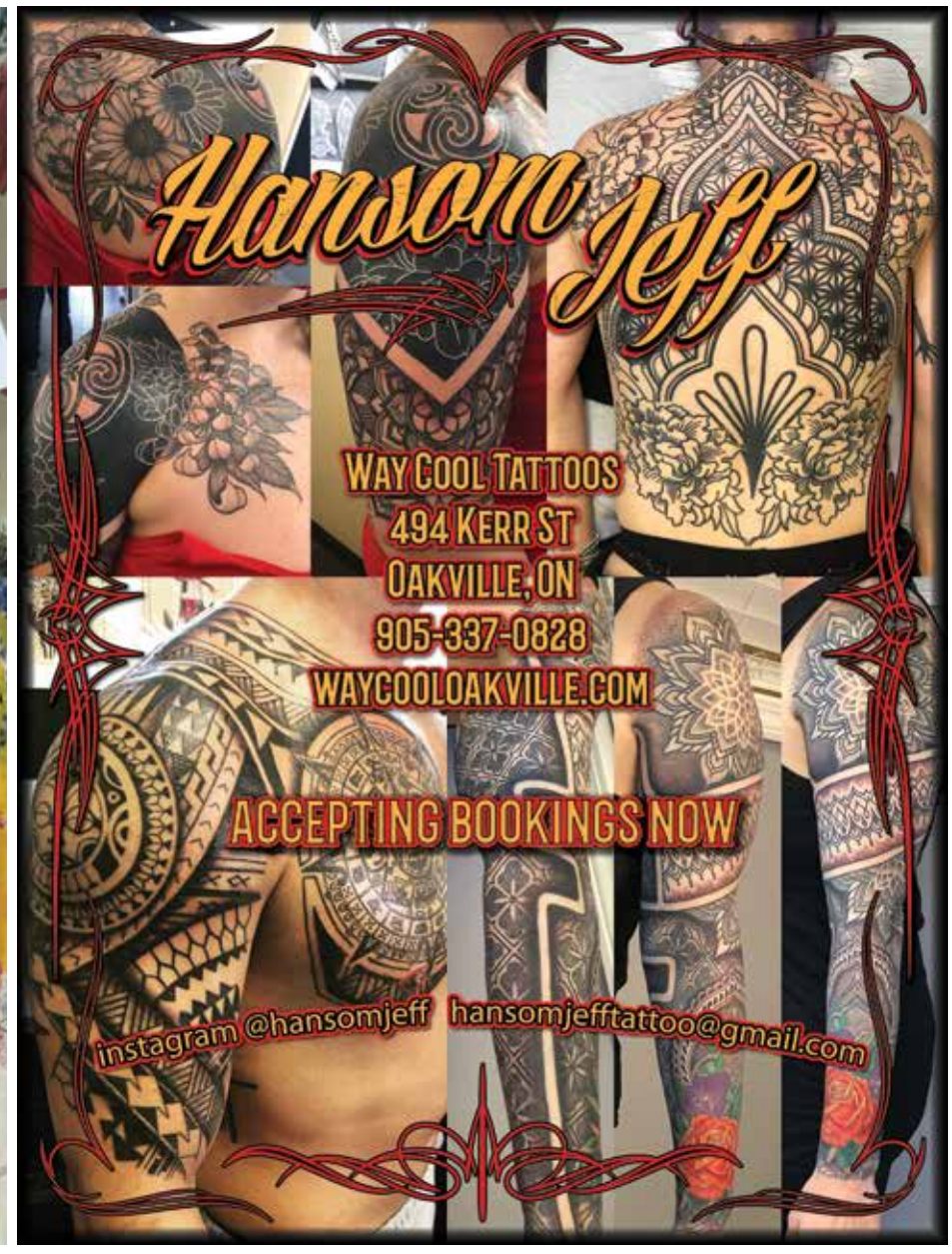

Tales from the Darkside: I Tripped on Acid from Outer Space

By Vince D'Amato

As a distribution company, and specifically being more of a horrorcentric genre distribution company, I have to say I'm a little surprised at the lack of 420 horror that comes our way (meaning it *doesn't* come our way – like at all). But there are definitely some wild, weird and wacky films that do indeed come our way – sometimes I think we might be a magnet for the super-weird. Last year, one of those super-weird films came to us from Italy, it had been titled (from Italian) "I Tried an Acid from Outer Space", bearing a little bit of a lost-in-translation breakdown. But the film was ca-ra-zy. It's an animated balls-out trip-fest boasting a plot that is basically about what the title says will happen – in other words, utter weirdness. Of course, we picked it up immediately, and it's been out since last year, and while I admit we did change the title very slightly (with the director's direct participation), we wanted to keep that alluring *rhythm* of the original title, hence, *I Tripped on Acid from Outer Space*. It was released by Darkside Releasing on Blu-ray, DVD and via streaming services such as Tubi, Plex and Amazon. Again, despite it being a "super-weird" one, possibly even more shockingly, it wasn't the *weirdest* one that came our way at that exact same time. Another brain-messing trip-fest that had also been sent to us was a wildly experimental film from Washington, USA – *How to be Lucky* – by auteur J. Fair, who created what she alluded to as sort of a pseudo-vampire-anti-corporation meta-fictional mindfuck, which basically takes the most famous part of 1974's *The Parallax View*, throws that in a blender with an existential boiling-down and wringing-out of corporate-speak, and wildly amplifies that into what can only be described as post-modern crazytown. Fair warning, it's definitely not for everyone – but in the same breath, it is. It's an indescribably hypnotic headtrip, in a way that *I Tripped on Acid from Outer Space* both is and isn't. The former is 100% meditative while the latter undoubtedly strives for a more traditional narrative – that is, it *tries* for that, in the same way that early-eighties Cronenberg films tried for it. But to summarize, if only for the sake of the theme of this issue, both of these indie films are definite trips.

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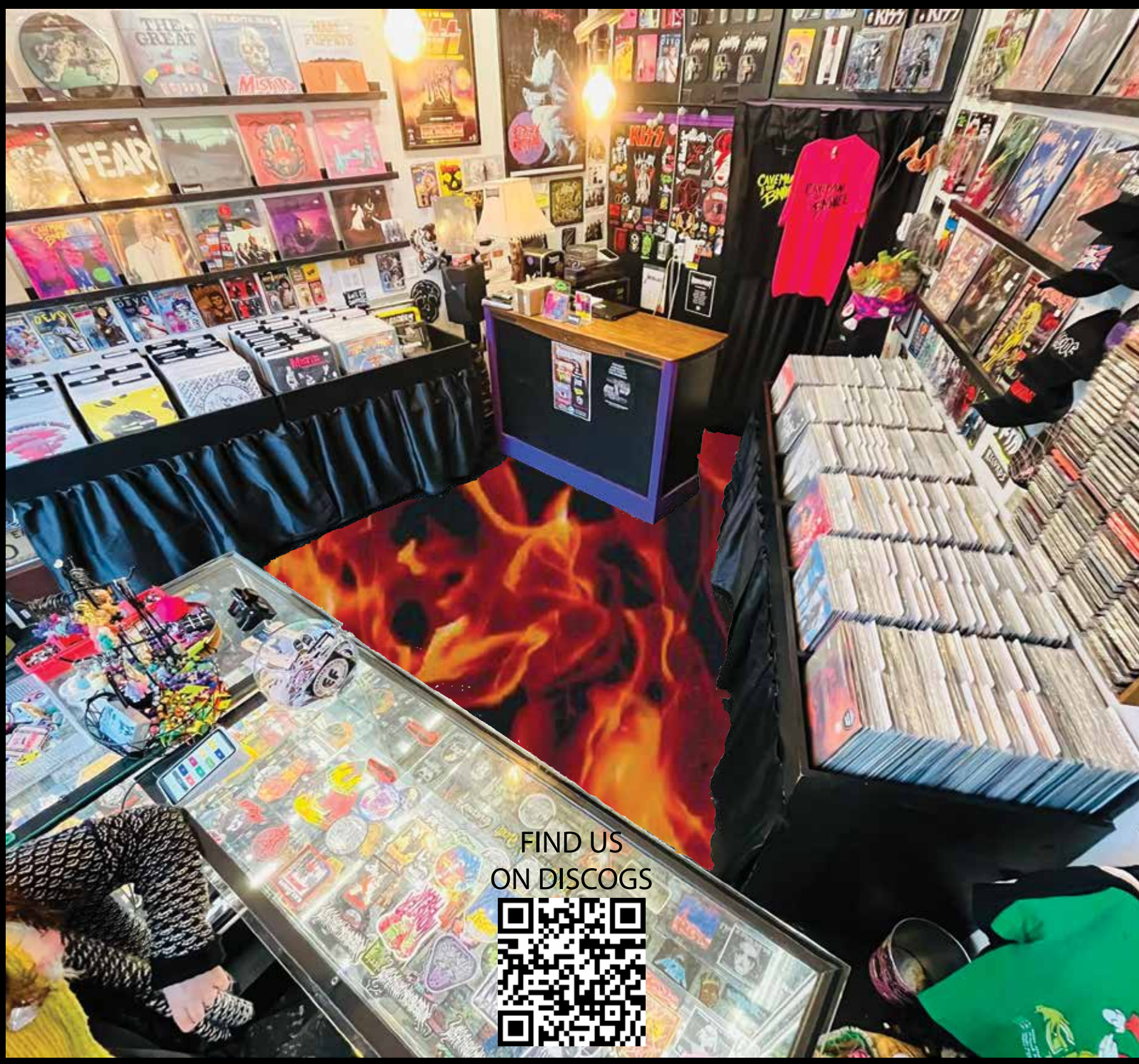

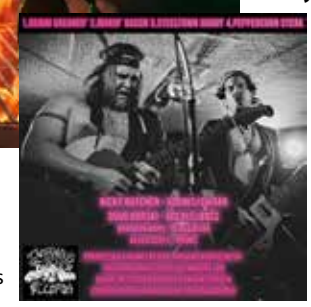

Back in the Butcher Shop: SONS OF BUTCHER Return

Interview with Ricky Butcher

By Asher Thrasher

After a decade-long hiatus, Canada's raunchiest rock-and-roll carnivores Sons of Butcher are back with *Skids*, a brand-new four-song EP and their most polished, unhinged material to date. Known for blending vulgar absurdist comedy with heavy riffs and chaotic live shows, the band is entering a new era — and *Absolute Underground* caught up with Ricky Butcher to talk about the new EP, the return of the band and life in Steeltown.

AU: Welcome back to *Absolute Underground Magazine*. What are Sons of Butcher up to these days?

Ricky Butcher: When we aren't rehearsing for our upcoming tour with BA Johnston, we're working on rebooting the old cartoon Sons of Butcher series for YouTube, but as a new live-action version! We're hoping to tie the live band into the cartoon universe, but reimagine it as if it were all real life. In addition to that, we just released our first EP of brand new material in over five years called *Skids*. We're already working on recording a follow-up EP and demoing for a full album! Lots going on in Steeltown!

AU: Your earlier albums were tied directly to the Teletoon series, but *Skids* marks the first time you've written songs that stand completely outside the cartoon's storyline. What did it feel like creatively to carve out this new identity? Did it feel liberating, terrifying, or just like slicing into a new cut of meat?

RB: It was a whole different writing process, getting deep into the minds of these cartoon characters and what makes them tick after 20 years. The answer was clear: Denim, Bacon, Handys and Steak. *Skids* was born! In a true reversal of process, writing these Sons of Butcher songs actually led me down the path of writing brand new scripts! This time, the songs lead me into the story instead of the other way around.

AU: It's the 420 issue here at *Absolute Underground*, do any of the band members partake?

RB: We all love a good blaze, except Doug.

AU: What's their favourite thing to do while high?

RB: Eat bacon, get handys and write songs!!

AU: Indica or sativa?

RB: Both, and plenty of both.

AU: Munchies of choice?

RB: Chips! Dips! Tits!

AU: You've always embraced vulgar absurdity, but *Skids* is described as your most "radio-ready" material to date. How did you balance staying true to your filthy, skid-life roots while polishing the songs enough to potentially corrupt the FM airwaves?

RB: The comedic barometer has shifted a bunch since the days of our show. We tried to give an honest vibe of Skid life without wandering too far into the gutter... we plan on moving INTO the gutter for the next release. Enjoy this radio-friendly SoB material while it lasts! After such a long hiatus, I found myself tiptoeing back into the role of Chief of Debauchery.

AU: Your first single, "Makin' Bacon", is described as a metal-forward track that almost derails itself with its chaotic structure. What inspired you to push the boundaries of your sound on this one, and how did you land on the idea of turning bacon worship into a full-blown rock opus?

RB: This track was written and re-written a bunch of times and a lot of the chaotic twists and turns came as a result of collaboration with drummer Kellii Scott. We wanted to push the boundary of how heavy a Sons of Butcher track can be while still maintaining a catchy vocal! The one line that started this whole song was "I am the Baconator... ." I literally stared at this line on the page for YEARS before it came together on the back of an instrumental "sting" I wrote for a TV show.

AU: Have you ever read this magazine on weed?

RB: Only on weed!

AU: Having Kellii Scott, your favourite drummer, play on the EP brings your origin story full circle. What was it like hearing your new songs come to life with him behind the kit, especially given the long history connecting Kellii, Jordon Zadorozny and the band?

RB: It has felt like a second Christmas to hear Kellii Scott drumming on MY SONGS! I love his style and his hard-hitting approach to all our tracks. It truly warmed my clogged heart to be able to reunite our producer Jordon Z. with his old drummer (from Blinker the Star) on this EP. Blinker the Star is still one of my favourite bands!

AU: The EP artwork captures your first show back after a ten-year hiatus. When you look at that photo now, what does it represent to you, musically, personally and in terms of the band's future as you head into the *Skids* era and your upcoming tour?

RB: The cover photo of this EP represents the rebirth of the characters of Ricky Butcher (me) and Doug Borski, almost rising from the ashes of the network cartoon show that was cancelled almost 20 years ago. Yet the band carries on! I like this particular photo from Randy Gilbert as it was taken at the climax of our set, and it shows the two main characters of the band alone, holding a rock pose in a vast stage of smoke. To me it feels like it's really the two of us carrying the Sons of Butcher torch into the future! We have since added two new members, Crissy Stixx on drums and Joey Salami on lead guitar.

AU: Anything else you'd like to add for our readers?

RB: Always adding new and different merch at sonsofbutcher.bandcamp.com/merch! We've got all the Skid essentials from toques to hoodies.

Photo Credit – Evan Thompson

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UNCLE OUTRAGE

Edmonton's Rising Cult Artist

Interview by Peter Illing

Absolute Underground: Who are you and what do you do?

Nils Rasmussen: I'm Nils Rasmussen, the founding member of my band, Uncle Outrage. If I had to explain UO's sound in a few words, I would say it's kind of like if Nine Inch Nails had a sense of humour.

AU: Tell me about your new album you've been working on.

NR: *Probably Robots*, which will drop in about a month, is UO's 8th full album. We've always had a strong cult following, but these new tracks are quickly getting TONS of new attention online, and a whole new generation is now discovering our 100+ tracks. My lyrics have always joked about UFOs and conspiracy theories in general, but this album really takes it a step further to lean into it.

AU: I've got to hear the album before the release. Major space themes happening here—is there someone or something else on the moon?

NR: 100%. The first single, "Someone Else Is On The Moon", is about the fact that the moon might be an artificial, hollow satellite that was built—not naturally formed. If you actually do ANY research on the moon, you instantly see how many aspects make no sense. NASA has satellite photos of artificial structures on the dark side of the moon. One whistleblower claims he worked for NASA during the Apollo program and he was ordered to airbrush out "bases on the moon". The idea that the public couldn't "handle the truth" or panic or whatever is total bullshit. Trump just confirmed that aliens are real in March and I don't see anyone freaking out.

AU: Tell me where the space and sci-fi love stems from?

NR: I saw my first UFO when I was just 11, back in 1996. That really made it so my formative years were sculpted around the fact that I knew that UFOs were real. From there, in the late '90s, I got into listening to *Coast to Coast AM* with Art Bell. Before the internet had anything near as much content as exists now, Art Bell was the radio show that took its listeners down all sorts of wild rabbit holes.

AU: What other influences are present?

NR: I don't try to sound like other bands—I've always wanted Uncle Outrage to stand on its own. Some bands that helped steer me in the right direction were Nine Inch Nails, Mindless Self Indulgence, DEVO, Future of the Left, Blink-182, Crass, NOFX and tons of other punk bands.

AU: You're an author in the sci-fi genre too. Do you have any new books in the works?

NR: Yeah, I have a few short stories which have been published, but I've been working on a humorous sci-fi detective novel. I'm going to be turning it into a full-blown audiobook and release it as the next "album".

AU: Is the lab in the Alchemy music video canon to the lab in I GOT A ROBOT?

NR: "I Got A Robot" is the 3rd music video where I'm a mad scientist. This just sort of happened by coincidence. Psychologists can read into that however they like.

AU: A lot of dope sounds on the new album. What did you program the virtual instruments with?

NR: I've tried tons of different software, but I always seem to come back to using Propellerhead's program, Reason. I've been using Reason for 25 years now and it's still the industry crown jewel.

AU: Who is the new collaborator that is in your latest music videos?

NR: UO has a long history of band members coming and going, but I've been working with Zane Noble as a bassist and for help with songwriting for the past three releases. He is just amazing. Out of ALL the musicians I've had the pleasure to work with, Zane is BY FAR my favourite to work with. It was always a balancing act before. I had to make constant compromises with what we wanted the band to be. Zane is the first who has been 100% on the same page as me.

AU: From 2025 till now you have grown 20,000 monthly listeners on Spotify alone, fans are bootlegging their UO merch, and I swear I've seen at least 5 new UO tattoos on Instagram. UO stardom is blowing up. How does it feel?

NR: It feels really strange, but I have to say—Uncle Outrage fans are the BEST. I've received over 300 emails with fan art. The people who get into UO get into it HARD. I always try to reply to everyone who writes to me, but it's getting to the point where, as hard as I try, I can't keep up with the amount of amazing letters bombing my inbox.

AU: What should all your new fans know about Nils and UO?

NR: If you want a band that truly does not give a fuck, Uncle Outrage will be your new favourite band. I started making music just for myself. The only reason I had an mp3.com page was because my dad's late '90s computer only had around 64 MB of storage. I was using mp3.com like Dropbox because the files took up too much space on the hard drive. Then I began getting fans and the rest is history.

AU: Nils, thank you for existing. Anything else you would like to tell the *Absolute Underground* readers?

NR: There is still plenty of room on the Uncle Outrage bandwagon as it just keeps gaining fans. If you take the time to **check UO out on YouTube and/or Spotify**, you can contact me and I'll take the time to write back. I love you guys so much. Uncle Outrage is really the most fun I have in life. The more the merrier.

Feel free to email Nils, he encourages it: uncleoutrage@gmail.com

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HIGHWAY

Interview with guitarist Ben Chambert

By Asher Thrasher

Absolute Underground: Your new album, *Last Call for Rock 'N' Roll*, out in April 2026, feels like both a rallying cry and a personal statement. At what moment did you realise this album was going to be more emotional and autobiographical than anything you'd done before?

Ben Chambert (guitar): Hi! The further I got into the writing process, the more I felt the need to write about personal experiences. The last few years haven't been easy on many levels. Writing about these themes, like in "Peace Out" (my divorce), "Mayday" (my father's passing), or "Bang Bang" (our internal conflicts), was a cathartic process. Before, I saw myself more as a storyteller, creating fictional or fantastical tales. But now, I felt the need to be more personal and open up to the fans, all while touching on universal themes that everyone can relate to. I guess that's what we call maturity, haha!

AU: The first single, "Hi-Way," marks a return to big riffs and high-voltage energy, but also introduces orchestral and atmospheric elements. How did you balance classic HighWay DNA with the new surprises you wanted to bring to fans?

BC: After our acoustic album *The Journey*—an experimental interlude we fully immersed ourselves in and which I consider a true artistic success—we wanted to return to a big rock sound with catchy riffs that get people headbanging! Our audience wanted that too. The track "Hi-Way" came from that desire, and it was the obvious choice for a first single: HighWay is back!

But *The Journey* left its mark, particularly on how we approached the backing vocals and orchestral arrangements—very Queen-like, which we love. We didn't just want to make a classic "big rock" record; we wanted to incorporate everything we learned from the previous album. Our producer, Brett Caldas-Lima, played a major role in the sound and these arrangements. He's kind of our Mutt Lange! Ultimately, *The Journey* was the springboard for this album. Our audience expects to be surprised, and they won't be disappointed. It's hard rock, but much more open-minded than before.

AU: You've said this album was crafted 'the old-fashioned way' with intense pre-production. After 25 years in the game, what did you do differently in the studio this time that changed the final sound?

BC: For the first time, we finally took the time to work with a real producer—to dissect every detail of every song to find what worked best for the compositions. We took the time to experiment and test the tones of each instrument. It was fascinating. In the past, we never had the necessary time (or the budget) to make a great album that we're 100% proud of, without any disappointments or regrets. This time we were able to do it, and it was an unforgettable experience that you can hear on every track of *Last Call for Rock 'N' Roll*.

AU: The new lineup seems to have transformed the band's chemistry, especially with Cerise and Florian joining. How did their arrival reshape the writing, the vocals, and the overall identity of HighWay moving forward?

BC: Their arrival was a breath of fresh air and completely revitalized the band. They are both excellent singers, and their contribution to the vocal harmonies is incredible. Florian is also a talented music theorist, which is a real asset for the vocal and musical arrangements. Not to mention the addition of a second guitar, which transforms our live sound in the best way possible. With two guitars and the new backing vocals, our sound has become monumental! We can't wait to perform this album live with this lineup.

AU: Several songs form a thematic trilogy about self-determination ("Go! Go! Go!", "Let Me", "D.K/D.C"). What pushed you to explore this idea of breaking free from judgment and living life on your own terms?

BC: My personal experience and that of those around me, haha! "Go! Go! Go!" was inspired by Arnold Schwarzenegger's biography. His life journey and determination are limitless and very inspiring. As a child of the '90s, I grew up with his movies and his story. He also inspired the song "90s Action Movie", a nostalgic ode to films where everything felt simpler and more innocent than today... and it feels good.

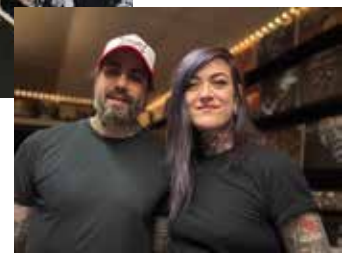
The trilogy you mentioned is about that theme: living your life to the fullest, not listening to the critics, fuck the haters, working hard and visualizing your goals—the "law of attraction" set to music. All with one goal: to be happy! Because in the end, that's all that matters, even if life is full of obstacles.

AU: You've described this record as your most mature and diverse, yet still pure hard rock. When fans listen from "Last Call" to "(Don't) Look Back", what journey do you hope they feel, musically and emotionally?

BC: Great question. It's a HighWay rollercoaster! Listeners will experience everything that makes us human. There's fun, laughter, love, rage, passion, sadness, melancholy, and nostalgia… but in the end, there is hope and light. Closing the album with "Don't Look Back" is very meaningful. Its angelic and luminous finale after such an emotional journey is a metaphor for the tumultuous lives we lead. The lyrics say it all: Love yourself and don't look back! It's one of my favorite HighWay tracks ever.

AU: Anything else you would like to add for our readers?

BC: Thank you to all the readers of *Absolute Underground Magazine*. Thank you for your attention and for supporting the underground rock scene! Buying albums and going to shows is what allows this scene to thrive. A huge thank you for that! I hope you enjoy listening to the album as much as we enjoyed writing and recording it. Pure passion! See you at a show! Santé et Merci!



METAL, INK AND VINYL: INSIDE MOURNING STAR TATTOOS & RECORDS

In Hamilton, Ontario, Mourning Star Tattoos & Records is bringing two worlds that have always belonged together under one roof: heavy music and tattoo culture. Part record shop, part tattoo studio, Mourning Star is a one-stop destination for metalheads, collectors and anyone looking for custom ink or hard-to-find records. Owners Adam and Angel spoke with *Absolute Underground* about the shop, the scene and building a space where music and art collide.

Absolute Underground: Who are we talking to and what are you most famous and/or infamous for?

Adam & Angel: Hi, you're talking to Adam and Angel, owners and operators of Mourning Star Tattoos & Records. Adam handles all the music side and Angel the tattoos.

AU: Tell us about the concept and origin of Mourning Star Tattoos & Records in Hamilton, Ontario.

A&A: We decided to put the best of both worlds together and make it a one-stop shop. Usually, music and tattoos go hand in hand, so we combined our passions and created a space under one roof that offers tattoo collectors and metalheads something fresh and what seems to be unheard of.

AU: What is your mission statement as a business?

A&A: We hope to provide a unique space to cater to the needs of our customers.

AU: What's the shop's vibe and aesthetic and what makes it unique in your opinion?

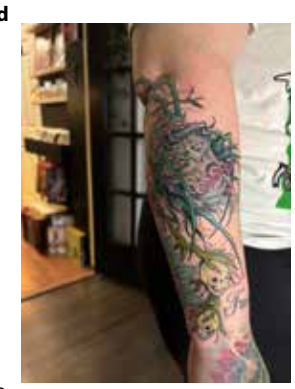
A&A: The vibe when you walk in the door is what you'd expect from a metal shop, top to bottom with merchandise covering all metal subgenres, and there's something for everyone. At the back of the record shop is a cozy and inspiring, creative and nicely decorated tattoo studio space. What's unique is that you can shop for your record collection while your tattoo stencil dries, or browse tattoo flash when you pick up the newest records!

AU: What sorts of records do you stock and what sort of tattoos do you rock?

A&A: Metal, hardcore, punk and a little bit of new wave. Tattoos are all custom designed, illustrative/new school.

AU: Do you sell anything besides records?

A&A: Yes we do! We have CDs, tapes, T-shirts, long sleeves, hoodies, patches, books, tattoo prints, pins and other miscellaneous cool shit!



AU: How long have you been a tattoo artist? What got you started?

A&A: I've been tattooing since 2014, so roughly 12 years. I started tattooing because I love art and wanted to be able to create something lasting and meet cool people along the way. I love collecting tattoos on myself also, so that first tattoo I got solidified my path instantly.

AU: What style of tattooing are you best known for?

A&A: I have always been told I have a unique and recognizable style, but I am still unsure of what to call it. I think it's somewhere along the lines of imaginative illustrative artwork, with an influence of new school and surrealism.

AU: What other tattoo artists work at the shop and what skills and styles do they bring to the table?

A&A: Jessica Victoria will be starting with us April 2026. She is a black and grey artist offering illustrative custom work.

AU: What's the craziest request for a tattoo the shop has gotten so far?

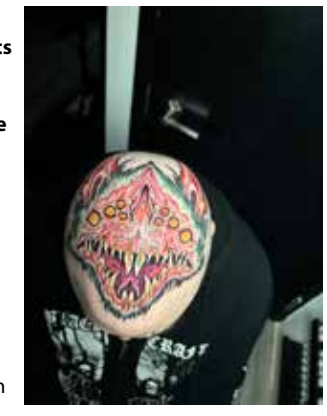
A&A: We've only been open since mid February this year, but tattooing in Hamilton's a trip in itself, and we would need a whole segment on that subject!

AU: What sorts of music are usually playing at the shop?

A&A: Everything metal! … and sometimes Rush!

AU: Anything else you want the readers to know about you and your shop?

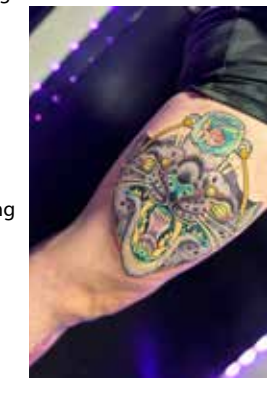
A&A: If you're in the GTA and are into rare and hard-to-find metal records, cool unique tattoos and tons of wicked music and artwork, this place is for you!



AU: Any special events planned in the future or anything else you want to mention or promote?

A&A: Angel will be tattooing at NIX Tattoo Convention, the Northern Ink Xposure in Toronto, the weekend of May 1–3.

Our store is located at 95 Ottawa Street North in Hamilton, Ontario. This street is a lively community and hosts many events during the year, with this upcoming May 9 event being "Sew Hungry," a food truck festival. The street will be shut down and we will have a sidewalk sale. Come check it out**!**



AU: How do people set up an appointment and find you online?

A&A: The best way to **contact for tattoo bookings is angelbondtattoos@gmail.com** for general inquiries, but our social media is updated daily with new tattoo designs and tattoos made in our studio space. **Check us out on Instagram**! **Our social media platforms are as follows:**

@mourningstartattoosandrecords

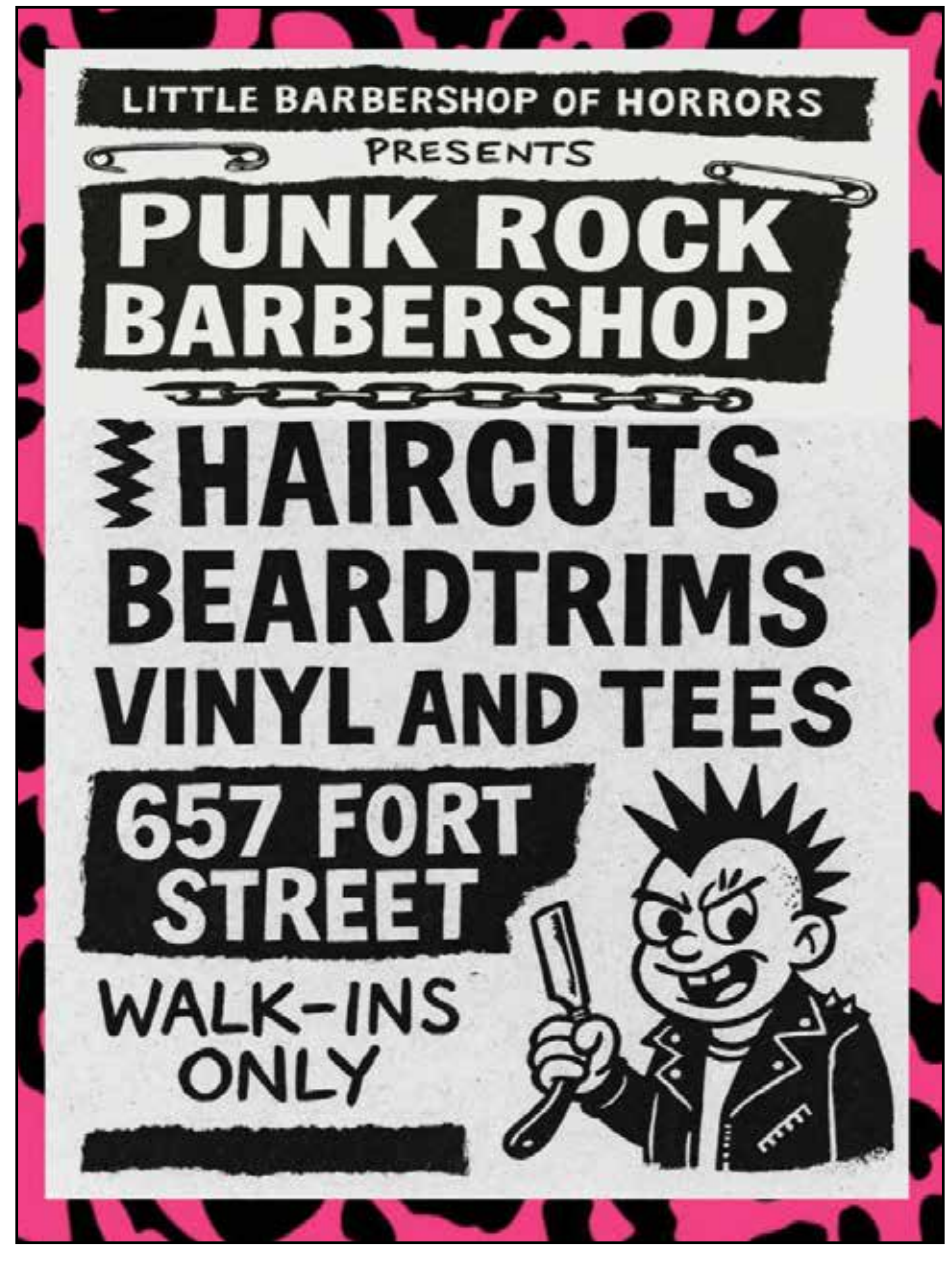
@mourningstarrecordshop

@mourningstartattoos

@angelbondtattoos

AU: Any final words?

A&A: We want to thank *Absolute Underground* for taking the time to set this up. If this magazine is something you like, you sure as hell will like our store! Many thanks!



ROBERTA BAYLEY

Shoot to Kill

By John Carlow

I maintain an ongoing interest in the creative story behind certain treasured album covers. One such classic was the Ramones' first album. I started on a journey to find out all about that particular shoot, the photographer behind it and many other images of hers that are still sought after and coveted today. I was fortunate enough to have a chance to talk with Roberta Bayley in NY about her life and work.

Roberta worked the door at CBGBs in a magical time when bands like the Ramones, Television, The Heartbreakers, Suicide, Talking Heads and Blondie frequented the small stage. People saw these now legendary bands for $2 to $5, and Roberta was free to take photographs of these "friends," not knowing then she was shooting music history.

As the 80s rolled over, record labels became more rigid, some of the same bands got bigger, and the prospect of being a "professional" music photographer loomed. Roberta was no longer just shooting musician friends, and the advanced era of digital didn't hold a lot of interest anymore, so she moved on. Today, her work from 76 – 87 primarily is celebrated widely.

"Roberta Bayley was born in Pasadena, California, and grew up in the San Francisco Bay Area where she was an avid music fan and saw the Beatles, the Rolling Stones, the Kinks, the Who, the Byrds and Bob Dylan, among many others. She attended San Francisco State University for three years before moving to London in 1971, where she worked briefly for Malcolm McLaren and Vivienne Westwood at their Kings Road store Let It Rock.

Arriving in New York in the spring of 1974, Bayley soon began working the door at CBGBs, New York's legendary punk club. She started photographing the musicians who played there and soon went to work as chief photographer for Punk magazine, which gave the movement its name. She is one of the main photographers to visually chronicle the early punk rock scene, from 1975 through the 80s.

Among the artists Bayley has photographed are Iggy Pop, the Ramones, Debbie Harry and Blondie, Richard Hell, Elvis Costello, the Sex Pistols, Johnny Thunders and the Heartbreakers, Ian Dury, Brian Eno, Nick Lowe, The Damned, The Clash, The Dead Boys, X-Ray Spex, Squeeze and a reunited New York Dolls.

Bayley's photographs are featured in countless books and magazines on punk. She co-wrote Patti Smith: An Unauthorized Biography (Simon & Schuster, 1996) and published her own book on Blondie titled Blondie Unseen (Plexus) in 2006. Bayley's photographs have been exhibited worldwide."

Absolute Underground: When did you first show an interest in photography?

Roberta Bayley: I was always interested in looking at photographs from a young age. My family subscribed to *LIFE magazine* which had features by all the great photojournalists of the 50s & 60s. We also had a copy of the catalogue from MOMA's groundbreaking photo exhibit *The Family of Man*. I didn't put that photography together with the "amateur Brownie Kodak family photos" we took, and had always taken for generations, although in my grandparents' childhoods most photos were formal portraits. It wasn't until the 60s I began to realize that you could take "serious" photos, I guess it came from looking at photos of pop groups and fashion magazines and seeing Antonioni's film *Blow Up*. The Swingin' 60s. So, in 1966 I took a photo class in high school and took my first "serious" photos and learned the basics of developing and printing. I seemed to have a knack for it and liked it. I guess I was 15 or 16.

AU: What equipment did you start on?

RB: In high school it was Yashica. Around 1969 in college, I got the bug again and bought a used Nikon F. I took some photos then, but I didn't have a darkroom. I sold that camera and went to England. My first camera in New York was a used Pentax Spotmatic and then I switched to Olympus OM1. I primarily shot and developed black and white, though I did love colour, but it was costly. You had to involve a lab. You can't imagine the level of poverty back then, so cost was always a consideration. It may have been a good thing, as it forced you to be economical in your shooting.

AU: When would you say was the best era to be a music photographer?

RB: Oh, I think the best time was probably the 60s! Dezo Hoffman, Robert Freeman, Gerard Mankowitz, David Bailey. Astrid Kircherr — The Beatles 1962! Does it get any better than that? All the fashion photographers were taking photos of rock bands — Brian Duffy, Jerry Schatzberg. And then Jim Marshall, David Gahr and all those San Francisco photographers in the Summer of Love days, Baron Wolman, Herb Greene. Things were just so wide open, nobody was thinking about the future. Not too many women though, except Annie (Leibovitz). Punk did open up a lot of room for women to take photos of rock stars. It became normal, not exceptional.

AU: You seemed to primarily shoot smaller venues as opposed to larger arena type staging. Which did you prefer?

RB: Small gigs absolutely. I don't know if I ever shot in big arenas. Only if I had a pass to be in the pit, which was rare. With live photography you had to compete with other photographers, it was tricky and I just wasn't a big fan of it. Jim Marshall was one of the best live photographers then. I prefer candid, like a photojournalist. Fly on the wall approach. I didn't know how to deal with record companies — I thought they should be calling me! A lot of the bands I was shooting were friends. I never shot anyone I was intimidated by. I never had a fancy setup in a studio. Maybe shot once or twice in a studio. Rarely posed anyone. I would just capture who they really were.

AU: First band you ever shot?

RB: The Heartbreakers were roll numbers 4 and 5 on my camera. I did a lot of photography for The Heartbreakers. The photo used on the cover of *Please Kill Me* was taken in my apartment. Placement on that cover reignited interest in that shoot and I sold a few prints.

AU: You said you never got paid much?

RB: There was no money in it when I was shooting. Luckily living in that part of New York was cheap then. Never really got paid, few exceptions. I did get $600 to shoot KISS. After CBGBs (75 to 78) I went to work for Blondie for a year for $150.00 a week. I worked with the publicist and was sort of a runner. They hadn't really been successful in America yet. I was hired to do the Sex Pistols tour in America. I took a lot of pictures then because everything was paid for. Ultimately, they weren't my most commercial subjects.

AU: You famously shot the Ramones' first LP cover while writing for Punk. Did you ever get inklings that the people you were shooting would become legends?

RB: I thought the Ramones were legendary right from the get-go. They were just so unique. Sire Records didn't like the photos from the photographer that had been hired to shoot their first album so went looking for what had already been shot of them. They chose one of mine for the cover, plus another for publicity uses. I was paid $125.00 for the shot in Albert's Garden. I sell a contact sheet blowup of the street shots from that shoot for *Punk Magazine*. They were the most resonant part of my career. I saw The Stooges in 1970 and I didn't know what it was, but I knew I'd never seen anything like it. Unfortunately, the music business was (and is) so conservative. The majority of people go for the familiar. I suppose it reinforces their world view! Elvis and the Beatles were the last time that the public consensus converged with my tastes.

AU: Most memorable shoot?

RB: In retrospect, the Ramones. At the time, Iggy. Iggy was like the holy grail of the punk movement. It was a big deal when the Stooges came to New York, and I shot all the photos for their cover piece in *Punk Magazine*. Shooting Iggy was more important to me than if someone said I'd be shooting Mick Jagger.

AU: Who did you shoot that you got closest to as a friend?

RB: That's a tough one because some of the people I was closest to (who are still alive) I don't speak to anymore. I'm most proud of still being friends with Debbie Harry after 50 years. She is a stellar human being, and I treasure knowing her.

AU: Pick one of your pictures on your wall. Why did it get there and why did it get singled out?

RB: I'm right now looking at one of Baron Wolman's photos of Pamela Des Barres from her GTO days. Not long before he died, I traded photos with Baron and got this one of Pamela that I loved. I've known her since her book came out in the 80s. She's such a doll (as she would say!). He received a photo I did of Sid Vicious. I traded with Andrew Kent for a Bowie in Paris 75–76. He was Bowie's main photographer at the time. I frame photos for my wall. I have a few of my own, but mostly work by others.

AU: How did things change for you with the rise of digital?

RB: I never clicked with shooting in digital and so after a few failed comebacks I basically retired. I just started losing interest. It all started changing in the 80s. When digital photography came on I did think I was going to switch to digital. I got a cover shoot for The Strokes but I still didn't really know what I was doing with the digital camera, and they were just about to break up so it was an uncomfortable photo session. I liked setting it all up but they broke up right after that and the magazine didn't use those pictures. It wasn't part of a big thought process. It's just something I didn't want to do. I didn't want to shoot people I didn't know or go into this big profession. It just didn't appeal to me.

AU: Biggest hurdles in your photography career?

RB: "Being professional" vs. Having a good time. That's why I retired early.

AU: What is your measure of success?

RB: Having a good time!

AU: Any advice for up-and-coming music photographers?

RB: Don't expect to make money. Shoot what you love. Enjoy what you do. When that stops; get out.

AU: Best place to find your work?

RB: My dealer's website is **musicphoto.net**

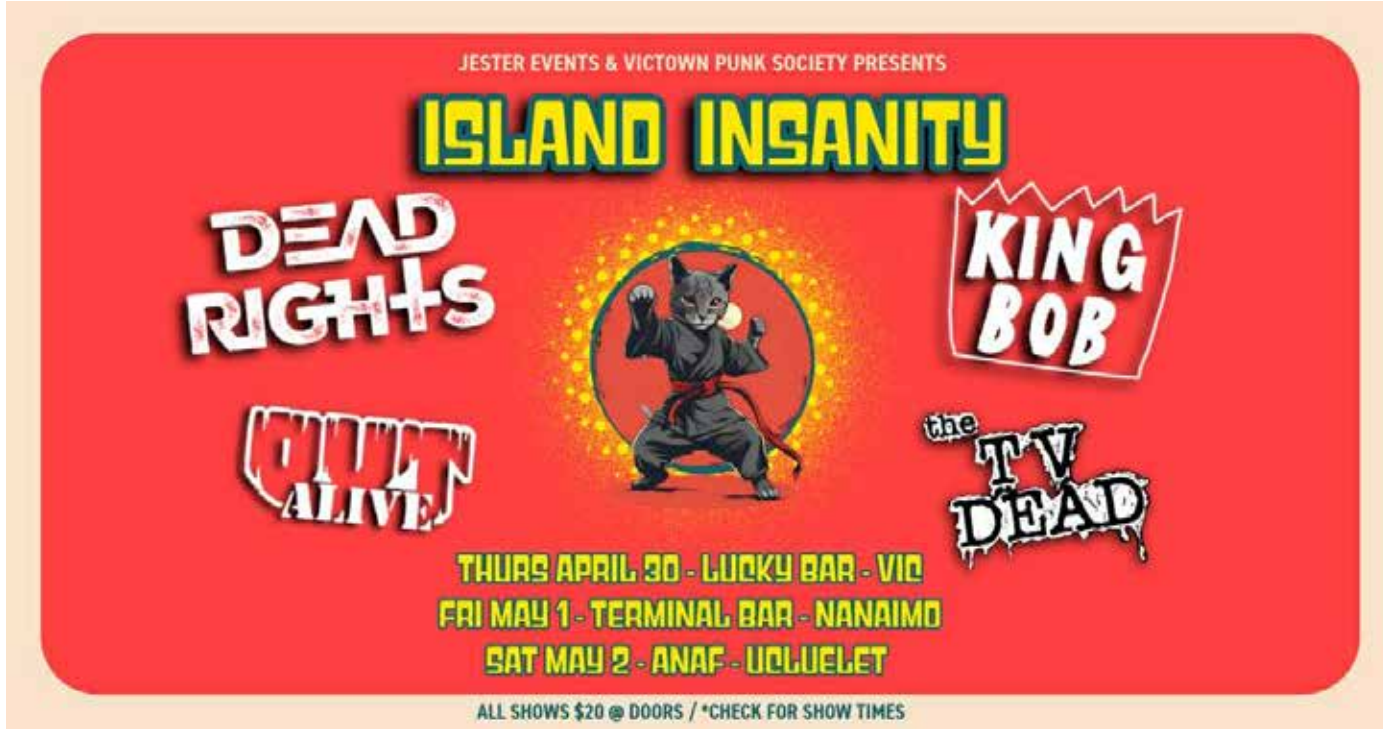
AU: What's on the road ahead?

RB: I like to take things as they come. I hate making plans!

AU: Thank you, Roberta.

Photo credits: Blondie CBGBs 1976, Cover shoot outake Ramones, Iggy and Ramones 1976, by Roberta Bayley; Roberta Bayley at CBGBs 1977 (c) GODLIS

Bio excerpt used with permission. Roberta Bayley.



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BURNT LUNG: High on Doom, Heavy on Vibes

Interview by Ray MacKay

AU: Who are we talking to and what are your skills to pay the bills?

Harry: Hey, I'm Harry, and I play guitar and do vocals in the stoner doom band Burnt Lung. I also just started doing vocals in a new Death Grind band called Void of Mercy. To pay my bills and support my musical endeavours, I work a day job driving around, setting up tents for film and events in the Lower Mainland. It's not really going anywhere, but I'm able to take as much time off as I need for music.

AU: For our unfamiliar readers, please give us a brief history of Burnt Lung.

Harry: Burnt Lung is my greatest joy in life, man. I started this band about seven years ago, and it's been a beautiful journey. We've had some lineup changes over the years, which held us back for a bit, but ever since Aaron and Sol joined, we have really started rolling.

AU: Who is in the band?

Harry: The lineup for the Lung is currently me on guitar and vocals, Sol on drums and Aaron on bass. There was a running joke about a "Spinal Tap" curse going for a while as we cycled through drummers, but as soon as we found Sol, we really hit the vein, and I would say the same about finding Aaron. I couldn't be more stoked on how things have been going since.

AU: Where are y'all from, and what is the music scene like there?

Harry: I grew up in New Westminster, while Sol and Aaron are more Vancouver-based. New West is pretty sweet; the staple of the music scene here is definitely Bully's Studios. We have been jamming at the Front in New West for a while now. There are a lot of amazing musicians down there. It's crazy to crazy as hell to hear bands like Anciients and Black Wizard jamming down the hall. That kind of environment is so inspiring.

We have also recorded both our self-titled EP and upcoming full-length album at Little Red Sound Studios with Michael Kraushaar.

The Vancouver music scene has much talent and passion flowing here. I have to mention Kelowna, Nanaimo, Victoria and Nelson, B.C., which all feel like home now, too. We have gotten so much help from our peers and are happy to pass that on to the next band that needs it. You gain nothing from holding this information back, and we all gain so much from having better bands around. We encourage everyone to reach out to the bands and artists they look up to; everyone is always happy to help, and that's how we grow our scene to make it even stronger.

AU: We know words can barely capture the stoner doom radness that is Burnt Lung, but if possible, try to explain your sound to our readers.

Harry: In essence, I would say a deep, religious-like devotion to the enlightenment of Black Sabbath. Once you have let Iommi into your heart as the one true lord and saviour, the path is clear.

It's Sabbath worship at a core, but if we are talking about influence, which is what Burnt Lung is, I would say Sabbath, Megadeth and a lot of Alice in Chains would be the unholy trifecta. *Rust in Peace* changed my life, Alice in Chains probably saved it, and Black Sabbath is Black Sabbath.

We love to play and want to show you everything we've got, every single time. My goal for this band has always been to play for as many people as possible and bring any sort of comfort, relief or enlightenment, to anyone who needs it. Being able to perform for people feels like such a privilege, and there's no feeling in the world that even comes close to playing your music on stage, to people who want to listen. I'm gonna chase that feeling until the day I die.

AU: What can you tell us about your new single, "DMT"?

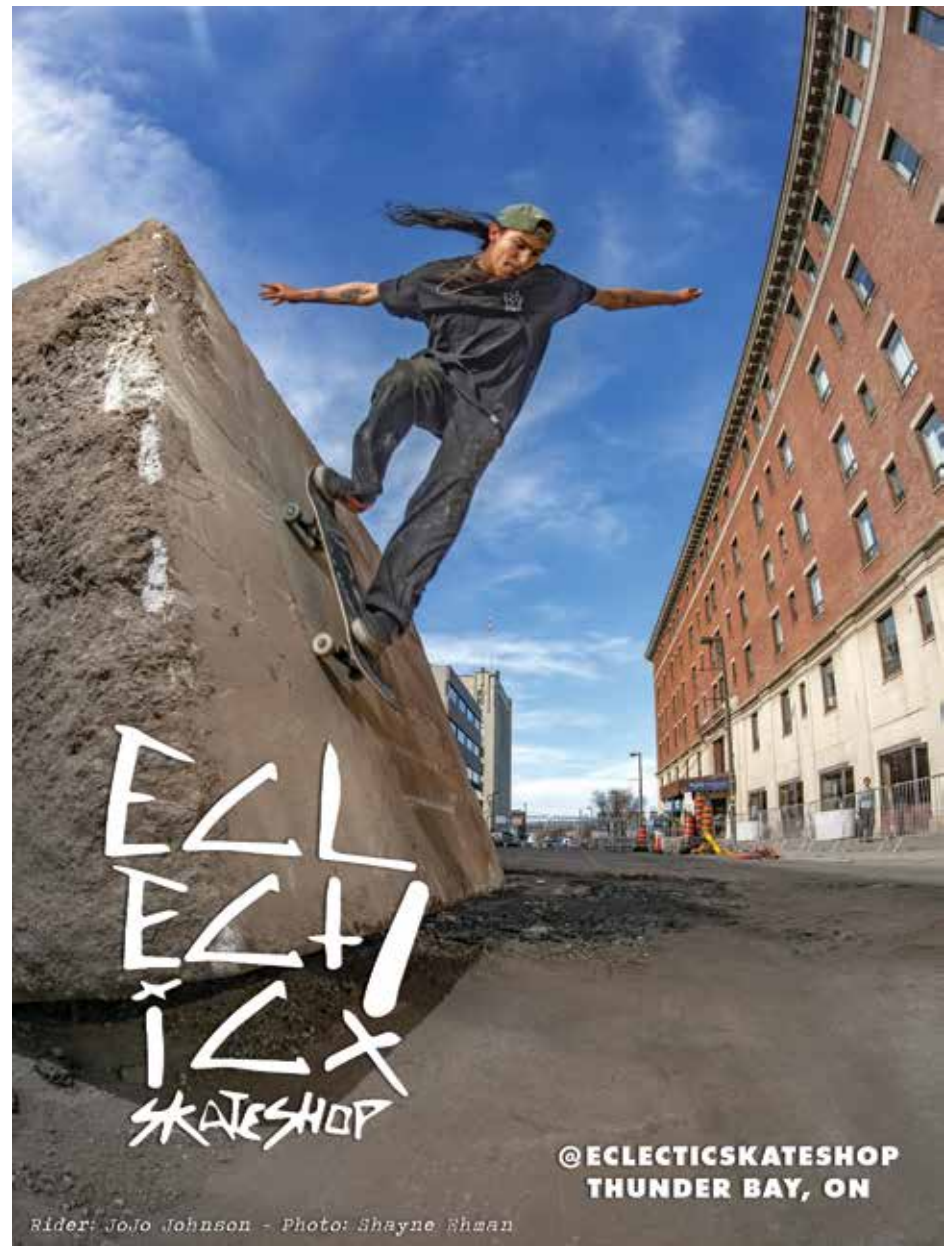
Harry: I wrote most of this song after a nice trip into space; the main riff and lyrics came to me almost instantly after I woke up. It's about enlightenment, the other side and the entities that inhabit those spaces. I have never had a song come to me like that before; it was kinda spooky.

AU: "DMT" is just one of the trippy tracks on your upcoming debut album, *Slave to the Sun*, which will be released on April 4th, 2026.

Harry: "DMT" is one of seven brand new songs we have recorded on *Slave to the Sun*, we are very happy to have it finished and ready for your ears. Working with Michael Krausher at Little Red Sound studio is such a pleasure. He has done so many amazing albums for so many of the bands we love and has become a good friend. Love ya dude!

AU: Tell us about the creative process behind *Slave to the Sun*?

Harry: I have a lot of riffs in the bank and sometimes they start to pile up, so I'm usually down at our studio most nights working on them.



I'll have these riffs in my head all day at work until I can get back home to play them. Some are easier than others to fit together, so I'll sit on some for a while until I can get some basic structure before showing the guys.

We will usually just jam the song for a while as a warm up jam until we all get comfortable with our parts, then tweak it if need be. I always have an idea for the theme but usually finish the lyrics last. We have also come up with stuff on the spot while jamming so I always have my phone ready to record just in case. There is already a huge dent in the next album as well as some semi-acoustic songs for a *SAP* / "Nutshell" style EP called *Lungplugged* that I'm pretty stoked on, but it's on the back burner for now.

AU: If you could hire anyone to do your album art, who would you pick?

Harry: There are so many good artists, and I discover new ones every day, but off the top of my head, Arik Roper or David V. D'Andrea would be two that come to mind. Their work is iconic; if I had to choose, I might go with D'Andrea. The work he has done for Om and Yob has a powerful, psychedelic, higher consciousness feel that definitely resonates with our style.

AU: What's your favorite song to perform live?

Harry: It changes from time to time, but I think we would all agree on "DMT". "Rest and Rot" is another one for sure and has sorta become our ending song, so it really feels right when we finish playing it, say goodnight and start tearing down gear. I love playing music with these dudes, so everything we play becomes my favourite when we are all in the pocket.

AU: What're some highlights of your career to-date?

Harry: Being from New West, it was pretty special when we first played a show at Bully's, we have so much love for that place and everyone involved there. Playing MASSIF MUSIC Fest in 2025 was a huge highlight. The way they treated us made us feel like rock stars. Nelson is one of the most beautiful places I have even been, being put up in a hotel and getting taken care of all weekend was magical. They really showed us a glimpse of what that next level feels like, and it has given us even more drive to push harder to get even better. Something about seeing a meat and cheese platter in the green room really makes you feel like you've made it haha.

MASSIF MUSIC is a family, and I couldn't be more proud to be a part of it. I encourage everyone to apply to play or volunteer.

Possibly the biggest and most recent highlight though would be playing the Rickshaw Theatre for the first time, opening for Bison. It was a goal for us since day one, and we have all spent so much time there over the years that playing there just felt right and validating as a musician. It has always been my favourite venue, and to play on the same stage as some of my heroes is a feeling I will cherish forever.

AU: It's the 420 issue here at *Absolute Underground*, do you puff the chronic?

Harry: I do enjoy the comforts of the holy herb. I'm the only one in the band these days who really partakes, but it's not a big deal. What works for some people doesn't always work for others.

AU: What's your favourite thing to do while high?

Harry: My favourite things in the world to do, stoned or not, are to play, write and listen to music. Creating art never gets old, and there are so many outlets for it. I also love to hang out with my cat, Hash.

AU: Indica or sativa? Best name for a strain you have ever heard?

Harry: I love a good stanky indica. I also really enjoy a nice sativa, but it seems harder to find consistently. I remember trying a strain back in the day called BC Roadkill, which was amazing. Another would be one called 9lb Hammer or Stripper Spit haha.

AU: If you could name a strain what would it be?

Harry: It would be cool to be able to throw some "Burnt Lung" in the bong. It's as much of a dream to be on the cover of *High Times* as it is to be on the cover of *Rolling Stone*… hahaha, well almost.

AU: Munchies of choice?

Harry: A big old donair, or some Hawkins Cheezies. Maybe wash it down with an Arizona Iced Tea.

AU: Weirdest thing to ever happen to you while baked outta your skull?

Harry: I don't know about weird, but I remember (barely) seeing Cypress Hill perform live on 4/20 down by Sunset Beach at exactly 4:20, playing "Hits from the Bong" as I hit my bong. If I recall correctly, the city of Vancouver tried to shut it down, but they decided to proceed anyway. That was a beautiful day.

AU: Best stoner band?

Harry: When I think of a stoner band, I think of Sleep or Electric Wizard. They are probably my favourite marijuana-themed bands, along with Sabbath, of course. I have never seen more weed being gifted and thrown on stage to a band than while Sleep was playing, but I also don't know a band that deserves it more.

AU: Best weed movie?

Harry: Maybe one of the Trailer Park Boys movies. I grew up watching the show and could probably quote the first few seasons from memory. That or *Tenacious D*.

Tony and Ozzy were on the cover of *High Times*, so probably them. I'm a big fan of Bill Hicks and I know he smoked, but if we are including fictional characters, I would say Ricky from the *Trailer Park Boys*. I always wished I could have smoked a joint with Gord Downie. I really love that guy.

AU: Any plans for 420 this year?

Harry: If it's nice out, I might go skateboarding around downtown or to the beach and see what everyone's up to, share our new single and try to find some nice bubble hash.

AU: Anything else to promote? Any final words for our readers?

Harry: I mean, **stay tuned for the full release of *Slave to the Sun* later this year.** We are gonna put out another single first, so there's that too. **We are opening for one of my favourite Canadian stoner bands, called Dopethrone, at the Rickshaw on May 16th**, as well as **playing the annual Wheelies Motorcycle Cafe parking show in Victoria in June with our buds in Black Wizard, Franklin and Everage** to name a few.

AU: How do people find you online?

Harry: We are most active on Instagram: @burntlung, but come down to a show, come say hey at the merch booth. We hope to see you all soon, and thanks for reading this!

Album Artwork: Unggunn Yulianto

Photo credits:

Colin Smith, @colinsmithtakespics / Rock The Mosh Sooke B.C. 2025

Drew Wadden / @drewadden / Jackknife Brewing Kelowna B.c. 2025

Noah Edwards, @noahshredwards / The Globe Live Studio In Nanaimo B.C. 2026

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VALYEAR: An Invitation to Chaos

By FLORA

Toronto's Valyear is back with a vengeance. As they prepare to release their second album, *An Invitation to Chaos*, the band opens up about heavy riffs, personal battles, and the unfiltered passion that fuels their music. AU caught up with the brothers behind the chaos to get the story straight from the source.

AU: For readers discovering the band for the first time, who are we talking to today and what's currently happening in the world of Valyear?

We are the band VALYEAR and we hail from Toronto, Ontario, Canada. We are currently about to release our second album, *An Invitation to Chaos*, and about to embark on a small tour across Ontario to warm up for future dates that are in the works as we speak!

AU: Your new album *An Invitation to Chaos* arrived March 24, 2026. What can fans expect from this next chapter of the band?

We took our sound to the next level from our previous album, *Revolution Fear*! We really honed in on who we are on this album. Not to take anything away from *Revolution Fear*, because we love, and are very proud of that album. But we took the best moments of that album and brought that to *Chaos* and upped the ante! If you like heavy riffs, big choruses, and great hooks, we are your band!

AU: *An Invitation to Chaos* is a powerful title. What does that phrase mean to you and how does it reflect the mindset behind the record?

This album was basically an autobiography of my life while I was getting clean. I thought when I got off alcohol and drugs that my life was going to calm down. However, I ended up going through some of my hardest challenges clean. I didn't have the numbing agents in my system anymore… so I had to go through the feels… and that was very chaotic! The cleaner I got, however, the more I shed the shackles of the chaos I was engulfed in. Realizing you are as addicted to chaos as you are addicted to drugs is a harsh reality and a huge realization.

AU: Your sound blends classic hard rock swagger with modern heaviness. How do influences like Skid Row, Mötley Crüe and Drowning Pool shape what Valyear does today?

Growing up listening to those bands showed us what swagger and showmanship looked like. A lot of bands today have really lost that in my opinion. I miss the days of debauchery in Rock & Roll! It seems to be getting really stale. We really love the idea of being a dirty, heavy, rock band like they were!

AU: The band has built a reputation for groove-heavy riffs and emotional intensity. How did the chemistry between the four of you shape the sound of this album in the studio?

We are brothers first. We aren't afraid to be honest when writing and we get the songs as close to finished as possible before we record them. We spend a lot of time on preproduction and we really encourage each other. We represent each other and we want to honor each other as we are all equally responsible for what comes out. If one of us sucks… we all suck and we love each other too much to let that happen.

AU: Guitarist Marc Rizzo (Soulfly) appears on "Suffer." How did that collaboration come together and what did he bring to the track?

We opened for Marc in Toronto at The Rockpile. He was such a cool and humble guy and he is a brilliant musician. He was very kind to us and after we played I messaged him to thank him for such a great show and he, out of nowhere, offered to play a solo on one of our tracks. First, I was blown away by what he offered and second, I wasted absolutely no time sending him the track before he could change his mind. Lol! I sent the track. He sent it back and the solo was epic!! Like DEADLY!! We were elated and so happy with the way it turned out. Marc is a super cool guy and we stay in touch. I hope to play with him again if we end up in the States or he ends up back here we will make that happen!!

AU: The record explores some heavy emotional ground. When writing these songs, were you aiming more for personal catharsis or for connecting with listeners who may be going through similar struggles?

That has always been my mission. I want people to know there is always a way out. We don't have to stay stuck in our messes. I often wish I could show people the side I am on first. Then they could see how beautiful it is on the other side of pain. However… the only way through it is through it. So I'm gonna cheer them on through music and encourage their fight!

AU: Your live shows are known for their intensity and connection with the audience. How do you translate the emotional weight of this album onto the stage?

The songs are so strong all we have to do is deliver them with the passion we wrote them with. We are very connected up there because we are brothers. So we just stay honest. Nothing we do is contrived! So staying real, staying vigilant and staying passionate… people can relate to that!

AU: When fans hear *An Invitation to Chaos* for the first time, what kind of experience do you hope they walk away with?

I want people to relate to us. I want to build a connection through honesty and passion. I want people to walk away knowing that any of us can overcome horrible circumstances and we want to cheer people on while they fight! Be the soundtrack to their battles!

AU: It's our 420 issue — does weed culture naturally fit into the punk lifestyle, or do you just roll it into your shows for extra chaos?

I, personally, am in recovery. I have lost the privilege of any mind-altering substances. However, the guys aren't like me… so they are known to have a few drinks. But yes… I find most musicians that I know love weed and weed culture. I get it. I just abused my rights and privilege with it so I don't engage anymore.

AU: Which Valyear song hits the hardest in a perfectly "enhanced" listening session?

For me I really like "Pale Face" and "Psycho." I think they could be appreciated after a good bud session! Lol.

AU: Ideal scenario: full fridge, good bud, and a classic record — what's playing and where are you?

When I would indulge, I loved a few bowls, headphones on with albums like *Transmission* by The Tea Party or *Dig* by I Mother Earth. Those are great weed albums!

AU: Looking ahead, what's next for Valyear — touring plans, more videos, or the next chapter after *An Invitation to Chaos*?

We are doing a small run through Ontario to see how that goes to prepare for a bigger run. We don't really stop working. We have already started writing the next album and have most of the music written. But we won't start that album until we are done with the cycle of *Chaos*. So lots of shows over the next year and we will go from there!

AU: Where can we find you online?

Website: selfmaderecordsllc-business.com/valyear

Bandcamp: valyear.bandcamp.com

Instagram: @valyearband

Photo credit: Sofya Oliver

DRUGLORDS OF THE AVENUES

By Chuck Andrews

Absolute Underground: Who am I speaking to and what is your role in Druglords of the Avenues?

Matt Grayson: Matt Grayson. Me and Johnny Bonnel started this band in 2004. I write the music and play guitar; he writes the lyrics. Our band members contribute their parts after the song is structured.

AU: Where is the band from?

MG: East Bay California, Modesto, California and space.

AU: When did Druglords of the Avenues form and how did the formation come about?

MG: We formed in 2004. Me and Johnny started writing songs together. I grabbed the hardcore band I had at the time (which) didn't have a vocalist… switched the genre up and had Johnny sing. That's how it happened.

AU: Tell us a bit about the band's back catalogue. What can you say about the previous two LPs and other recordings?

MG: Yeah, we have two other records; they're all home recordings. If you're interested in checking them out, you definitely should. Sounds like Druglords of the Avenues.

We originally released them DIY in 2006 and then Red Scare Records re-released our first LP *Sing Songs*. I forget what year that was…2007–2009? Our second album *New Drugs* was more aggressive…and our new album *Gotta Light* is even more aggressive!

So, if you like pop-punk, punk rock and hardcore punk rock, you'd probably like it… or not. We're not crowd pleasers in the way of writing a song a bunch would love. We just hope they do… and if they can't dig it, that's okay, too.

AU: *Gotta Light* came out March 23, 2026 on Pirates Press Records... what more can you tell us about the record?

MG: This album was in the works for a long time. Since 2015, when I started demoing songs… then in 2018, things came to a halt until about two years ago. Long story I don't wanna get into…

Me and Johnny wrote a lot of the lyrics in this album, and this album is really connected to me… more than any other album. There's a lot to be said, so read the lyrics. I hope someone can relate to the light, the dark, and this weird world of duality. I'm singing on a few tracks. They ended up coming out really cool in my opinion.

JB: Skippy from Pirates Press Records came up with the album title.

AU: What can you tell us about the picture disc artwork for *Gotta Light*?

MG: Johnny did the album artwork for Side A. I had an idea for Side B, with the swirling and the art. Thought maybe if you were stoned or drunk it would kind of be cool to see something swirling around a record player. Or sober if that's your thing… which there's nothing wrong with.

AU: How did Druglords of the Avenues come to be on Pirates Press Records?

MG: Well, as much as we love Toby and Red Scare, we had put out a previous 7" with Pirates ("MacGowan's Seeth" b/w "Forward To Fun," 2013), and we wanted to do a picture disc… something different for a change. It was just gonna be an EP, and then it turned into a full length. Sometimes different is good for a minute or two…or forever…who knows? But I am grateful to Pirates Press Records for wanting to release something else of ours.

They did an amazing job working with me and helping me through the process of recording and finalizing everything… especially Chad Williams. He really invested himself in this record wholeheartedly, I believe and I will be forever grateful for that! Everyone has been rad.

AU: The band is known for having quite the punk rock pedigree. What other bands do the current members play in?

MG: Johnny currently sings for Swingin' Utters & Primitive Heads. Mike Mininger, our bass player, has a cool band called CVCC. Our new drummer Patrick has a band out of San Francisco called Run Motor Run. They're really cool & talented. And our new guitarist Mike has a band called Get Dead... also a cool band. We have two new members live (who didn't play on the record), because family life & schedules are just too hard these days.

AU: Any plans to tour for the new album? If so, where?

MG: No plans to tour. We want all of our friends' bands — or any bands — to hit us up when they come through the Bay Area and Southern California! If we get a good enough offer, maybe we could do something.

AU: Is there anything else you would like to add?

MG: Don't be a piece of shit.

JB: I believe this album can save lives, it saved our lives in a way. Much love to the listeners!

Druglords of the Avenues can be found on all major streaming services as well as:

instagram.com/druglordsoftheavenues

facebook.com/DruglordsOfTheAvenues

druglordsoftheavenues.bandcamp.com

piratespressrecords.com/druglords-shop

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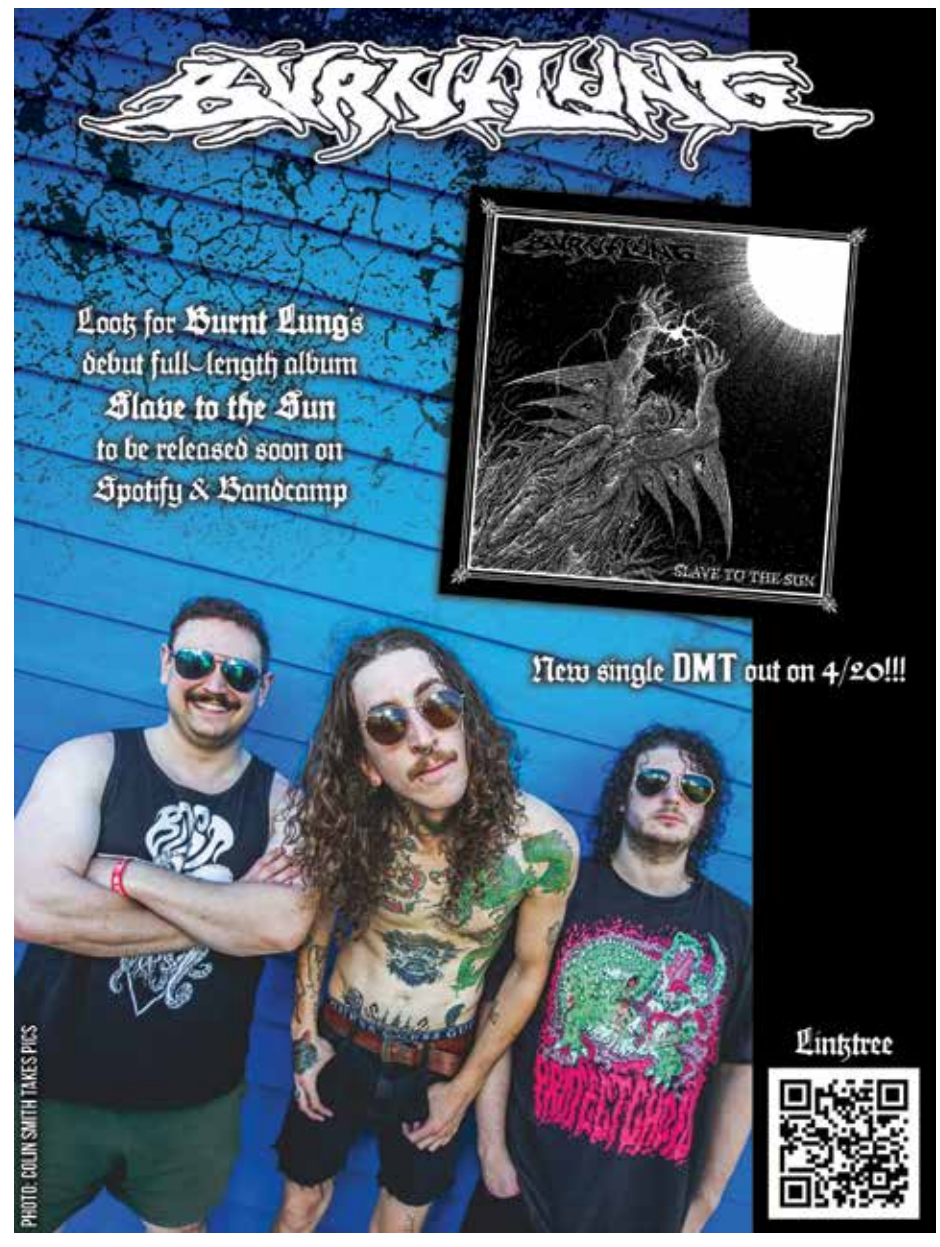

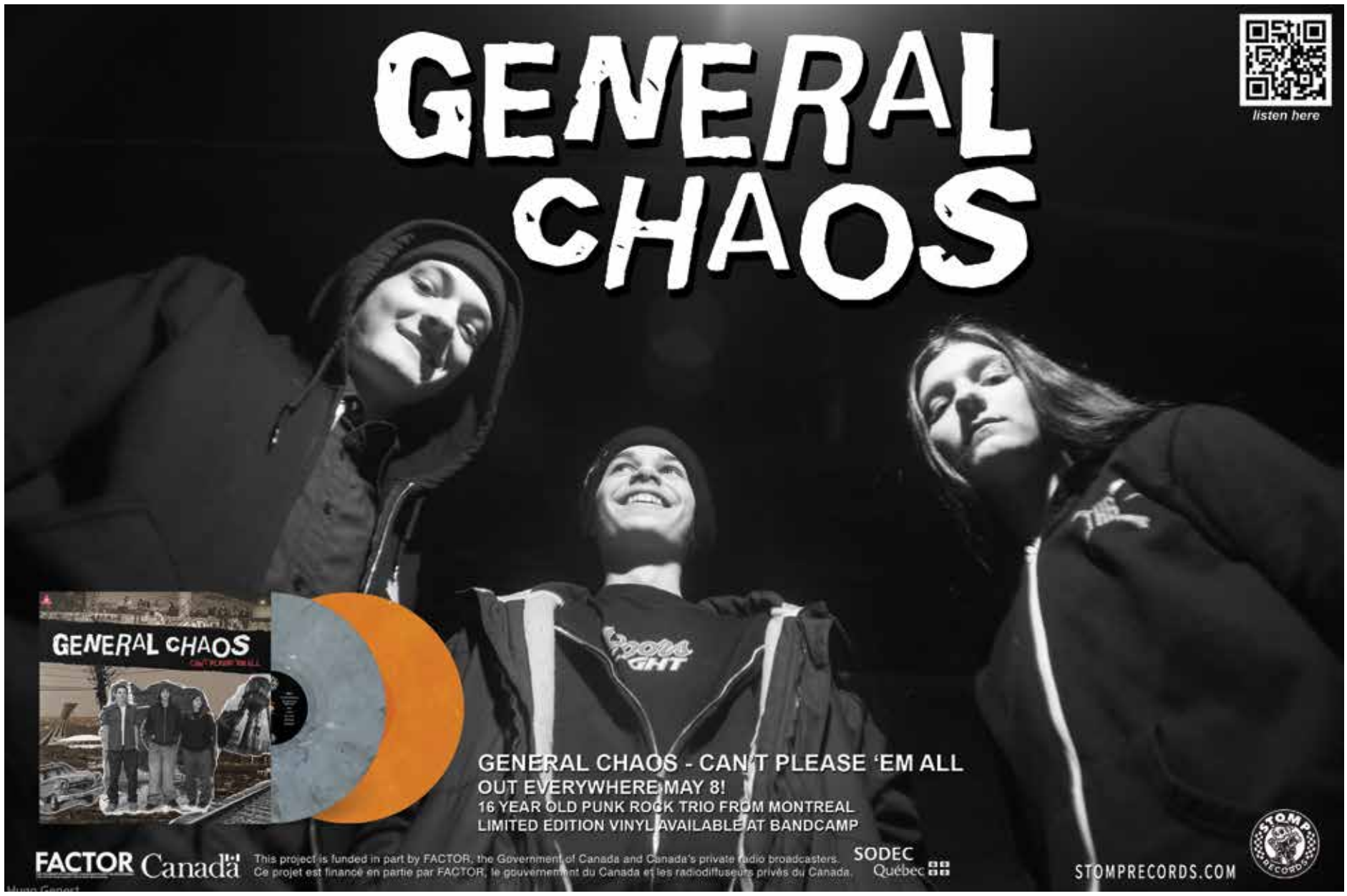

HOWELLS: Calgary Alt-Rock Visionaries Release New EP, *Fade Into Being Part 1*

Interview by Ray MacKay

Calgary's alt-rock/post-hardcore outfit Howells is making waves with sold-out shows, radio play, and fans who literally tattoo the band name on themselves. With the new EP *Fade Into Being Part 1* dropping April 17 and a fully immersive visual rollout, the band is carving a unique space in Canada's underground music scene. *Absolute Underground* caught up with Benjamin Howells to discuss the EP, the band's rise and the community they're building around their music.

Absolute Underground: Who are we talking to and what are you most famous and/or infamous for?

Benjamin Howells: Benjamin Howells here. Known to drink only holy water and sleep on a bed of dead roses.

AU: Who is in the band?

BH:

- Benjamin Howells – Vocals and Guitar
- Kwesi Cripps – Bass
- Edison Grove – Drums
- Dylan Mackay – Guitar

AU: For our unfamiliar readers, please give us a brief history of Howells.

BH: Howells started in a small mountain town void of music. For many moons, it was just me writing songs alone. Howells didn't come to life until a decade later, when I relocated and began conscripting old friends to join me on stage. At first, no one would book us. I sent 87 messages before landing a DIY venue (a glasses store). It sold out. Then another. Then another. Fans started showing up in merch… then tattoos. Persistence collided with the right congregation. It's loud, emotional and built on a dream. One we get to live every show.

AU: Where are y'all from, and what is the music scene like there?

BH: Calgary, Alberta. Over the last year, something here has stirred. Young bands are emerging in waves. Emo, post-hardcore, punk. Kids finding each other and pulling people into rooms again. A gathering known as Rockin' 4 Dollars has become a proving ground. Five or six bands a night. Twenty minutes each. Just enough time to make a mark. Or disappear. It's given rise to a new generation. You can feel the pulse rising. What Calgary needs now is unity. More collaboration. More overlap between artists. The seed is planted. If we work together, we can grow these seeds into an Eden.

AU: We know words can barely capture the alt-rock awesomeness that is Howells, but if possible, try to explain your sound to our readers.

BH: Howells walks between worlds. One foot in the chaos of 2000s post-hardcore and metalcore, the other in something softer, more modern. Familiar, but not stuck in time, like a neon cathedral. It's romantic, dark and anthemic. Moments that feel intimate enough to whisper in your ear, followed by ones that feel deific in scale.

AU: You've collaborated with artists in the Western Canadian scene like Folded Hand and Astrology Girl – what was that like?

BH: Writing "Overflow" with Astrology Girl was effortless. They're exceptional songwriters. Sharp instincts, no hesitation. Alive, unpredictable and impossible to fake. Chaos, but the right kind. Folded Hand moves differently. More precision. More intentionality. Like a rapier. Different energies, different worlds, but each one expanded Howells' sound in ways I couldn't have reached alone.

AU: Tell us about the visual-heavy rollout for *Fade Into Being Part 1*, including a music video for every song?

BH: I grew tired of simply releasing songs. I wanted to build a world. *Fade Into Being Part 1* lives somewhere transitory. Like a dream you can't quite hold onto. Every visual detail serves that idea. Song covers shot on a 1984 Minolta X-700. I had only 1 subject: the head of a white-tailed deer. Each of the five covers capturing a different stage of decay and rebirth. The videos follow a similar language. One performance space. Narrative fragments woven throughout, revealing meaning & expanding the world. With guidance from Mercedes Arnhorn of Softcult, the vision sharpened. What started as an idea, became something immersive.

AU: What do you feel Howells' relationship with the alt-rock community is?

BH: I'm trying to grow a garden that feeds more than just myself. We move through the scene like a quiet steward. Present, but not always seen. The respect is there, and I'm grateful for it but the goal is larger. To leave something behind. A foundation the next wave can build on. To bring opportunity here. So the path isn't as steep for those coming up. That's why I mentor. To tend the soil. So something stronger can take root.

AU: What's your favourite song to perform live?

BH: The ones where people lose their minds. Lately, that's "8 Fold Fence". Especially the breakdown. There's a moment where everything tips. Where the room stops thinking and just reacts. Those moments take something out of me. But that's kind of the point.

AU: It's AU's 420 issue! If you could name a strain what would it be?

BH: "Faded Into Being."

AU: Best stoner band?

BH: Astrology Girl.

AU: Best weed movie?

BH: *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind*

AU: Favourite stoner celebrity?

BH: Patrick Star

AU: Any plans for 420 this year?

BH: Literally to fade into my being.

AU: Any final words for our readers?

BH: Pursue peace. Pursue art. Everything else will fade away.

AU: How do people find you online?

BH: howellsmusic.com & @howellsmusic on Instagram

Press photo credits: Heather Adam of Haruna studios
@haurnastudios

Spiritual Aggression

GHOST OF MY DEAD WIFE

Written By:
the Ghost

Guitar, Bass, Keyboards and Vocals:
the Ghost

Drums:
Rob Shallcross

Produced By:
Rob Shallcross

Mixed By:
Rob Shallcross
w/ Lucas Truman

Mastered By:
Rob Shallcross

Cover Art By:
Kim Thiessen

A&R:
Jesse Pettersen

A Message From "the Ghost":

"Four years ago my wife passed away due to cancer. She was diagnosed with small cell lung cancer, apparently with no cure.

After twenty-five years I lost the love of my life. I have never felt so empty in my entire existence. I had no idea how I would process this after her life slowly faded away in front of me. Watching her do chemo therapy, with a projected life span of two weeks, I kept her with me for nine months before she finally passed. I was so sad. There are no words to describe how terrible this experience was for me. After her passing, the first song on the record "Only In My Dreams" came to me. I put this together and my good friend of many years "The Wizzard" Rob Shallcross said to share it. It touched him so deeply, as he saw what I was going through. By releasing it I thought it may help the healing process and help others heal who may be able to relate. I was very fortunate to find someone like her and to enjoy twenty-five amazing years of partnership.

To everyone that lost a loved one to cancer, you're not alone.
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DEATHRAW

French Thrash Debut Release, *Reduced to Ashes*

By FLORA

France's Deathraw emerged in early 2025 as a new force in modern thrash metal, built on speed, precision and an unapologetically raw approach. Formed by guitarist Aurélien Gonzalez (ex–Dead Tree Seeds) and vocalist/bassist Eric Walzer (ex–Draugen), and completed by drummer Fabrice Goddi, the trio channels classic Bay Area influence through a darker, more contemporary lens.

With their debut EP *Reduced to Ashes* released on Friday, February 13, 2026, Deathraw delivers five tracks of fast, technical and fiercely direct thrash. Fueled by relentless riffing, expressive solos and politically charged themes, the band's sound is both rooted in tradition and driven by urgency. *Absolute Underground* caught up with Eric Walzer, bassist, vocalist and engineer for the EP, about the band's origins, creative process and what lies ahead.

Absolute Underground: For readers discovering your music for the first time, can you introduce Deathraw and tell us about your role(s) in the band?

Eric Walzer: Deathraw was born from the fusion of two projects. Aurélien was composing on his own, then Eric joined the project to rework the arrangements, handle bass and vocals, and shape the band's overall identity. Originally a guitarist, Eric has also composed several upcoming tracks, making Deathraw a project driven by two fully involved songwriters. Drummer Fabrice brings his strong thrash background and experience in technical death metal, adding a powerful, fast and precise approach, even on riffs that are deliberately kept simple. The main goal is to preserve the raw soul of the compositions as much as possible, without falling into overproduction.

AU: Deathraw came together after major chapters in your previous bands. What pushed you to start something new in 2025, and what did you want this project to be?

EW: At that time, we all had different paths. Each of us was making music on our own: Aurélien had been composing in a band where he couldn't fully express himself, Fabrice was mainly playing in death metal bands even though thrash had always been his true preference. On his side, Eric was available and trying to give a real, physical form to his solo project, without success. Everything pointed to the fact that we were meant to come together.

AU: Your sound is rooted in classic Bay Area thrash but feels sharp and modern. How do you balance tradition with your own identity?

EW: It's quite simple. We've all been listening to thrash metal for a long time, but each of us came into it at different periods, partly because of our age differences. Aurélien is strongly influenced by the 80s and 90s, Fabrice shares those roots while leaning more toward the 2000s. Eric, on the other hand, was especially shaped by the 2000s and 2010s, with a taste for more modern productions, up to current sounds. The Bay Area influence is therefore very present through deliberately old-school songwriting combined with a sound closer to the 2000s, creating a natural balance between tradition and modernity.

AU: *Reduced to Ashes* is raw, technical and intense without feeling overproduced. What was your mindset going into the recording process?

EW: It's simply the way we play and compose. The goal was to preserve the raw nature of the songs as much as possible by deliberately keeping the time spent on each track to a minimum. Spending too much time on the material would probably have caused us to lose something essential.

AU: Lyrically, the EP tackles power, struggle and resistance. Where do those themes come from, and why are they important to you right now?

EW: These are in fact only part of the themes explored on this release, which is conceived as a concept EP built around five chapters, and following a precise order. The idea was to highlight certain realities, but in a deliberately exaggerated way, similar to what you might find in a comic book or a film. The notion of revolt emerges in the fourth chapter, when the witness of this masquerade becomes a martyr after exposing a regulatory plan targeting lower-income citizens, orchestrated by elites.

AU: The band is currently a power trio and looking for a fourth member for live shows. How do you envision Deathraw evolving on stage?

EW: There are two possible ways for the band to evolve live. Either Eric handles both vocals and bass on stage, or he focuses solely on vocals, microphone in hand, while we bring in live members for guitars and bass. In any case, we're really looking forward to taking Deathraw on stage and breathing this project to life in a live setting.

AU: With your worldwide debut release of *Reduced to Ashes* this past February, what are you most excited about for this next chapter — and what can fans expect next?

EW: This is the first thing we have created together. The excitement mainly comes from being able to present a shared and coherent vision. It is also an important step in defining our identity. A first release is always a strong statement, a way to lay the foundations and establish where you stand.

AU: Where can people buy your music and connect with you online?

EW: Our music is available on **Bandcamp: deathrawthrashmetal.bandcamp.com** as well as on all streaming platforms. On Bandcamp, the tracks are available in WAV format, with no loss of quality. **CDs will follow soon.**

We are quite active and accessible through our social media pages:

instagram.com/deathraw_thrashmetal

facebook.com/Deathrawthrash

Aurélien also has a well-established **YouTube channel. The name says it all, go check it out!**

youtube.com/@frenchthrasher/videos

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GANG OF FOUR: Interview with Hugo Burnham

By Jason Flower and Ira Hunter

Absolute Underground: Who are we talking to today and what are you most famous and or infamous for?

Hugo Burnham: I'm Hugo Burnham from Gang of Four.

AU: Where is the Gang of Four from and what was the music scene like there?

HB: We three Leeds University students – all from the south – who drank, danced and hung together, started in Leeds, Yorkshire in 1977. We were joined by a real musician down from the Lake District, who had come to Leeds to find a band to join. We clicked pretty quickly. Punk rock was just past its infancy, having started in London, and the city was up there with Manchester and Liverpool for new music and new venues catering to the new "movement" – for want of a better word. The Anarchy Tour had come through town at Leeds Polytechnic in December 1976 – the first city not to have been banned by local authorities. Fun and mesmerizing - the Pistols, the Clash, the Heartbreakers and the Damned. A few months later – May '77 – saw Talking Heads open for the Ramones at the same venue. Leeds was on a roll.

AU: Who were the original members in Gang of Four?

HB: Me, Jon King, Andy Gill and originally for the first two shows Dave Wolfson (aka 'Wolfman') – when we re-convened later that year after the summer break, Dave Allen found us and we were on the way. Slowly!

AU: What was it like when you were on Fast Records? A big happy DIY family?

HB: Our friends, the Mekons signed the first deal with Fast– owned and run by the Rezillos' manager Bob Last. It was really a means to an end – a one-off EP planned to help us go further. We had very little to do with anyone else on the label other than having seen them play occasionally – and playing a Fast product showcase in London together. We have never seen a penny in royalties to this day, despite solid sales for years, and Last selling/leasing the rights to various other entities (starting with EMI Records, who we eventually signed to). Classic indie thievery.

AU: Describe the band's sound and live show if possible.

HB: Loud.

AU: You had such poignant lyrics back in the day, quite incredible for a major label act — what was the reaction of the critics back then?

HB: Indifference, at first. Then the live shows beyond our home base (thank you Buzzcocks, the Banshees) and then the EP which John Peel embraced heartily, got us quite a lot of attention.

AU: What was your reaction when you learned that your first album, *Entertainment!*, was ranked on Rolling Stone magazine's list of the 500 greatest albums of all time?

HB: That was lovely. If only we'd sold as many as people imagined, given the attention over the years.

AU: Is there any early material still unissued hiding in the vaults?

HB: I think we put everything we found onto a cassette as part of the *Gang of Four: 77-81* box set, released in 2022. Except for one early demo "Call Me Wanker". A bridge too far…

AU: Tell us about your most recent album.

HB: There isn't one. They may be one coming…. No promises.

AU: What motivates you to keep playing after all these years?

HB: Fun and friendship.

AU: Who else is currently in the band and what do they bring to the table?

HB: Gail Greenwood (Belly, L7) is a force of nature on-stage and as a person. A huge breath of fresh air quite unlike anyone else who has ever played with G4. Ted Leo (of so many bands, but principally his own band, the Pharmacists – and his work the last few years with Aimee Mann) is unbelievably fierce. A great player with immense stage presence. Not easy to fill the Gill spot – but we found the two most apt and able to do so (first, was Slint's David Pajo '22-'24). This line-up is hard. And sober onstage. A delight.

AU: Previously having David Pajo join just seems like such a surprising dream come true for any underground music lover. Can you tell us about your relationship to David, any comments on the Spiderland album by Slint, and of course, what it was like to have him in the group?

HB: Pajo brought so much to the band – as a person as well as a player. He profoundly honoured Gill's work while bringing his own style and force to it all. Which is exactly what we asked him to do. We're not a tribute act.

AU: Were you able to check out the new Punk Rock Museum in Vegas yet? If so, what were your thoughts?

HB: Sadly no. We weren't in town long enough to do anything but arrive, check, play, break down, sleep and leave for the next show on the tour.

AU: What's the most important message you are trying to impart through your music?

HB: Be the resistance. Support live music.

AU: Is this really the "Long Goodbye" tour? Any plans to play Canada?

HB: We played two shows in Canada. It was our last headlining tour, as such. We will play again – but just short, interesting runs, and occasional festivals.

AU: Final words of wisdom?

HB: Be the resistance. Support live music.

AU: How do people find you online?

HB: We're called Gang of Four. Look us up.

Photo Credit: Tina Clark

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POULTRYGEIST 2: DAWN OF THE CHICKEN DEAD

Mercedes the Muse Goes Full Troma

By Cody "No Teeth" Cook

Absolute Underground: Hi Mercedes! It's pretty wild that after 20 years, Troma is making a follow-up to *Poultrygeist*! How did you get the opportunity to direct the sequel?

I'm still tripping out that I'm making a sequel to one of my favorite Troma films! I've been making movies for 20 years coincidently, over ten years with Troma now. Uncle Lloydie taught me how to drive. Now I'm taking his car out for a spin. I'll bring it back with a few dents and broken windows no doubt.

AU: What's the vibe of this new film? Is it a true sequel, or more of a spiritual sequel (like #ShakespearesShitstorm is to Tromeo and Juliet)?

It's a true sequel taking place 20 years after the previous events. Not a watered down remake or some reboot shit. The goal was to move the bar as did the first one 20 years ago.

AU: What are some of *Poultrygeist 2's* taglines and titles so far?

Full title, following in the George Romero vein, is *Poultrygeist 2: Dawn of the Chicken Dead*. Tagline is, The Fowlest movie ever made!

AU: You've worked on several films for Troma. How did you first connect with Lloyd Kaufman and the studio?

They distributed my first couple of movies then Uncle Lloyd started producing my movies ever since. I'm the niece he wishes he never had.

AU: For those not familiar with your work, can you tell us about some of the other Troma movies that you've directed?

Honor Killing which was my first feature I directed, *Divide & Conquer*, *Evul Twinz*, *Rise of the Super Tromettes*. They can all be streamed on Troma Now for only $4.99, first month is free, or if you're a physical media freak like me go find the blurays.

AU: As you're directing a sequel to one of Lloyd's films, what level of involvement does he have in the project, and in what capacity?

I get random text and phone calls with his fever dream ideas. He told me to show ya'll something you've never seen and can never unsee.

AU: This has to be a dream project for you! Are there any other Troma titles you'd love to take a crack at directing?

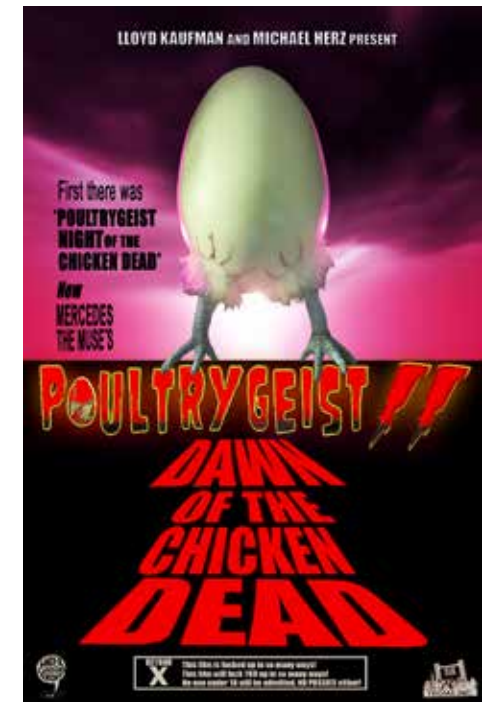
Toxic Avenger V, mother fucker!

AU: What's your favourite Troma movie?

Poultrygeist Night of the Chicken Dead. And I always hold the first *Toxic Avenger* at top spots because it was my introduction as a kid. I also had a Toxie toy from the *Toxic Crusaders* line back in the day.

AU: What's it like living and working in Tromaville? Do you ever see Toxie or Kabukiman just hanging around?

You need to read my tell-all comix book *Mercedes Does Tromaville*. No joke, Troma sells them under convention tables, it's a completely X-rated anthology of my sexual exploits around town



with some of the filthiest underground artists like Mike Diana and John Howard.

AU: What format do you prefer: VHS, DVD, Blu-ray, or 4K?

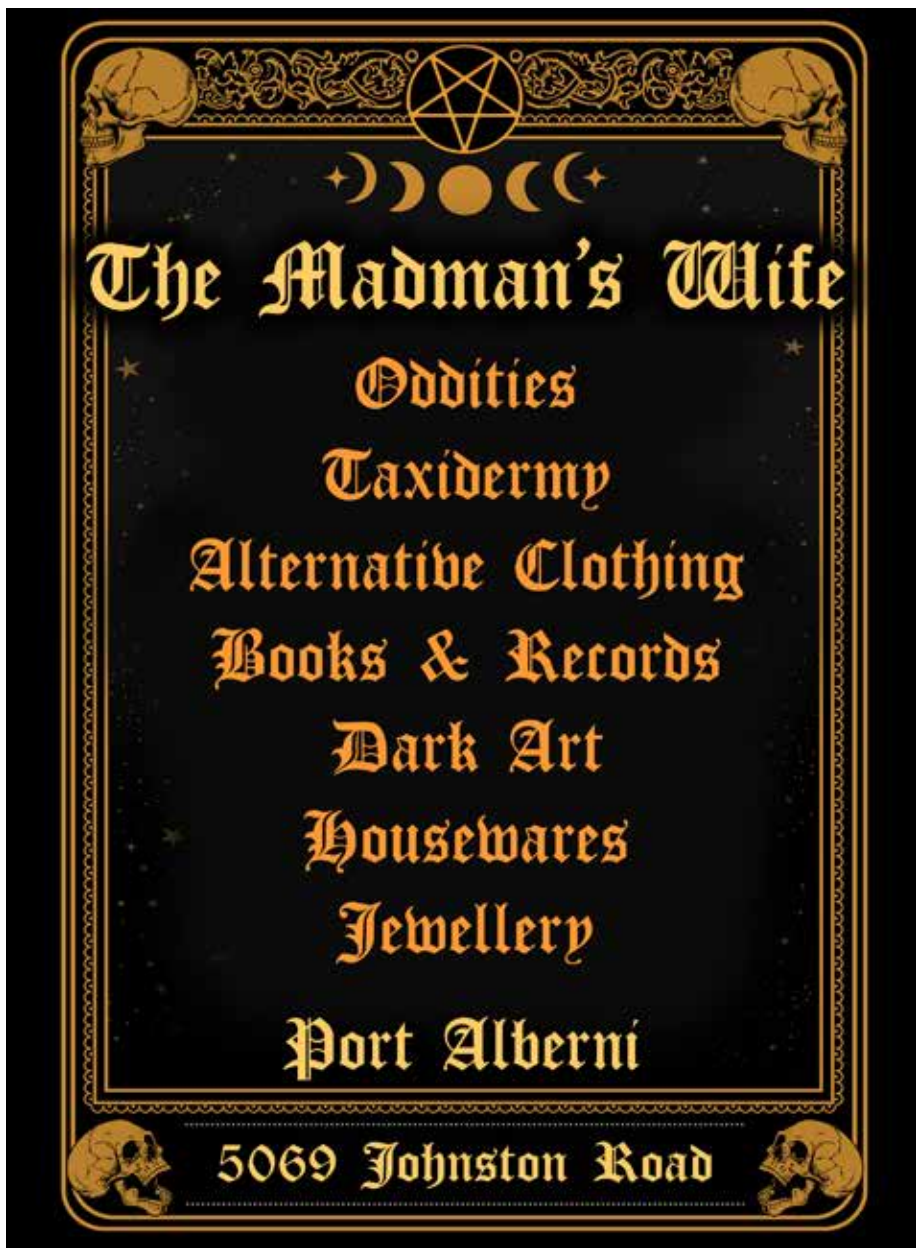
I'm a VHS whore… I mean hoarder. I collect VHS tapes, fucking love movie cover art back when they gave a fuck.

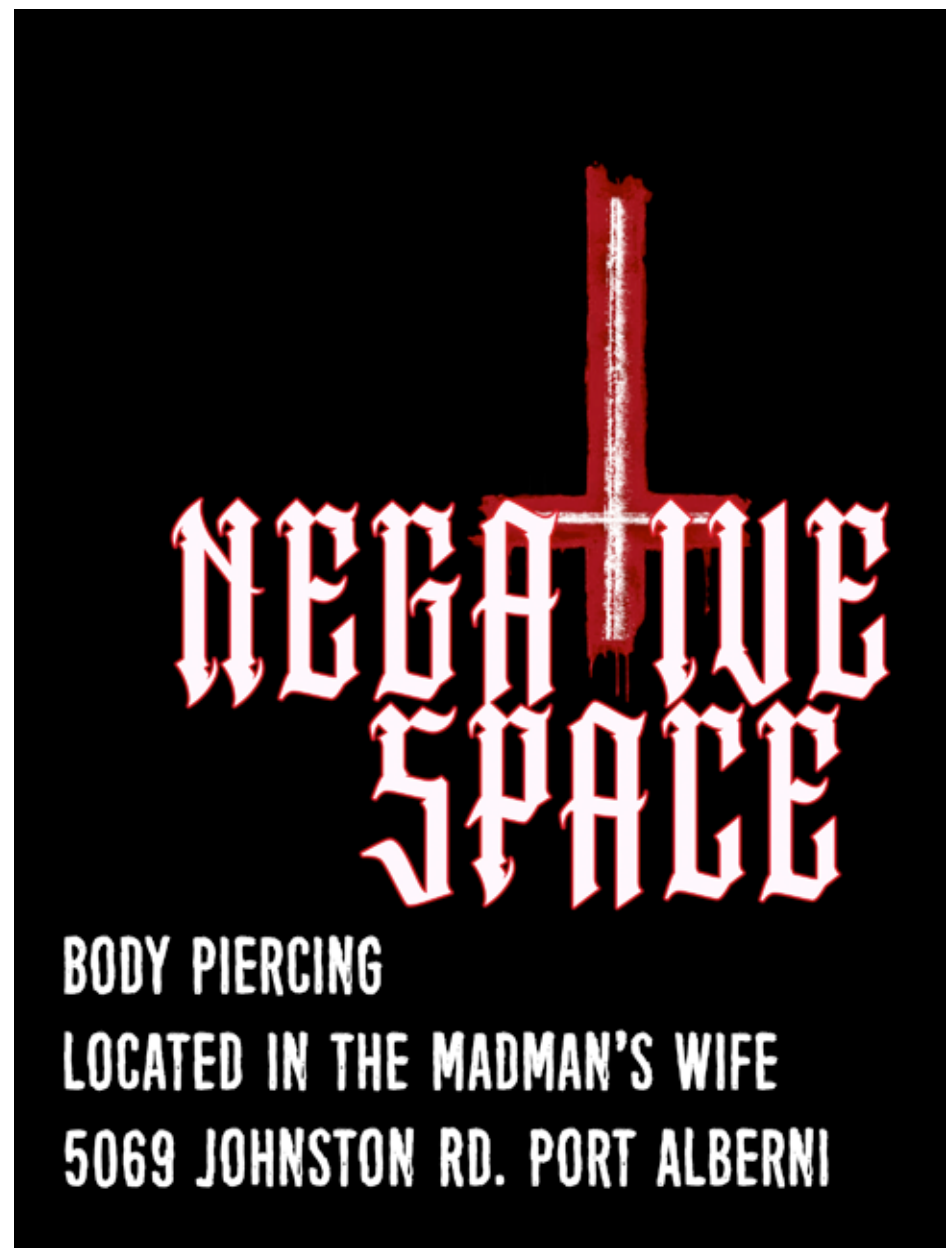
AU: How can people connect with you online?

If you want to see my ass in a thong go to: **instagram.com/mercedesthemuse** but if you want to see my bare ass I recommend: **x.com/mercedesthemuse**

Follow the movie's production journey here:

instagram.com/poultrygeist2movie





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The Most Controversial Album of the Century?

Misanthropik Torment Pushes Extreme Metal Into Dangerous Territory

Extreme metal has always thrived on provocation, but few releases in recent memory have generated as much controversy as *Make Assassinations Great Again*, the latest album from Misanthropik Torment, the project led by Erik Leviathan. Released January 20, 2025 through SelfMadeRecords, Misanthropik Records and Earache Records digital distribution, the album has already sparked intense debate over artistic expression, political messaging and the limits of shock value in music.

The album presents itself as a brutal sonic manifesto, tackling themes such as political corruption, global conflict, media manipulation, environmental destruction and societal collapse. Leviathan describes the project as an attempt to challenge listeners and force confrontation with uncomfortable realities, though critics argue the album crosses into deliberately inflammatory territory.

The controversy surrounding the record reached a peak with the lead single "Make Assassinations Great Again", which reportedly resulted in a visit from the United States Secret Service to Leviathan. While the artist has publicly stated that the music is intended as entertainment and artistic expression rather than a call to violence, the album's rhetoric and imagery have continued to generate backlash and discussion within both metal circles and beyond.

Musically, the album blends elements of death metal, industrial metal and extreme metal, featuring contributions from multiple musicians across the record. The track list includes politically charged titles such as "Kill The Tyrant" "America Is A Fucking Disease" and "Click Hate," which addresses media manipulation and online outrage culture. Other tracks focus on global conflicts, environmental destruction and what Leviathan describes as the moral collapse of modern leadership and institutions.

According to Leviathan, the album's central theme revolves around distrust in global leadership and the belief that political systems worldwide are failing the public. Many of the tracks explore controversial geopolitical topics, including war, colonialism, media influence and systemic corruption. The project positions itself as anti-establishment and intentionally provocative, drawing influence from extreme metal's long tradition of pushing boundaries and confronting taboo subjects.

Despite the controversy, or perhaps because of it, *Make Assassinations Great Again* has gained significant attention online, with listeners debating whether the album is political satire, social commentary, shock art or something more serious. In extreme music, controversy often fuels interest, and this release appears to be no exception.

Whether viewed as a piece of confrontational art, an exercise in shock value or a genuine political statement, Misanthropik Torment's latest release is undeniably designed to provoke reaction. In a genre that has always embraced the extreme, this album attempts to push those boundaries even further — and the resulting conversation may be exactly what its creator intended.

selfmaderecordsllc-business.com/misanthropik-torment-links

Photo credits: Neptune's Daughter Photography

BRENDON SMALL

From Metalocalypse to Dethklok

By Jean-Francois Gosselin

Absolute Underground: Hello, Brendon

Brendon Small: Hello

AU: Nice to meet you. Thanks for doing this. I want to dig into how you write, how you tour, and how the storytelling side fits in. For people hearing about you for the first time, how would you describe what you do today and what chapter you're in right now?

BS: If people don't know me, I'm a guy who went to music school and became a TV show creator. At music school I was also taking writing classes at another college, so I was going to two different colleges at the same time. Then I got into stand-up and tried to figure out a way to make a living being creative. That got me to a TV show called *Metalocalypse.* In that show, I got to write a bunch of music and scripts at the same time. I would write scripts with character, comedy, and world building, and then I would turn around and go write the music that happens in that world.

Then hopefully, at some point, I'd be able to put out records and tour the whole extravaganza. That started 20 years ago, and here we are 20 years later. About two years ago we put out a movie and two records, *Dethalbum IV* and an orchestral kind of synthesizer score. We knew we wanted to do something for the 20th anniversary, and then this crossed our agent's desk about pairing with Amon Amarth and Castle Rat. That's the way we would celebrate it. So that's where we are right now.

I think the way you describe me is: I'm a guy who is a writer who performs.

AU: Right now, what are you most excited about: the music, the live show or the creative world behind it?

BS: The fun thing about this show is that it's the encapsulation of all things *Metalocalypse* and Dethklok. It's a really fun live experience that incorporates technical ability from this crazy band that I'm playing with, visual technical ability with the animators and artists I've worked with over the years, and then the live experience of being in a room full of people.

To me, I don't think a lot of TV shows can do that, and hit the audience they've been trying to go after this whole time. So I get to connect with people. And for a writer who performs, it's kind of the perfect position for me to be in. I'm on stage, but I'm not really the center of attention. The gigantic movie theater-sized LED screen we tote around, that's the focus. We manage to hypnotize an audience. The looks on their faces are sometimes unbridled joy, and sometimes just jaws open, mouth open, eyes open. Hypnosis.

AU: When you start writing, what comes first: the riff, the rhythm, or the melody?

BS: I sit with my guitar all the time, and anytime I have an inkling of an idea, sometimes it's just a riff, or even two chords. One chord against another creates enough friction or tension or musicality that gets me excited. So that happens every once in a while.

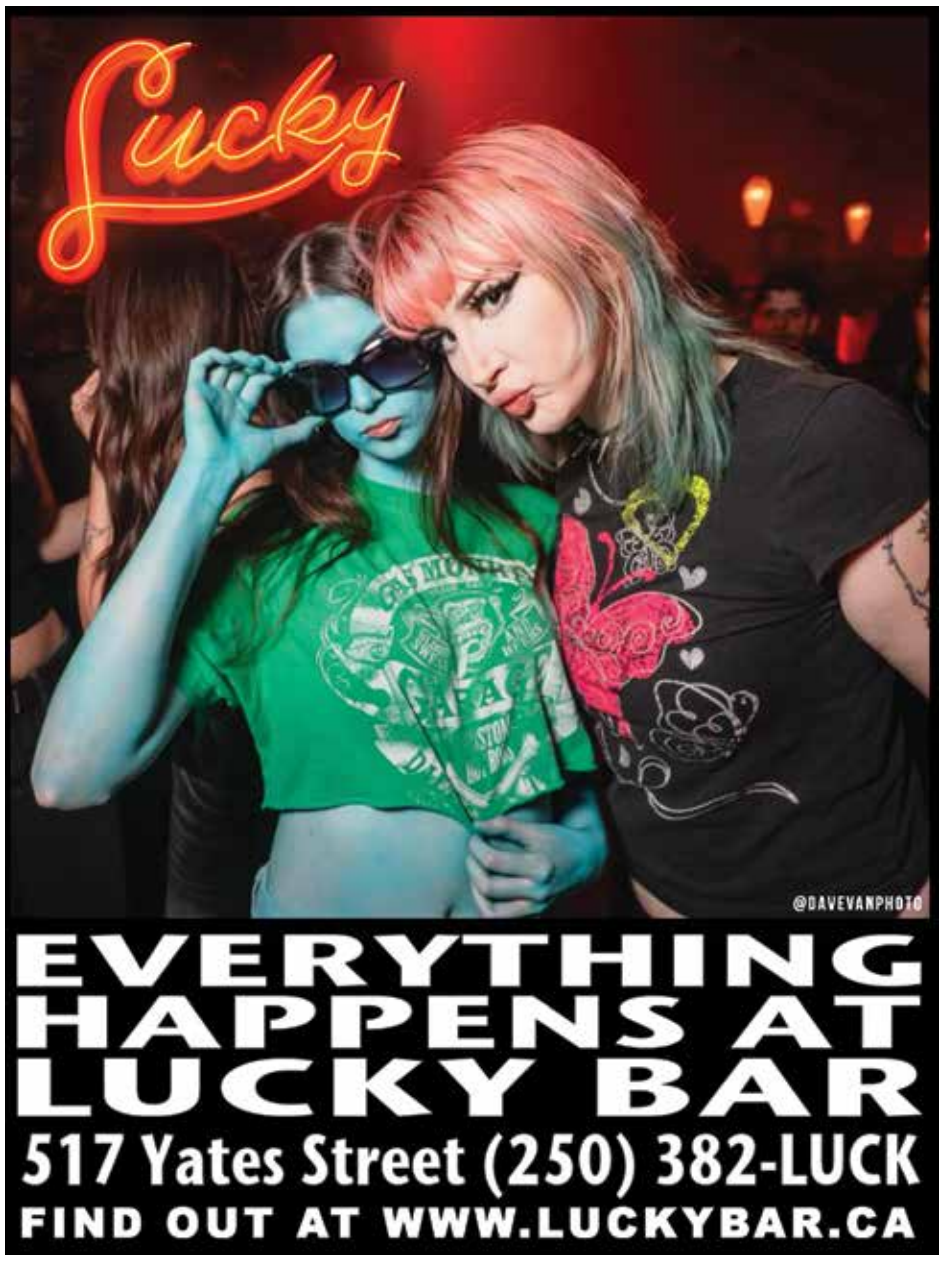
Then I have to figure out what the feeling of the song is. In *Metalocalypse*: *Army of the Doomstar*, there were two songs I had to write. I had to write the wrong song and the right song. One of them had to feel like going into battle, we might die, it has to be triumphant. So you go, what is the feeling this needs to have? What does it need to encapsulate? And then you experiment until you get close enough to where you say yes in your head. This is clicking. This is the right emotional energy. This is the right brutal energy.

It's me experimenting over and over and walking around in a circle and listening and listening. Eventually I get to a point where I don't hear speed bumps anymore. I hear only forward motion. And then I go, okay, this is worth listening to. Because I don't want people to listen to a song and look at the timeline and go, I've got four more minutes left of this, can you believe this? I want them to go, this is a journey. It's going to keep twisting and turning.

AU: Does storytelling or visuals ever change what comes first?

BS: Absolutely. Even in the past, I knew if I wanted to do a live show and I didn't have visuals for it, I had to create them. You've got limited ability and limited budget, and you go: how can I be creative with that? That's classic production. That's old Roger Corman filmmaking. You've got nothing, make something. Make it funny. Make it worth getting to the end of it. Have a story that culminates in a different idea.

So yeah, I think visually first sometimes, idea first



sometimes. And sometimes it's just a riff I'd like to play in front of people. When you're writing, you're kind of desperate all the time going: what will fit into this world? So you keep your radar up and you keep exploring.

AU: What makes a good riff for you, and how do you know it's worth building a song around it?

BS: Comedy writing or writing a script takes a while to get up on its feet. With music, even if your guitar's out of tune and you're playing out of rhythm with a looped drum beat, that's enough to give you an indication of the feeling of the final piece. You get to fast forward to what the song will finally sound like. You get that energy.

And the idea is to preserve that energy from the original demo. Don't kill it. I got lucky with an energy and I don't know how I did it. Maybe I was thinking about something else and my unconscious mind took over.

A good riff fits into the world of the show, or the band. I think about AC/DC. Everything they do sounds like AC/DC. And then you've got bands like Mastodon who evolved over the years, and it still sounds like Mastodon, it's the same DNA, but it mutates.

So I think: what makes the band sound like the band? Where do I allow mutation? And then ultimately, does it sound good to my ears? Seriously. It's that simple. My ears have to be awakened by this stupid little simple thing. Simple is easier. If you want to complicate it later, you can. But the core idea has to be simple.

AU: What was the hardest part turning Dethklok into a real touring band?

BS: For me personally, it was getting guitar and vocals happening at the same time, and learning the stage. Music school wasn't a lot of live performances. It was a lot of sitting in a room practicing scales, intellectualizing musical concepts. Stand-up taught me you can fail a lot and you just keep pushing. So I was used to practicing a lot and I was used to eating shit.

So I put it together. Vocals and guitar doesn't come naturally, it comes from accepting the challenge and practicing until you can make sense of it.

And then, finding a great group of musicians was huge. Finding Gene Hoglan and having him on the first album, and then continuing collaboration with him over all these years was an incredible find. We talk about this stuff all the time: what makes a great live song? When we carve out set lists, we do it months in advance because the production is so heavy.

I watch audiences at shows. Where are they engaged? If they disengage, what happened?

They paid good money. They need to see the best show possible.

AU: What's the best part of touring and what's the hardest part?

BS: When I'm on stage, I'm thinking as hard as I possibly can because there's a lot going on. Rhythm guitar is controlling your right arm, controlling tension. You have to be mindful and go: take it easy. Be loose and warm. Don't cramp up.

It's almost like having a stutter. You have to say: slow down, be patient, be cool, relax. It's like I'm in the middle of a laser tag battle, smoke and lights and crazy shit going around. How do I stay cool?

Then you've got the tricky part: don't dig in too much, keep it relaxed, lighten up. You've got a solo coming up. Then lyrics right away. Then switch pedalboard. That's hard. And it takes lots and lots of getting on stage and asking that of yourself.

I work with perfectionists. Gene is a musical perfectionist. Nili is, and Pete is too. We're always asking: how do we make the perfect show happen? Sometimes we get close. Sometimes human mistakes happen. You course correct quickly and keep moving.

Rest helps. Sleeping a lot helps. And touring now, to me, is almost like a vacation. You did all this work and now you celebrate it. I love engaging with people across America, Europe, Australia. I don't see the downside unless people stop showing up. Then you've got a problem.

AU: What's the one thing you learned over time that made you a better songwriter-composer?

BS: Writing music is tricky because once you write something you think is cool, you eliminated that option. You can't write that song anymore. So now you've got to go somewhere else. You keep hunting and pecking and asking yourself.

I don't think what the audience wants. I think: what do I want to hear? What does that 14 year old kid inside me want to hear, the one who got excited about guitar? That kid is my audience. If you're not excited about your own music, people will hear it. It'll sound generic, like anybody could have written it.

So write the music you like. Write the stuff you were interested in seeing that you haven't seen someone do.

AU: After the show, what do you want people to feel or remember? Where can they find you online and get music, merch and tickets?

BS: I think about the audience a lot. I want them to feel like, holy shit what a show. And I want them to think, boy, I wish they would play just one more song. I want them to want more. I want to give them enough to satisfy them, but still want them to go: one more, one more, one more.

I want to leave them where I haven't worn out my welcome, where they're still thinking about it the next day. You can do that if you time your show right. From comedy to Cannibal Corpse, the right length show is the right length show. Don't wear out your audience. Make them want to come back next time.

You can find *Metalocalypse* on Facebook and Instagram. I'm on Twitter and Instagram too.

For tickets: dethkloklive.com

For merch: shopdethklok.com

AU: Thank you very much for your time and I'll see you on May 2nd at the Montreal Bell Centre.

BS: Awesome. Thanks for taking an interest, man, and nice to meet you.

EXODUS – chats with founding member Tom Hunting on drums

Calm before the storm, up in the mountains prior to world tour

Interview by Erik Lindholm, February 13, 2026

Editor's Note: This interview has been edited and condensed for print. The full interview can be read at absoluteunderground.tv/exodus-interview-with-founding-member-drummer-tom-hunting

Absolute Underground: Good to meet you Tom! My name is Erik, I'm with *Absolute Underground magazine*. We've been running about 20 years out of Victoria, Vancouver and across Canada. I want to say thanks for taking the time with this.

Tom Hunting: Oh, that's awesome. My pleasure. We're stoked to be coming back up there, man!

AU: Can you set the scene for us? Where are you now? Where are you talking to us from?

TH: I'm in Northern California, in Lake Almanor, California. It's way up in the mountains, where the Sierra meets the Cascadia mountain range. In that region near Mount Lassen.

You know, we're stoked to be coming back up there. And, yeah, it's going to be a frigging classic thrash metal beat-down! (laughs)

AU: You're starting out the tour on the west coast of Canada. Can you tell us a bit about how you decided to start your tour run in Canada, on the west coast?

TH: We just jumped on. Megadeth has been talking about this Canadian run for probably eight or nine months, and we were in the conversation too, and, you know, it was supposed to be slated for, I don't know, 2027? Maybe next year, or later this year. I was thinking this fall or something. But, you know, for some reason it got pushed up in the pack, and they're like, "you still want to do it?" We're like, "yeah, we were supposed to be off until March 20th", the day the new album drops, when we'll be starting a European tour. "Why not? We'll go do this one", you know?

It's a fun run. Like, you know, I've never been to Nova Scotia. It's been a long time since I've been to Victoria. We're playing some places we've never played before, probably just driven past or not, you know, routed to. So it's going to be great. It's going to be cold as shit, but, you know, we're ready to rock!

AU: I wanted to reflect on lineup changes. Rob Dukes has come back to the band. You are one of the members who's been with Exodus the whole time since the start, and you've seen various lineup changes. How do you kind of feel?

TH: Gary's the one that's been. Gary's been a member the whole time. Like, I've taken two breaks, but I am the only original member from the first day of Exodus. You know, this band goes through changes a lot. I mean, I've been part of those changes too: like leaving twice, you know, being dismissed once and leaving once. But, you know, it's all good. It all leads us to where we are right now. And, you know, I don't hold anything against Zet (Zetro, last singer). I love the music we made together. And I love the journey we had together. It didn't seem like he was too happy. You know, it's just the truth. He wasn't very happy.

And, you know, we have limited time left to do this, like the fuse is a lot shorter from where this ends than where it started. So, the rest of us want to maximize right now and the time we have left. Record all we can. Play… basically until we're fucking physically unable to play, you know? And we're having fun.

We're still in the zone, and we like the creative process. And we like that. We love the life. I mean, it's a life on which we feast! (laughs)

AU: Love to hear that. Good.

TH: Rob's back in the fold. And, you know, he had a lot of great ideas on this record, vocal ideas. And, you know, we recorded a lot of music. And it was a creative explosion that I did not expect! You know, figured we go in and we would do our 10, 11 songs, a couple of bonus covers. And the shit never stopped. Those guys kept spitting out guitar riff after riff!

AU: That's all good. It's all part of the journey. I would love to hear your thoughts on the new album *Goliath*. We've heard a couple of singles but not heard it in its fullness yet. Let's start with the cover art. It looks like a large character — I will guess is Goliath? He's kind of in a city… and looking kind of neutral, or maybe ominous. Can you tell us more about the art, along with the theme of the record?

TH: Oh man, there's all kinds of themes going on. All songs about all kinds of stuff. There's really no concept music involved like with the album *Goliath*. I mean, the song "Goliath" is about your good old happy story about a giant creature and the living in the ground breaks out kind of like Godzilla, half human, half — I don't know. You'll see!

AU: It's fun. Well, man, on a more personal front, we've read that you fought through some health challenges. Do you have any perspective, or thoughts on health you care to share for our readers?

TH: Sure. I'm okay with talking about that. I basically had stomach cancer. Had a gastric tumor, squamous cell carcinoma in the cardio region, which is up on the top of your stomach, you know? It was an esophageal type of cancer. You know, I kind of knew something was going on. Like I just, yeah, I was losing a lot of weight and just feeling pretty shitty. Even when we were recording *Persona Non Grata*, cause we did it up here during COVID and I was feeling it then.

I got diagnosed in February of 2021 and I had mesothelioma also. But somehow I wound up in the arms of UCSF (University of California San Francisco), in San Francisco, through a friend that Gary knew. His name is Scott. He helped me navigate the beginnings of going to UCSF. I mean, like I said, I'm not a churchy person… but there's angels walking around, and we are for them. And we have to activate when the time comes, you just have to listen and activate. And he was listening.

Next thing I knew, I was in the arms of the UCSF medical system and they attacked that shit with a vengeance, you know? I can't say enough awesome stuff about the science that they're doing there, you know, and the application of their science and how they're helping people, you know? So I'm a big fan!

AU: Man, that's super cool. Big shout out to UCSF! Thank you for your time. Any last words for the metal heads across Canada?

TH: Oh! We're stoked to come there, stoked to go some places we've never been in Canada, and just hang! We love hanging. Maybe I can stop in Revelstoke and ski for a day off, if we have one. We love going up there, we have a lot of fun. And, you know, Lee's a huge hockey fan — and shit — who knows, maybe we can catch a game? We're gonna take it all in, dude… This is a "hang in Canada journey." (laughs)

AU: I'm so excited for you!

TH: We're coming! Oh yeah, oh yeah, and play metal too! In between the skiing, the pizza, the watching hockey. Yeah! And I'd love to have a copy of your mag to read on the road.

exodusattack.com

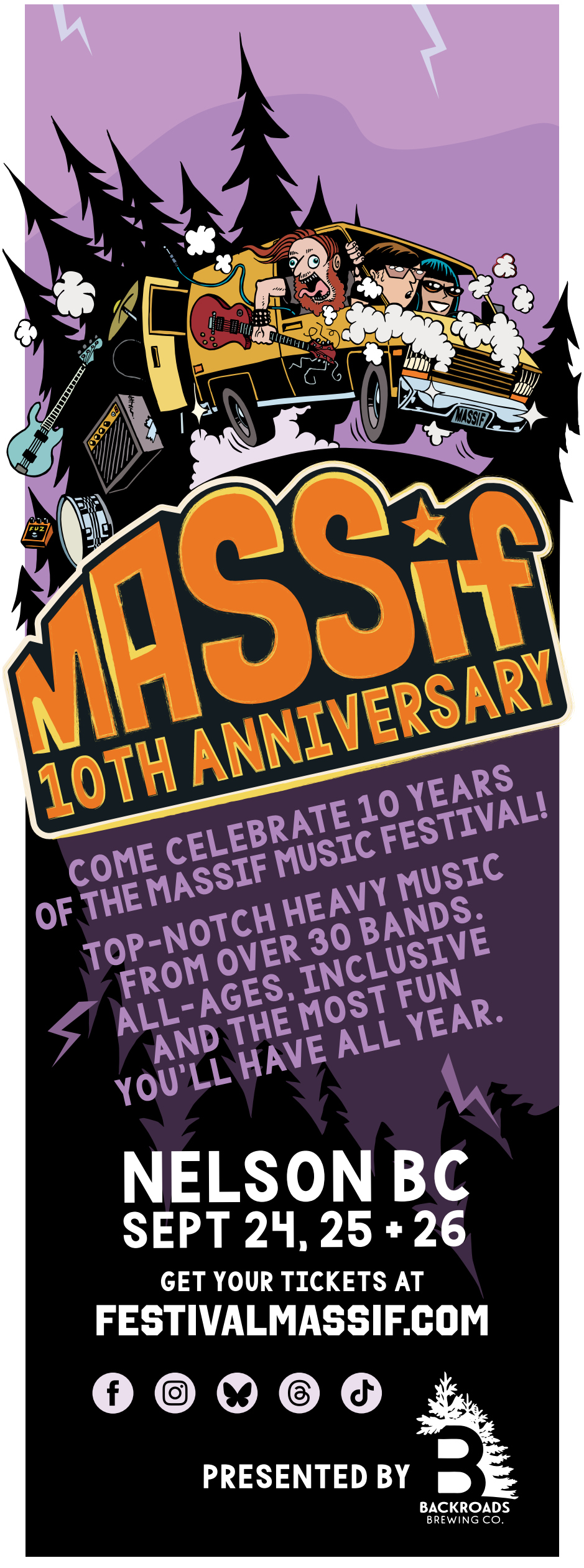
metallipromo.com/ex.html

UCSF - University of California San Francisco: ucsf.edu

Cancer treatment and medical research

Photo credit: John Carlow

Editor's Note: This interview has been edited and condensed for print. The full interview can be read at absoluteunderground.tv/exodus-interview-with-founding-member-drummer-tom-hunting



420 QUESTIONS WITH LANDPHIL

By Ira "BC Bud" Hunter

AU: Who are we talking to and what are you best known for?

Landphil: My Name is Phil "Landphil" Hall. I play in a few different bands but most would know me from Municipal Waste, I also play in Iron Reagan, Cannabis Corpse, Morbikon and AXELR8.

AU: How many albums has Cannabis Corpse released? Can you share some of the album and song titles with our weed blasted readers?

1.) Blunted At Birth

2.) Tube Of The Resonated

3.) The Weeding

4.)Beneath Grow Lights Thou Shalt Rise

5.) From Wisdom To Baked

6.) Left Hand Pass

7.) Nug So Vile

AU: With Cannabis Corpse did you invent a completely new sub-genre of metal mixing death metal and weed related lyrics? What did you call it?

Landphil: I don't recall any other death metal bands really being satirical before Cannabis Corpse existed. The death metal thing has exploded these days but when we started in 2006 no one gave a shit about old school death metal it seemed, I've always been drawn to music that doesn't appeal to people.

AU: I was thinking like Weed Metal instead of Speed Metal or Hash Metal instead of Thrash Metal. What are some other weed related bands people should check out?

Landphil: Cephalic Carnage was probably my favorite heavily weed oriented band.

AU: What's your latest project AXELR8 all about? What makes it different from other projects you have been involved with?

Landphil: I have made thrash metal, death metal and black metal albums. AXELR8 is my first foray into writing something with melodic vocals and attempts to have big choruses and an arena rock vibe. I was listening to a lot of KISS and ZZ Top at the time.

AU: What's new on the Municipal Waste front?

Landphil: We are deep into writing a new album so expect new music soon.

AU: It's our 420 issue, do you ever use weed for musical creativity?

Landphil: Smoking weed has become a habit that I can't seem to break even though I want too, it used to help me feel creative but lately it just makes me feel dopey and lazy.

AU: So weed can hinder you sometimes? Is there anything you prefer to do not stoned?

Landphil: Yea, of course it can hinder you. I'm 43 and still play metal, I prefer not to have thanksgiving dinner with my parents stoned.

AU: The best free weed a fan ever threw up on stage for you, was in what city?

Landphil: In Oakland someone threw the biggest blunt I'd ever seen on the stage. The thing was the size of a small baseball bat.

AU: Creature Skateboards put out a series of Cannibal Corpse skateboards. Have any of your bands ever had a skateboard released?

Landphil: I have a whole wall of my home decorated with my bands' skateboards, gotta love the vibe some good artwork has on a skateboard.

AU: What's a day in the life of Landphil like?

Landphil: When I'm not on tour I typically drink some coffee in the morning and try to be creative until about 3pm, then after that attend to whatever life responsibilities I have, then have dinner with Franki my fiancé and maybe go out.

AU: Have you been working on any new animation projects?

Landphil: I just completed a music video for the band Exhumed, called "*SHOVELHEAD*" check it out on YouTube!

AU: Is 420 sort of like Christmas to a Christian but for weed smokers?

Landphil: I guess, you don't exactly get together with grandma to smoke weed on 420. Maybe some do…

AU: Has Cannabis Corpse or Municipal Waste ever been featured in High Times?

Landphil: Yes both Municipal Waste and Cannabis Corpse have been featured in High Times. I was very stoked to get into that rag, I had often looked at it as a teenager.

AU: Have you ever been to the Cannabis Cup?

Landphil: No, I have not. I was in Denver during a weed fest one time. It's pretty whacky.

AU: When we were on the Barge To Hell metal cruise that time when Municipal Waste played, how did you spend your time on the island of Jamaica? I went swimming with dolphins and Cannibal Corpse. There was also an excursion where you hiked up the waterfall with Municipal Waste, but I'm wondering if you were able to score any good weed there or go to the Bob Marley museum?

I went out and swam with a dolphin, I couldn't wait for it to be over. Cruises suck.

AU: What's the most insane weed you ever smoked that just knocked you on your ass?

Landphil: The ex-guitarist Brady from Turnstile gave me a weed pen one time that spun me out hard. I have no idea what was in that thing.

AU: Do you go for all these newfangled diamonds and moon rocks and shatters and tonics and stuff like that or are you a straight up smoke a joint and hit the bong kind of guy?

Landphil: I just put a little weed in a bowl and smoke it. Doing all that other stuff is too much work. We don't have legal weed here in VA so it's hard to find as well.

AU: Been turned into an action figure yet?

Landphil: Actually yes. I had an action figure made on Massacro Toys. I was pumped when I saw it!

AU: If you could name your own strain what would you call it?

Landphil: "Question your life choices weed"

AU: Anything else to mention or promote? Final words? How do people find you online?

Landphil: I appreciate you reaching out and *Absolute Underground* kicks ass! If anyone is interested in checking out my music go to Instagram, that's where I am most active. I just dropped a cool black metal album with my band MORBIKON called "*Lost in the Astral Abyss*" available now on Tankcrimes Records.

AU: What's on the hazy horizon for you?

Landphil: Lots of new music in the works so expect a lot of touring soon!

@landphilmetal

municipalwaste.net

@ironreaganofficial

@official_cannabiscorpse

@axe.lr8

instagram.com/axe.lr8/

@morbikon

tankcrimes.com

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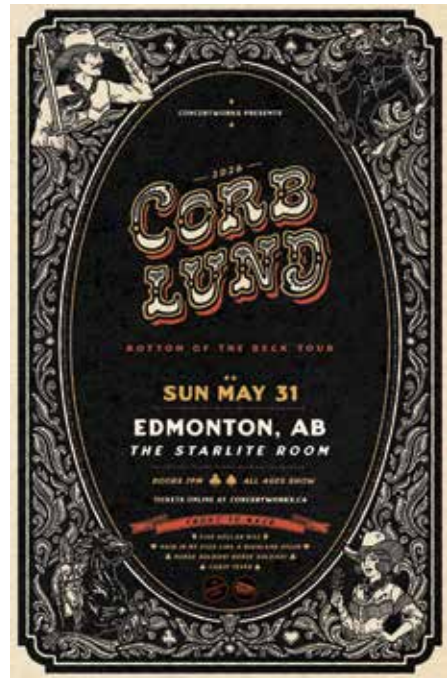

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May. 16 – PHORBODA album release with Grand Mal, Warwolf & Caustic Fog

May. 20 - Dopethrone w/ Mizmor, Tribunal & Hard Charger

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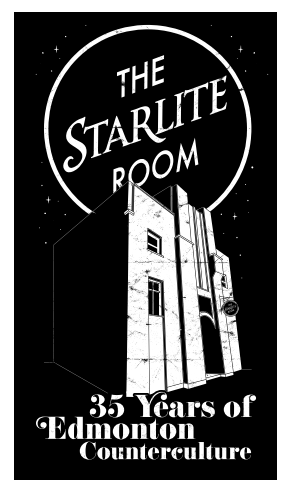
May. 24 - Fake Dust with Falsebody, Autolysis, and Tatara

May. 28 – 31 - Corb Lund – Bottom of the Deck Tour



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CEPHEIDAE VARIABLE

Interview with multi-instrumentalist, composer and producer Ryan Koepke

By Asher Thrasher

Absolute Underground: Welcome. Please tell our readers who you are and what you do.

Ryan Koepke: I'm a multi-instrumentalist and producer based out of BC, Canada. Cepheidae Variable started as a solo project and creative outlet. Instrumentation, mixing and production are done by me. Though, there are big plans for future collaboration.

AU: Your debut album, *Primordial Reverie*, unfolds like a novel in three acts: fantasy, sci-fi and melancholy. What was your process for building such a narrative without lyrics?

RK: The album didn't originally start out with this in mind. It took shape sometime after "Carving a Dragon" was mostly complete. A large part of this was I wanted to explore various genres, themes and tonalities, but I wanted to get all of this completed on my first full-length release. Through that, I came up with the idea of treating groups of tracks as travelling through different biomes. I think this resulted in a very unique album that still remains cohesive. That said, I do not think I accomplished my goal of getting all the experimentation out of my system in a single album although I expect to continue in the sci-fi direction with future releases as there is so much more I wish to explore.

AU: You've said your writing mirrors that of a novelist, starting with visual themes and emotional arcs. Can you walk us through how one of those "storyboards" became a finished track?

RK: I think the best example of this is seen in "Entropic Harvester". This track was meant to introduce a villain of the album. In my mind, I pictured a desolate planet littered with the remnants of civilization. Like a dystopian junk yard. The Entropic Harvester itself is a bio/mechanical being that harvests all life, which it mistakenly deems to be useless energy.

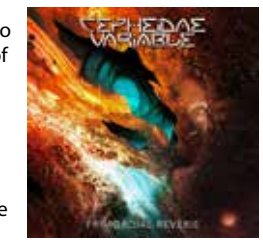
The track starts out with the arrival on this planet, and in my mind, I envision a fairly basic but visually vivid storyboard. In this example it goes something like: sneaking around hiding from the creature > being found > more sneaking > fighting during the first solo > losing ground during the keyboard solo > another hectic battle during the second solo > a stalemate where hostility seems to disperse > defeating the Entropic Harvester > continuing on the exploration of this new world > cut to third person showing the creature possibly still alive before it shuts down.

AU: Recurring motifs and rhythmic mutations appear throughout the album. What do you hope listeners discover on repeat listens that they might miss the first time?

RK: There tends to be a lot of subtlety throughout and honestly, I doubt even I could pick up on all the throwbacks I implemented during the writing process, having stepped away for a while. There are also some not-so-subtle things, such as the outro of "Singularity" being a reprisal of "Overture". My production work also has a lot of very small details, such as car horns and telephones ringing, that you might not hear until many listens in. Or the delayed clock on "Encounter" emerging in reverse from the operatic synth intro before dissolving.

AU: Cepheidae Variable began as a casual outlet but took on new weight after your father's cancer diagnosis. How did that moment of resilience transform your approach to releasing music publicly?

RK: It had a fairly large impact on the writing process and how far I've taken this project. I consider "Zephyr of Ouroboros" a very pivotal point in the construction of the album. This track is thematically built around a circle of grief, having started the writing process when I received this news, coming to terms with the worst-case scenario, but also having a lot more hope by the end of it. The energy in "Encounter" is very much driven by this elevated drive and continues throughout the rest of the tracks. This album would have been released regardless however, I have no doubt it would not resemble what it does today if not for the events occurring within my life.



AU: The project's name is a playful twist on "Cepheid Variable," now tied to jellyfish. How does that quirky identity reflect your balance of seriousness and whimsy in progressive metal?

RK: I think this is par for the course for the genre. Progressive metal has always had a bit of a cheese factor to it. Some of my favorite bands, such as Haken, have names derived from less than serious sources. I think it puts a bit of personality into the project while not detracting from the music itself, which I take very seriously. From a musical standpoint, I like things to go a bit off the rails occasionally, but never breaking the fourth wall.

AU: You've admitted to once disliking metal until Dream Theater opened your eyes to its possibilities. How did that revelation reshape your musical path, and how does it echo through *Primordial Reverie* today?

RK: Iron Maiden was the first metal band that really opened my eyes as a listener. The level of melody and projection of emotion there, always seemed taken a step further than my earlier days of listening to a lot of classic rock/blues. Dream Theater, however, showed me the possibilities of where the instruments and composition could be taken. It was a very wowing moment for me that shaped me as a guitarist and writer. *Primordial Reverie* has a lot of those influences in it, from the occasionally less traditional song structure and odd time signatures to some of the more radical instrumentation.

AU: You've described the artwork as evoking loneliness and wonder. Do you see those same feelings reflected in the way listeners interpret the music?

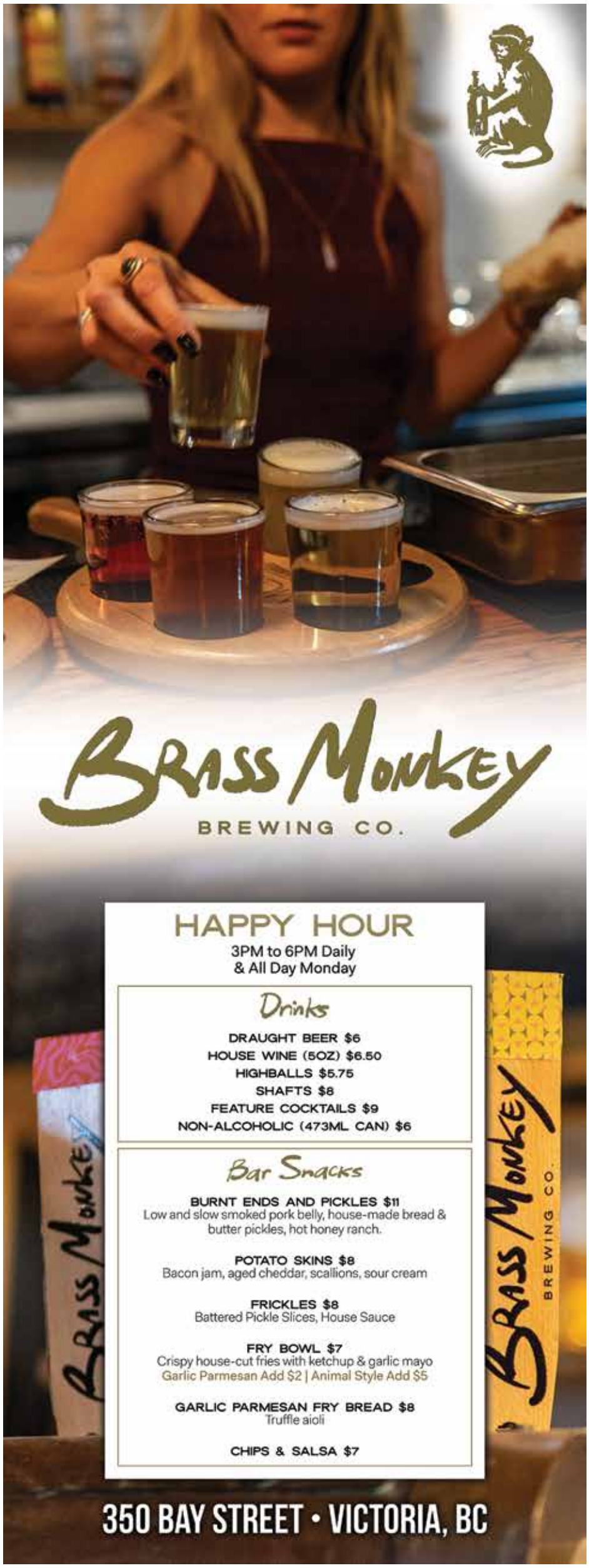
RK: From the outset, I wanted to be quite vague about how I described the visual storyboard of my tracks because I wanted people to shape their own story around the music. It's been quite interesting to me hearing the stories some of my fans have come up with. It's also been very validating because a lot of the feelings that I was trying to invoke have been mirrored by my audience. I think I especially succeeded with the outro to the album, as well as the division of acts.

AU: Anything else you would like to add for our readers?

RK: I'm just glad people are enjoying my work and encourage fans, critics, musicians, whoever to reach out and let me know your thoughts. I'm an open book when it comes to my music and creative process.

I also want to say that if you like what you hear. Keep your ears open for future releases. It's a bit early to talk about what's next for Cepheidae Variable, but I can say that fans of vocals have a lot to look forward to… though, I'll likely always keep an instrumental B-side available. Thank you, everyone, for listening.

cepheidaevariable.com



40 YEARS OF MASTER OF PUPPETS

The Genius and Influence of Cliff Burton still remains

By Ferdy Belland

Metallica released their third album *Master of Puppets* on March 3rd, 1986 - and nailed their name forever into the ironclad pages of music history as a leading force in the rising thrash-metal community. They finally hit their creative stride and imaginative high-point; all eight songs on this album are eight of the best songs Metallica would ever write. Metallica owes this singular creativity to the late great Clifford Lee Burton (1962-1986), described by Dave Mustaine as "the Major Rager on the Four-String Motherfucker."

Burton was a huge presence who didn't kowtow to anybody. When Lars Ulrich and James Hetfield first approached him in 1982 to quit his band Trauma and join their band instead, Cliff firmly laid the rules down: he wasn't going to leave San Francisco and move to Los Angeles. L.A. was for dumbass clones of Ratt or Motley Crue. Ulrich and Hetfield had to move to Frisco's thrashtastic scene, or no dice. So they did. And Burton wasn't going to wear pleather trousers, or one of those numbfuck bullet belts. Was Lars going to argue with a redhaired Bass Viking who towered ten inches over him? Nope.

Analyze the songs on *Kill 'Em All*. All of them were completed before Cliff joined the band. As cool as they still are, those raw, primitive songs were written by zitty 18-year-old heshers who dug Judas Priest and Motorhead and Saxon and sped-up hardcore punk. Instant thrash! Cliff's indeed there, driving along the riffs Ian Hill-style, but the thrilling "Anesthesia: Pulling Teeth" bass solo that intros "Whiplash" shows how Burton was an equal-standing instrumentalist to anyone else in Metallica, at a time (then as now) when most rock bassists were background rumble, plodding along on 8th-note roots. What could possibly come next?

Ride the Lightning came next. It's the same band as on *Kill 'Em All*, but it's a brand new Metallica. Why? Cliff had now been in the band long enough to pass along his in-depth knowledge of music theory and jazz-fusion / prog-rock composition to the others. He taught James Hetfield and Kirk Hammett how guitar harmonies worked. He showed them King Crimson and Yes, and how to extend their stylistic elements into a metal sound. That's where 8-minute instrumentals like "The Call of Ktulu" came from. Cliff dragged Ulrich out to a Return to Forever concert, too: "See that, shrimp? That's Billy Cobham! Welcome to the world of REAL DRUMMING!" With *Ride the Lightning*, everything accelerated for the band; it sold 85,000 copies (without radio play or MTV) within the first nine weeks Megaforce Records released it. That's when Elektra Records took notice of this upstart underground band - and the heightened quality of the songwriting. Q-Prime Management (handlers of Def Leppard at the time) wouldn't bother with a bunch of beer-guzzling Bay Area nitwits unless they smelled money - 500,000 copies worth in the first run. And thrash money spent well, as it turned out. Thanks Cliff!

Throughout his time with Metallica, Burton stood his ground and kept his head. Hetfield and Ulrich might have been the bandleaders, but no way was Cliff a subservient employee. His voice was equally strong and influential. His all-around input made Metallica the best it could ever be. Stare at the old photographs or watch the grainy old video footage of them live in their element then: Burton isn't faking his wide, sunny smile. He rules his side of the stage, whipping around his ass-length crimson mop and making that bass rumble and roar and sing on its own. And nobody made denim bellbottoms cooler for metal. Nobody.

By the time Metallica was back in Copenhagen recording the *Master of Puppets* album with Flemming Rassmussen, Cliff was busy composing the intro to "Battery" and the intro to "Damage, Inc." and the entire middle sections of "Orion" and who knows what else. A confident multi-instrumentalist, Cliff presented intricate demo sketches to the others, who didn't know whether to shit or go blind. But they gratefully absorbed Cliff's lessons and whaddaya know? *MASTER OF PUPPETS* - and the world is all the better for it.

Now Metallica becomes an international buzz band and lands a career-defining opportunity to nab the opening support slot for Ozzy Osbourne's *Ultimate Sin* world tour. *Master of Puppets* moves over 1,000,000 copies (again: no radio, no MTV), but six short months after the album was released, Cliff is gone - taken from us far too young in a tragic tour-bus accident along a lonely highway in Sweden that could've been prevented. So it goes.

There's much speculation as to what Metallica could have become if Burton was still alive. Most of the … *And Justice for All* songs were already underway at the time of Cliff's death, so there would've been further prog-metal exploration. And you know the low-end frequencies would've ended up loud and clear in the mix, thanks. But would the *Black* Album have happened, even with the producer-switch from Flemming Rassmussen to Bob Rock? Hard to say. We might've seen albums that sounded closer to *Death Magnetic* than godawful sonic vomit like *St. Anger*. There'd be no metal-Beatlemania global explosion of popularity, where the world's jocks and cheerleaders became overnight Metallica fans. Ulrich would've had to settle for living in a mansion without bronze lions flanking the gates. But Metallica would've remained special and very present in the public. And Cliff Burton would've kept the creativity and the attitudes in check. Dare to dream.

Today, we still vividly remember what it felt like to be wet-nosed, wide-eyed teenagers, struggling to grow our hair out, finding purpose and identity and our own meaning of life through high-octane earsplitting music. We still remember staring in awe at images of these distant, unreachable heroes - in the pages of monthly music magazines, or fleeting snatches of live video on real-time TV, or swapped cassettes with friends. Much of this was thanks to the Metallica which still had Cliff Burton within it. Cliff, who only lived to be 24, but he seemed timeless and immortal.

And 40 years onward, he's still alive within the grooves of *Master of Puppets*.

MISANTHROPIK TORMENT

THE MOST CONTROVERSIAL ALBUM OF THE CENTURY

Misanthropik Torment, the extreme metal project founded by Erik Leviathan, has unleashed what is being decried as the most controversial album of the century, Make Assassinations Great Again. Released in full on January 20th, 2025, through a strategic alliance of SelfMadeRecords L.L.C., Misanthropik Records, and Earache Records Digital Distribution, the album serves as a brutal sonic manifesto against perceived societal tyranny, advocating for the eradication of predators and a complete systemic overhaul. The project's stated purpose is to enlighten through chaotic artistry and challenge listeners to rethink global structures, vehemently asserting a stance against all political establishments. This intent, however, reached a fever pitch with the album's lead single of the same name, a track so incendiary it prompted a visit from the Secret Service to Leviathan himself. While the creators emphatically state the music is for entertainment only and do not condone unlawful violence, the album's provocative themes and extreme rhetoric challenge the very boundaries of artistic expression, daring the public to confront uncomfortable ideologies from the volatile fringe of metal.

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CLAWFINGER

Interview with Zak Tell- Part 1

By Ryan Dyer

Since forming in 1988/89 at Stockholm's Rosegrove Hospital, Clawfinger have carved out a reputation as one of Europe's most outspoken and uncompromising heavy bands. Blending rap and metal before genre labels caught up, they built their legacy on sharp social commentary, explosive live performances, and an unwavering sense of identity. Upon the release of their new album, *Before We All Die*, released February 20, I spoke with vocalist Zak Tell about the band's early days, controversial beginnings, festival highs, visual missteps, and why North America remains uncharted territory.

AU: After 18 years, Clawfinger is back with a fierce new album, Before We All Die. Why did you feel that now was the right time to return? Was it a matter of life experiences and building up material over the years?

Zak Tell: It was mostly just a matter of having enough songs to be honest. We slowly and gradually started making music as Clawfinger again and we had about six-seven songs written a year or two ago. We had a Zoom meeting with our manager and he knew about this material so he said: Guys, would you consider writing two or three more songs and then we could possibly release a new album before we all die? We laughed about it because we knew that we're not getting any younger and our last release was so many years ago. Then we replied: sure, we can give it a go, if it works it works, if it doesn't it doesn't, oh and by the way, *Before We All Die* is a good title! It's obviously easier to write songs when you're not even thinking in terms of an album and when you don't have a record company breathing down your neck. There are only a couple of songs on the album that were actually written specifically with an album in mind, the rest are just songs we had. As for it being the right time to return, well I don't know, the world has always been a fucked up place and nothing has really changed so this album could just as well have been released in 2010 if we'd had the songs back then.

AU: The first track, "Scum", doesn't mince words regarding Trump. Your message is clear, and more information comes out every day. Would you add anything to the song now that the Epstein files have been released?

ZT: No, we make it pretty damn clear that we think he's a foul human being, a morally corrupt, narcissistic, greedy, egocentric maniac who doesn't really care about people, a failed businessman turned president and a fucking scumbag!

AU: "A Perfect Day" starts so mellow and idyllic — a neighbor smiles, everything seems calm — before descending into the opposite of that after the narrator wakes up the next day. What was the idea behind this contrast, and how does it fit into the broader narrative or mood of *Before We All Die?*

Zak Tell: I was just kind of sick of everyone always liking to sugar coat their realities to make it seem like they live perfect lives. You know, sunsets, photos of amazing meals, happy, well dressed smiling kids etc. I just thought it would be fun to start off with that kind of vibe and then gradually let the dark cloud come into it all musically and kind of ruin it. I guess the reality is that we go between the two extremes and experience bits and pieces of both, there certainly is no such thing as the perfect life even if some people try harder than others to make it seem that way.

AU: "Big Brother" is an interesting concept in 2026. We are all Big Brother now, aren't we?

ZT: Yes we are, we all have our own surveillance cameras in our pockets and we constantly pinpoint our own locations in updates and via apps… and we don't even think twice about it. Our phones are tracking everything we do. The lyric, though, is also referring to all these damn reality shows where people expose themselves, make fools of themselves and are prepared to do anything for 15 seconds of fame and attention. I find it sad and scary that being recognized and famous no longer has to be attached to actual achievements or because of something you have created. It's enough to just get your private parts out and say dumb shit. The lyric was actually written back in 2007 for our *Life Will Kill You* album but we never found the right song for it, finally we succeeded!

AU: Death is always looming, and as we grow older, we see those around us fall. The album title and song "Before We All Die" struck a chord with me: "Live your life. Don't fall in line." Did you feel this album was a statement meant to be made while we are still here — both for you to create and for fans to experience?

ZT: It's just the truth, we're all going to die and sometimes it feels like our race is actively trying to quicken the process. We're fucking over the one planet we have so badly it's ridiculous. We're all greedy and obsessed with money, wealth and our own personal success. We've forgotten what basic decency is, we're quick to judge people based on appearances, religions, sexual preferences and we are not as open minded and patient as we think we are, we're actually pretty fucking horrible! What happened to "thank you", "how are you", "can I help you", "how are you doing today" and just basic politeness and kindness, treating people as we would like to be treated ourselves? There's no contradiction in being nice and also going your own way and paving your own path but it doesn't have to be at the expense of others. It's also just an internet joke like I mentioned earlier as we are all getting older, are going to die and we haven't released an album in almost two decades!

AU: Clawfinger, to me, is a state of mind — a state of truth. I feel this is what brought you success in the first place and has made people lifers. What do you think?

ZT: That sounds nice and we hope that it's true, sometimes it feels like it, we're not a band you listen casually to so you're probably not wrong. I think people realize that what we do is sincere, it's unfiltered, it's honest and that we're actually trying to say something that means something, not all bands do that and I guess that's one of the things that makes us unique. We are who we are, we sound the way we do and what we've got is what you're getting!

To Be Continued...

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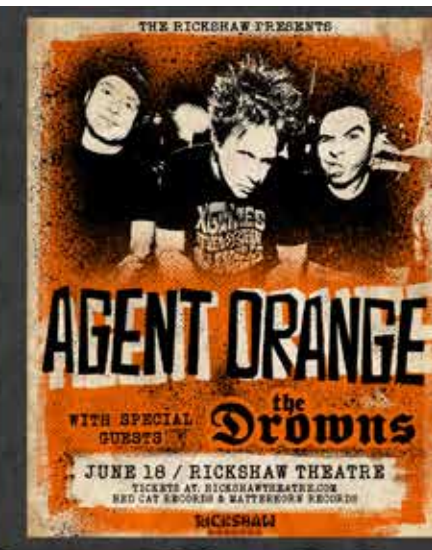

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OLD GANG - NEW BLOOD

Stefan Kaufmann (DATOG) Interview

By Ferdy Belland

Guitarist-producer Stefan Kaufmann discusses metal supergroup Dirkschneider and the Old Gang

"We did the *We Are One* album with Das Musikkorps der Bundeswehr (the German military orchestra) back in 2020," recounts guitarist-producer Stefan Kaufmann of Dirkschneider and the Old Gang (DATOG), the new German metal-supergroup headed by Accept's legendary former vocalist Udo Dirkschneider. "We did the song "Where Angels Fly," and there was another song we really wanted to do, so we recorded it with our vocalist friend Manuela Bibert. We all connected as friends and musical collaborators, and were excited to see what else we could do - and then the pandemic arrived."

A sadly common story for all musicians from all styles and genres who struggled alongside the rest of the world to trudge our way through the early years of the 2020s. But with true Teutonic toughness, the DATOG members (which includes bassist Peter Baltes, drummer Sven Dirkschneider and guitarist Mathias Dieth) regrouped as they could and kept the creative fires burning.

"We wanted to do something with local musicians and local technicians, so we weren't dying of boredom during the lockdown," says Kaufmann, "so the recording sessions turned into a charity project. We wrote and recorded two more songs and then released the *Arising* EP, along with three promotional videos. And it was a very big success! Then the record company got all excited and pushed us to do a full album, but we didn't have the material. And after three years of waiting out the pandemic, we finally did have enough songs to regroup for recording. And then what started as a charity project evolved into a Love Child between the six of us!"

And what a Love Child DATOG is: the video for the leadoff single "Babylon" (an impressive 9-minute epic which has nearly 320,000 views on YouTube as of this writing, and still climbing) spells out everything one needs to know about the band - the gritty growl everyone's loved about Udo, the soaring angelic voice of Manuela Bibert (the Sarah Brightman of Heavy Metal), the virtuosic guitar interplay of Mathias and Stefan, and the rock-solid percussive flourishes of Sven (guess who his dad is). There've been previous so-called 'supergroups' in the past, but rarely do you find collaborations that weren't forced and bolted together into an awkward gaggle of hesitant folks who don't know what to do with each other. There's nothing artificial (or, to give it German authenticity: *ersatz*) about DATOG. All they'd need to improve the model would be to recruit Uli Jon Roth, but DATOG is astounding enough as they are. Listen for yourself.

"There's no pressure on any of us, no music-industry obligations," says Kaufmann. "No one's hovering over us, saying: *you've got to release a METAL album! You need DOUBLE BASS in this song!* - nothing like that. We simply write according to what styles of music all six of us love, individually and collectively and this is what comes out. It's an easy-going creative experience where everyone has their say. Nobody's dominating, nobody's calling the shots. It's a democratic process. As long as all six of us ended up liking all twelve songs, then we succeeded."

DATOG's musical connection is described as the sort of laid-back harmony every band strives for. And the output is also impressive: Kaufmann says the album was whittled down to size from a list of over two dozen songs the band finished before serious recording sessions began.

"We've got six very different musicians working together, really," says Kaufmann. "Take the song "Babylon" - when I was recording solos with Matthias, he offered to bring in a riff of his that he'd had in the vaults. Which was encouraged and accepted, and became the main riff of the song. And then we recorded piano and clean guitar afterwards, and then we stopped writing the song so Manuela had time to add her vocal melodies atop everything. So after she came in and recorded her parts, it was then that we composed the song's chorus. It's our type of teamwork. And all the songs were written like that, more or less. Someone would bring in a basic idea and everyone else would add their input to it. Some songs were brought in more complete and finished, but all in all it's an easygoing process that works very well. I can still listen back to what we've done and there are still surprises to be heard. We're doing all this because we want to do it, not because we have to do it. If the public likes what we're doing, then of course that's great, but we're doing this for ourselves."

As an in-demand producer-engineer, Stefan Kaufmann certainly finds no time to rest. He's currently working on the new UDO album and has a long list of eager musical clients in the queue once that project is put to bed. But the buzz as of late remains the Old Gang, and his attitude towards that group is positive, but he's keeping it a non-overwhelming experience.

"We aren't proactively seeking out a European tour," explains Kaufmann. "If we get an offer we cannot resist, then we'll play. And we get asked all the time! Udo and Dieter and Sven are all busy with UDO, Manuela's busy with various choirs and musical theatre in Switzerland and stuff with her own band, Mathias is a lawyer with a thriving practice... having us do a dedicated tour isn't impossible, or to play some special shows here and there, but the band wasn't formed with that necessarily in mind. Most of us have been doing this for half a century now, and everyone knows that the music industry is a tough business. We write the music, and record the songs, and film the videos, all for the fun of it. But we would tour for the fun of it!"

For more information on Dirkschneider and the Old Gang, please visit datog.de

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MICKEY MOONE

The Exile of Skeleton Lake

Written by Dennis Lightheart, A.P. Records

They say Mickey Moone didn't simply move to Skeleton Lake; he was driven there by forces older than memory. The story goes that he fled under a sky split by torches and pitchforks, chased by an ancient resentment no living person can name. He paddled across the black water until he reached the island at the lake's heart, a place locals avoid and maps refuse to acknowledge. There, beside a still that burns in impossible purples and greens, Moone began forging the sound that would define him: a one man storm of punk rock, heartbreak and 1950s shimmer.

In the real world, that still is his home studio, where he writes, performs, records and mixes every note himself. But the myth insists the process is alchemical. They say each guitar lick is hammered on an anvil of moonlit stone, each drumbeat carved from the bones beneath the lake, each harmonica wail pulled from the wind that circles the island at dusk. When he emerges with new music whether the gritty stomp of "Perspective" or the vintage-sweet glow of "Take It Easy" the mainland swears it feels enchanted, as if the songs carry traces of whatever magic fuels that eternal flame.

And so Mickey Moone remains both man and myth: a Skeleton Lake exile who returns only when the still commands it, carrying songs that feel half remembered and half bewitched. His videos win awards, his singles ripple across Canada and yet the legend persists that he is merely the messenger that the lake itself is the true composer, whispering melodies through the trees. Whether you believe the folklore or the facts, one thing is certain: every time Moone steps off that island, the world gets a little stranger, and a lot more alive.

Photo credits: Julie Kennedy

GRAVEMASS

This Is The Way

Interview with Mayan Hate (guitar)

by Asher Thrasher

AU: What is Gravemass up to these days?

Mayan Hate: Hello, Absolute Underground Magazine. Gravemass's favorite and most badass magazine on the planet! Gravemass has been busy putting out our latest video and performing our album release show for "*This is the Way*". As well, working with End Game Records on our Summer Western Canadian 2026 Tour.

AU: You wrote the entire debut album's music in just two months between other projects. What headspace were you in during that writing burst, and how did that intensity shape the sound and direction of *This Is The Way*?

Mayan Hate: Yeah, I was at the time pretty pissed off. Sick of trying to make music in my life work and just trying to work with a band situation that was not working. So, with the frustration of all that going on and literally in the studio trying to make that work. I decided to focus on something that I could control, which is music that, in the moment, just poured out of me.

AU: Gravemass is made up of musicians who've dominated the Vancouver metal scene for decades. When you were composing the riffs, how much were you writing with these specific players in mind, and how much was pure instinct and aggression?

Mayan Hate: 100% pure instinct and concentrated on making it as aggressive and pissed off as the moment felt. When it came to the other players in the band, I did not have to question their needs or skills. I already knew exactly who the players in the scene were meant to be. Luckily for us, everyone involved was once approached. I guess you could say this lineup was just meant to be. It has been an effortless process since the get-go.

AU: You've described the band's sound as "brutal, angry, fast, dark, and evil." When you listen back to the finished album, which track best represents your vision as the main songwriter, and why?

Mayan Hate: I think pretty much every track has a lot of aggression and anger in it. I am having a hard time picking just one, but if I have to pick one. "Poison Temple" was one of the last ones to write and it has some cool riffs that are fun to play. I think this album is just the beginning, the process and song ideas for the second album are already in the works and that is what I am stoked about now.

AU: The first album was written primarily by you, while the second is planned as a full-band collaboration. What made *This Is The Way* something you needed to spearhead personally, and how do you see the writing dynamic evolving?

Mayan Hate: The first album was spontaneous and made out of anger and hate. It just happened and it worked so I went with it. Now that we are actually a band of brothers who have known each other for decades. I would be stupid not to tap into what these players have to offer.

AU: You've already begun writing for the second album. After establishing such a relentless, uncompromising sound on the debut, what new ground are you hoping to push into next, musically, technically, or thematically?

Mayan Hate: Super stoked to see where this goes from here. Our only focus is to tap into everyone's aggression in their playing to make the best possible follow up record. The more pissed off, the better; that is the only focus.

AU: It's our 420 issue, do any of the band members blaze the unholy smoke?

Mayan Hate: Yes, Lorde Heathen, Murderer of Colonizers and Bowels of Hell all partake.

AU: Favourite thing to do stoned?

Mayan Hate: I have been personally off that program for years. But when I did partake, playing my guitar is what came to mind. These days, I am pissed at so many things; my guitar is what keeps me sane.

AU: Indica or sativa?

Mayan Hate: Back in the day, sativa was the only way. Unless I was out of them, then Indica was cool.

AU: Anything else to mention?

Mayan Hate: Meeting fans of the band so far has been the highlight for sure. So many rad as hell people that are coming out that seem legitimately excited for this band and what we are doing. We want to thank every single one of you who has shown that support, bought a shirt, come to a show, downloaded our album from Bandcamp and supported us in any way. Welcome to the family.

AU: Final Words.

Mayan Hate: As always, Hails to the Gravemass Family!!! \„/\„/

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DEFORMER is a music project initiated by Dutch cult figure Mike Redman in the early 90's. It's considered radio-unfriendly, bold, dark and unorthodox, 'a soundtrack for audio outcasts and musical misfits'.' Often banned or intentionally ignored by press and promotors, in the underground Deformer has achieved legendary status for the project's perpetual reinvention, extreme musical crossovers and the incessantly outrageous horror-themed theatrical performances and record covers.

At first the 'disturbing' record sleeves were censored, sales stagnated and the records didn't find the right audience because Deformer resembled more of a death metal band than an extreme electronic act. Now people collect the physical releases and Deformer is hailed for putting the horror aesthetic into the genre, inspiring a new generation of artists and labels. Mike Redman usually designs all record covers himself, but some renowned visual artists such as Ed Repka (known for his iconic work for metalbands Death and Megadeth), Graham Humphreys (cover artist for horror milestones like The Evil Dead and A Nightmare on Elm Street) and famous Japanese Manga/ Guro artist Shintaro Kago have also contributed to the bizarre visual aesthetics of Deformer.

Deformer's fanbase is as versatile as the music: metalheads as well as lovers of bass-driven electronic music join the infamous Deformer mosh-pits at live shows. These shows, by the way, are an experience of their own as fake body parts and other bloody attributes are thrown into the audience. It's almost as if you're at a GWAR show, which is not entirely strange knowing that Mike Redman - a dedicated Horror fan who has also featured in various documentaries, such as 'In Search of Darkness' and 'Cult of VHS' - has a past in special makeup FX artistry for film, and has found a way to integrate this profession into the Deformer project.

In addition to various solo achievements, Deformer has had great succes with side project VOODOOM and collaborated with many groundbreaking artists like Mike Smith (Suffocation), Public Enemy, Living Colour, Ice-T, David Vincent (ex-Morbid Angel) as well as movie legends Charles Band (Full Moon Features) and Tony 'Candyman' Todd.

After more than thirty years, Deformer remains underground, even online! The popular streaming platforms don't represent Deformer's most interesting back catalog and their social media game could definitely use some proper management. In 2022 'See, Hear, Scream!' was released, an excessive compilation of the most innovative and wildest tracks, a great chance for newcomers to catch up. Currently Deformer still performs and new material seems to be on the way, but might only be available offline, or at the better record stores. Either way, Deformer is raging on and keeps the underground moist!

Find a selection of Deformer releases at redrumrecordz.com
or stay updated on Instagram @deformermusic

PONTE DEL DIAVOLO

Dual—Bass Blackened Post-Punk from Torino, Italy

By FLORA

Absolute Underground: Ciao! Who are we talking to today, and what is Ponte del Diavolo most famous—or infamous—for?

Kratom: Hi! Kratom here. I would say that we're best known for blending different metal genres with a post-punk/wave approach and also for having a dual bass setup in our lineup. Also we give everything we have in live shows.

AU: Where are you from and what's the local music scene like there?

Kratom: We're all based in Torino (Italy), even though some of us are not born in the area. There is a lot of ferment here in the underground, and it's a really great environment to live in. I would say that the local music scene in Torino is an exceptional reality and unfortunately most of Italy is not like that, but of course you also have good people and venues supporting the music in other cities.

Abro: The Turin scene has always been one of the strongest in Italy. I'd say mainly for black metal, hardcore and electronic music.

AU: Your sound blends blackened post-punk and doom metal, bridging scenes that don't always overlap. Did that combination happen naturally, or was it something you set out to create from the beginning? How have audiences from different musical worlds responded so far?

Kratom: I guess the seeds of the different musical elements were always there but they just blossomed throughout the years. We all love metal and post-punk/wave music in the band, but for sure our singer Erba del Diavolo is the main component that shifts our sounds towards the post-punk/wave dimension, since it was her musical background while growing up. In terms of audiences I would say that our peculiar mix is mostly well received. Sometimes when we played in the more extreme metal festivals you can see some puzzled faces, but this is also entertaining for us and it's nice to surprise people. I'm a big fan of extreme metal music for example, but when I'm at a festival where 90% of the bands in the bill are extreme death and black metal acts, I also find it refreshing to listen to something with different flavors.

AU: The band's dual bass setup is powerful and uncommon. What drew you to that configuration and how does having two basses change the way you write or perform your songs?

Abro: It was Erba del Diavolo that had the idea of a new doom project with two basses. She reached out to us and after a few jams together we realized that something interesting was taking shape. In *De Venom Natura* we worked a lot on merging the sound of the two basses in a satisfying way. We are very happy with the result but we are also constantly working on it to improve our approach.

AU: Your second album, *De Venom Natura*, came out February 13. The title suggests something poisonous, raw and elemental. What emotional or thematic space does this album inhabit and what do you hope listeners are left feeling—or questioning?

Kratom: *De Venom Natura* revolves around the idea that Nature, in the broadest sense of the term, is imbued with poison—an element that works like a double-edged weapon. It is enrapturing and seductive but also toxic and potentially lethal. It is the leavening agent that transforms and makes new life possible, yet also the inevitable bearer of death, in an eternal cycle of life, death and rebirth. That being said, we prefer not to explain too much our point of view, since the beauty of making music is also letting the listener have its own take on it.

AU: "Spirit, Blood, Poison, Ferment!", the album's second single, feels almost alchemical in its language and atmosphere. What made this track the right choice to further introduce the world of *De Venom Natura*?

Kratom: This was the first song written for the album and also the first single we chose. It sits comfortably within the band's signature style: it opens with black metal elements and closes in doom territory, with a distinctly epic and decadent mood. Francesco Bucci's trombone (Ottone Pesante) enhances this epic feeling and gives the track an ancestral mood.

AU: This *Absolute Underground* issue has a Valentine's Day theme, so let's ask the important questions: any dating or relationship advice—from the romantic, to the brutal, to the brutally honest?

Kratom: I don't feel we're very qualified on this, but being an Italian I would say that a romantic and tasty dinner is better than a box of chocolates. Also some nice classics in the background to set the mood, like *Butchered at Birth*.

AU: Love can be obsessive, dangerous and intoxicating—much like your music. Do themes of love, desire or devotion appear on *De Venom Natura*, even in darker forms?

Erba: Yes of course, every union is an act of magick against the small self that insists on being sovereign. You don't love to be saved; you love to be undone. Death, then, is not the end of love but its most honest shape: the moment you stop lying to yourself and let your will burn away everything that is false. In that fire there is no comfort, no redemption, only freedom. And anyone unwilling to die has never dared to love.

AU: Do you have any upcoming tours or shows planned for 2026?

Kratom: Absolutely, we'll bring the new record on tour around Europe. The shows confirmed so far are:

2026 02 13 - Hiroshima Mon Amour - Torino
2026 02 27 - Damage Inc. - Verona
2026 03 11 - Rock n'Eat - Lyon (FR)
2026 03 12 - La Maison Bleue - Strasbourg (FR)
2026 03 13 - La Boule Noire - Paris (FR)
2026 03 14 - Cold Crash - Nantes (FR)
2026 03 27 - Stengade - Copenhagen (DK)
2026 04 05 - Dark Easter Metal Meeting - Backstage Munchen (DE)
2026 05 07 - Montpellier (FR)
2026 05 08 - D8 Sorkuntza Faktoria - Bilbao (ES)
2026 05 09 - Sala Silikona - Madrid (ES)
2026 05 10 - Upload - Barcelona (ES)
2026 05 22 - Traffic Live - Roma
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2026 06 13 - ZappenDuster Festival - Munster (DE)
2026 06 19 - Hellfest - Clisson (FR)
2026 07 29/08 01 - Fekete Zaj - Mátra Sástó (HU)

AU: What's the best way for people to hear your music or to find you online?

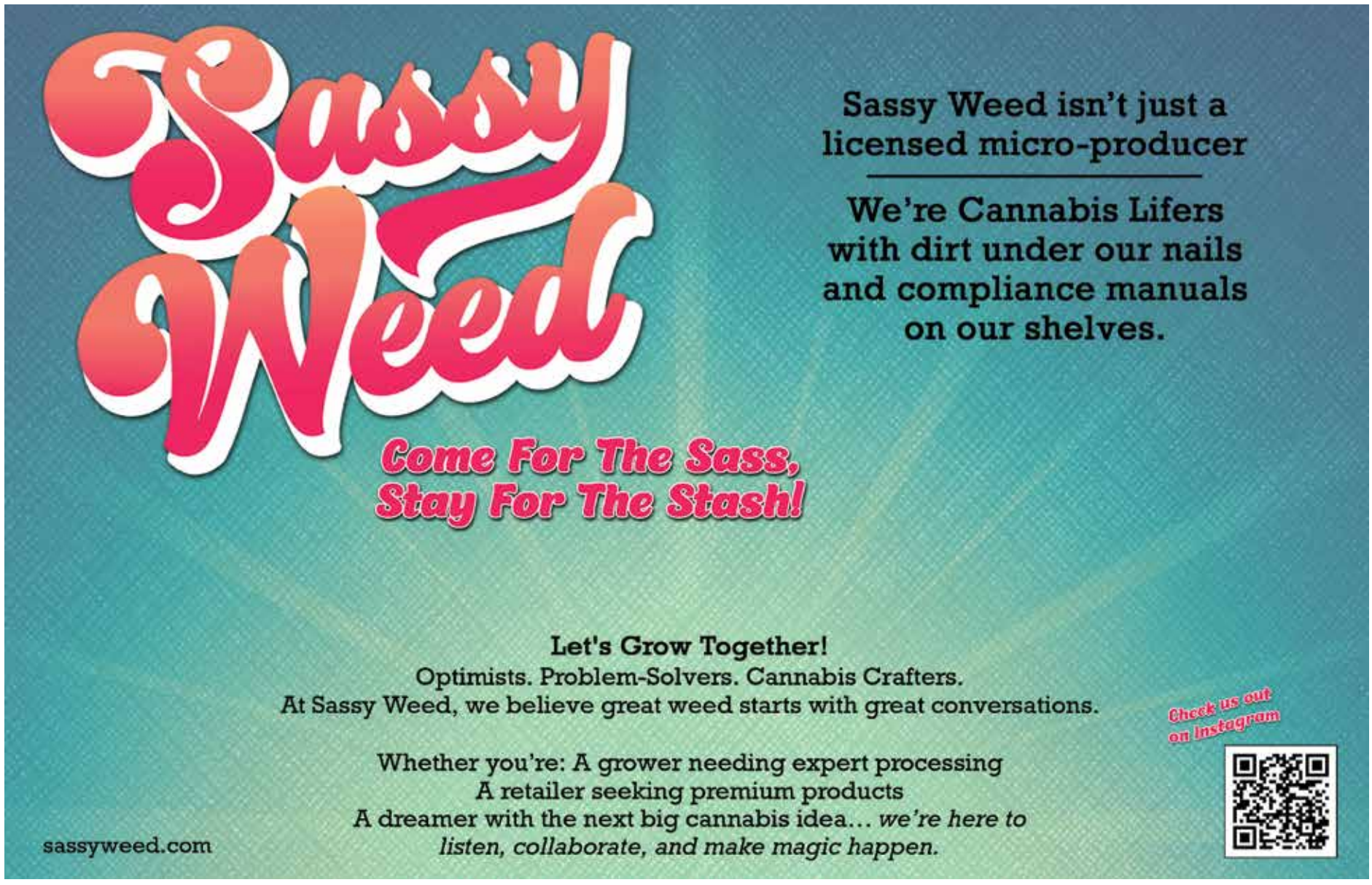
Kratom: Here is our linktree for all our outputs:

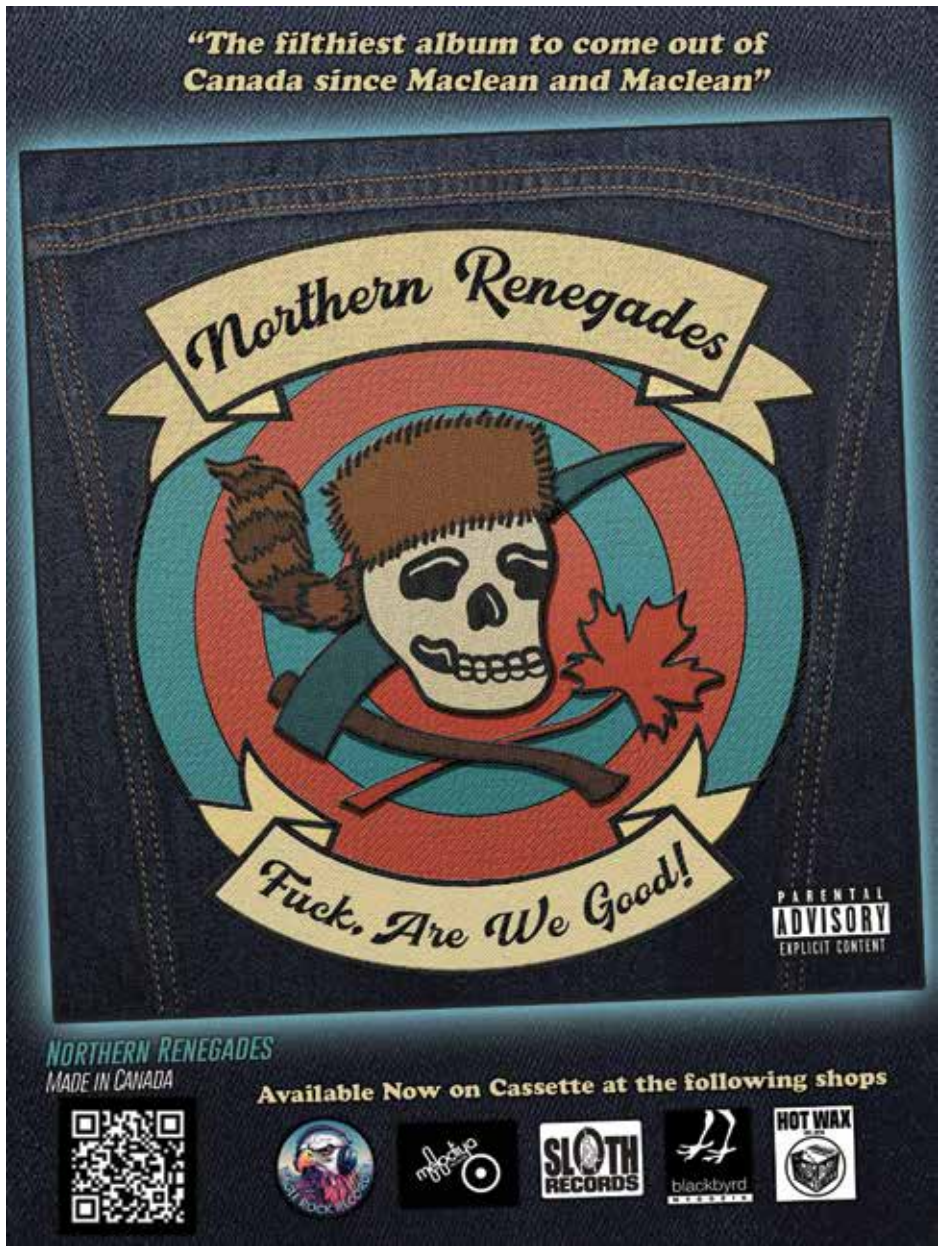
linktr.ee/pontedeldiavolo

AU: Any final words for our readers?

Kratom: Thanks for taking your time to read until here, hope to see you on the road soon!

Photo Credit: SergioBertani





Blunt In, Thrash Out: INSANITY ALERT Bring the Party to 420

By FLORA

Absolute Underground: For the uninitiated party thrashers, who are we talking to today, where are you from and what's currently fuelling the Insanity Alert mosh machine?

Heavy Kevy: I'm Heavy Kevy, singer and oracle, born in Rotterdam, The Netherlands, but for the last 16 years I´ve been living in the pretty city of Innsbruck in Tirol, Austria. The apparatus mosh from Insanity Alert is currently being fueled by preparations for the festival season. It's our 15th anniversary this year and we plan to go all out at lovely events like Wacken Open Air, Hellfest, Obscene Extreme, Dynamo, Alcatraz, Betizfest, Into The Grave and mucho mas!

AU: Your parodies walk the perfect line between tribute and total destruction — what's the secret to taking a classic track and turning it into an Insanity Alert anthem?

HK: Lots of love for the original songs and artists to begin with. A tremendous amount of patience comes next. Skilled musicians, crazy brainstorming, some luck with the lyrics and never forgetting the core. Persistence is king in this matter.

AU: From the demo to Moshemian Thrashody, the intensity and musicianship keep levelling up. How has the band evolved without losing that unhinged party-thrash spirit?

HK: This is gonna sound cheesy, but we really enjoy what we're doing. Since 2011 we've been playing shows, partying hard, meeting so many nice people and risking a lot. We still practice regularly, the guys keep getting better with their instruments. We spend many weekends on the road, driving big distances to play concerts. But the people (and the beers) make it all worthwhile.

AU: What usually comes first: the killer riff, the gang-shout mosh part or the most ridiculous lyric you can get away with?

HK: Most of the time it's the title, which in many cases is the gang-shout part. "All Mosh / No Brain" was too good not to use, but in the beginning I had absolutely no idea what the lyrics should be.

AU: Bands like Suicidal Tendencies and Municipal Waste clearly live in your DNA — what did they teach you about how this music should feel live?

HK: 100% the energy. No fuckin' around, not playing with your back towards the audience. Full frontal attack. It IS rock n roll after all, like Lemmy always put it. You hit the stage, you give it all and together with the moshers and the headbangers you try to create magic. Or like I put it myself: You come, you fuck shit up, you leave.

AU: You've torn up stages from Wacken Open Air to Hellfest — what's the most unforgettable Insanity Alert moment so far, onstage or off?

HK: Hellfest 2019, Mainstage. We were the 2nd band on the mainstage that day. During the soundcheck the whole field in front of the stage was empty. It was all surreal. Two years earlier we had played the Warzone Stage and that had already been so wild. The guys from Municipal Waste arrived during our soundcheck, they were gonna play after us. Other bands on that stage that day included Testament, Anthrax, Death Angel and fuckin' Slayer! The night before we had already watched ZZ Top, Whitesnake and Def Leppard, just to name a few... And now some idiots from the Alps got to do their magic. When I entered the stage, the field was filled with thrashers, all the way to the horizon. I really don't remember much from the show, but the videos look great.

AU: Your shows are pure circle-pit insanity — what does that physical, party-level interaction with the crowd mean to you?

HK: It's our everything. When the crowd delivers, it hypes us and makes us wanna play harder, faster and weirder. An IA show without maniacs is just a horrible thing.

AU: After nearly 15 years of speed, beer and blast beats, what keeps Insanity Alert from ever slowing down?

HK: We're in it for the long-run, and it's exactly those things that keep us going. As a matter of fact, we need MORE speed, beer and blast beats.

AU: What's next — more new music, more touring, more parodies or even weirder territory?

HK: No idea what the future might bring, but I'm hoping for all of the aforementioned. We really need to drop a new album, there's so many cool places I still wanna play or play again. My list of Re-Arrangement Ideas is very long, so I can see a sequel to *Moshemian Thrashody* coming for sure. And I have my mind set on playing more shows in Asia. We've been to Japan in 2019 and I hope we can make it back there this year. But Thailand, Cambodia and Vietnam are high on my list too.

AU: You're building the ultimate crossover thrash survival kit — give us three albums every fan needs for maximum mosh readiness.

HK:

- S.O.D. – *Speak English Or Die*
- Suicidal Tendencies – *S/T*
- Municipal Waste – *The Art Of Partying*

AU: It's our 420 issue — does weed culture naturally belong in crossover thrash or did you just drag it into the pit yourselves?

HK: Being born in the Netherlands, 420 has always been a part of my life since my early teenage years. If it naturally belongs to crossover, is not up to me to say, but it sure as hell works!

AU: Which Insanity Alert song hits the hardest in a perfectly "enhanced" listening session?

HK: "Wake & Bake" from our Moshburger album would do great! Although "Weedgrinder" from our debut LP could also be a great fit.

AU: Ideal scenario: full fridge, good bud and a classic record — what's playing and where are you?

HK: Currently my mood hangs towards Limone Sul Garda at the Garda Lake, drinking some lovely Lugana wine and enjoying *Chet* by Chet Baker from 1959.

Info, Shop and Dates: linktr.ee/insanityalert

Photo credit: Katharina Moll @katharinamll

THE PENSKE FILE: *Reprieve*

Interview with Travis Miles

By Ben Andress

Absolute Underground: *Reprieve* carries a powerful emotional arc — can you walk us through the personal or creative experiences that shaped the songwriting on this album and how those themes will come alive in your live set?

Travis Miles: In a way it seems like all of our creative and personal experiences brought us to this album. We've been friends since we were kids and have been creating together for 20 years (which is a crazy thing to say out loud aha) at its core the album is about holding on to what we find endearing about the youthful spirit, despite the inevitably of aging. It's about struggling with yourself and your own existence, in a way. And through that struggle, holding on to the things you love and the people you love, laughing in the face of mortality and creating a life worth remembering. In some kind of abstract, yet natural way, I suppose, that all of this comes across in our live show when it works best. When it feels like a celebration of community and expression and life in general. At least that's the goal post we aim for when we turn on the amps.

AU: What was it like recording *Reprieve* for Stomp Records this past October? Were there any collaborations, production moments or unexpected creative breakthroughs that pushed your sound in new directions?

TM: We took a bit of a different approach to recording this album than our past couple of albums. For one, we worked with a new producer, our long time best pal Adam Michael. Being such close friends it felt great and natural inviting him into the creative fold for the final writing sessions and the recording process. We made a conscious effort throughout the writing to only follow things that felt immediately exciting to us, and adopted a sort of first instinct wins type of mentality. In addition to that we recorded most of the record live in an effort to capture the energy of our live shows. There's songs on this album that aren't necessarily a departure from what we've become known for in our community, but rather more like an expansion of that. There's longer and more sonically sprawling songs than we've done in the past; at the same time, there's faster, more straightforward punk rockers than we've ever done and also songs that are more stripped down and indicative of our more folk leaning influences. The result is what I feel is our most expansive record to date and something I would be happy to point anyone towards who was looking to get to know our band and what we're all about musically and artistically.

AU: Since the release of *Reprieve* how has audience response on the road or online influenced the way you're performing these songs live especially for fans in smaller cities like Tillsonburg?

TM: The audience response to the Reprieve tour so far, which has taken us all over Germany, Switzerland and Ontario and Quebec has been very positive. Music, in my mind, works best when it's collaborative. Not only collaborative amongst its creators and performers, but collaborative between those who expel the music and those who embrace it. When we feel the energy exchange with a room of people who connect with our music, especially the new album, that's when we really feel like we're on the right track. It's like floating: everything else just melts away. Community and catharsis shine and life feels very worth living. That's happened more than a few times touring in support of this album and I'm grateful for that.

AU: What plans does the band have for 2026?

TM: We've got some shows planned around Ontario and Alberta this winter, we're playing Pouzza Fest in Montreal this spring, and then back to Europe for some festivals in the summer. More stuff will come about I'm sure. '26 for us as a band is mostly about getting these new songs in real spaces in front of real people and turning the fuck up.

thepenskefileband.bandcamp.com

BRENDAN + CHERYL

brendanandcheryl.bandcamp.com

Teen Punk Trio GENERAL CHAOS Bring the Noise with "Busted"

Montreal has always had a reputation for turning out loud, fast, and politically aware punk bands, and a new generation is already carrying that tradition forward. One of the most talked-about young bands in the city right now is General Chaos, a trio whose age might surprise you, but whose sound definitely won't.

Formed in 2022 when the members were only twelve years old, General Chaos have quickly moved beyond novelty status and into the territory of a serious working punk band. Now sixteen, the Montreal trio are preparing to release their second full-length album, *Can't Please 'Em All*, arriving May 8 through Stomp Records. The first advance single, "Busted," gives listeners a clear idea of what to expect: fast, sharp, hook-driven punk that gets in, hits hard, and gets out.

"Busted" is built on tight downstrokes, punchy bass, and a chant-along chorus, landing somewhere in the space between classic street punk and melodic skate punk. The track captures the tension between independence and consequences, with lyrics about speaking your mind even when it gets you into trouble. It's direct, energetic, and unapologetic — exactly what good punk should be.

What makes General Chaos particularly interesting isn't just their age, but how they've built their reputation. Rather than relying on viral attention or social media hype, they've earned their following the traditional way: by playing shows. From early appearances at Montreal's Pouzza Fest to all-ages venues across Québec and Ontario, the band has developed a reputation for high-energy live performances and tight musicianship well beyond their years.

Their debut album, *Outta My Way*, helped establish them as more than just a young band playing punk — they were simply a punk band, period. With *Can't Please 'Em All*, they appear to be taking another step forward. The album was recorded quickly in a live studio environment, capturing the raw energy of the band without over-polishing the sound. The result is expected to be immediate, loud, and honest.

General Chaos also comes from a city with deep punk roots, and that influence is hard to ignore. Montreal helped shape Canadian punk through bands that built independent scenes, DIY venues, and a culture that kept the genre alive across decades. General Chaos feel like a continuation of that lineage rather than a throwback to it. Their sound isn't retro — it's just the next generation doing what punk has always done: play fast, speak honestly, and don't wait for permission.

Lyrically, the upcoming album tackles themes like political division, consumer culture, straight edge identity and the frustrations of growing up in a complicated world. If "Busted" is any indication, the band approaches these topics with direct writing and no unnecessary polish — just energy, attitude, and something to say.

generalchaosband.bandcamp.com
instagram.com/generalchaos.band

Photo Credit: Hugo Genest

ver·nac·u·lar

RATBOY ROY

By John Carlow / Finding Charlotte Photography

In this feature *Absolute Underground* takes a few minutes to highlight someone in the local Victoria, BC scene.

Absolute Underground: Introduce yourself.

Ratboy Roy: I'm Ratboy Roy and I am currently the singer and lyricist for Victoria band, Hung Up. Other bands that I have been in from oldest to most recent are Ted Bundy Project / Alcoholic White Trash / Ratboy Roy and the Gloryholes / BLKR.

AU: What do you do in real life when not on a stage?

RR: I do metal fabrication to pay the bills, and in my spare time I like fishing, hiking, going to punk shows and touching myself inappropriately.

AU: I know you were a regular at the late great Tavern of the Damned. What did that haven for the underground scene mean to you?

RR: It meant a lot. I've played and watched so many shows there over the years that I think I began to take for granted that it would always be there. It was a sad day when they closed the doors.

AU: Funniest / best story to come from your years there?

RR: I don't know if it's funny or good but the craziest melee / riot I've ever seen at a show was there. Hong Kong Blonde was playing with the Neo Nasties, and Alcoholic White Trash opening. I guess the crew that came over from Vancouver with Hong Kong Blonde and the Neo Nasties were in a rowdy mood that night because before the headliner even hit the stage a small riot had broken out. Multiple fights, tables being flipped, and it seemed like the cops were there in seconds and they were beating the shit out of people. It was by far the wildest fight night I've ever seen anywhere I've played. Not the typical Logan's vibe at all.

AU: What are your impressions of the current local scene?

RR: The Vic scene is always strong with talented people in killer bands. My favorites are Dayglo Abortions, Keg Killers, Gnar Gnars, Fully Crazed, and Neurospasm just to name a few. The most important and impressive thing about the Vic scene to me is the support for one another. Every year there are benefit shows for people who may be ill, or for families of friends who've passed away. I think we really do give a shit about one another.

AU: The tats on your hands. When did you have that done? Are you glad they're gonna be there forever?

RR: The tattoos on my hands say RATO PUNK. It's my stage name in Portuguese (I am an immigrant here to steal your jobs and women). I got them done when I was in the Ted Bundy Project which is when I figured out that being on stage and writing music was what I was put here to do. I don't regret getting them a bit. Rato punk til I die!

AU: Has anyone been on stage half naked as much as you have?

RR: Traumatized a few drummers I'm guessing. Ha! Funny enough I'm almost never completely naked on stage, just mostly naked. I think I've been completely naked a couple of times when someone has come on stage and yanked down my gonch when I was too drunk to stop them. The only drummer who has ever mentioned anything about it was Jason Brown when at the end of our set I would turn my ass to the crowd and shake it around, which meant I was shaking my junk at him. He said something like "Fuck you're shaking that right in my fucking face." He deserved it... RIP bro!

AU: Anything special in your music collection?

RR: My tape collection has been decimated by all the moves that I've done over the years. I have a modest record collection but there's nothing noteworthy as far as monetary value. My favorite album is a Misfits bootleg that Hoon Trash bought for me when he was in Japan on tour with the Gnar Gnars, it has some raw sounding recordings from their band practices, and I fucking love it.

AU: Social media?

RR: No, I'm not on any social media. I did have a Facebook account for over a decade and had a like / hate relationship with it that eventually turned into more hate and less like, so I said fuck it and deleted it. I do miss the info for shows and getting to see all the posters but for the most part I'm happier not being on there.

AU: Like all kinds of music?

RR: I really do love all styles of music. I know it's cliche to say so but there's only two types of music: good and bad. All genres fall into one of those two types.

AU: Fav bands?

RR: Misfits, Ramones, Dwarves and lately Viagra Boys are probably my favorite bands right now, but the answer to that question can change depending on my mood.

AU: Who is on your bucket list to see?

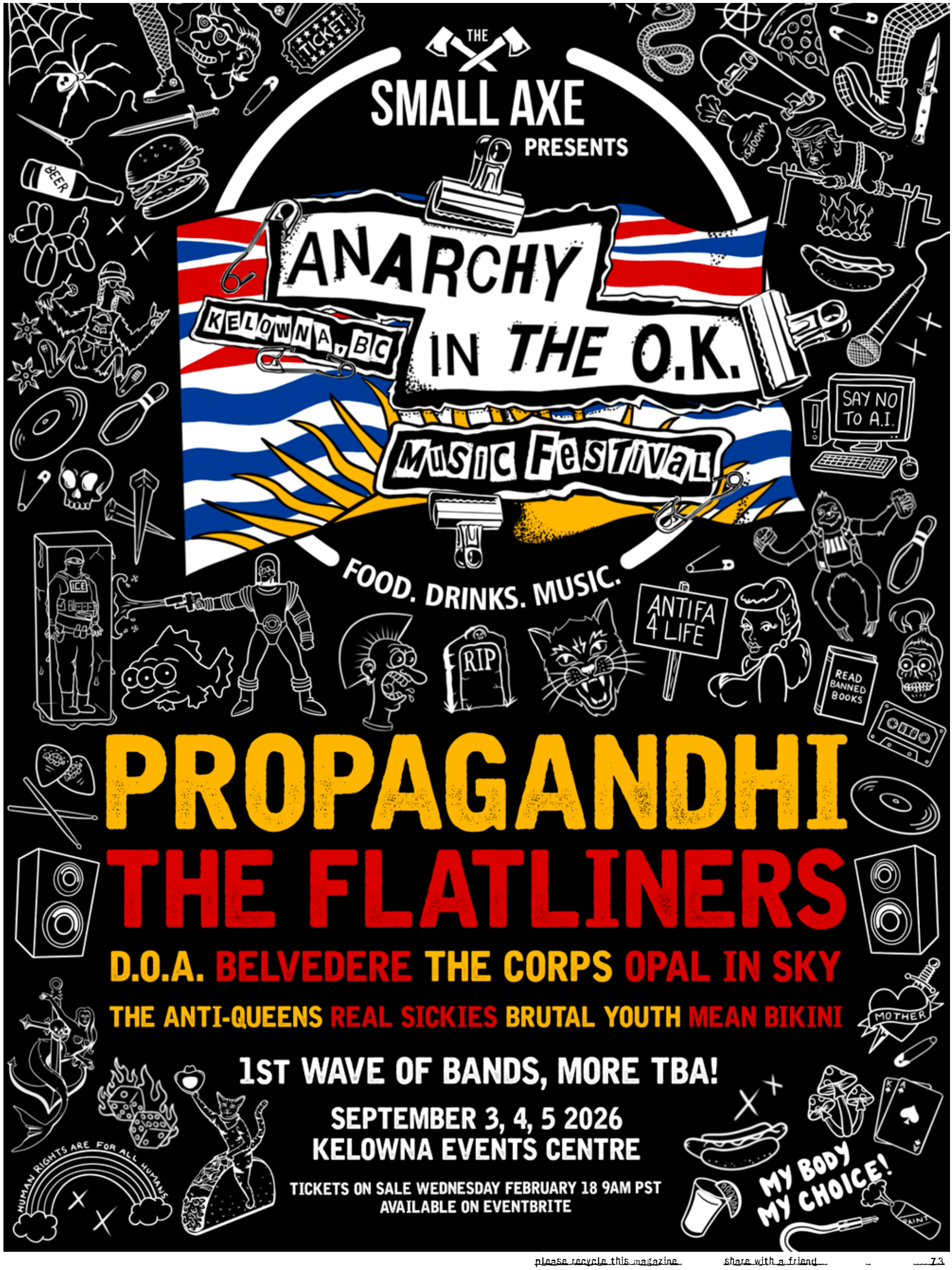
RR: I don't really have a bucket list of bands to see. I guess the closest thing would be the Misfits with Danzig, but I doubt they will ever come to Canada and there's no way I'm going to the States to see them. I saw Danzig with Doyle on his legacy tour, and they played a bunch of Misfit songs. That's probably the closest I will get.

AU: Should music have a message?

RR: Yes and no. I know that answer is a cop out, but I do like lots of songs with messages when they're not preachy or are delivered intelligently. Even though I like lots of songs with messages, if I listen to too much of them for too long, I will crave a good dose of Aaargh Fuck Kill style songs too.

AU: Road ahead?

RR: To keep collaborating on writing music that I love with my friends and hopefully keep entertaining people until I drop dead on stage or from touching myself inappropriately too much.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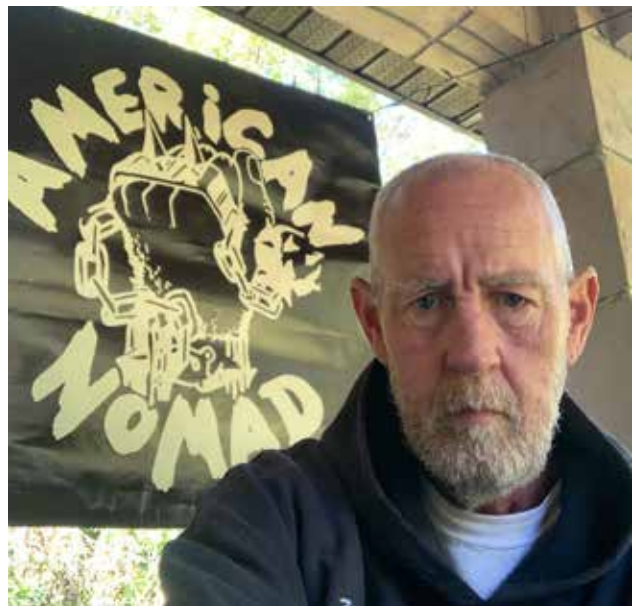
BILL DANFORTH DUES PAID...

Interview by Paget Williams



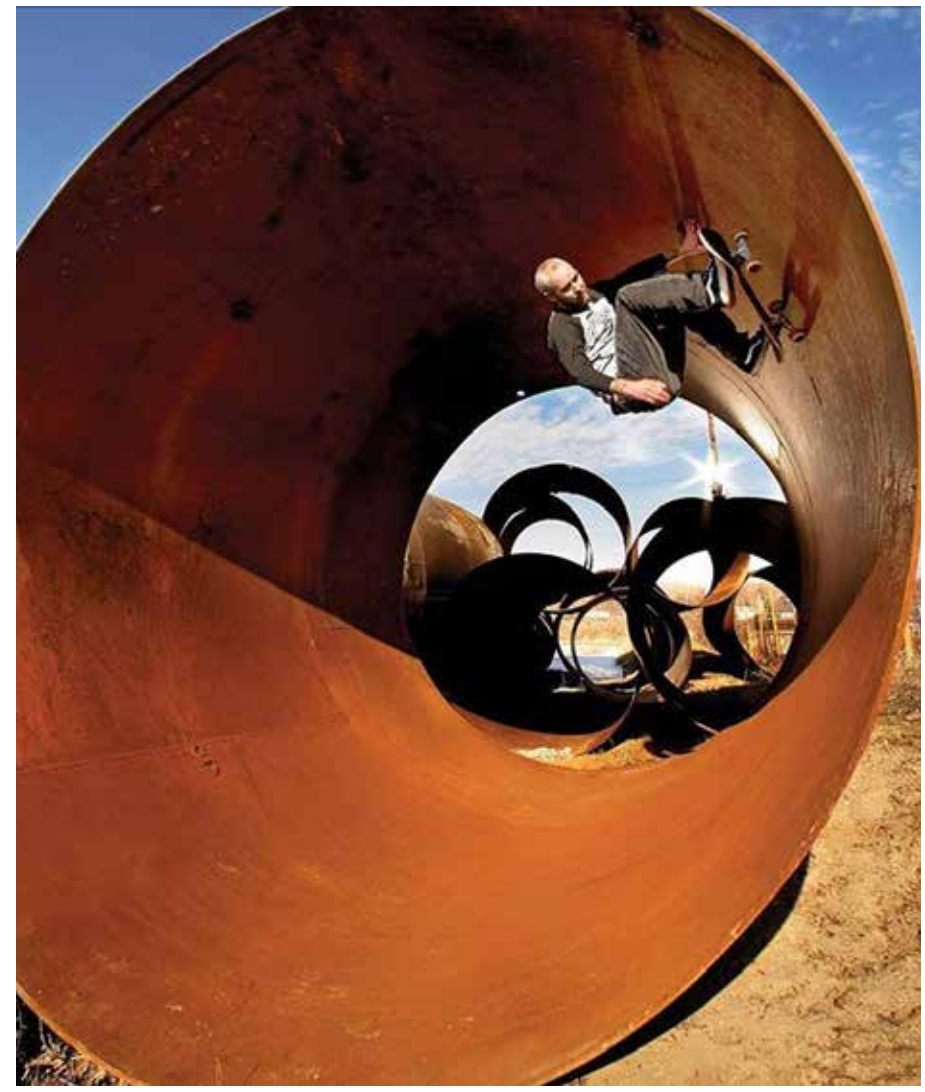
Bill Danforth is one of the most authentic and influential people in the evolution of skateboarding culture. Hailing from Detroit, Danforth grew up in a scene driven by raw energy, early skateparks and a deep connection to punk "mother f**kin" rock. That combination would go on to define not only his skating style, but his lifelong approach to the culture and life itself.

Danforth first put his feet on a skateboard in the early to mid-1970s, skating schoolyards and loading dock banks with friends. From the beginning, it wasn't about competition or recognition—Danforth is a true soul rider. It was about freedom. That sense of limitless expression became central to his identity. He has often described skateboarding as "the freedom of no rules," a mindset that would shape his aggressive, anti-conformist style for decades to come.

His early career saw him riding for Madrid Skateboards before making a pivotal move to Alva Skates, founded by skate legend Tony Alva. It was with Alva that Danforth made his first major impact on the global skate scene, helping to define the raw, fast and powerful approach that characterized late-1970s and early-1980s skateboarding. His punk rock ethic and attitude further cemented his place among skateboarding's original pioneers. How many other people have you seen wearing Docs when they skate?

Over the years, Danforth's presence in skateboarding remained constant. He rode for OG brands like Canada's own Skull Skates and Tracker Trucks, while also founding his own brand, American Nomad Skates. More recently he even released a "Bro" model with Montreal skate shop Revolution 514. His loyalty to the culture and its roots has always outweighed any pursuit of mainstream success.

Known for skating in Doc Martens and embodying a "punk as fuck" attitude, Danforth's style is unmistakable. He favours classic, powerful tricks like frontside rock and rolls, laybacks and other lip tricks, executed with speed and authority. More than technical innovation, it's his approach—fast, raw and unapologetically individual—that continues to inspire generations of skaters.



Beyond personal achievements, Danforth has also contributed to growing the skate community. He helped develop the Grind Tour, a program designed to introduce young people to skateboarding during the height of the Warped Tour era. The initiative reflected his belief that skateboarding should remain accessible, creative and, above all, fun.

For Danforth, skateboarding has never been about fame or sponsorships. His advice to younger skaters is simple: do it for the joy, not the recognition. That philosophy—grounded in authenticity and passion—has defined his entire career.

Having known Danforth for a lot of years, I have to say that the whole skateboarding community is hella proud of him for this recognition! His induction into the Skateboarding Hall of Fame serves as a fitting acknowledgment of decades of dedication. More than just a pioneer, Bill Danforth represents the enduring spirit of skateboarding: rebellious, creative and forever true to itself. On May 15 you should all crack open a cold one and raise it to a lifetime of skateboarding. Cheers Bill!!!

Absolute Underground: Where did you grow up and what is the skateboarding scene like there?

Bill Danforth: I grew up in Detroit, Michigan and we had a strong scene with skateparks and punk rock.

AU: When did you first jump on a skateboard and what first got you stoked on skateboarding?

BD: Early to mid 70s, just having fun with friends skating schoolyards and banks at loading docks.

AU: What team do you currently skate for?

BD: American Nomad Skates, Tracker and Skull Skates.

AU: How did you first get on the skate team?

BD: I own American Nomad, I own Tracker I've skated for since 1981 and Skull Skates I've been friends with since the mid 80s.

AU: Where is your favourite place to skate?

BD: I love to skate old 70s skateparks that are still around.

AU: How long did it take for you to realize skateboarding was naturally built into your psyche?

BD: Immediately when I felt the freedom of no rules.

AU: How would you describe your skateboarding style?

BD: Punk rock anti-conformity.

AU: What are some of your favourite tricks?

BD: Frontside rock and rolls, laybacks and basically lip tricks.

AU: Where is someplace in the world you still really want to skate?

BD: South America.

AU: Describe the sensation of skateboarding verbally if at all possible.

BD: Once again, it's the freedom and the lack of rules.

AU: What do you think your strong suits are when it comes to skateboarding?

BD: Knowing the history of how skateboarding began.

AU: What sort of attitude does it take to be a good skater?

BD: The fact that skateboarding is fun. It's not about being the best.

AU: Who did you look up to that influenced you on your journey?

BD: The Dogtown and Z-Boys era and especially Tony Alva.

AU: What sort of music and bands do you like to listen to when skateboarding?

BD: Always punk rock.

AU: Any skateboarding superstitions?

BD: Never skate on Friday the 13th.

AU: What is it about skateboarding that makes it so enjoyable?

BD: It's creative and fun.

AU: Any advice for up-and-coming skateboarders?

BD: Just skate for the fun of it. Skateboarding isn't about just turning pro or getting sponsored.

AU: Do you snowboard or surf as well? If so, what are the differences and similarities?

BD: I surf sometimes but skimboard a lot more. They both use the same mindset as skateboarding because it's fun.

Photo credit: Greg Fadell

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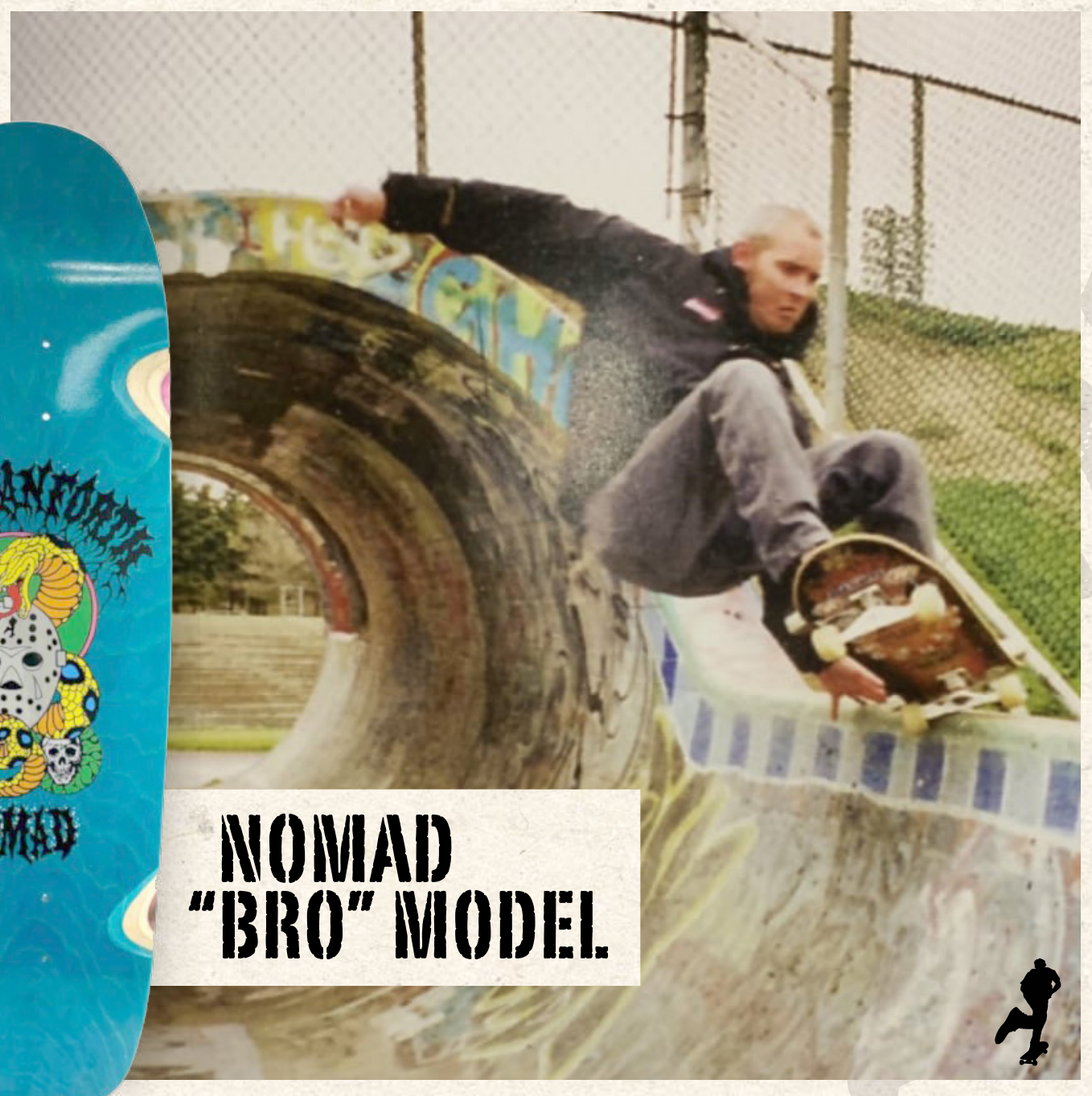

NOMAD "BRO" MODEL

PHOTO BY: MARC TISON

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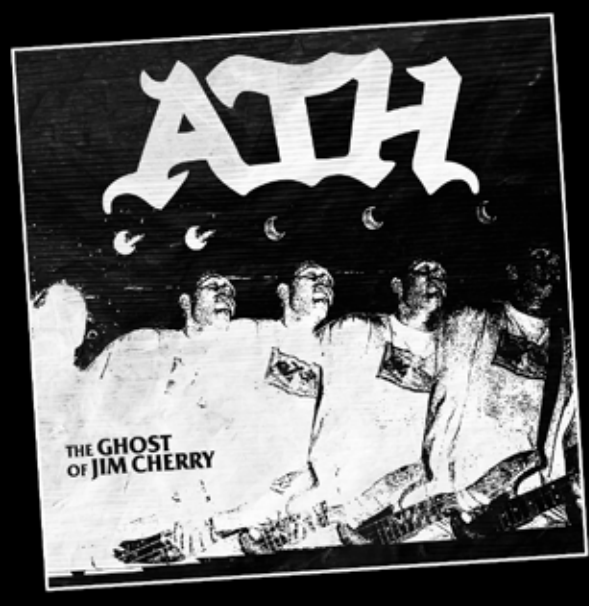

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SHRED SESSION

MENACE FINGERBOREDS

An Ode To Skateboarding

By Ray MacKay

AU: Who are we talking to and what are your skills to pay the bills?

Zach: Hi my name's Zach. I'm a full time student nowadays but I guess I'm best described as a regular guy that grew up skating and listening to rap that just wants to keep that inner child in us alive.

AU: Tell us the origin of MENACE FINGERBOREDS.

Zach: Menace began as a way to stay creative while going back to school. Skateboarding has always been a big part of my life and thankfully a lot of what goes into making fingerboards are skills that I picked up throughout life via jobs, hobbies, etc. I don't really have too many expectations for Menace - it just makes me happy to work with my hands and see people use the stuff I make.

As for the name, 'Menace' has always been a thing throughout my life. I loved Dennis the Menace as a kid and would later adopt it as a tag in my old graffiti days. Way later I used it as a battle rap moniker which is a story for another day. So yeah… Menace is about many facets of my life kinda converging into one project.

Most of the graphics and brand artwork is done by one of my best friends Josh Makorto whom I urge everyone to look up. He's an incredibly talented painter/designer @elmakorto

AU: What do you sell? How are they produced?

Zach: I make/sell fingerboards, obstacles and accessories. They're basically mini replica skateboards but every step that goes into making actual skateboards translates to making fingerboards as well. Wood plies, shaping, concave, real wear graphics, kicks, pop, etc are all factors. It's really an art in and of itself. I really respect all the people out there who paved the way for people like me. Fingerboarding is a super grass roots community.

I make everything by hand in my studio apartment here in Vancouver. I think people would be surprised at how much they can do in a small space with the right tools. I want to make some process videos soon. Follow @menacefingerboreds (shameless plug lol)

AU: How do people buy your stuff?

Zach: I ship anywhere in Canada.

AU: How'd your passion for fingerboards start?

Zach: It all starts with skateboarding for me. Fingerboarding is just an extension of my love for skating and I'm really grateful I found it honestly. I know some people try and separate the two but as I age and have less time to be on my board I find fingerboarding helps me stay in touch with what this ultimately is, skateboarding.

AU: How did you learn how to do all of this?

Zach: I think I'm just one of those people that's had a million different types of jobs throughout life which inadvertently gave me a lot of little skills. I was a concrete worker when I was younger so the obstacles stuff comes pretty naturally to me. I was a ticketed carpenter as well at one point so the woodworking thankfully didn't come with much of a learning curve. I think Menace is the most 'me' project I've ever gotten into. To me it's very easy and is just fun to do and I want it to remain that way.

AU: What are your most popular products?

Zach: My obstacles get a lot of good reception which is great. At the moment I'm getting ready to release my first series of decks which I hope are also well received.

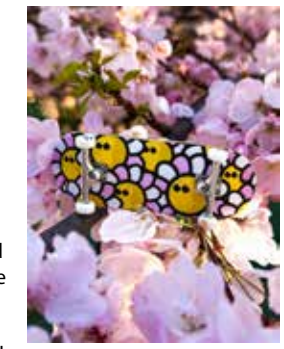
AU: Any upcoming releases to tell us about?

Decks! They might even be available by the time this comes out. They're sooooo sick and sooo much fun to make.

AU: What's your fav fingerboard trick?

Zach: As a skater I like anything that resembles skating. The crazy techy fingerboard stuff is great but personally I'm in it for the realism.

AU: Any crazy fingerboard stories to tell?



Zach: Haha one time at a bar I very secretively passed my friend a fingerboard thinking it would be a funny gift and 10 minutes later he came back to me after going to the bathroom and said, "I thought you gave me drugs!" Lol classic

Another of my favorite tropes within fingerboard interactions I've noticed so far is when bumping into my friends who have young kids. More often than not they'll have a tech deck, or something like it, with them so when uncle Zach pulls out a fingerboard from his pocket and you see that look of validation and excitement in their eyes you really feel like you're contributing to something. After which I always try and push them into skating.

AU: How do people find you in person and online?

Zach: Follow us on IG @ menacefingerboreds to stay informed. The IG and website are the best places to stay updated on new products, events, etc but Menace stuff is also available in a few stores if anyone wants to take a peak in person check out…

Replay Boardshop in Abbotsford

Deckheadz in Burnaby

Banshees in North Van

PM Hobby Craft in Calgary

More soon!

Thanks for taking the time to read this! Peace.

menacefingerboreds.com

instagram.com/menacefingerboreds

FILM HIGHLIGHTS

MY BLOODY VALENTINE: 45TH ANNIVERSARY

Cross your heart...and hope to die. Celebrate the 45th Anniversary of this cult Canadian slasher with the 4K uncut version of MY BLOODY VALENTINE!

FRIDAY THE 69TH

Porn filmmakers in 1981 cash in on the slasher craze with a ripoff about spring break coeds stalked by a killer beekeeper at a cursed camp.

LUCID

A 1990s art student uses a lucid dreaming elixir to break through creative blocks, but soon finds herself trapped in a nightmarish underworld.

THE WEED EATERS

An idyllic New Year's getaway in isolated New Zealand takes an unexpected turn when a bad batch of cursed weed unleashes horrific after-effects.

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Calgary Underground Film Festival Feature

Friday the 69th

Interview with Director Alex Montilla

By Ryan Dyer

Absolute Underground: The title *Friday the 69th* is obviously a cheeky nod to *Friday the 13th* but also brings to mind the spoof movie *Saturday the 14th*. Was that raunchy humor your starting point, or did it come later?

Alex Montilla: That's funny you bring up *Saturday the 14th*. I used to have my mom rent me that movie from our local grocery store all the time when I was a kid. Keep in mind, I had never even seen *Friday the 13th*, but something about the VHS cover made me want to see it.

For my movie, the title is kind of a long story... that also kind of answers some of your other questions.

During Covid, I started shooting little short films on my phone. With each project, I would look into gear to make my phone movies look different and better than just a phone. Eventually I got the BeastGrip depth of field adapter, which allowed me to use Canon lenses on my phone. I noticed it gave the footage a vintage, creamy quality. So I started thinking about something I could shoot that leaned into that look. Having just come off the success with my slasher comedy short, *OverKill*, I thought about doing another one but in a Black Dynamite/ Grindhouse style; where purposefully amateurish filmmaking is very visible. I wanted a gimmick that would be forgiving for my lack of technical knowledge (I still don't really know how to use a camera). So I thought, "what if porn stars made a slasher movie?" That was about it at first. It was going to be a short, but presented as select scenes from a recently discovered print of an unreleased feature film. I pitched it to my friend Sam (he plays Howard the hippie in the movie) and asked if he had any ideas of what I should call it. He suggested *Friday the 69th*. I laughed at first and dismissed it, but later realized that he nailed it; it's completely ridiculous and completely perfect. And now I get to tell people my movie title and hope they laugh rather than think I'm a pervert. Thank you, Sam. Once I started writing, the title was kind of my north star of silliness and inspired me to turn the short into an entire feature, my first.

AU: The film is specifically in 1981, during the original slasher craze, when films like The Burning and *Maniac* were putting the nasty in video nasty. What drew you to that era?

AM: I wanted to set it after *Friday the 13th* obviously, but also in a time before the effects were too good and the movies had so many kills and so much nudity. Mostly for budgetary reasons. I knew that if I was going to self-finance this and do everything myself it would need a small cast willing to work for nothing and effects I could easily pull off. Also, story-wise… 1981 was still a time where making a low budget slasher could pay off huge, thus providing motivation for the mid-level porn filmmakers to want to make the genre change.

AU: Shooting a feature entirely on an iPhone is unusual—what were the biggest surprises or challenges with that approach?

AM: Honestly, I don't know a ton about shooting on other cameras. So shooting on an iPhone is kind of all I know. That said, it has some weird things compared to a "real" camera. For example, the opening scene with the two fisherman…it was like 110 degrees and the phone kept overheating; some of the footage dropped frames as I was recording and then eventually the phone just shut off. So I took my shirt off and wrapped it around the phone until it cooled down so we could finish. Side note: it was so hot that day that my car from 2005 overheated and died. RIP. The other big difference was storage. I used an app called FilmicPro, not the built in camera app, and after a few hours I would have to plug a hard drive in to the phone to move the footage over. Then I would delete it from my phone (terrifying) to make room to keep shooting. But the major mistakes in the movie like stuff being overexposed and out of focus, is just because I don't know what I'm doing. That's why I came up with the whole porn gimmick.

AU: How did you decide which slasher clichés to exaggerate for comedy and which to play straight?

AM: I'm kind of always playful, so I didn't really purposefully play anything too straight. A friend of mine who is a bit of a slasher aficionado commented that the ending really works and that it would've worked in a straight slasher movie. I think Amy is just such a good actor that you kind of forgive the ridiculous things I'm making her say. The big dilemma for me was how silly to go. There are a few *Airplane*-zany moments I allowed toward the end, but I purposefully tried to keep it within a certain "bad 1981 movie" reality. For example, the most common "this movie is bad" cliché is having the boom mic in the shot. I didn't do that. Instead, I opted to do all of the sound in post like some of those old movies would do. So there were no mics even on set. I did do it in the trailer though.

AU: With a scene at the original *Texas Chain Saw Massacre* house, how did you balance homage to classic horror with the film's absurd, comedic tone? In order to make the movie feel accurate to time and genre?

I watched just about every obscure 80s slasher movie I could (shoutout *Cheerleader Camp*, *Twisted Nightmare, Madman* and *To All a Goodnight*). While I kept the basic structure of the original *Friday the 13th*, I borrowed (stole) tons of lines, character traits and situations from those movies. Under a modern lens, some of the scary or serious things from those movies are hysterical. Then, when my childhood friend Jessy was working at the *Texas Chain Saw* house at the time and said we could shoot there… which, yeah duh yes yes yes… I had an idea to steal some exterior shots of other famous horror houses (the *Poltergeist* and *Halloween* houses aren't too far from me). But the day we went to shoot outside of the *Nightmare on Elm Street* house, the new owners covered it with large bushes and Harris/ Walz 2024 signs. So there went that plan.

fridaythe69th.com

instagram.com/friday69film

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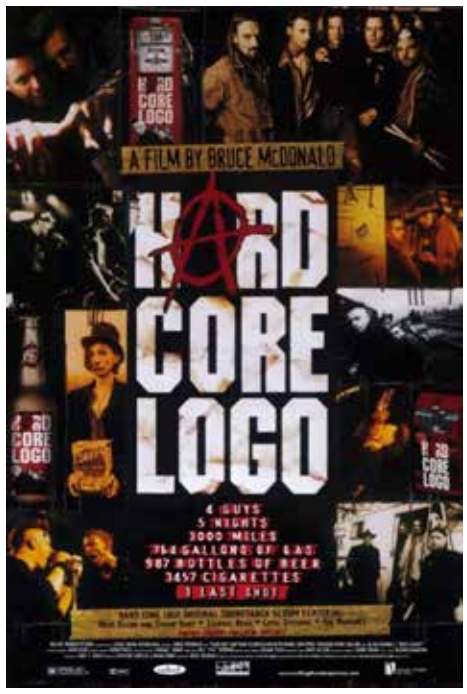

Calgary Underground Film Festival Feature

Hard Core Logo

Interview with Director Bruce McDonald

By Chadsolute

AU: We are celebrating 30 years of *Hard Core Logo*!

Bruce McDonald: Yes, it's kind of crazy.

AU: What do you recall of the initial film release? Like, I know I saw it when it came out, but I can't remember if I saw it on video or in a theater.

BM: I can't remember much actually to tell you the truth, but I do remember we had a couple of cool posters, one they didn't use because they were afraid it was just like a close up of a guy flipping the bird at you with the Hard Core Logo tattooed on his finger. But I think we used it for one of the soundtrack albums. One of music from the movie and another one which was like a tribute album with covers by Canadian bands of the fictional Hard Core Logo band. Like Pursuit of Happiness who recorded it as a tribute album, where the idea was like, "Oh yeah, we grew up, listening to Hard Core Logo, we love those guys." and it was really fun. BMG put it out

But the cover album record album art, the movie people sort of didn't want to use it. There's a Scottish guy, Liam, that did the movie poster that I think people know, it's sort of like a montage of photos and different pictures from the movie stuck on the poster.

AU: I did see it in the theater because I remember looking up at it during the concert scenes.

BM: It's fun to see it in the theater. We shot it on 16 millimeter film, blew it up to 35, so I guess you were probably watching 35mm prints.

I wanna go into my storage and find those old albums. I wanna find the old posters. We had a great photographer on the set, Liane Hentscher, she did a great job and, you know, just dig up some of that stuff for the 30th anniversary.

It's kind of touching that people are paying attention to something that was made back in the 20th century and still kind of resonates. The kids love it, the history, it makes us all feel good.

AU: Your writer, Noel Baker, based the screenplay on a book by Michael Turner?

BM: Well, it's nice that you're paying attention and you're talking to me, makes me very happy.

AU: It's a great movie. Yeah, I watched it again yesterday. A few things kind of rang some bells. How did you get the Joey Ramone cameo?

BM: Well, we had met Joey on our very, very, first movie called *Roadkill*, and we made it for cheap! My producer Colin said, "Oh fuck, we gotta get a name in this movie.", like it was just made for nothing. And we thought, well, we fucking can't afford a movie, star. We have no money. So we thought, well, who to us is a star? Who is someone you'd love to meet? And we both looked at each other and were like, "The Ramones!" We were both big Ramones fans and it was sort of a musicy themed movie. So anyway, long story short, we kept contacting his record label, and one day he phoned!

The deal was, I think, all the hamburgers he could eat and a first class ticket from New York and like 1000 bucks or something. That's how we got him for *Roadkill*.

AU: So he was at that show at the Commodore?

BM: No, we sort of kept in touch over the years, you know, whenever the Ramones would be in Toronto, I'd always get some tickets.

Joey was such a fucking generous dude. Like I remember one Christmas, I get this package and I opened it up and it's a fucking leather jacket with a Ramones patch on it. Merry Christmas from Joey. I was like, dude, I was so surprised. It was probably worth more than the fucking fee that we paid him to be in our movie.

Anyway, so because of all that, when *Hard Core Logo* came up, we thought, well, it would be great to add him in and weave him into the mythology of Bucky Haight and Hard Core Logo because he's part of that sort of punk rock, and Joey being Joey, he was really sweet and agreed to do it. Yeah, it was great.

AU: What was the process of filming this? Was it almost like a tour, like you started and did all the Vancouver stuff, and then you kind of hit the road and then made your way to Calgary and onward?

BM: Well, that was sort of the plan, to do, the whole route chronologically. Now we did get to Calgary and through the mountains as you see in the movie. Then some of the other locations we cheated a little bit. That Saskatchewan farm, it was just movie magic. A lot of my movie Highway 61 was a similar thing, we shot a lot of it around the place and did the movie magic, so you think you're on the entire trip. But in the research we drove to all the places. We went to the clubs and what I guess is remarkable is that it's like Canada and it's like fucking forever between these gigs. I think only Canadian musicians really appreciate this kind of deep dedication to the craft of suffering through, especially in the off months of winter and the tougher weather. It's like you have to be deeply committed to your band and you know if it doesn't kill you, it's definitely gonna make you stronger.

Yeah, it's heroic, man. I've always been a fan of music and musicians. My respect kind of went way the fuck up after I did that tour. I was like, wow, this is like serious game. I think musicians when they see the movie, Canadian or from elsewhere, they really get, it. They're like, "Oh yeah, this is sort of how it really is."

It's like as the guy in the movie says, he says, "Yeah, at this point you're doing it for love."

AU: The live show at the Commodore you had D.O.A., Flash Bastard and Art Bergmann. Then you guys kind of just snuck on Hard Core Logo?

BM: Yeah, we promoted the show. We worked with the people at the Commodore. We sold tickets and promoted it in the radio. We had Art Bergmann, Modernettes and everybody, D.O.A., they're all great, right? We went to them and said, "Hey, we're doing this Michael Turner book, Hard Core Logo, and we want to put a show on with this fictional band.", Some of them knew the book, they knew Michael, and they were all like, 'Yeah, great." They were known to that scene, right? And they all knew each other. It was really great to see them all there and it was a really great vibe. We were not a big budget movie so it's very helpful when we don't have to pay the audience to come to the set. They bought tickets and that was really generous of the Vancouver rock and rollers to come out and support their bands and this idea of the movie. So when our band came out, you know, we made it clear to people like, "Hey, we're obviously shooting a movie here." And I think they were playing to playback, all the other bands are playing live of course, because our band were all actors except for Hugh Dillon playing Joe Dick.

So we ran their song, I think 2 or 3 times to shoot at different angles and things, you know, and the crowd fucking got into it, man. They loved it because they were sort of part of the movie.

AU: What kind of changes did you make between the book and the film?

BM: Good question. It's interesting because Michael Turner wrote all the lyrics of the songs, so we had to come up with the music in studio with a producer named Peter Moore and we took the lyrics and it was like big bush party after school with songs like "Who The Hell Do You Think You Are?" and "Somethings Gonna Die Tonight". All these songs, Peter Moore and his band Swamp Baby did the music to it, and they fucking did a great job. While Hugh, who is part of the Headstones, did the vocals.

All in all, in the book I think Michael's observations, it is kind of an interesting novel because it's almost like a collage. It's a series of set-lists, phone answering machine messages, tour diaries, it's really great. It's really appealing, very readable, very sort of modern, and great to translate to screen.

It really laid out the groundwork for us and then the screenwriter, Noel Baker, kind of filled in the dialogue between things and kind of worked their characters and the tensions in the band and tried to up the stakes on some of the secrets and the reveals.

AU: John's diary entries were all from the book?

BM: What really electrified me when I read the book was I thought, Wow, I could see the movie like right away. And because Michael was a player in the Hard Rock Miners, that's why the movie speaks so authentically to a lot of musicians.

Be Sure To Check Out the Hard Core Logo - 30th Anniversary National Canadian Film Day Free Screening at the Calgary Underground Film Festival Wednesday April 15th at 7pm.

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HEADSTONES – Part 2

Burn All The Ships

Interview with Hugh Dillon: Frontman of Headstones and star of cult Canadian classic Hard Core Logo

By Ira "Heart of Darkness" Hunter

AU: If there was an anniversary of Hard Core Logo, could you get the band back together and perform those songs?

Hugh Dillon: I would do it in a heartbeat. It's harder to get all the rest of the folks involved. They do all kinds of shit for Hard Core Logo. I've done some of it. Sometimes it's Q&A's. I think at some point the Headstones will play a bunch of Hard Core Logo songs after this tour. When we go out and are just doing clubs on our own. We've done that in the past and people love it. There was a song that we rehearsed and played for Hard Core Logo but it didn't make the cut, it was a sped-up version of ABBA's SOS. So people who were on set and people who were inside Hard Core Logo knew that was an unreleased thing that the Headstones did, and we still do that. It's kind of a Vancouver or BC only thing. You know, be careful what you wish for, we could easily be on your doorstep.

AU: Would the Headstones and DOA ever tour?

HD: We've played with them. I love them. I've sung on Joey Shithead's albums, his solo stuff. No, it was DOA. I've done background stuff. Back in the day we were crossing Thunder Bay and it was Fishbone and DOA and I would get up and sing Takin' Care of Business with DOA.

AU: What would you say your career highlights and lowlights are?

HD: For highlights, I am there right now. I start season four of Mayor of Kingstown, the show I created with Taylor Sheridan, it's coming out on Paramount+ all over the world in mid October and this Headstones record, *Burn All The Ships*, is one of the best records of our life together as a rock and roll band. Working with these people that we're working with, this is it. These last few years of music and television and film, everything I've worked hard at has got me here. So now my friends and family enjoy it and that's the big part. The relationships I have are all stronger, deeper and better. I've been clean and sober for a long time and my relationships with my friends in the States are great and I love all the actors I work with. The lowlights, heroin addiction. I just couldn't cope and I lost everything. It was 2000 or something like that and I just thought there was no way forward and that is where the love of other people and people who champion you, and really care about you got me past that threshold of falling into the void of the usual suspects. You know drug addiction, suicide, jails, institutions and deaths. I'm just lucky that I had people to help me get here.

AU: I'm glad you're still here and still rocking. How did you get all these bands together for this upcoming co-headlining tour with The Tea Party, Finger Eleven and the Headstones?

HD: Those guys, we've played with all of them at different times. Headstones usually like going out by ourselves, we are our own little entity. But there's something kind of exciting when the venues are a little bigger and there's three bands. Years ago, we would open up here and there for The Tragically Hip and it was just exciting because it's a bigger event so everybody's game is up. People are there because they fucking love these bands. These are music fans. They're not, "Yeah, I kind of know them." No, you fucking know these bands. You know their goddamn songs or you don't show up. That's the kind of fan I am. When I was growing up and I would go see a bands like Teenage Head or BTO for example, I'd go to see them at Barrymore's in Ottawa and I would make it there because I wanted to hear those fucking songs. Music is its own thing. It's just touches people in an emotional way. Sometimes it's subconscious but we all identify to either a sound, or a lyric, or a point in time and we're lucky to be able to do it.

AU: What do you attribute your success to?

HD: I guess that's kind of what I'm noticing when we're talking today is, I'm like, fuck that's half of it. You've got to show up. You've got to keep your head down and always do your work and then if you're lucky, you catch a break. That's kind of what it's all about. Anybody successful will tell you that, yes talent, yes skill set, but as Kurt Vonnegut used to say, it's the place and time.

AU: Your last tour was all Canadian cities.

HD: We made it to CBGB's in New York back in the day but the reason why we're still here is because we're such a profoundly Canadian band. By the time we were playing in New York and places like that and trying to move ahead in the States the drug abuse with the band, my heroin addiction and everything else, we couldn't sustain it. So I'd get to New York we play CBGB and we'd kind of be falling apart. Our home was Canada, there was no, hey we're going to play in Australia or we are playing Japan. We couldn't do it. That was the problem with heroin addiction too. I couldn't leave because I was hooked. So unless there was a guarantee I could score. It's no longer about money or crowds, that's the problem, it became not about the music. That's why I love being a Canadian band and building this fucking audience and this fan base that we have. They've seen the band in great shape and bad shape but it all comes down to the lyric and the melody and the songs and that's what they relate to. They know where I'm from and who I am. It's those fans that got me here and got the band here and we've been across this whole country for decades. It's crazy. That's why I never thought much about playing in the States. I just thought, I don't need to meet any new people.

To Be Continued...

hughdillon.com

headstonesband.com

dinealonestore.com

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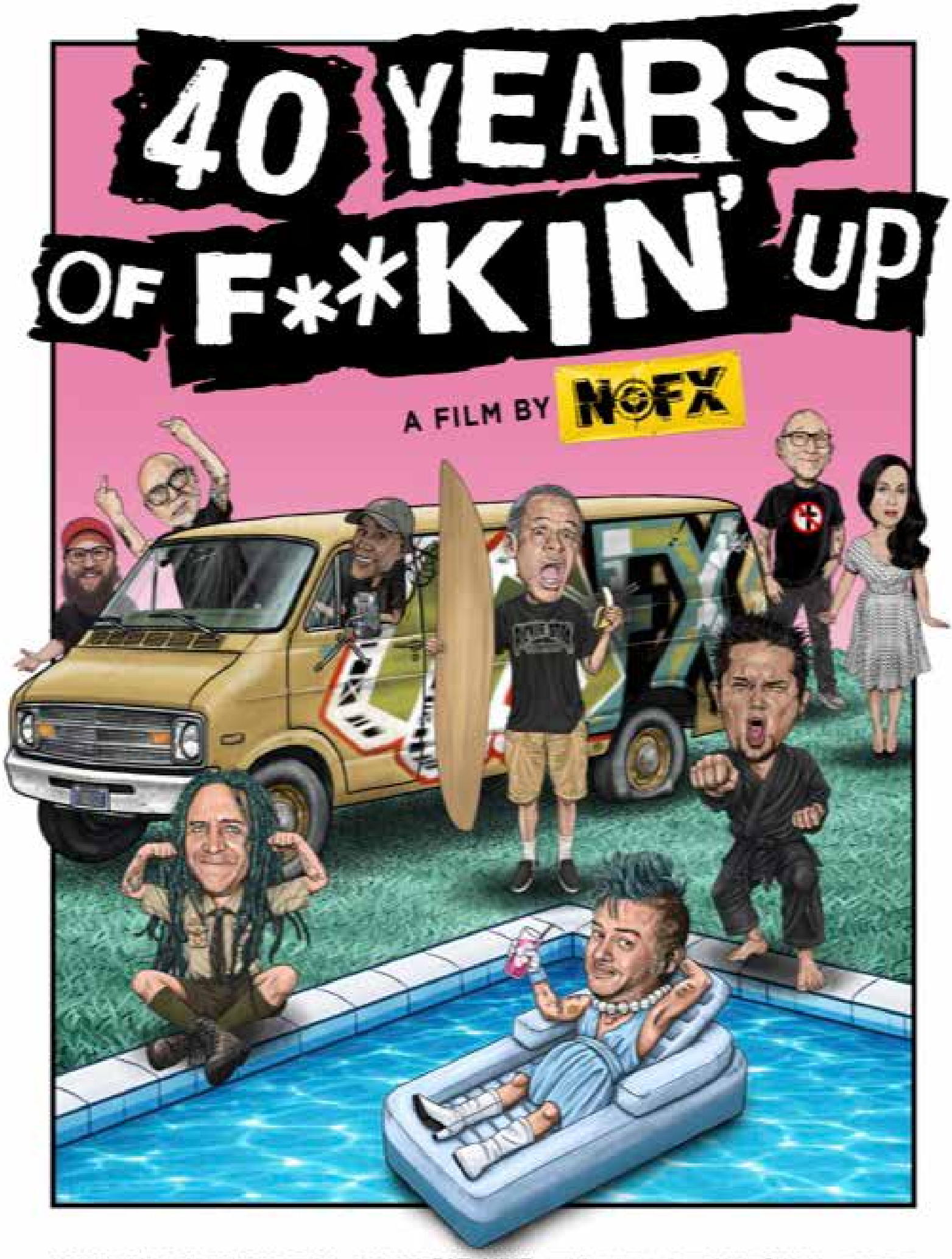
40 YEARS OF F*KIN' UP
A FILM BY NOFX
DIRECTED BY JAMES BUDDY DAY
PRODUCED BY FAT MIKE
MUSIC BY NOFX
SOUNDTRACK & SCORE AVAILABLE ON FAT
NA
NOT APPROPRIATE FOR ALL AGES.
SERIOUSLY, NOT APPROPRIATE FOR PEOPLE OF ALL AGES

Calgary Underground Film Festival Feature

NOFX - 40 Years of Fuckin' Up

Interview with Director James Buddy Day

Interview by Chadsolute

AU: I saw that the premiere screenings have been sold out since South by Southwest, where are we talking to you from?.

James Buddy Day: I was at the LA screening last night, flying back to Calgary now.

AU: I have seen the movie and I just finished watching the South by Southwest, post screening Q&A, they looked pretty wild.

JBD: Yeah, we did those at as many screenings as we could.

AU: So you are now the head of a family business of sorts, Pyramid Productions, a long running media company who produced *The Movie Show*, *Flame TV* amongst other shows and you've kind of brought the company into more of a documentary/horror/true crime sort of direction, with the *Last Words of Charles Manson*.

JBD: Yeah, I do a lot of true crime stuff. I've been doing true crime for about 10 years now.

AU: Would you say that's a focus of the company now?

JBD: Yeah, it's what we get paid for and most of our success has come from.

AU: With your new film *NOFX, 40 Years Of Fucking Up*, how did you shift into the world of punk music?

JBD: We've been doing true crime for about 10 years, like, so, we've done a lot of true crime, like we have a lot of shows on Amazon, MGM, Hulu and Paramount. About 2 years ago I met Mike, and that was kind of the genesis of the project where it started.

AU: Where did you meet him?

JBD: I just reached out. I had a list of my dream projects. Wanted to really focus on stories and things that I find interesting. So in my phone's app I made a list of like 10 dream projects and NOFX was on the top of the list.

I reached out to Fat Wreck Chords and Mike emailed me back right away. Yeah and we hit it off and then we started zooming and we had a lot in common, and he was going through a lot of the stuff in the movie at the time.

When we first started, I was working on a project called *Blumhouse's Compendium of Horror*, which is a TV series on Amazon. I needed someone to do the theme, and he was he was like, yeah, I would love to do that. So he composed the theme for us and then we kept working and we're talking about how are we going to document this 40 years of history that you guys are wrapping up and eventually that became the movie.

AU: So you kinda hit the ground running with this documentary. Did they already have the last tour planned out?

JBD: Yeah, they had started the final tour. We had started filming when they started the final tour, and then it kind of came together over the course of that.

AU: I like how you kind of leaned in on the Canadian dates with footage and especially with like the majority of the band interviews were done at the legendary Starlite Room in Edmonton, a great friend of the magazine and supporter of the arts in Canada.

JBD: Yes, we did the band's spine interviews there while they were playing Edmonton, and I'm from Calgary, so it was just convenient for film crew and gear to do it there. We met them in Edmonton when they were here for the final tour in Alberta, and then we rented the Starlite Room because it was within walking distance from where they were playing and did all their interviews over a few days.

Then Melvin did like a DJ set there, for the last night they played there.

AU: So, because that Canada part was obviously filmed in Canada, did you get any backing from Canada film grants or anything for this, and is it considered a Canadian film at all?

JBD: I mean, I'm Canadian, my company's Canadian. Everyone that worked on it is Canadian. So, yeah, I mean, I think it's a Canadian film. I mean, NOFX is not Canadian, obviously, they're from California. But you know, I'm Canadian. I think all the stories I do are Canadian. I think the way people define Canadian films is insane. Like, you know, the way the government defines them is crazy. I mean, if I go make a TV series for Netflix, and I produce it and write it and direct it, how is it not Canadian?

AU: I screened the movie at home alone on my computer, but I liked how Fat Mike said in the SXSW Q&A, that this isn't intended to be watched at home on your couch. He wants it seen in the theater with your friends, to be a tradition like *Rocky Horror*, like an event. How serious was he when he said you'll never see physical copies or on streaming services? Will this movie always be on tour?

JBD: He's very serious about it. You gotta see it in a theater and you gotta find it, or find someone who wants to arrange a screening at their local theater, absolutely.

AU: Any future projects coming up after this?

JBD: Absolutely, I've been doing my true crime projects. We have a podcast called *Unmarked: A True Crime Podcast*, which we launched in January. Which is now on it's 20th episode. It's hosted by Audioboom.

I have a few true crime projects lined up, a couple you'll see later this year. I have a book coming out, which is a dark fantasy book called *The Plague of Steel* which you can find on Amazon.

AU: Reading your bio, I found it interesting you were about to speak with Charles Manson, becoming one of his last interviews.

JBD: Mhm, yeah, yeah. And it kind of all came together and then we got the interview. And then he ended up dying and then we ended up having the last interview.

AU: What was that day like, and how did you interview him? Did you go visit him in the cell, or like was it a Zoom?

JBD: I spoke with him a few times on the phone. So yeah, the first time it was like almost exactly a year before he died. The first time he called me, I was filming a TV show in Florida, and was at an Applebee's, and my phone just kind of rang and I saw that it was from the California Department of Corrections and I had written him a letter, so I thought he might call but I didn't, you know? I thought like there's a 10% chance he would call, then my phone rang and I was like, oh my god, and I ran outside. I was with the cinematographer I work with, Nate Harper, and we just ran outside and the waitress ran after us.

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I just took the call and I was like, hello, and I remember he was like, "Hey man, how's it going?" and I'm like, "Good, how's it going, Charlie?" or something like that.

I was like, this is crazy, he gave me instructions how to talk to him, you know? I had to get on his phone list and stuff like that. Then, yeah, he just started calling me and we talked for over a year and he knew I was gonna record these phone calls and make a documentary about it.

The documentary I made is called *Charles Manson: The Final Words*, which was on reels at the time. This is 10 years ago, so we were just finishing it, you know, we had a couple things to do and then he died while we were finishing it, and then we kind of rushed to finish it and get it out after that.

That started 10 years of work, I have never put down the Manson case since then, because then I did a project with some of the Manson women for NBC and I did a project about his funeral and I wrote a book called *Charles Manson: The Last Words*, which is really the most definitive take on the case of my research. And then I've done a few podcasts about it and talked on my podcast as well.

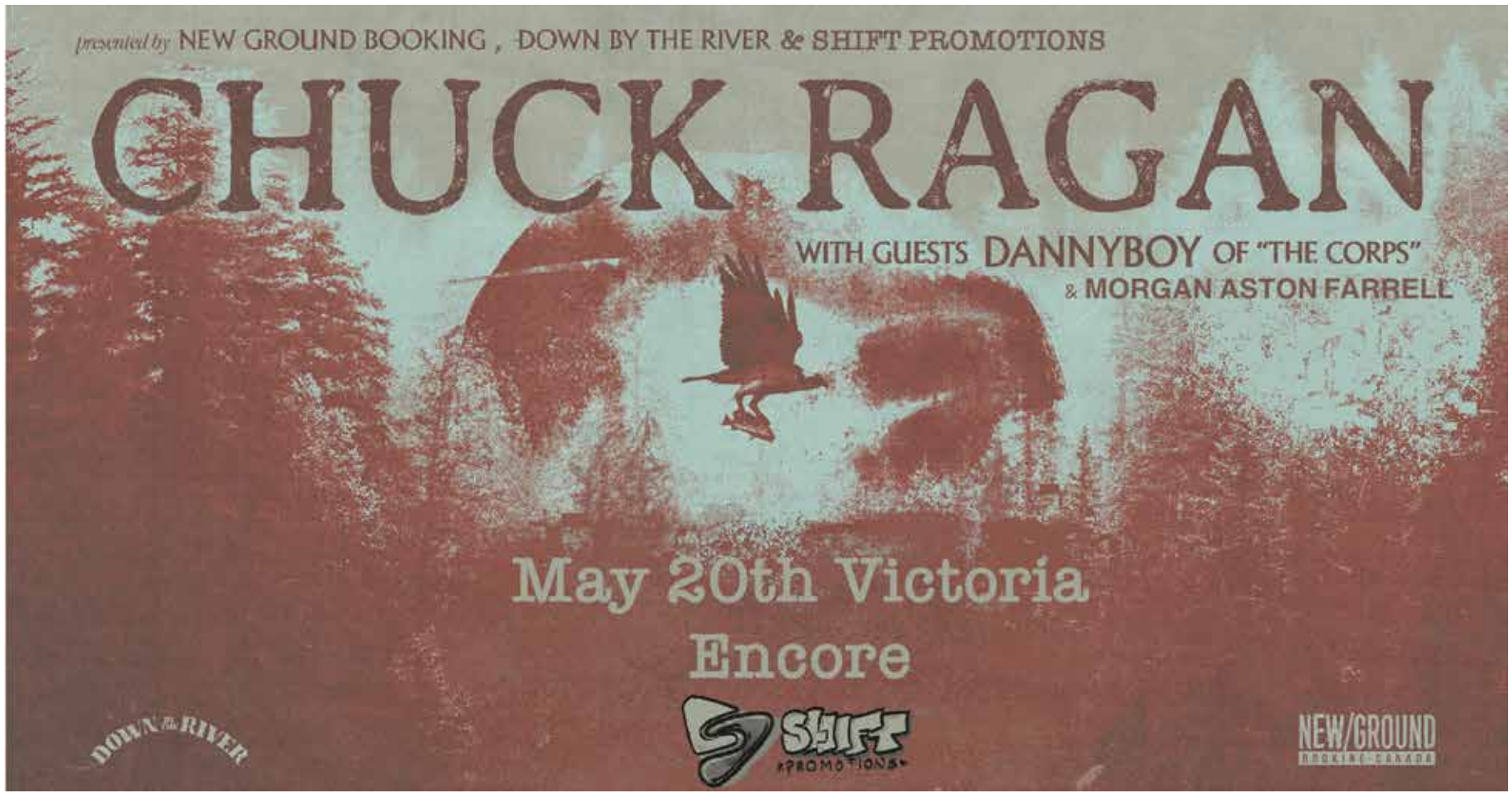
AU: Was he aware Rob Zombie was gonna narrate it?

JBD: No, that came afterwards, he had died by that point.

40yearsoffuckinup.com

pyramidproductions.tv

podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/unmarked-a-true-crime-podcast/id1864402340



NUNSLAUGHTER: Satanic Chaos Continues

Four Decades of Death Metal Blasphemy

By Ray MacKay

Absolute Underground: Who are we talking to and what are you most infamous for?

Don of the Dead: Greetings, it is I, Don of the Dead. I am most known for being the vokillist of the death metal band NUNSLAUGHTER.

AU: Who is in the band and where are you from?

Don of the Dead: The band consists of Tormentor on guitars, Wrath on drums and Malum on bass. We are located in Cleveland, Ohio.

AU: For our unfamiliar readers, please give us a brief history of NUNSLAUGHTER.

Don of the Dead: NUNSLAUGHTER was created in Pittsburgh, PA and we released our first demo in 1987. I relocated to Cleveland, Ohio at the suggestion of our drummer at the time, Sadist. We are one of only a handful of death metal bands that have continued for almost 40 years. The band has approximately 200 releases with more being slated for release. We perform a very early style of death metal that aligns with the beginnings of the death metal scene.

AU: We know words can barely convey the mayhem that is NUNSLAUGHTER, but if possible, try to explain your sound to our readers?

Don of the Dead: We have continued to produce the death metal sound of the 80s. We have not hopped on any trends or tried to ride the wave of nostalgia. Our music is entrenched in the punk ethos while delivering satanic blasphemies.

AU: What can you tell us about your upcoming album, *Satanic Chaos Legions*, set for release on June 26th via BLKIIBLK?

Don of the Dead: The new album was crafted over a period of about two years. We are very proud of what we have created and although it is a new album, the music style and aggression is very much rooted in our beginnings. Our union with BLKIIBLK will enable us to promote our music beyond the underground and bring our satanic offerings to the metal masses.

AU: Tell us about the creative process behind *Satanic Chaos Legions*.

Don of the Dead: Much of the album stems from our guitarist, Tormentor. He is very creative and certainly a huge creative force behind the songs and the recording, as he was the engineer and producer on this album. We were able to create most of these songs from the darkest regions of the netherworld. All of the members in the band are music veterans and provided their creativity. It was a collaborative effort and I think we created a beast of an album.

AU: Which of the upcoming tracks on *Satanic Chaos Legions* are you stoked as hell for your fans to hear?

Don of the Dead: "Jesus Fucking Dies" is a real fist in the face of god. All of the tracks have satanic imagery and deathly overtones. From the title track "Satanic Chaos Legions" to the last track "The Spear of Satan," we manifest evil audio. If Christianity makes you sick then check out "Peucharist."

AU: How did your creative process change or differ from your previous albums to *Satanic Chaos Legions*?

Don of the Dead: On this album we made quite a few demos of the songs that appear on *Satanic Chaos Legions*. We had time to craft the material the best way possible. Tormentor and Wrath contributed the majority of the material and I think it shows a grand understanding of the ethos of NUNSLAUGHTER.

AU: Tell us about the new music video you released for the single "Satanic Chaos Legions".

Don of the Dead: The song is the title track and a sick one at that. The video is a simple lyric video just to get the ball rolling. We have another five videos filmed to promote the album that give much better insight into the feel of the album. "Jesus Fucking Dies" will be out on Good Friday this year, so look for that one.

AU: What's your most killer song to perform live?

Don of the Dead: "Burn the Cross", "I Am Death", "Cerebus" and "Worst Nightmare" seem to be fan favourites. We excel at songs about Satan and hell so our set list tends to favour that subject matter. I would have to say the song people find most entertaining is "Raid the Convent". They know the words and scream them back at me during the show. It is impressive.

AU: Are you fans of the nunsploitation genre of films? If so, any recommendations?

Don of the Dead: I am aware of the genre but I have not looked into those films, although I guess I should.

AU: If someone had never heard of **NUNSLAUGHTER what song or album would you recommend to them as introductions?**

Don of the Dead: I think a good place to start is the album *Red Is the Color of Ripping Death*. From there it is anyone's guess as our catalog is quite extensive and is contained over a 40-year period.

AU: Any upcoming tours? Plans to come to Canada?

Don of the Dead: We have a European tour coming up in July to support the album and another South American tour in November. At this time we do not have a Canadian tour planned, but most likely it would be early next year.

AU: Anything else to promote? Any final words for our readers?

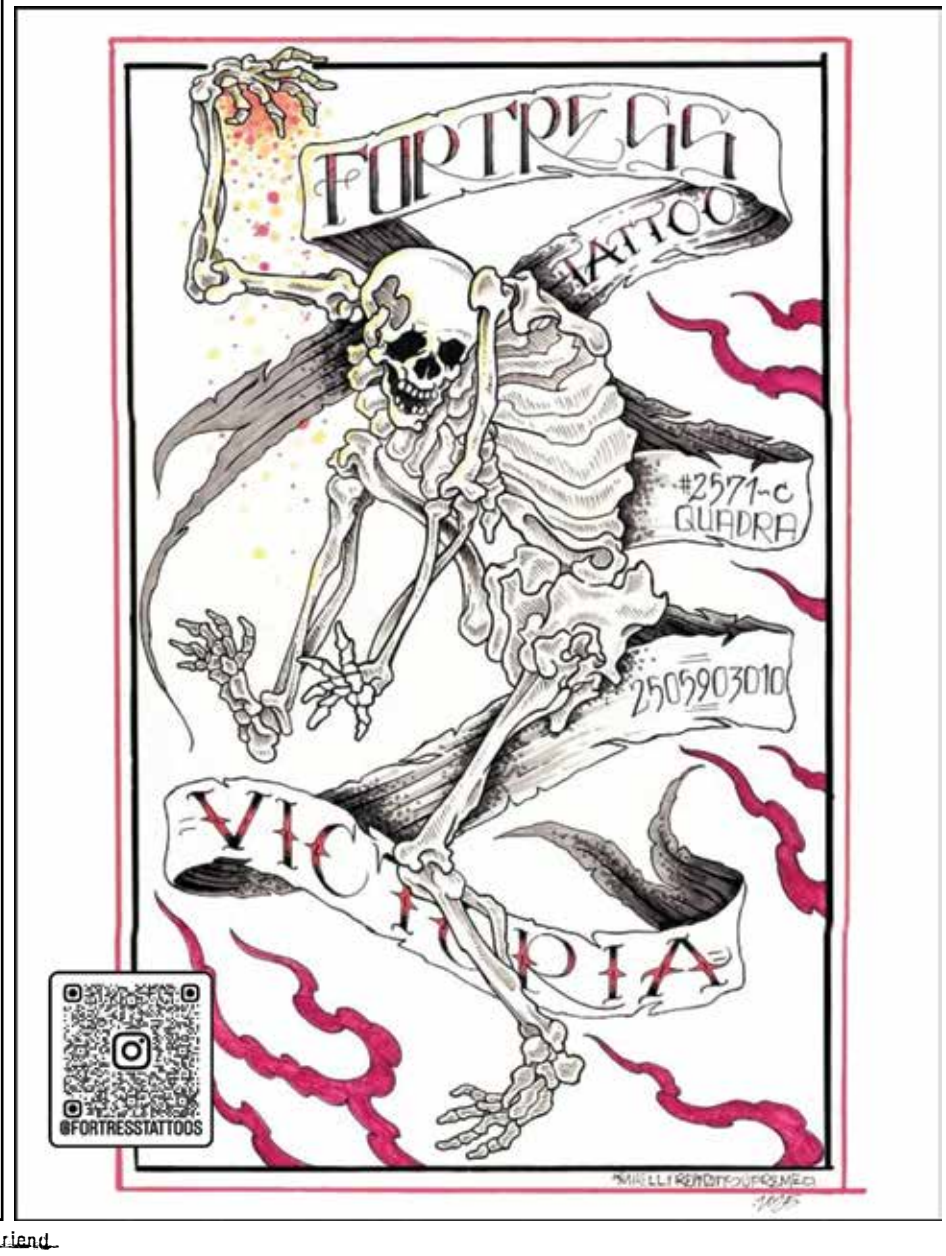
Don of the Dead: NUNSLAUGHTER has a huge back catalog of music stretching back to the beginning of the death metal underground. If you have a few hundred hours to kill, check it out. Look for our numerous videos supporting *Satanic Chaos Legions* as well as lots of legacy videos and live shows.

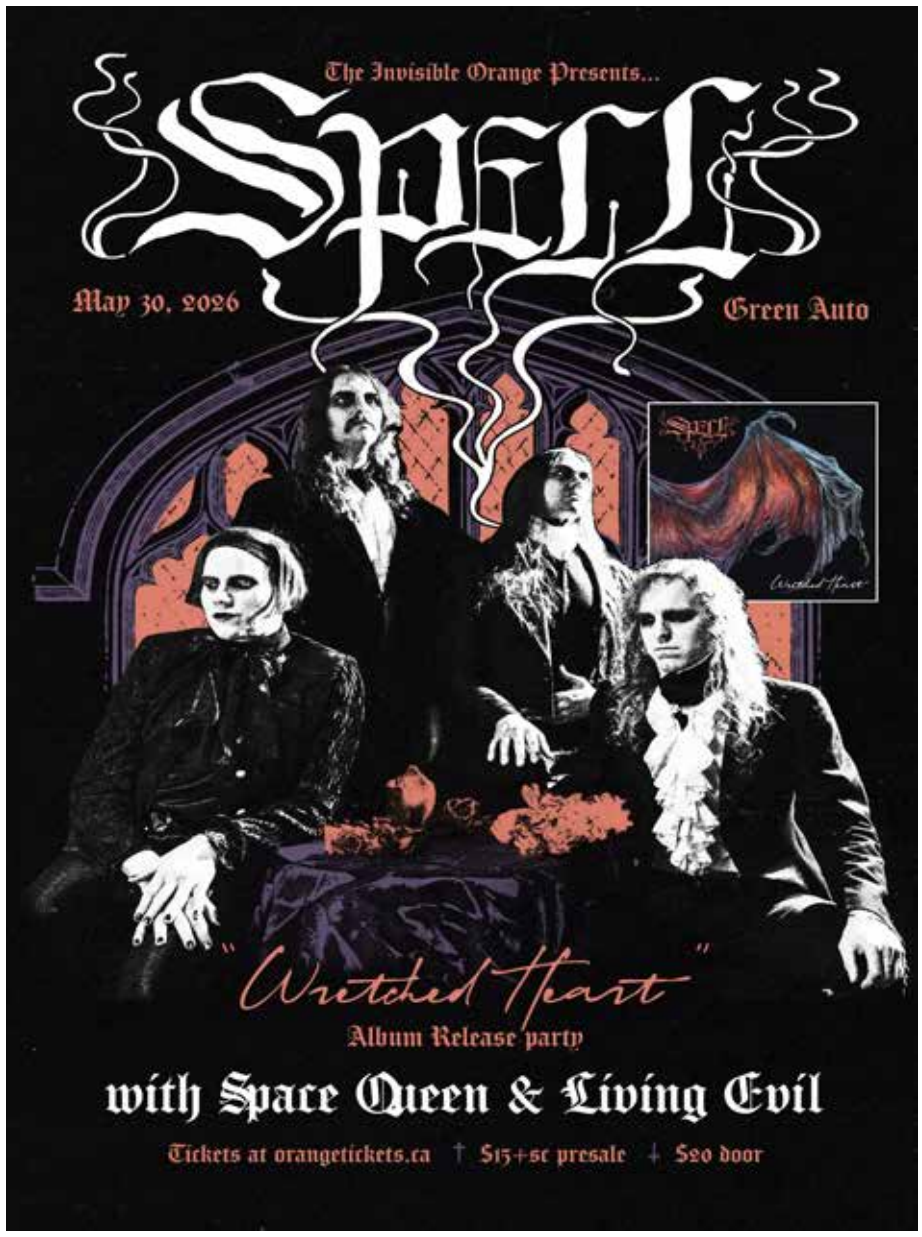
AU: How do people find you online?

Don of the Dead: NUNSLAUGHTER is on all the major streaming platforms **Spotify, iTunes and Bandcamp: nunslaughter.bandcamp.com** etc., and **merchandise can be obtained at nunslaughter.com**.

Photo credits: Dave Vezdos

BLKIIBLK RECORDS





STAND AGAINST FEAR

Interview by Eric Carr

Stand Against Fear (SAF) are a Guelph, Ontario band who recently recorded their first full-length album, *Too Little, Too Late*.

Absolute Underground: Mark, who is Stand Against Fear?

Mark - Vocals

Nathan - Bass

Dan - Rhythm Guitar

Eric - Lead Guitar

Tony - Drums

AU: Who are the members and what are your music backgrounds?

Mark: I have played music since I was two (violin & singing). I played violin for 10 years, trumpet for four to five years, piano for two weeks lol, self taught crappy guitar... got introduced to punk in '75 in the U.K. Saw Ramones as a 12 year old in '80, Punk bands/jamming by 15. First band in '86 (The Brute Creation), Hockey Teeth in '92, Lemmy's Moles, Put to Shame, Meh, Dirty Bird, Peace Corpse, Stand Against Fear.

Eric presently plays in The Bunchofuckingoofs as well. Past bands are The 3Tards, Politikill Incorect, Grey Bush and many other bands. Nathan was the singer for The Nasties, now he is the bass player for Stand against Fear. Tony also plays with To The Bloody End. Dan is the new guy.

AU: When and how did the band come about?

The band started when Mark approached Nathan to start a band, & we got Steve from Negative Gain fame, & Aaron & Erik. The band now stands as Nate, myself, Dan, Eric, & Tony.

AU: Where do you consider home base for the band?

Home base is considered as Guelph as Nate & Dan live there. At one point four of the five guys did. Guelph has always felt like home - it's great.

AU: What are your influences?

Music of all kinds, & genres.

AU: How would you define your sound?

Punk, rock, hard-core,

AU: What is your creative process? How do you write songs?

Sometimes individually, sometimes as a unit. Generally, music first, then lyrics.

AU: How would you define your lyrics and what do you generally write about?

Up to this point mainly political. Sometimes personal.

AU: You just released your new album *Too Little, Too Late* on Against The Wind Records, tell us about it.

It took a while to get out, but at the end of it I believe we are all happy with it. It was a labour of love that we feel will hold up over the years.

AU: How would you describe your live shows?

Fun. Energetic. Chaotic. Open to all that want to sing and dance along. A good time.

AU: You guys play fairly regularly. Do you have a favourite show/ memory?

I believe we all play live to be something with that room. We want to bring it all out and leave nothing on the stage and yet leave the audience wanting more. Every gig is our new favourite memory. Especially when people come to talk to us about their experiences at shows.

AU: How would you describe the scene now at this point?

The scene is cyclical. It seems the better known bands, those with tenure and larger ticket prices get the crowd, instead of the smaller/local bands that rely on friends & supporters. I think what I am trying to say is people save up their money and go to maybe two or three large shows, instead of getting out more with their friends in a local venue, even for free shows. I have no idea why that is.

AU: If you weren't in a band, what would you be doing?

Seeing bands. Probably writing/recording music at home like I have when bands I am in break up.

AU: Where would you like to take your music and message?

I would like to see us play some more outdoor fests and get on the road more and meet new friends. Possibly touring in B.C. soon.

AU: What shows have you got upcoming?

We are playing Jimmy Jazz in Guelph on April 18 (free show) with Knifehammer / Big Brother & 3 Easy Payments. We usually play one to two shows a month, and more if we get asked.

AU: If you could choose the perfect four-band bill for you, what would it be?

That's a tough one because there are so many great bands out there and we have so many friends. We love playing live, and I wouldn't want to leave anyone out, so I will make one up that would never happen: Minor Threat, Conflict, Poison Idea, Sick of it All, Stand Against Fear. Yep I suck at math.

AU: What are your plans for the future?

Travel out of our box. Preach to the non SAF converted and live a long happy band life. In reality, keep doing what we are doing: play live, record, & support friends & organizations that do positive work for others & animals.

AU: How can people get in touch with you and hear your music?

linktr.ee/standagainstfear

Bandcamp: Stand Against Fear OFFICIAL or most streaming platforms

Socials or safstandagainstfear@gmail.com

AU: Last thoughts?

Thanks very much for the opportunity to be in your Zine. We have been reading it since the beginning. Let's go see the band down the road. Cheers.

Photo credit: Ryan Voll

Mountain Collective American Tour 2017:

THE STORM OF THE CENTURY PART 8

By Brydo "Puff 'Em If You Got 'Em" Parker

With Telluride in the rearview mirror. I was thinking back to how this whole trip started and had played out so far. This is the rear view recap... I live my reality in an old ski movie called *Hot Dog* and when a huge storm started brewing way out in the Pacific and the whispers of The Storm of the Century were getting into my ears and soul, I asked my great friend and snowboard riding brother, Ira, if he was interested in doing the Mountain Collective multi-mountain pass. An enthusiastic yes led us to renting a 35 ft old RV. 2000 bucks for a month.

We headed out across America through the Cascades, Sierra Nevadas and Rocky Mountains to hit every ski resort on our Mountain Collective passes and others. Crystal Mountain, Mt Bachelor Mt Shasta, Tahoe, Mammoth, Taos, Hesperus, and Telluride so far. Whoa, I almost swerved into the ditch. I have got to stop looking in the rearview and start looking where we are going. Aspen. To the Valley of the American Ski Gods heroes, movie stars and real estate tycoons.

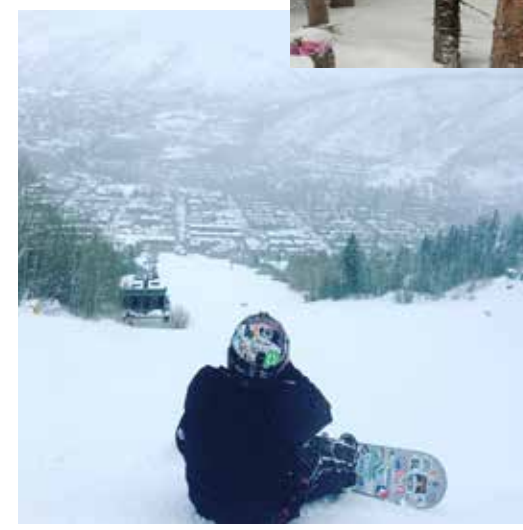
We rolled in not looking for any trouble down a wind blown snow drifting road late in the evening with a stiff crosswind, one working windshield wiper and flickering headlights.

As we approached the town of Aspen there were some signs sticking out of snow banks saying RV Park Open. We pulled right in and found a recently plowed and vacated spot with power and water. What? I still want to go back there to this day. Absolutely nobody around. Maybe everybody is up night skiing?

There is tons of fresh snow. We found another sign saying Laundry Open. We had a hard time deciding what to do?

A. Get on the bus that stopped right out front every 15 mins go into town and stock up or... B. Don't go into town and do laundry instead. We picked A and B and hoped the laundry would still be there when we got back.

From the bus window we could tell Aspen was all it is cracked up to be. Expensive stores, beautiful rich people, big trucks and sleds. No wonder all the snooty people are here. The snow is the best in a hundred years. There are four world class ski resorts bundled together and the X Games was setting up to run next week at Buttermilk. Shut down to us as we are not X athletes.



And we are on the bus.

We did a turn and burn. We loaded up and went back to our rig to burn some Oregon chron, finish laundry and work on fixing the big rig. Dumping the poop and loading up on propane and water.

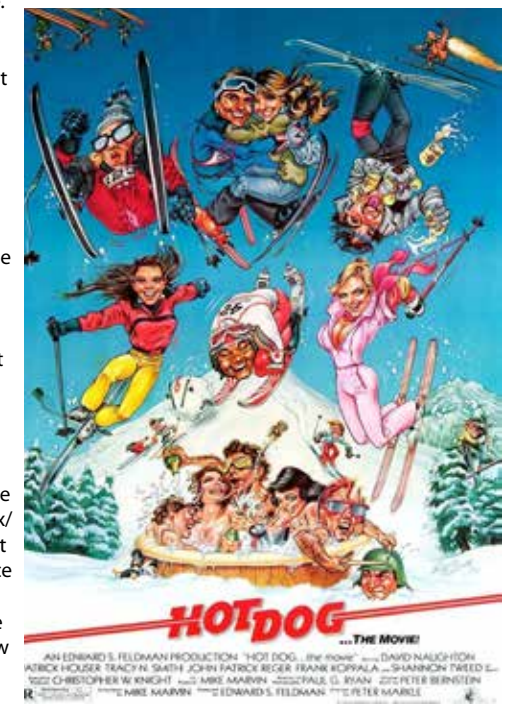
Back in 2017 the Mountain Collective Pass included two days at either Ajax or Snowmass. Now it's two days at any of the four starting with Snowmass, Buttermilk, Aspen Highlands and Aspen. Aspen mountain will always be Ajax to me. How could anybody pick? Luckily we didn't have to. We got on the bus at 6:05 AM and ripped Ajax a new one. Ripping down the gondola line was the first run fresh pow the whole way down right to the green zone to grab some very expensive grass. We burned it right then in the next ganjola ride up.

When we exited the ganjola the skies opened up to a blue bird day for the whole day. You can ride Ajax/ Aspen all day and not do the same run twice and still not see the whole mountain. The view of the city below is super cool.

Day Two: We decide to ride Aspen Snowmass, the bus goes there as well. Huge is a word used to describe this world class ski area. Deep snow, wicked fall line, awesome people and infrastructure.

Now there are not too many obese skiers but the massive burger at Elk Camp Lodge could change the face of American ski food. Shrinkflation is not a thing here. Ira was ripping in the park and landing some huge airs. I was burping burger.

This is one of those mountains that kicks the shit out of you and leaves you wanting more. Runs like the Jerry Garcia Shrine with a tree section filled full of Grateful Dead memorabilia and signs that say No Straight Lining, cliff bands, parks, food and drinks make this the place for us.



Heading back to the RV is hard to do but with Snowbird in our sights so we get ready for a dinner time assault on the desert crossing into the Mormon state. Utah here we come.

Next issue Snowbird in Utah.

mountaincollective.com

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40TH ANNUAL PEAK TO VALLEY RACE

Feb 27th-28th, 2026

Whistler Mountain

By Brydo Parker

I knew something special was going on in Whistler for the 40th Anniversary of the mighty gate banging race called the Peak to Valley Race. When Mike McSticket and I got to Squamish at 8 am Friday morning and the highway was backed up to Cat Lake turnoff just outside of Squamish, we knew it was going to be big. This race was the brainchild of crazy canuck Dave Murray. He wanted to give people who wanted to race a taste of the Olympics, so the Peak to Valley race was born. This is the longest giant slalom in the world at 5.6 kilometers of thigh burning gravity induced ski psychosis.

I was in the third running of this race back in 1987/1988 when I first moved to Whistler. I raced in a speed suit my mom made for me. It didn't help me win but it did help me pick up speed when I caught a ski tip on the starting gate and rocketed to the bottom of the Whistler Peak Saddle head first on my back.

Fast forward 40 years to the same starting gate. This is where age and wisdom come into play. Enter the Crowster. Sliding smoothly and with a dedicated sneer into the starting gate to the sounds of cow bells and a chorus of caw caw caws. This 75 year old gate banging Whistler Mountain Ski Club and Squamish legend is part of a team of four. The team is divided into two teams of two. Which run two co-ed racers over nineteen on Friday and two on Saturday.

The fastest combined time wins overall first place and the Stefan Ples trophy. The overall combined oldest age and time wins the Dave Murray trophy. These are awarded at an exclusive late night private party at the top of the mountain in the Roundhouse Lodge. This party was sponsored by See Ya Later Ranch Winery. Great wine and skiing go great together, like snow and skis. An awesome sponsor who took the duty of hosting the 40th running of this event very seriously.

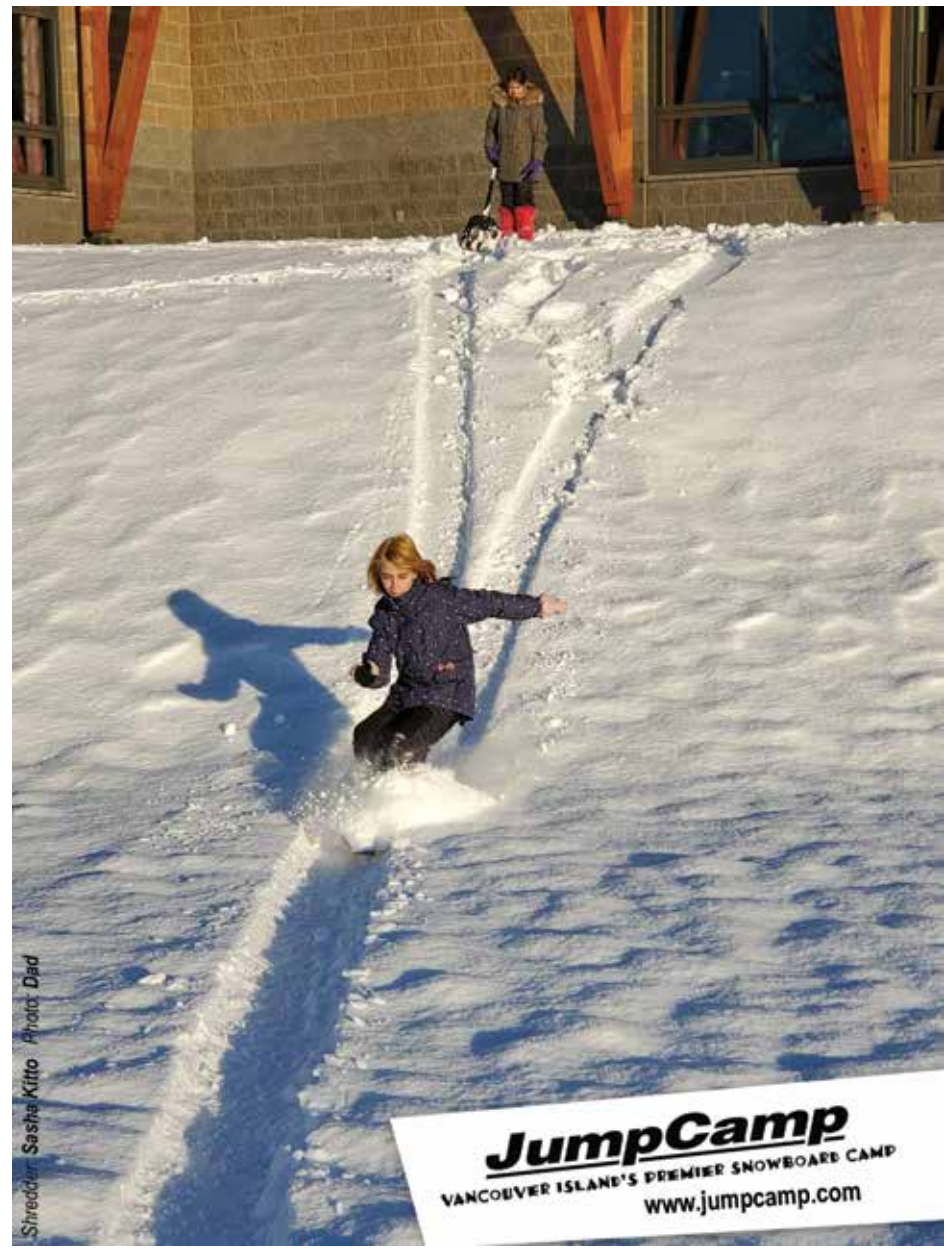
McSticket and I started taking photos to cover this event at the top and worked our way down. We met Oisin McHugh about a quarter of the way down. Oisin is a local legend photographer who shot most of the shots for this article and all of the shots for the event finale.

The changing snow conditions made for a varied speed race as some racers struggled to keep momentum in the flats and some flew at the speed of light. Everyone racing had a blast and so did the spectators. At the very bottom of the race course past the finish line is the legendary saloon Dusty's where the libations of wine and other booze were flowing freely. Healing elixir to the physically and emotionally spent racers. Sitting around a roaring gas fire at Dusty's telling old and new stories while meeting new and old friends. Bragging rights as well as the pure camaraderie of the wrap up party are what make this race so special to so many.

We are all looking forward to cheering on the running of the mighty Peak to Valley 41.

whistlerblackcomb.com

Photo credits: Oisin McHugh and Mike McSticket



THE WEED OLYMPICS

ALASKAN THUNDER FUCK

GRAPEFRUIT DIESEL

KILLA BEEZ

PURPLE CHEESE

ZOMBIE KUSH

JUDGE - CASLOE / SASQUATCH SISTER

Strain	Appearance	Smell	Taste	Rank / Potency	Comments
Alaskan Thunder Fuck	Glistening gold & amber-haired nugget	Smells like a skunk's bum-bum	Fruity and dank thick smoke	8.5/10	I'm a stoner and I loved the hell out of smoking this all day and night.
Grapefruit Diesel	Looks better than dispensary garbage	Has an aroma of grape wine & Skittles	A little harsh and charcoal	7/10	Looks way better than it tastes but zaps the mind devine every time.
Killa Beez	If money grew on trees	Like a fruit smoothie, baby	Reminds me of my 1st joint, Yummeriffic	9/10	Hope I can buy a bag of this to smog on before it's up in toked smoke.
Purple Cheese	Looks a bit like old outdoor	Moldy and damp basement smell	Like eating old fermented grass	5.2/10	20 years ago you'd have gotten busted for it even if it's shit, Probably ratted out.
Zombie Kush	Looks like a big bud, man, I like it	Jello and Orange Crush	Smooth cinnamon aftertones	8/10	Powerful yet enlightening, probably 11-week sativa crossbreed.

Casloe

RANDOM GRAVES

JUDGE - RANDOM GRAVES / SASQUATCH BRO

Strain	Appearance	Smell	Taste	Rank / Potency	Comments
Alaskan Thunder Fuck	Looks like an Xmas tree dipped in glazed honey	Exactly like taffy	Cross between vanilla cake & marmalade steak	9/10	One-toke stuff -- intoxicating aroma. Threw me for a loop and put me in a nice coma.
Grapefruit Diesel	Curly red hair on a bed of green pears	Citrus and dry fig crust	Sparkling grapefruit soda baked into a fritatta	7/10	Moderately potent. Took many a slow hit.
Killa Beez	Rock hard nugs crystally drugs	Like tree sap	Like a honey sandwich covered in Cool Whip	8/10	Extremely smooth tokes. Made me wanna chain-smoke.
Purple Cheese	Multicolored beans	Raspberry jam burnt in a frypan	Grape soda & dead toad	4/10	Didn't get me baked. Gave me a headache.
Zombie Kush	Sticky alien bud	Subtle & earthy Almost like a Hershey's	Sweet berry pine Like a fine wine	7/10	Lifted my cerebral state. This head-stone made me fade away.

JUDGE - INK.D / SASQUATCH BRO

Strain	Appearance	Smell	Taste	Rank / Potency	Comments
Alaskan Thunder Fuck	Reminds me of the strain Golden Nugget. Hell yeah	Fresh pineapple & skunk funk	Chronic dense immense fog	8/10	Smooth groove after puffing this bad boy, intense immense dimensions.
Grapefruit Diesel	It's no show-stopper, but good crystal count	Another super loopy fruity candy like Tranquilness	So harsh, like burnt marshmallows	6.5/10	Looks and potency ain't everything but bad taste, sux, and it ain't worth bux.
Killa Beez	Honey-covered green machine	Like sniffing the beehive as you extract the gold	Just devine, like a bubblegum & skunk bum	9/10	This is a flavor-packed, no crap, mind-zap, crystal-stacked head-smacker.
Purple Cheese	Mexican dirt weed	Old barn & rotting dung	Like when you smoked lawn grass at 9 years old	4/10	Was this a trick? If so it was a mean one. Pricks and comedians haha.
Zombie Kush	Some huge hairy nuggets of love	Like Violator Kush	Genuine deep and clean blackberry soap	9.5/10	Me love to get violated and that flavor seals the deal and reinvents the stoner wheel

ink. D

GOLD MEDAL:
KILLA BEEZ
SILVER: ALASKAN THUNDER FUCK
BRONZE: ZOMBIE KUSH
COMPOST PILE: PURPLE CHEESE

Victoria, B.C. Legislature Denies 420 Permit

By Ted Smith

Since legalization, the annual April 20 protest in Victoria, B.C. has moved from City Hall to the front lawn of the B.C. Legislative Buildings. Celebrated in Victoria since 1997, April 20 has become the unofficial holiday of cannabis smokers around the world. Until this year, the staff have issued an event permit for the protest.

"It seems rather sudden that we have not even had an opportunity to address whatever concerns the committee has before being given a final no." – Victoria Cannabis Buyers Club

Every year, until now, after the Victoria Cannabis Buyers Club (VCBC) sends the application, we are reminded that smoking cannabis is prohibited on the Legislature grounds. Then we were given the permit. This year, things were suddenly different.

On Friday, March 20, the Parliamentary Education Office sent the VCBC an email informing of a sudden change of heart:

"As you are aware, according to the Precinct Use policy, events and event participants are prohibited from selling, serving, or consuming a regulated substance within the Legislative Precinct, including alcohol and cannabis.

If there has been non-compliance with these identified requirements, the Legislative Assembly may refuse to approve any future requests for authorization related to similar or connected events. After careful consideration, the Precinct Use Committee is unable to approve your event request for April 20th this year unless the identified conditions are met."

In response, the VCBC sent the following email:

"It is somewhat surprising that this would happen, given the fact that we have held this event at the Legislature on April 20 since 2019 with a permit. To our knowledge there have been no serious issues or complaints about this event that have not been addressed. For example, we have moved the event as far away from the building as possible.
In the past we have had meetings with the Precinct Use Committee to discuss any potential problems. It seems rather sudden that we have not even had an opportunity to address whatever concerns the committee has before being given a final no. Is it standard practice of the Precinct Use Committee to deny permits without an opportunity to directly address the concerns with the applicant, even in cases where the permit has been issued to the applicant for several years for the same event?
As we have said in the past, this event is a protest. There is no public property in Victoria, Vancouver or any major city in Canada where a large group can gather to smoke cannabis without being in violation of a smoking bylaw. This is despite cannabis being legally available to adults to purchase."

No response has been received before going to print.

While it is unclear whether there will be any enforcement of the anti-smoking bylaws on April 20 at the B.C. Legislature, there is no doubt that many people will be there to have a puff at 4:20 p.m. With a long history of cannabis activism in Victoria, there is a strong local cannabis movement determined to push for relaxing the smoking bylaws to allow for more indoor and outdoor public consumption.

If anyone gets a ticket for smoking cannabis on April 20 at the B.C. Legislature before me, I will be upset.

The only realistic way indoor cannabis smoking facilities and outdoor consumption spaces will be endorsed by the provincial government is if they are embarrassed in international media for enforcing this bylaw. Cannabis might be legal, but it is far from free of unnecessary prohibitive regulations.

Photo Credit: Matt Love Photography

EVERGREEN CANNABIS

Interview with Owner Mike Babins

Absolute Underground: Who are we talking to today and what are you best known for?

Mike Babins: Mike Babins, my wife and I own Evergreen Cannabis. I once accidentally wore my slippers to a Danzig concert.

AU: What is your association with the world of cannabis? How did you first become involved?

MB: We own Vancouver's first licensed store. Before that we were a medical store, before that I was slinging dimes in college, before that I grew up noticing that the cigarettes Daddy rolled himself smelled better than the ones he bought from the store.

AU: What is it like running an independent store in a city full of chains?

MB: It can be rough at times but luckily the Kitsilano crowd appreciates quality bud. The chains are all getting kickbacks from the corporate LPs to carry their product. When someone walks into Evergreen for the first time, we show them what real weed is supposed to look and smell like.

B.C. is known for growing some of the best cannabis in the world. Going to a chain to purchase a pre-roll made from weed that was mass produced in Ontario is like living in Italy and ordering Domino's." — Mike Babins, Evergreen Cannabis

AU: You have a bit of a reputation for giving customers a hard time when they buy pre-rolls, why is that?

MB: Pre-rolls are a scam. We carry the best ones we can but in the end, you are buying the scraps and paying a premium price for it. It's like walking into a steak shop and ordering a hot dog. Try rolling a joint and then only smoking it a week later — it's going to be dry and flavourless. Lots of people buy them because they never learned to roll, I regularly give out free rolling machines. Evergreen is about getting you the best quality bud for the best price — and pre-rolls just don't cut it.

AU: While you are on your soapbox, what are your thoughts on vape pens?

MB: Aaargghhh, fine let's do this. I get why people like these but it's not the natural way to consume, and they are tolerance killers. They are just too easy to use. Most people don't realize that they are so concentrated that one puff is like smoking a joint. When you hit these all day you aren't getting any higher, you are just filling your system with extra THC. Once you have all that THC in your system you stop getting high as it never gets a chance to clear out. I personally prefer using a dry herb vape — you put actual flower in those. If you must buy 510 vapes then make sure you get full spectrum, which means it all comes from cannabis. Most of the popular brands are just THC distillate with "botanical terpenes," aka "natural flavour," added.

AU: What's the best part of your job?

MB: I hang out with my dog listening to records and make people happy all day. And the donut shop across the street sometimes brings us freebies.

AU: When I walk into a shop, what is the best way to choose flower?

MB: Smell it, look at it. Is it fresh? Does it smell like berries? Or like dry hay? Do not choose by THC percentage — high THC being "stronger" is one of the biggest myths of this industry. If you trust your budtender then ask them, tell them what you want to feel. Don't just say "I want something strong," instead say "My buddies and I are going to be playing video games all night, I'm going for a long walk, I need to clean the house, I want to sink into my couch until I pass out."

AU: Who are your favourite growers?

MB: Just check our website ecsvan.ca. We only carry weed that we love.

AU: Do you prefer Sativas or Indicas?

MB: Do you prefer pizza or burgers? Depends on the mood!

AU: What is your favourite all-time strain to smoke?

MB: Tuggs McGraw. But I haven't been able to find it since the '90s.

AU: Why is it important to support local growers and stores?

MB: B.C. is known for growing some of the

best cannabis in the world. Going to a chain to purchase a pre-roll made from weed that was mass produced in Ontario is like living in Italy and ordering Domino's.

AU: Any plans for 4/20 this year?

MB: We're normally so busy that day that I end up not consuming anything! It's also the first day of the NHL playoffs and I can confidently say I don't think anyone will be watching the Leafs or Canucks.

AU: Where are your products available?

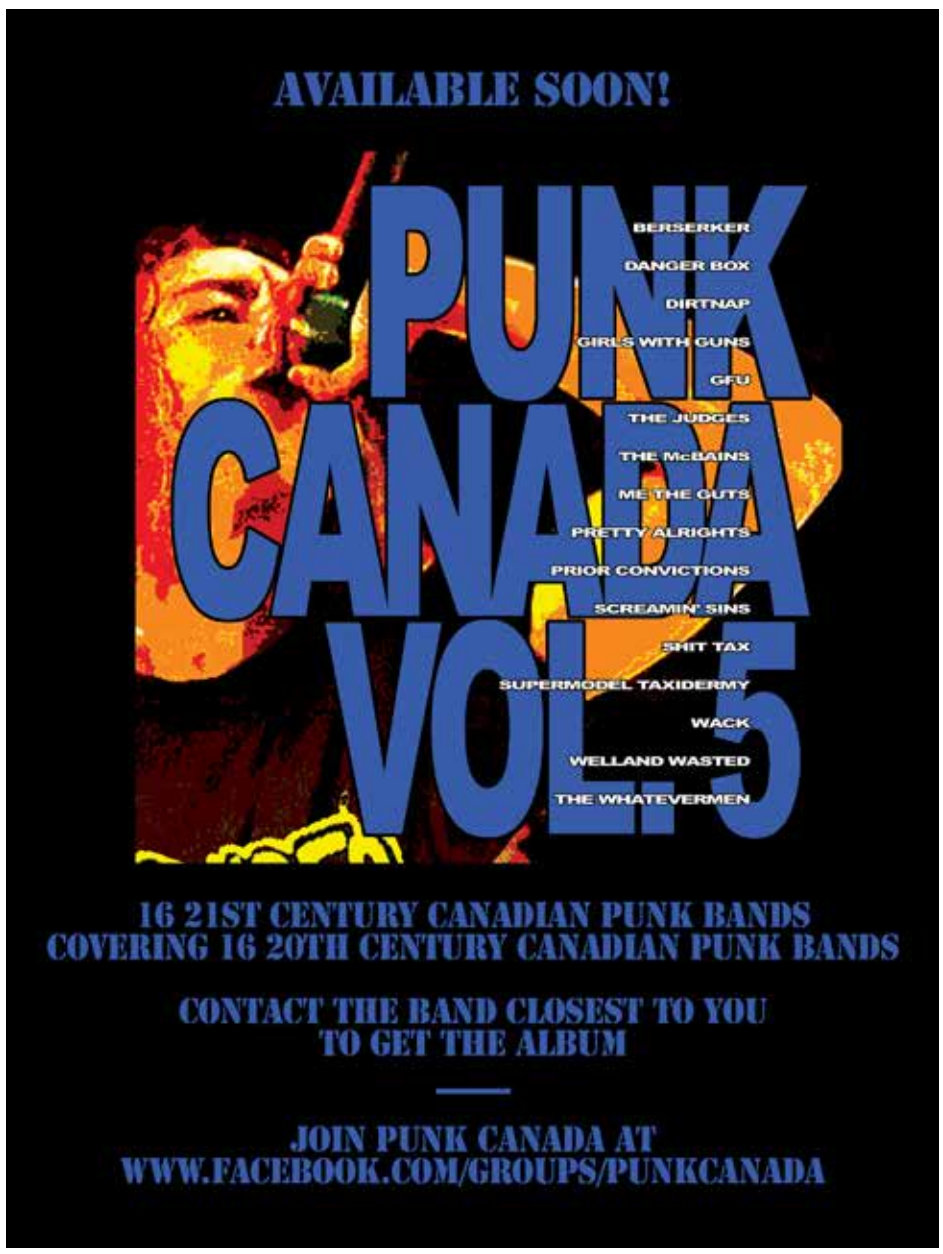
MB: 2868 West 4th in Kitsilano, corner MacDonald. We deliver anywhere in B.C. from ecsvan.ca.

AU: How can people find you online?

MB: Instagram: @ecsvanbc

Bluesky: @ecsvan

Facebook: @ecsvan



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BIA FERREIRA
TRAIN TO ROOTS
ALPHA CENTAURI TRIPPYCALS
DAVE-O-RAMA

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MEAN BIKINI
VIC CITY SKINS SOUNDSYSTEM

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11 APRIL	UADA + MORTIIS	RICKSHAW THEATRE
14-16 APRIL	CASTLE CANADA TOUR '26	VICTORIA, VANCOUVER, CHILLIWACK
23 APRIL	ROYAL THUNDER	ASTORIA PUB
23-24 APRIL	REVOLUTION ABOVE DISORDER	VICTORIA & NANAIMO
24 APRIL	CATTLE DECAPITATION	RICKSHAW THEATRE
27 APRIL	SHADOW OF INTENT	RICKSHAW THEATRE
30 APRIL	BLACK FLAG	RICKSHAW THEATRE

APRIL-MAY

24 APRIL - MAY 1	TEMPTRESS + SPACE QUEEN	WESTERN CANADA TOUR
1 MAY	WITCH RIPPER	THE COBALT
1 MAY	EVERYTHING'S RUINED + DEAD GOON	ASTORIA PUB
2 MAY	DEAD MEADOW + TEMPTRESS	RICKSHAW THEATRE
3 MAY	LEÆTHER STRIP	THE COBALT
9 MAY	MASTER BOOT RECORD	RICKSHAW THEATRE
9 MAY	OXYGEN DESTROYER + XOTH	PHOENIX BAR & GRILL
10 MAY	GIGAN + OXYGEN DESTROYER	ASTORIA PUB

MAY-JUNE

14 MAY	DAZZLING KILLMEN	ASTORIA PUB
15-17 MAY	DOPETHRONE + MIZMOR	VICTORIA, VANCOUVER, KAMLOOPS
21-23 MAY	PRISONER (CA)	KAMLOOPS, CHILLIWACK, VANCOUVER
22 MAY	TERRIFIER	ASTORIA PUB
30 MAY	SPELL - ALBUM RELEASE	GREEN AUTO (MAIN STAGE)
05 JUNE	IRON KINGDOM	RICKSHAW THEATRE
26-28 JUNE	ANVIL	CHILLIWACK, VANCOUVER, VICTORIA

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MARIO'S SUPER SOIL
Level Up Your Grow

Absolute Underground: What are your skills to pay the bills?

Mario: You're talking to Mario, the founder and the "boots on the ground" behind Mario's Super Soil. My skills are a mix of heavy lifting and high-level coordination—I'm the guy hand-blending the products, bagging the soil, and managing everything from shipping to social media.

AU: Tell us the history of Mario's Super Soil.

Mario: We started in 2019 in Mississauga, Ontario. I saw a major gap in the market for clean, high-performance organic inputs. I wanted to create a brand that worked just as well for a prize-winning tomato as it does for a high-grade craft flower.

AU: What is the day-to-day work life like?

Mario: It's a 24/7 hustle. I might spend the morning hand-mixing a batch of Level Up and the afternoon coordinating logistics for a shipment or answering grower questions.

AU: What do you produce?

Mario: I specialize in high-performance organic amendments. Level Up is our "Growth Engine"—it's incredible for vegetative growth in any plant. Flower Power is our "Finisher"—it's designed to maximize yields, whether that's bigger peppers, sweeter fruits, or resinous flowers. We also source premium Worm Castings and Compost to give growers a complete organic foundation.

AU: What do you use in your own garden?

Mario: I use the full lineup on everything. I grow a wide variety—from my own medicine to heavy-producing vegetable beds. If it's growing in my yard, it's powered by the same stuff I sell to my customers.

AU: It's our 4/20 issue. Do you partake?

Mario: I'm definitely part of the community and culture, but at the end of the day, I'm a plant guy. I appreciate the culture as much as I appreciate a perfectly grown heirloom tomato.

AU: For someone wanting to grow their own, what would you recommend to get started?

I recommend starting with our Super Starter Pack, it has everything you need to feed your soil from start to finish. Use Level Up during the vegetative stage to build a strong, healthy frame, and switch to Flower Power for the bloom cycle. This system works across the board for any high-value crop that needs dense nutrient delivery.

AU: Any career highlights to share?

Mario: The real highlight is hearing from customers who have seen their gardens transform. Also, a recent standout has been partnering with local schools to provide the soil for students growing native nut trees—showing the next generation that "Soil is Life" is a big win.

AU: Anything else to mention?

Mario: Whether you're growing food or medicine, the secret is in the soil. Support local, stay organic, and don't be afraid to get your hands dirty.

AU: How do people find you online?

Check us out at **mariossupersoil.com** or follow the daily grind on **Instagram: @mariossupersoil**

Naturally Nutra

AU: Please introduce yourself.

Naturally Nutra is a small, Canadian, family owned and operated brand that calls BC home. We have decades of experience in the wellness sector and are a niche CBD brand that is proud to offer THC-free formulations. We believe that quality and innovation are key, and are committed to delivering exactly what we promise.

AU: What is your goal as a business?

At our core, we're here to make wellness simple, clean, and trustworthy. We've always seen ourselves as a "master of one" brand, meaning we focus deeply on cannabinoids and do them really well. Everything we create is designed to help people feel better in a way that's approachable, consistent, and rooted in quality.

AU: Can you explain the benefits of CBD?

CBD is one of those ingredients that meets people where they're at. Some people incorporate it into their daily routine to support balance and relaxation, others lean on it as part of their recovery or wind-down rituals. What's important is that it works with your body's natural systems, rather than overriding them. It's subtle, but over time, that consistency can really add up.

AU: What makes your CBD products unique?

We're proudly THC-free, which actually puts us in a bit of a niche category. A lot of people want the benefits of cannabinoids without any psychoactive effects, and that's where we shine. We also focus on precision dosing, clean formulations, and consistency. No guesswork, just straightforward, reliable products.

AU: Where does your pure CBD originate from?

Our CBD is hemp-derived and sourced from trusted partners in BC who meet strict quality and testing standards. Every batch is third-party tested to ensure purity and potency.

AU: What are your most popular products?

Our *Sunbeam CBD:CBG* capsules are definitely a standout—they've built a really loyal following. People love them as part of a daily routine.

Our *CBD 3000 Relief Balm* is another favourite, especially for targeted use. It's something people keep on hand and reach for when they need it.

We also have our *24K Gold CBD:CBG* facial line, which blends cannabinoids with skincare ingredients like hyaluronic acid—so it's a bit of a crossover between wellness and beauty.

AU: What new products are you developing?

We're always exploring new minor cannabinoids and higher-potency options. Right now, we're working on expanding our capsule line with CBG and CBN, as well as pushing into higher-dose CBD formats. On the topical side, we're developing stronger balms and innovations within skincare.

AU: Any plans for 420 this year?

We like to keep things a bit more wellness-focused, but 420 is always a great opportunity to connect with our community, run some fun promos, and highlight what makes CBD unique.

AU: Where is Naturally Nutra available?

We're available across Canada, including Ontario through the Ontario Cannabis Store, BC through the BCLDB system, and in some online medical channels as well. We've built a solid presence over the past few years and continue to expand.

AU: Anything else to mention?

I think the biggest thing is that we're here for the long game. We've been steady, consistent, and focused on building trust. In a fast-moving industry, that's something we're really proud of.

naturallynutra.com

@naturallynutracbd

Brisket, Blunts & B.C. Bud: THE KITCHEN CANNABIS

Absolute Underground: Who are we talking to today and what are you best known for?

Tom Smale: My name is Tom Smale. I am the CEO and one of three founders of The Kitchen Cannabis. I'm also the master grower for our facility — and the janitor, haha.

AU: What is your association with the world of cannabis? How did you first become involved?

TS: I love this question — it's part of our brand ethos. I pretty much grew up with it. The joke I make is that I was running around cannabis plants before I knew what they were. I have uncles on Vancouver Island who've been doing this since the '70s.

I personally got into it in my early teens by digging out a crawl space with a 20-litre bucket and a beach shovel. We stapled poly to the floor joists and secured the bottom with dirt. This was awful and definitely not smell-proof. The whole neighbourhood smelled like skunk, but I thought it was the greatest grow-op ever built, haha.

I moved the gear through my girlfriend's dad, who became an amazing mentor. Unfortunately he's passed now, but he was dialed in and ahead of his time when it came to cultivation knowledge. This guy taught me the ins and outs of the industry long before legalization. RIP GT.

AU: What drew you to the cannabis industry? When did you first start growing cannabis?

TS: I answered part of this above, but what drew me in was the culture. It wasn't just about the money — it was about growing cannabis and having this secret network to operate in. It was truly family. We shared genetics, bailed each other out when needed, and spent most of our time together.

Part of the reason we called our brand "The Kitchen" is that we always came together to cook, share ideas, and connect. Growing up, most of our "transactions" and "meetings" took place at my mentor's house in the kitchen before, during, or after we made food together. There was always abundance and an open-door policy for the people we worked with. It was my favourite place to be.

Today I do my best to carry that forward with cookouts at the house, and I always make sure there's more than enough food. I'm grateful I can do that. That behaviour and culture I grew up with was a huge part of drawing me into this industry.

"It wasn't just about the money — it was about growing cannabis and having this secret network to operate in. It was truly family."

— Tom Smale, The Kitchen Cannabis

AU: What is it like being a licensed producer in B.C.?

TS: It's tough — take me back to the crawl-space days, haha. Jokes aside, it's especially hard for the little guys. The costs and taxes associated with this industry are on a different level, and the margins for error are very slim.

We try to stay focused on the good stuff. I'm grateful we get to openly share our craft, and I love that the stigma around cannabis has changed since legalization. We serve many medical patients who truly need cannabis, and I enjoy that people have open, non-judgmental conversations about it now. The industry will evolve over time, but until then we just keep grinding. I don't even know what else I'd do — I love the game.

AU: What's the best part of your job?

TS: Not worrying about getting raided anymore — my wife sleeps a lot better at night, haha. (This is not a joke.)

What I enjoy most is the process. It takes months to go from a clone to a labeled, stamped, finished product. So much can go wrong, and when we cross the line with something that makes the consumer happy, it's the most fulfilling feeling. The icing on the cake is hearing positive feedback — it makes us want to reload, do it again, and do it better.

AU: What strains do you currently produce and what makes them unique?

TS: Right now we have Cherry Chemtrail on the market (B.C., MB, ON, SK, NWT) and Red Velvet Cookies just launched in B.C..

Cherry Chemtrail leans Sativa. What's unique is we've been able to hit high-20s to low-30s on THC and, more importantly to me, the terpenes and flavour (4%+ terpenes). One of my favourite products right now is the Cherry Chemtrail 1-gram blunt — the flavour merges really well with the tea-leaf blunt wrap.

Red Velvet Cookies is a heavy hitter, more Indica-leaning, and packed full of flavour. Super dense bud structure — gorgeous to look at and smell. It's been one of my favourites to grow lately.

AU: Do you prefer Sativas or Indicas?

TS: This depends on what I'm doing. If I want to order pizza and watch movies, I'll be smoking Indica for sure. I personally prefer Sativas. I find it way more mellow and I stay really productive. There are no down days in the garden and they seem to keep me off the couch and out of the pantry, haha.

AU: What is your favourite all-time strain to smoke?

TS: My all-time favourite strain is Mimosa. I love the citrus flavour. I was lucky enough to get my hands on this cut and it was a staple for me in the legacy days. The other one is Blue Dream… I just grew it for years and loved the plant growth and smell.

AU: What makes an expert grower in your opinion?

TS: Easy answer: diligence. Cannabis wants to grow — it's a weed. Dialing in grow rooms, feed programs, and maximizing a cultivar's potential is a whole other conversation that comes with experience and really paying attention to what's happening in the grow rooms.

Growing cannabis keeps you humble. As soon as you get sloppy with the plant or your grow rooms, karma will kick in and problems start happening.

An expert grower constantly checks environmentals, plant health, and disease/pest pressure. They become one with the grow room and the plants. You should be able to walk into your grow room and hear a fan that isn't running or feel that the humidity is too high without looking at the controls. A great grower can sense it.

Another big separation between good and great is preventative maintenance and sanitation. A great grower keeps their "kitchen" clean and makes sure equipment is serviced and firing on all cylinders.

The "great" approach is to always be prepared and expect things to go sideways occasionally. We plan for "when" it happens, not "if," so we're ready and can resolve issues ASAP.

AU: What are some growing secrets or tips you can share with our readers?

TS: Oh man, I could nerd out on this for hours, but here are the main points:

#1 — If you're going to grow, do it right.

Water your plants, spend time with them, and give them the attention they deserve. You'll be rewarded if you stay on top of it. If you neglect them, you'll most likely be underwhelmed and you'll be hitting up the local retailer for your gear.

#2 — Fertilizer and pH are a must.

Whether salts, organics, outdoor or indoor, the plant needs food. pH'ing your water allows for optimal nutrient uptake. The plant may survive without it, but it won't thrive.

- Soil: 6.2–6.5 pH
- Coco / Rockwool / Hydroponics: 5.5–5.8 pH

#3 — Post-harvest: dry and cure properly.

Find a cool, dark place to dry and cure. Rushing this doesn't help — I understand you want to get to it after months of work, but be patient. Aim for a 14-day hang dry, or until the main stems snap. Hand-trim your gear — using trimmers knocks off trichomes and damages the product. Seal trimmed product in a jar or bin and air it out a couple times a day for 15–20 minutes. After a couple weeks you'll be stoked.

AU: Why is it important to support local growers?

TS: This ties back to an earlier question. It's tough for the little guys, and supporting local means supporting your community and your culture.

AU: Any plans for 4/20 this year?

TS: My plan is to fire up the smoker at 4 a.m. and throw a brisket on before we go take care of the plants. From there, probably do some "R & D" on some new strains and products coming out. I guarantee some beverages will be had, and basically starve ourselves until the food is done. Looking forward to it.

AU: Where are your products available?

TS: We're in the majority of B.C. retailers. One of our go-to retailers in the lower mainland is **Evergreen in Kitsilano**. The store has a great vibe with vintage music records throughout it and a great selection. **They order directly from our website, so I can guarantee they always have our freshest flower in stock. They also deliver anywhere in B.C.: ecsvan.ca**.

AU: How can people find you online?

TS: IG: @thekitchencanna

Website: thekitchencannabis.ca

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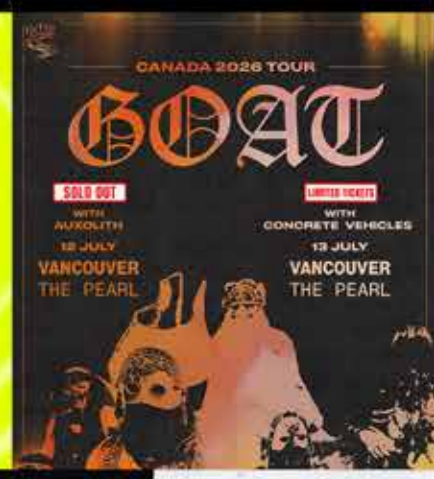
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GOAT
SOLD OUT
WITH AUXOLITH
13 JULY
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13 JULY
VANCOUVER
THE PEARL

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CANADA
JUNE 26
Belvedere
APRIL 24 KELOWNA, BC - REVELRY
APRIL 25 EDMONTON, AB - PAWN SHOP LIVE
APRIL 26 CALGARY, AB - THE ARROWHEAD
APRIL 28 RED DEER, AB - BO'S BAR & STAGE
APRIL 29 SASKATOON, SK - LOUIS
MAY 06 SUDBURY, ON - THE GRAND

CHIODOS
IT'S NOT YOU, IT'S ME
TOUR
CALVALOUIE
8/07 VANCOUVER, BC
8/09 CALGARY, AB
8/10 EDMONTON, AB
8/11 SASKATOON, SK
8/13 WINNIPEG, MB
8/19 TORONTO, ON

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SCARLETT
AUGUST 28 DICKENS
CALGARY, AB
PMA

SYNTHICIDE
TORONTO
CLAN OF XYMOX - COLD CAVE
BUZZ KULL
ROSA ANSCHÜTZ

HOLY FUCK
MAY 7TH — VICTORIA
MAY 8TH — VANCOUVER

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THE PEARL

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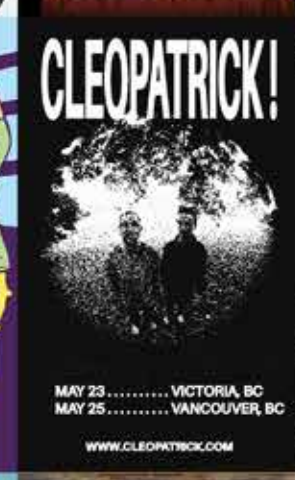
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MAY 27 MONTRÉAL
MAY 28 TORONTO
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CABARET VOLTAIRE
FINAL
USA+CANADA
TOUR
MAY 6
COMMODORE BALLROOM
VANCOUVER, BC
SEPTEMBER 18
PHOENIX CONCERT HALL
TORONTO, ON

IRESS
Nightosphere
May 12
Fox Cabaret
Vancouver, BC

Cremat
MAY 14 VANCOUVER, BC
RICKSHAW THEATRE

April 21
The Pearl
Vancouver, BC

RED BAY MOURNING
APRIL 23 - THE PEARL
VANCOUVER, BC

SHOW ME THE BODY
VANCOUVER, BC
THE RICKSHAW THEATRE
FRIDAY MAY 22ND

ANTI-QUEENS
MAKEWAR
IRON ROSES
ROAD TO POUZZA
MAY 15
LEE'S PALACE
TORONTO, ON

JOSHUA BECKETT: Craft Cannabis from Salt Spring Island

Joshua Beckett is the Director of Magi Cannabis and the Master Grower behind the Salt Spring Magic brand. Based on Salt Spring Island in British Columbia, Beckett and his small team focus on legacy-style cultivation, producing terpene-rich cannabis with a strong emphasis on careful growing, drying, and curing.

"The title of Master Grower doesn't mean mastery — it means responsibility." — Joshua Beckett, Magi Cannabis

Absolute Underground: Who are we talking to today and what are you best known for?

Joshua Beckett: My name is Joshua Beckett and I'm the Director of Magi Cannabis. Our consumer brand in British Columbia is Salt Spring Magic, and we're based on Salt Spring Island in British Columbia. Our cultivation and post-harvest team is made up of family and close friends. We operate very much as a small, independent farm rather than a corporate producer. Our focus is on producing high-quality, legacy-style cannabis, grown carefully and finished properly, with the kind of attention to detail that smaller craft operations can provide.

AU: What is your association with the world of Cannabis? How did you first become involved?

JB: My earliest connection to cannabis cultivation comes through my mother. There's a funny family story that the last thing she did before going into labour with me was water her plants. I became more interested in gardening during my teenage years. I've always had two strong interests: cannabis and cultural studies. Early on I helped my family with their medical cannabis garden, which eventually led me to become more involved as Canada's early medical programs began to emerge. I later became a designated grower for dozens of patients, many of whom were undergoing cancer treatments. They were dealing with severe side effects from chemotherapy and radiation—loss of appetite, chronic pain, and overall physical decline. Helping them access cannabis made a very real difference. I saw people regain their appetite, manage pain, and avoid relying as heavily on opioid-based painkillers.

What I observed firsthand was that cannabis could provide meaningful support to a person's early palliative care, helping people maintain a relatively normal quality of life for much longer. By helping manage pain, appetite loss, and other side effects of treatment, it allowed some individuals to remain active and engaged in daily life during very difficult periods. Today the industry is very different, and in many ways incredibly exciting. Cannabis has come out of the shadows, and there is now far more research, information, and community connection than ever before.

AU: What drew you to the Cannabis industry? When did you first start growing Cannabis?

JB: In many ways that was already happening alongside my early involvement with medical patients. What drew me in wasn't just the plant itself, but the intersection of horticulture, culture, and the ability to genuinely help people. Cannabis is a remarkably expressive plant, and I became fascinated by how genetics, environment, and cultivation methods influence everything from terpene profiles to the overall experience of the flower. That curiosity eventually turned into a long-term commitment to refining cultivation techniques and preserving the quality standards that B.C. growers have known for decades.

AU: What is it like being a Licensed Producer in B.C.?

JB: Being a licensed producer in British Columbia—and really across most of Canada—is something of a mixed bag. On one hand, it's an exciting field. After all, who wouldn't want to grow cannabis for a living? There is a tremendous amount of passion in this industry. At the same time, it comes with significant challenges. The regulatory environment is complex, and the tax burden on licensed producers is extremely high—I can't emphasize that enough. Profit margins are often very tight, and smaller producers in particular can struggle to access lines of credit or outside investment. There's also intense competition from every direction. Licensed producers compete not only with each other—both large and small—but also with unregulated sources that don't face the same regulatory and tax pressures. So while it's a rewarding industry to be part of, it requires a lot of persistence and creativity to operate a sustainable business.

AU: What strains do you currently produce and what makes them unique?

JB: Our current menu includes a mix of legacy cultivars alongside some newer genetics that we're excited about. One of our staples is Pine Tar Kush, a classic landrace-style indica known for its deep, earthy profile. We also grow OG Shark—what we call Timmy's OG Shark—a unique cultivar I've personally kept as a cut since the 1990s. Another house cultivar is Salt Spring Love Haze, my interpretation of Super Lemon Haze, selected to highlight bright citrus terpene expression. On the Kush side we produce Salty Pink, our favourite expression of Pink Kush, a cultivar that B.C. growers have long been passionate about. We also run Hippie Headbanger, an old-school favourite with strong OG character. Alongside these legacy cultivars we're continually exploring new genetics. Some newer ones in the garden include Blue Zushi, Grey Goose, and MAC Donut—with more always coming down the pipeline.

AU: Do you prefer Sativas or Indicas?

JB: Sativa and indica really exist on a spectrum, and the experience of cannabis can be very personal from one individual to another. Those labels can be useful shorthand, but they don't always tell the full story. Personally, I don't have a strict preference for one or the other. Generally speaking, I'll lean toward indica-leaning cultivars before bed and sativa-leaning ones when I want something a little more energizing and less likely to make me sleepy. What interests me much more than a simple label is the terpene profile—the smell, aroma, and flavour of the flower. Those characteristics often tell you far more about the experience than whether something is called a sativa or an indica.

AU: What is your favourite all-time strain to smoke?

JB: My favourites tend to change over time depending on what's in the garden and what's really expressing itself well at the moment. Right now, I'm particularly interested in Blue Zushi and Gas Tanker. Over the years, though, I've definitely had some long-standing favourites. A long time ago I was really into White Rhino. After that, for quite a while, it was almost exclusively Timmy's OG Shark, my cut of OG Shark that I've held onto since the 1990s. Like most growers, part of the joy is always discovering the next cultivar that really stands out.

AU: What makes an expert grower in your opinion?

JB: I tend to shy away from calling myself an expert. There are many incredibly knowledgeable people in this industry, and cannabis cultivation is something you continue learning about for your entire life. That said, I do take the title of Master Grower seriously. To me, it doesn't mean you've achieved mastery—because that will never really happen. There is always more to learn. Instead, the title represents responsibility. Primarily, a responsibility to the consumer to produce cannabis that is clean, carefully cultivated, and ultimately provides people with a good experience. At the end of the day, that responsibility—to the plant and to the people who enjoy it—is what defines a good grower.

AU: What are some growing secrets or tips you can share with our readers?

JB: The focus of indoor cultivation has changed quite a bit over the years. I remember back in the day, when growers finished a shift, we would inevitably start talking shop about nutrients and additives—what products people were experimenting with and which combinations might improve the crop. Today the conversation has shifted significantly. Modern growers are far more focused on environmental control and data collection—temperature, humidity, airflow, lighting and maintaining stability in the grow environment. Instead of trying to fix problems with more additives, the emphasis now is on creating the most stable and healthy environment possible for the plants to thrive.

AU: Why is it important to support local growers?

JB: If consumers don't want a monopolized, two-dimensional corporate cannabis culture, then supporting independent craft growers and retailers is essential. Small producers are often the ones preserving unique genetics, maintaining traditional cultivation knowledge and focusing on quality over scale. By supporting independent producers and local retailers, consumers help keep diversity, innovation and culture alive within the cannabis industry.

AU: Any plans for 420 this year?

JB: For 420 this year, I'll likely be on Salt Spring Island enjoying the festivities and sampling some great products. It's always a good opportunity to connect with the community and celebrate cannabis culture with the people who appreciate it most.

AU: Where are your products available?

JB: Our products are available throughout British Columbia, primarily through independent retailers that focus on quality craft cannabis. Stores like **Evergreen in Kitsilano always have our freshest flower in stock, they deliver to any location in B.C. from ecsvan.ca**.

AU: How can people find you online?

JB: People can **learn more about what we're doing and follow our work online at MagiCannabis.com**. It's a good place to find updates about our cultivars, our approach to craft cultivation and what we're working on at the farm on Salt Spring Island.

CANNABIS CORNER

FERNWOOD GREEN

Island-Owned, Community-Grown

Jess and Matt talk local growers, neighbourhood roots and 420 celebrations in Victoria, BC.

Absolute Underground: Who are we talking to today and what are you best known for?

Fernwood Green: We are Jess and Matt; the managing team at Fernwood Green.

AU: What is the origin story of Fernwood Green Cannabis?

FG: At Fernwood Green we are proud to be island owned and operated. We opened in the lovely neighbourhood of Fernwood and strive to be the neighbourhood hub providing quality products; recommended by our knowledgeable staff, that support local producers and the Fernwood community.

AU: Who are some of the growers, producers, and brands you are currently working with?

FG: We love to work with local growers and supply products produced on the island and mainland. We're currently working with brands such as: B.C. Weed Co., Sitka Legends, Smyle, Victoria Cannabis Co. and Woody Nelson (to name a few!)

AU: Where is your shop located and what do you like most about the neighbourhood?

FG: Our shop is located in the quaint neighbourhood of Fernwood. Situated on Cook Street, we are surrounded by local businesses and organizations. What we love the most is working with and within the Fernwood community!

AU: Any plans for 420 this year?

FB: Party! The store will be having sales, free merch, cupcakes, a raffle and a piñata right at 4:20p.m. Come check it out!

AU: What are your favourite flower strains to enjoy? Do you prefer Sativas or Indicas?

Jess: I prefer Indicas. My favourite flower strains to enjoy at the moment are: 33 Splitter by Woody Nelson and West Coast OG by B.C. Weed Co.

Matt: Sativas. My current favourite strains are: Honey Bananas by B.C. Weed Co. and Mango Cake by GoodBuds.

AU: What's the best part of your job?

FG: Our Customers! Between our regulars and newcomers, the vibes and good energy that our clientele bring is easily the best part of our job.

AU: How do people find you online?

FB: Check us out at FernwoodGreen.ca and follow us on Instagram: @FernwoodGreen

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Behind The Scenes With Verne Andru, Artist Behind CAPTAIN CANNABIS

By Ed Sum

Absolute Underground: For readers unfamiliar with your work, could you share a brief introduction and how you first entered the animation and illustration field?

Verne Andru: I'm probably best known for my work on *Captain Cannabis*, with *Rock & Rule* and *Captain Canuck* also part of my background. Over my career I became a bit of a jack-of-all-trades, moving between music, electronics, art, film, and computers. From the 1950s through about 1980 there simply weren't many ready-made solutions for creative or technical problems, so if you wanted to make something you had to figure it out. A turning point came when my family got our first television set. I was about eight, and Sunday evenings often started with *The Wonderful World of Disney*. Cartoons like *The Flintstones* followed. They sparked my interest in both music and animation.

My teen years began around 1967, right at the start of the huge cultural and creative explosion that included Woodstock. It was an incredible period for music, art, and new ideas. Around that time I discovered Robert Crumb's *Zap* and the underground comics movement through local head shops. That led me into comic shops and indie publishing. I eventually became editor of the *Canadian Graphic Collector*, where some of my first comic and writing work appeared.

I also had good timing. My high school held a career day where one of the companies present was the publisher of *Captain Canuck*. My entry into animation was similarly about being in the right place at the right time when a local start-up, Credo Group—now Credo Entertainment—began work on its first animated short, *Blowhard*.

AU: Who or what inspired you early on, and how did that path eventually lead to the creation of *Captain Cannabis*?

VA: *Captain Cannabis* emerged from a mix of underground comics culture and the political climate of the time. I was interested in creator-controlled entertainment and the freedom that independent publishing allowed. At the same time, the conversation around cannabis was changing. After the Summer of Love, the Canadian government created a Senate committee to examine their policy. The LeDain Commission released its report in the early 1970s recommending that the government at least decriminalize, if not legalize, cannabis. That debate and the larger cultural shift around it formed the backdrop that helped inspire the character and the broader concept.

AU: For readers who don't know *Captain Cannabis*, how would you introduce him?

VA: The central idea is that smoking weed transforms Hal Lighter into a superhero. That immediately raises questions about what makes cannabis special and where it comes from. Exploring those questions led me into a wide range of research about its history and mythology. That research eventually expanded into stranger territory involving aliens, Roswell, and a much larger fictional universe. I compiled many of those ideas and notes into a book called *Outside the Box* for readers interested in unusual or speculative topics.

From the beginning I envisioned *Captain Cannabis* as a feature-length animated project. The challenge was that the technology available at the time simply wasn't advanced enough to fully realise the idea.

AU: For this version, where are you at with it? Have there been significant changes to Hal's character since his 1977 debut?

VA: The 1980s, especially during the Reagan "Just Say No" years, were difficult for projects tied to cannabis themes. The cultural climate made development challenging. Things began to shift again in the mid-1990s as the internet created new ways to connect with audiences and share independent work. In 1999 I was able to register the **captaincannabis.com** domain, which was surprising at the time. Even then, however, it was difficult to sell or distribute products with the word "cannabis" in the title. Because of that, I spent time developing another part of the story centred on oKee, the alien responsible for bringing the cosmic cannabis to Earth.

I took that concept to the NATPE convention in New Orleans in 1999 and received strong interest from potential buyers. They said it needed further development. Since then, I've been building the story across multiple media formats. I wrote the second half as a feature screenplay and created a full animatic using temporary voices.

One lesson I took from *Rock & Rule* was the importance of strong story development before production begins. I even turned the first ten pages into feature-film style layout drawings before adapting them into the first *Captain Cannabis* comic in 2004. Since then I've been able to attend major conventions like FanExpo and openly sell *Captain Cannabis* products.

Recently I rebooted the series with 40th Anniversary editions of #1 and #2 along with an all-new issue #3. These books form the foundation for the first planned feature film, *Beginning of the End*. The full story is structured as a 24-book series and eight films, with the "420" storyline unfolding in the later half of the arc.

AU: In your transition to animation, and while working on *Rock & Rule*, were there storyboards?

VA: The movie was developed in a much looser way than many modern productions. What were called "storyboards" were often rough sketches and scribbles rather than fully developed boards. The closest things to formal planning were the layout drawings and pose planning that I did during production. I discuss that process in more detail in my upcoming book, *Rock & Rule* Behind the Scenes, which is part of my KickStarter project. It's a reward for that documentary I'm making.

AU: Beyond nostalgia, what are you hoping to preserve or clarify with this crowdfunding project?

VA: Years ago I uploaded clips to YouTube and over time, viewers began asking many questions about how the film was actually produced. The videos have gotten millions of views. My main goal is to answer those questions and provide a clearer picture of what happened during production. I have a collection of remaining production artwork, and the KickStarter will help connect those pieces with fans who appreciate this film's legacy.

AU: Are there additional stretch goals you're excited about if the campaign exceeds expectations?

VA: Yes. The *Rock & Rule* Behind the Scenes project is also intended to help fund development of the first *Captain Cannabis* feature film, *Beginning of the End*. The more support the campaign receives, the faster that project can move forward.

AU: Is there anything you'd like readers and longtime fans to understand about your work, or about the future of Canadian animation preservation?

VA: Much of my career has been spent working behind the scenes, which means many people recognize the work but not necessarily the name. Early in my career I used my full name, Verne Andrusiek, but after moving into technology work following *Rock & Rule* I used the shorter name Verne Andru. That shift likely contributed to some confusion about authorship.

I originally created *Captain Cannabis* in the 1970s with the goal of bringing a sense of optimism and fun to audiences. It has taken decades of work and persistence to keep the project moving forward, but the timing finally feels right.

The current projects, including the Kickstarter campaign, are an important step toward bringing the full *Captain Cannabis* universe to life while also preserving the creative history behind the work.

captaincannabis.com

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SPELL

Incantations with Cam Mesmer

(Vocals, Bass, Rhythm guitar, Synthesizers)

By Ray MacKay

Absolute Underground: What are your skills to pay the bills?

Cam Mesmer: I'm Cam from the band SPELL. Paying bills sucks. I write heavy metal songs, but I mostly pay my bills by teaching teenagers.

AU: Give us the history of SPELL.

CM: SPELL was started by me and my brother Al back in 2007. There weren't a lot of bands back then playing heavy metal in the old style, so we felt like we needed to do it ourselves after becoming obsessed with Iron Maiden around 2001. We've released four albums since then, and our fifth album "*Wretched Heart*" is about to come out on Metal Blade Records/Bad Omen Records on May 1st.

AU: Who is in the band?

CM: It's always been me and Al from the start. For a while we had another guitarist, but he kind of lost his marbles during the covid pandemic. So, on "*Tragic Magic*," (2022) we got him outta there and I played all the rhythm guitars and Al played all the solos. It was way better that way anyhow! Then we realized we couldn't do live shows as a two piece, so we got our friends Jeff Black (Glyph, Gatekeeper) and Gabriel Tenebrae (Black Magique, Girlfriends & Boyfriends) to join the band. They rule and played on our new album!

AU: What is your local music scene like?

CM: We're from Vancouver, BC. I've been a part of the music scene here for 25 years, and honestly, I think right now it's the best it's ever been. There are so many cool bands and new venues and different scenes! There's definitely a ton of creativity here. I think that everyone who loves music should start a band, it doesn't matter your age or experience! Just find some friends who want to do it with you and learn as you go! No time is better than today.

AU: Explain your sound to our readers.

CM: We usually call it "hypnotic heavy metal." Maybe we sound a bit like Judas Priest mixed with Depeche Mode, on the newest album. We started off mostly inspired by traditional heavy metal like Maiden, Priest, Sabbath, Accept, Ratt, Dokken, etc, but over the years we've been inspired by a lot of genres, so long as they fit our kind of melancholy mood. No-one wants to hear a happy song! So, we're bringing some influences from goth, disco, punk, soul, and other stuff in nowadays.

AU: What can you tell us about your new single, "Take My Life", out March 27?

CM: This song is about a close encounter I had with death. I had to take the life of another being as it looked into my eyes. This might be common for some people, but for me it isn't. I was surprised at how the power dynamic roles were reversed. I was anxious and uncomfortable, but I was guided and calmed by the being that was about to die. What incredible grace and composure in the face of death. I was astounded. So, I wrote a song about it and I think it's one of our most powerful!

AU: "Take My Life" is just one of ten thrashing tracks on your upcoming album, *Wretched Heart*, out May 1st. Tell us about it!

CM: It's the best album we've ever made, by far! A big step up. I had a lot of major life changes and sadness during the time I was working on "*Wretched Heart*," so I just poured absolutely everything I had into the album. I worked harder and put more blood, sweat and pain into this album than anything I've done in my life. I felt obsessively inspired. I wrote hundreds of pages in my journal, trying to externalize my sadness and loneliness, before condensing it into lyrics. I hope this album can offer some catharsis for listeners who might be going through something similar.

AU: Creative process behind *Wretched Heart?*

CM: Usually I get ideas for songs either right when I get in the door, all excited about something, or right as I'm falling asleep, when I'm not quite awake. Then me and Al will workshop them in the jamspace, with me on guitar and him on drums. Then we'll make demos and make arrangements and work on them with Gabriel and Jeff to get the final thing ready to record in the studio! I took a long time with the lyrics for this album because they're very personal. Sometimes in the studio when we're working with our producer Felix Fung, we make even more changes and creative decisions. I think the most important thing is not getting too attached to any single part of it and letting yourself be flexible and open to new ideas.

AU: What tracks are you most excited about?

CM: The lyrics to "Lilac" and "Wretched Heart" are the most vulnerable. I'm quite proud of those. I hope that anyone else who's going through a hard time will hear those and find some solace.

AU: What influence, if any, does Christopher Lee and The Devil Rides Out (movie and/or novel) have on you and your music?

CM: Christopher Lee is the coolest and 60's/70's Hammer Horror is super important to us! A huge influence on heavy metal as a genre!

AU: "Take My Life" has a new, gnarly music video out! Tell us about it!!

CM: Oh man! We did videos for "Lilac" and "Take My Life" with our friend Sean from Ramble Films. He's absolutely brilliant and we trust him completely to bring our ideas and fantasies to life in the best possible way! We have a couple more music videos coming out soon, too.

AU: What's your favorite song to perform live?

CM: Right now, "Lilac." It's such a meaningful, personal song for me. I spent a long time visualizing performing it at Hell's Heroes festival in Texas, and I almost cried when it actually happened. That song is really raw and I can barely keep it together, to be honest.

AU: Highlights of your music career so far?

CM: Touring Europe is always our favourite thing to do. Being on the road with Angel Witch and Green Lung were fantastic memories. We also loved touring with Lucifer! Any chance we have to get on the road is a great memory.

AU: 420 issue, do you blaze Satan's Cabbage?

CM: Not really, but everyone should do what they want and narcs can get bent!

AU: Anything else to mention?

CM: Yeah! Our album release party is coming up in Vancouver on Saturday, May 30th at Green Auto with Living Evil and Space Queen. We'll be playing new songs for the first time, and it's our first local show since 2024. See you there!

AU: How do people find you online?

Spotify, youtube and all that just by searching SPELL, or instagram/tiktok **@spellofficial** or **spellofficial.bandcamp.com**

Photo Credit: Caitlin Delaplace

STAR CRYSTAL

Interview with Susanna Radimovskaya

By Ray MacKay

Absolute Underground: Who are we talking to and what are your skills to pay the bills?

Susanna Radimovskaya: You're talking to Susanna Radimovskaya, the frontwoman of Star Crystal. Creating and performing music are definitely my "skills to pay the bills."

AU: Who is in the band?

SR: Our lineup is: Susanna Radimovskaya (vocals), Ily Dubchak (keyboards, backing vocals), Alex Nasirov (guitar, backing vocals), Max Rusnak (drums), and Eugene Toderash (bass, backing vocals).

AU: For our unfamiliar readers, please give us a brief history of STAR CRYSTAL

SR: Star Crystal started in 2012 in Ukraine, but the dream began much earlier when Alex and I met as teenagers. We were obsessed with '80s glam rock and power ballads. When I met Alex—a wild, self-taught guitar player who lived for riffs—everything just clicked. Eventually, we decided to stop dreaming and actually build the band.

We put together an amazing crew: Ily, a classically trained keyboardist and former university professor; Max, a drumming prodigy from a musical family; and Eugene, who provides that deep, grooving bass. After our first album *Follow Me* and the follow-up *Revival of Glam*, we are now pushing hard with new tracks. We've played everywhere from the Metal Days Festival to clubs across Europe. Our mission is always the same: to see how our music connects with people's stories and emotions.

AU: We know words can barely convey the raw awesomeness of STAR CRYSTAL, but if possible, try to explain your sound to our readers.

SR: It's a mix of everything that made the '80s great. We have slow, fast, driving, and dreamy songs—there's something for every taste, like a Michelin-star restaurant! Our music is inspired by the "muses," not mass-produced in a factory. Sometimes we choose not to release a song because we can't find the right "soul" for it. We believe this is the right approach for any band, and our fans really appreciate that honesty.

AU: Your most recent release was your single "Power Of Love" in 2024. Any plans for a new release anytime soon?

SR: Yes, very soon! You'll get to hear "Turn Around." It's a very fast song about speed and car racing, all set in a classic '80s mood.

AU: What's your songwriting process? Where do you get your ideas?

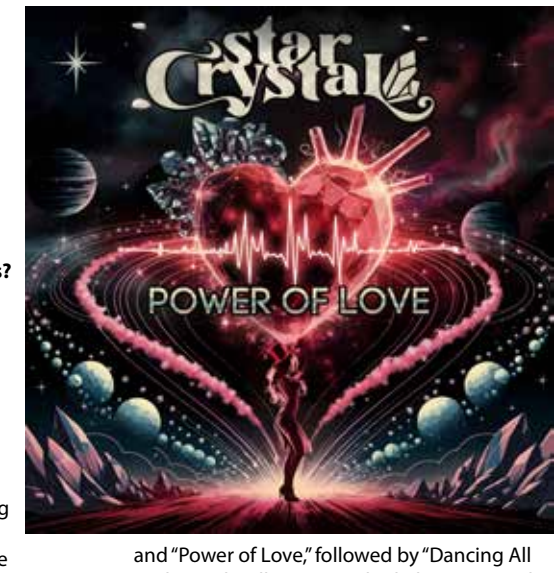
SR: Alex usually brings the initial killer riff, a melody, or a basic structure. That idea is the seed. Once he has the core, the whole band joins in, and that's when the song is truly born. We jam together, and everyone contributes—Eugene on bass, Ily adding those rich '80s keyboard textures, and Max setting the rhythm. A lot of ideas also come from watching old movies from the late '80s; they have such a unique atmosphere that we try to capture, almost like writing a soundtrack for a specific scene.

AU: What's your favourite song to perform live?

SR: Probably "Come on Baby." It's very intense and energetic. The crowd always goes crazy when we play it at the end of our shows.

AU: If someone had never heard of Star Crystal, how would you want to be explained to them? And what single song and/or album would you recommend to them as introductions?

SR: I'd describe us as a nostalgia band that sounds like a modern version of the '80s. Check out our recent singles like "Come on Baby," "Wild Wind," and "Power of Love," followed by "Dancing All Night" and "Fall in Love." I think those songs show all the different sides of our music.



AU: Any upcoming shows or tours?

SR: We are planning a tour through Germany this fall, plus some festivals in the summer, including the Tallinn Rock Fest.

AU: Anything else to promote? Any final words for our readers?

SR: Keep an eye out for our new live recording from Vienna, Austria—it's coming to YouTube soon (if it's not already out!). We also have the "Turn Around" release and a new video for "Power of Love." Lots of exciting stuff is on the way!

AU: How do people find you online?

SR: You can find us as **@starcrystalband on Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, YouTube and Spotify**. Or visit our website at **starcrystalband.com**. Don't hesitate to **send us a DM after you read this interview**.

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RULES ARE MEANT TO BE ENFORCED: With Ref. Ronny Hiebert

By Mike "Little pizzazz!" Croy

Absolute Underground: Who are we talking with?

Ronny Hiebert: You are talking with Ronny Hiebert. An old man with a nerdy passion of being a wrestling fan, who started training to be a pro wrestling referee in the spring of 2022. I've always been a big fan of wrestling, and I saw an opportunity to train in town and work on my new found hobby.

AU: What are you best known for?

RH: I'm best known for being one of the top referees in the PNW (Pacific Northest). Thanks to the direction of the Pro Wrestling Academy here in Victoria, British Columbia.

AU: How did you get into wrestling?

RH: Since I was a young lad in the 80s, I was introduced to wrestling at an early age. As I got older, I continued to watch WCW, WWF, and ECW on and off through the years. After the pandemic, I decided that I was going to check out the Pro Wrestling Academy to see what it was all about and decided I wanted to become a referee.

AU: What's the best thing about being a referee?

RH: Watching the matches up close and being a great narrator to a story the performers are trying to tell.

AU: Have you ever been injured in the line of duty?

RH: Yes, I've dislocated my left shoulder during a spot where I was pulled out of the ring. I finished the match, but had to go to the hospital right after to get it set back into place... eight hours later.

AU: Who inspires you?

RH: Currently, I watch Mike Chioda, Aubrey Edwards, and Charles Robinson for inspiration.

AU: What's the craziest match you've officiated?

RH: There are a few crazy matches that I've done. The one that comes to mind was the fatal four-way Barbed Wire Mayhem match held by 365 Pro Wrestling on June 14th, 2025, in Victoria. The competitors' hair getting stuck in barbed wire, people getting slashed up in all sorts of places.
Lots of action all over the place!

AU: What's the funniest thing you've seen happen at a live show?

RH: The funniest thing that I've seen during a live show was during a cleanup between matches where there was a bit of shrapnel laying around in the ring. The wood bits were getting swept off the canvas when the broom broke in half. The look of shock on his face was priceless.

AU: If you could invite anyone for dinner, who would you invite and why?

RH: I would invite my Opa. He was a huge part of my childhood and would have loved to have one more conversation with him.

AU: Who's the most intimidating in the ring?

RH: The most intimidating is probably Crazy Steve. He threw a chair at me once, and I had to take away a crossbow from him as he was about to use it too!

AU: What do you like to do outside of wrestling?

RH: I'm mostly a homebody. Watching wrestling or playing video games. I do go to the gym here and there just to keep up on the cardio demands.

AU: What kind of training do referees need?

RH: With training, you need to understand and familiarize yourself with the rules of each type of match. Be in shape, burpees and squats are your friends.

AU: Do you have any advice for people interested in getting into wrestling?

RH: Just do it. Go find yourself a local pro wrestling training school in the area and just go. That's the hardest step.

AU: Who is the biggest rule breaker in wrestling?

RH: There are quite a few that I've come across. The biggest one, however, would have to be Josh Cadwell. He will do anything to win.

AU: Who are you currently listening to?

RH: Deftones, Korn, Tool. I love nu metal at the moment, it brings me back to my teen years.

AU: What companies have you refereed for?

RH: I've pretty much worked for every promotion in B.C., with a few exceptions. I also travel to Moose Jaw every few months to work with Reaper Wrestling.

AU: Anything exciting coming up for Ref. Ronny you'd like our readers to know about?

RH: Stay tuned with 365 Pro Wrestling on the island. We've got lots of surprises coming up.

AU: What characteristics make a good referee?

RH: Confidence, quick decision making skills, and being aware of your surroundings.

AU: Is there a match stipulation that you haven't ref'd yet that you'd like to?

RH: I have not been in a last man standing match yet. That one is on the bucket list for sure. I would also like to do another falls count anywhere match.

AU: What's your favourite venue to perform in?

RH: My favourite venue right now is the First Met Hall, here in Victoria. Huge space and a great venue.

AU: What has being a referee taught you?

RH: Being a referee has taught me to be more of a leader and becoming more comfortable in that role.

AU: Ronny, is there anything else you'd like our readers to know?

RH: Thanks for inviting me to be a part of your magazine. I also enjoy video games and hitting up the gym in my spare time.

Make sure to check out Ronny at wrestling shows all across B.C. and other provinces.

Photo credit: Darren Ho

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TAPPED WRESTLING FEDERATION: Port Moody's Own Wrestling Revolution – Interview with Mike Arboit aka, Dance Daddy DeNero

By Mike Babins

AU: Hello and welcome to *Absolute Underground*! For those just discovering Tapped Wrestling Federation, who are we talking to today, and what's your role in bringing TWF to life?

TWF / Mike Arboit: I'm Mike Arboit, also known as Dance Daddy DeNero — entrepreneur, business owner and professional wrestler. I've been in the wrestling world for many years and helped get Canadian Apex Wrestling off the ground, running shows at one of the venues I co-own, Site B. Eventually, we decided to launch our own promotion, Tapped Wrestling Federation, right out of Site B. These days, I wear a lot of hats — I wrestle, write the storylines, book the matches, build partnerships and sponsorships, and handle just about every role you can think of. It's a full-time passion project.

AU: Growing up, who was your favourite wrestler, and what about them stuck with you?

TWF / Mike Arboit: Chris Jericho, hands down. He's been around forever and still finds ways to reinvent himself. A proud Canadian who can convincingly play both hero and villain, he's great in the ring and on the mic. His longevity and adaptability in this business are incredibly impressive.

AU: TWF launched as a brand-new promotion with a sold-out show at Site B in Port Moody. When did the idea first take shape, and when did you realize there was real demand for hometown wrestling in the Tri-Cities?

TWF / Mike Arboit: Running my own promotion has always been a dream in the back of my mind. In 2024, we hosted Canadian Apex Wrestling shows at Site B and they were incredibly successful. I wanted to bring wrestling in more often, but the timing just didn't line up. We had open dates, wrestling had already proven to work in the venue, and with my experience — plus the advantage of owning the space — it made sense financially and creatively. With support from close friends in the business and relationships I've built over the years, we put together a strong roster and an amazing locker room culture. From there, TWF was born.

AU: Tell us more about TWF as a promotion. What sets it apart, and what kind of experience are you aiming to create?

TWF / Mike Arboit: The atmosphere at a TWF show is electric. The crowd isn't just watching — they're part of the show. Our goal is to make TWF a true community fixture and the Tri-Cities' own wrestling promotion. Port Moody has proven it craves live wrestling, and our shows reflect that. We focus on fun characters, strong storytelling, crowd interaction, and creating an unforgettable experience. There's a throwback feel to the 80s and 90s era of wrestling, making it perfect for adults who grew up with it and for kids experiencing it for the first time.

AU: How would you describe the overall feel of a TWF show to someone who's never experienced live professional wrestling?

TWF / Mike Arboit: Intoxicating — and not just because of the beer from Twin Sails and Brave. Site B transforms from a warehouse into an epic wrestling venue in no time. The fans play along with the story. They know who to cheer for and who to boo, and they embrace it fully. Even people who don't normally care for wrestling end up loving our shows because it's an experience unlike anything else.

AU: TWF is deeply connected to Port Moody venues and local breweries. Why was building within the community so important?

TWF / Mike Arboit: I'm one of the founders of The Fountainhead Network, a coworking space built around community. That same mindset carries through everything we do. Last spring, we merged TFN with Site B, Twin Sails Brewing and Brave Brewing under one umbrella. With my wife and I now part of the ownership teams across these businesses, we wanted to lean into joint promotion and shared culture. Community is everything to us — it's what makes all of these businesses thrive. Being Port Moody's own wrestling company means a lot.

AU: For wrestlers who want to be part of TWF in the future, what mindset matters most?

TWF / Mike Arboit: Have fun. Stay humble. Don't think you're bigger than the locker room. Everyone plays a role in making the show successful. If you bring toxicity backstage, you're gone — no matter your reputation. No politics, no egos. Work hard, respect the crew and you'll be rewarded.

AU: You're balancing promotion duties while returning to the ring as Dance Daddy DeNero. How has time away from wrestling influenced your approach?

TWF / Mike Arboit: I stepped away from wrestling in 2015 and returned in 2021 with the Dance Daddy DeNero character. My original goal was simply to wrestle in front of my kid — I didn't expect it to turn into the most successful run of my career. I was fortunate to work with close friends like Scotty Mac in Langley at Loft Country Wrestling and later with Daniel Adonis when Canadian Apex Wrestling was getting started. During those early days, I was able to contribute creatively with branding, graphics, social media and promotional support while continuing to perform in the ring. Now, balancing both the promoter and performer roles is definitely a challenge, but it's also incredibly rewarding. With my business background and wrestling experience, it felt like a natural next step in my journey.

AU: Would you rather be Sharpshootered or Figure-Foured?

TWF / Mike Arboit: Sharpshootered, 100%. My shins are messed up and the Figure Four hurts like hell.

AU: What's next for Tapped Wrestling Federation, and how can fans stay connected?

TWF / Mike Arboit: For now, we're running quarterly shows at Site B. As our businesses expand, we may increase the schedule — but I don't want to oversaturate the market. Championships will continue to be introduced throughout the year. We crowned our first TWF Champion, Shareef Morrow, at Holiday Hangover, and another title will be unveiled on April 4th at Tapped Out

instagram.com/tappedwrestling.

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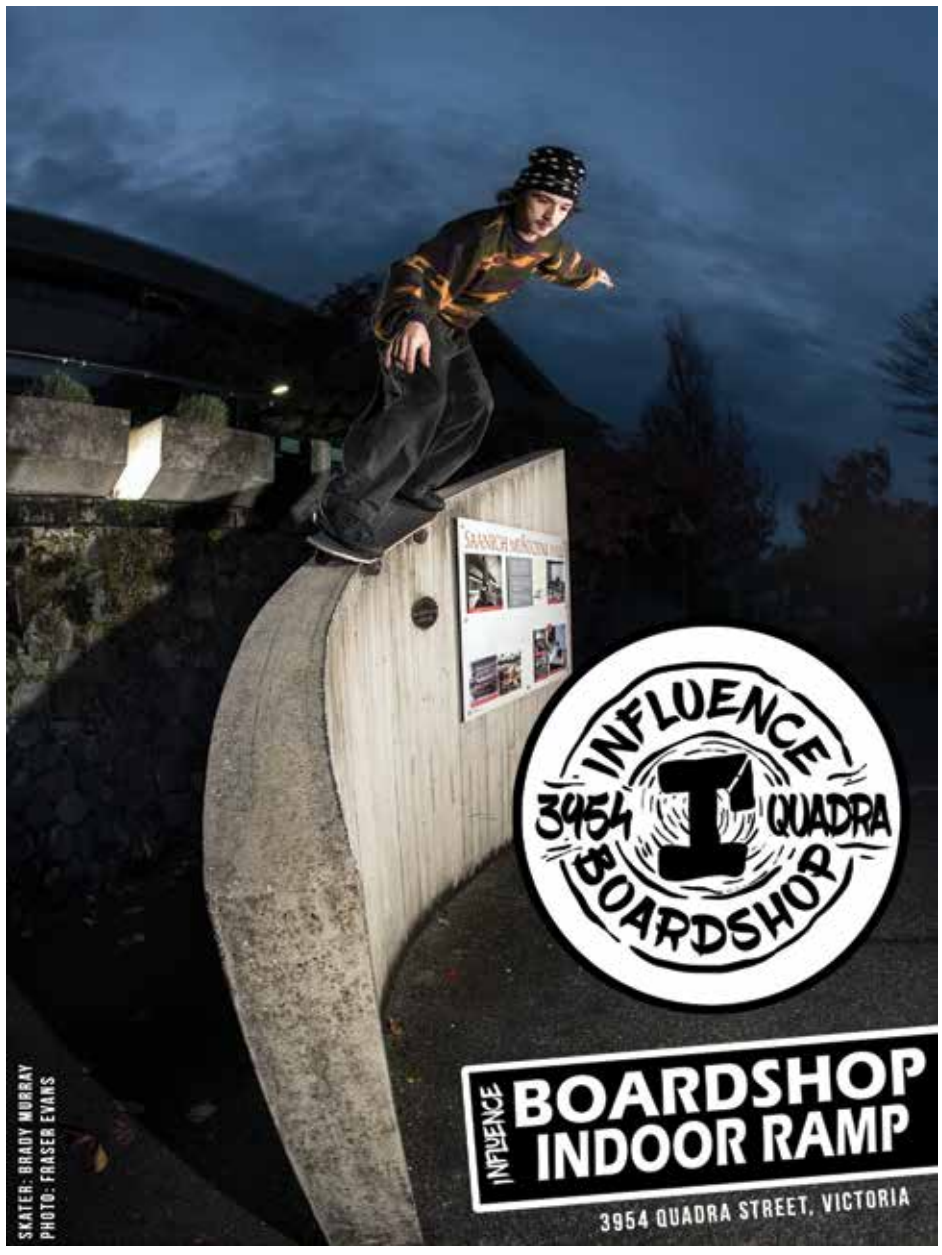


JESSE LEBOURDAIS – BETTER EVER THAN NEVER!

Interview by Steve Pearson

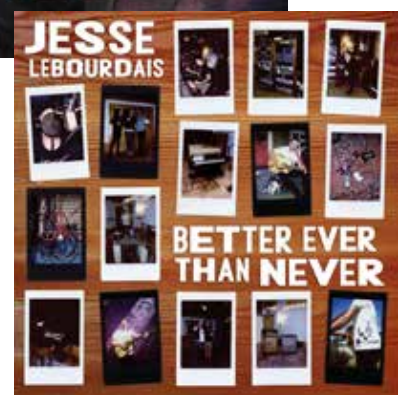
Absolute Underground: Welcome back, friends! Today I'm talking with Jesse LeBourdais — singer, songwriter, author and overall, a pretty cool guy. How's it going, Jesse?

Jesse LeBourdais: Good! Drinking coffee, hoping it doesn't rain too much today. I'm over it, ready for spring.

AU: Your album, *Better Ever Than Never*, is out on April 21st. What excites you most about releasing this record?

JL: It's been a few years since I last released an album, and so much has changed, so the whole process seems fresh and exciting. People can access the songs in more ways, and there are more ways to engage with people about them. But mostly I'm just happy to get these songs that I have had in my head for years out into the world.

AU: Your songs are filled with passion and raw emotion. Which of these new songs are the most meaningful to you?



JL: The last track on the record is a sad song called "Worst Day", and it's about my friend Ben, who died a couple of years ago. That one still hits every time. "Better Ever Than Never" (the song) also means a lot to me. Whenever I feel old or like it's too late for something, it reminds me that death is the only deadline, and you can really do anything you want with the time you have.

AU: You've been writing songs for almost 30 years now — how has your writing process changed from the early days?

JL: When I first started, I thought the goal was to write songs that sounded like the bands that I loved. You know, as close as you can get. There was a point, when I was in my mid twenties and was reading a lot of Hunter S. Thompson, where I realized that absolutely no one can replicate it when you are being your true self. Your voice and perspective are unique, and the more you lean into the weird little things that make you, the more your songs will turn out special and unique.

AU: If you could only pick one, which song fires you up the most when performing it live?

JL: Acoustically, "Hold You Down" is my favourite, and audiences seem to really quickly and readily relate to it. For full band, "Take What I Can Get" is really fun to play. It's fast, with lots of great parts that just kind of play themselves. Whoops, I picked two!

AU: As you've alluded to, the Jesse LeBourdais live show can be a solo experience or a full band performance. Where does the band's name — The Long Winter — originate from?

JL: I come from the interior of BC, and growing up, winters were prolonged and intense. They were also really boring and you just had to wait until the snow was gone before you could really do anything. My life is punctuated with all these moments of waiting for winter to be over. So the term is a recurring theme, both metaphorically and literally, of a long winter messing with me. So I reclaimed it for a band name as a reminder that sometimes you just have to wait out the weather.

AU: You'll be joined by The Long Winter at Red Gate for the album release show on April 24th. The Furniture and Dear Vandal will also be rocking the stage — then you hand-picked Colin Pearson to play a solo set to kick off the party. Why was that?

JL: It's important to me to acknowledge the different stages of performance that I have done over the years. I've been in full-on punk bands, played solo and everything in between, so having another solo performer up there is always important to me. I've had some incredible opportunities that came from opening up a show solo, so I do like the idea of always keeping that tradition.

AU: Since joining Kinda Cool Records, you've joked that you think the other KCR bands have a secret handshake that they are keeping from you. Has anyone been kind enough to share any of these secrets with you?

JL: No, they refuse to talk to me at all. I share a jam spot with three other KCR bands and they all clam up when I walk in. Something shady is going on and I'm gonna get to the bottom of it.

AU: What is your final pitch to someone who is reading this and thinking about whether or not they are going to listen to your new album after this?

JL: Not to get too up my own ass about it, but this album is the best thing I have ever done musically. I feel like it has the potential to hit folks in a way that is both enjoyable, and deeply personal. Everything sucks right now, and I'm not trying to distract from that, but rather embrace the feelings that evolve. If I may quote myself, "It's good to linger in the mud. You never come out quite as clean, but the hurt don't cut as deep."

Jesse LeBourdais – *Better Ever Than Never* drops April 21st and is available on vinyl (and more!) at kindacoolrecords.com

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VENUE PROFILE

THE CODA

AU: Who are we talking to and what are best known for?

CODA: We are **AL Smith** and **Christina Morrison**.

AL has grown and sold multiple businesses and mentors entrepreneurs, creatives, and leaders. He is a professional photographer and travels extensively.

Christina has worked in hospitality, travel & tourism. She is most noted as the owner and director of Salsa Caliente, an internationally touring Latin dance company and is a certified judge for Canada in the World Salsa Open. She plays Bari, tenor, and alto sax with local and touring musicians.

Together they are The Coda, a purpose-built live music venue in downtown Victoria, BC. After only one year, it is best known for high-quality live music, great sound, a strong sense of community, and for giving both emerging and established artists a stage that feels intentional, professional, and welcoming.

The Coda has quickly become Victoria's home for live music lovers who want an authentic, connected, community driven experience.

AU: What is the origin story of your venue?

CODA: Long time players themselves Christina and AL were noticing how much the live band music scene was shrinking in their home town of Victoria. They talked to the musicians they knew and discovered that their big frustrations were the rising costs of presenting their music, disappearing live music venue opportunities, and the challenge of working with existing venues. AL & Christina's love for live music, their city, and appreciation for musicians lead them to want to help be a part of a solution.

This care and love for live music and desire to help is what lead them to launch The Coda. It's a simple but powerful idea: Victoria needed a dedicated room for listening, where music and musicians come first.

After decades in music, events, and creative entrepreneurship, founders AL and Christina saw the gap between small bar gigs and large concert halls. The Coda officially opened on February 13, 2025, and is located in downtown Victoria, BC. From day one, the goal has been to create a venue that respects both artists and audiences, with thoughtful design and both local and intentional programming.

AU: Please tell us about your venue space, what makes it unique?

CODA: There are a few things that make The Coda unique. First it's the only dedicate live music venue for bands in Victoria with two stages designed for musicians to grow their fan base and concert attendance. We have an intimate Bar Stage with a capacity of 126 for early shows, and a larger Main Stage with a capacity of up to 300 designed for full-scale performances later in the evening. Both spaces are acoustically tuned, visually warm, and designed to feel intimate and close with no bad sight-lines, and no dead zones. They are rooms built for connection, not distraction.

The Coda is also unique in that it built its own in-house ticketing engine, designed specifically to put fans and artists first. Unlike most ticketing platforms, there are no ticketing or service fees for fans, which can save attendees up to $12 per ticket compared to typical third-party systems. Even better, the platform allows fans to add a voluntary donation directly to the band at the time of ticket purchase, creating a simple, transparent way to support artists before they even hit the stage. It's one more way The Coda removes friction, keeps shows accessible, and ensures more money flows directly to the musicians.

AU: What kind of shows are happening there?

CODA: The shows here span all genres but stay rooted in community and quality. You'll find live jazz, Latin, punk, funk, soul, rock, metal, world music, singer-songwriters, indie artists, and special curated nights. We also host dance-driven events, listening shows, album releases, and culturally focused nights that bring different communities together.

Supporting local musicians is also baked directly into the programming at The Coda. Alongside ticketed shows, the venue produces several of its own community-focused nights, including a monthly Jazz Jam that brings together players of all levels to share the stage and build the local jazz scene. The Coda also hosts a Singer Songwriter Night, where each month three artists are selected and 100% of ticket sales are donated back to those performers, turning the night into direct, meaningful support. Most uniquely, The Coda launched Canada's first monthly Video Game Music Jam, an all ages, open to everyone event that invites musicians to reinterpret and perform video game music live, creating a low-barrier, high-creativity entry point for younger musicians and curious newcomers alike.

AU: Are all-ages shows an option at The Coda?

CODA: Although we are primarily a 19+ venue we do host some all ages events.

AU: Tell us about any upcoming shows you have coming up if possible.

CODA: We've got some strong shows coming in 2026 including the Paperboys, Brass Camel, and Rum Ragged to name a few! Our calendar is always evolving, so the best place to see what's coming up next is directly on our website or social channels, but mostly by joining our email list.

AU: What's the best way to book your space?

CODA: The easiest way is reaching out directly by emailing: booking@gotothecoda.com . We work closely with artists, agents, and promoters to find the right fit for their show in our space.

AU: Is your space used for other events as well?

The Coda hosts private events, corporate gatherings, creative talks, workshops, and curated cultural events. The space is flexible, well-equipped, and designed to feel special without being formal. We are definitely a live music first space but will work with people on other events.

AU: The Coda recently celebrated it's 1 year anniversary. Was anything special planned?

CODA: Yes! Our one-year anniversary party had special programming that reflected what The Coda is all about: community, live music, and celebration. Always meaningful shows, familiar faces, and a couple surprises. Make sure you are on our email list!

AU: Anything else people should know?

CODA: The Coda isn't trying to be everything to everyone. It's intentionally focused on music, respect for artists, building a music focused community, and memorable experiences. If you care about sound, atmosphere, community, and the feeling of being part of something real, this is your room.

AU: How do people find you online?

CODA: You can find us at **www.gotothecoda.com**, and on social media via Instagram and Facebook under **@gotothecoda**. That's where we post show announcements, ticket links, and behind-the-scenes moments.

THE CODA
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THE GLOBE

Nanaimo, B.C.

By Laurie Storrie

Welcome to our new column where each member of Mean Bikini takes turns celebrating some of our favourite venues in the country.

After over 150 shows in almost 50 cities, we've seen some damn amazing rooms… we'll leave the awful ones out of here. Our goal with these reviews is to not only share what a venue looks like from a band's perspective, but also to encourage other bands to go play them. Seriously, if a venue makes this list, it's worth booking a tour just to get on these stages.

There is no better venue to kick off this column than Nanaimo's The Globe Live Studio. There are so many things, little and large, that take a good room to a great one — The Globe hits every nail right on the head.

From the moment you walk into the lobby, the ticket booth looks stunning and there's an ATM right there so you don't have to convince the door person to let you run in because you forgot cash. The doors open to the dance floor, couches at the edge of the room, and an elevated stage backed by a well-lit brick wall. Your photographer friends are going to have a hay day.

Do you ever see a great band put on a horrible show? If it's not from booze, chances are you can't hear them or they can't hear themselves. The Globe stage is big enough for a 5 or 6 piece band, and it sounds as good on it as it does on the dance floor.

Around the corner is the bar (bring your ID as this is an all ages venue) and a huge merch area complete with lights and bars to hang shirts off. Let me tell you, as a band just hoping to make enough money to get to the next show, this is huge. The Globe is run by musicians and music lovers that do everything they can to take care of the bands, including live streaming events, and offering touring acts accommodations for the night. For the fans, happy bands put on better shows.

Like the bar and merch, the bathrooms are out of the way. It's actually mind blowing how many otherwise great venues are hampered by the smell of the bathrooms opening onto the dance floor, or the bar lineup weaving into the moshpit. For those that have trouble with stairs, ask a staff member — there is one bathroom hidden on the main floor.

The best thing about the Globe for fans and bands alike? The built-in audience. Almost every show is nearing its 200 person capacity, and the kids are stage diving to the opening band they've never heard before.

As someone who's been in it for 30 years, the punk scene in Nanaimo rivals what I grew up with in Vancouver in the '90s.

THE GLOBE LIVE STUDIO

Where Music Matters

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Photo credits: Simon Clark, Laurie Storrie

The Latest Updates on *The Bride of Rocky Horror*

By Ed Sum

Just how astounding Bit Bot Media's graphic novel *Bride of Rocky Horror* is depends entirely on a fan's point of view. Its Kickstarter campaign bills it as the "officially licensed" continuation of the Rocky Horror tale. But as any Frank N. Furter fan knows, chaos lurks behind even the most polished façade. The project promises "the cult classic's next chapter, an official graphic novel with campaign-exclusive editions and merch." Yet that label still raises questions, since the licence has not been fully granted yet. That is not necessarily a red flag, as all systems appear to be a go in getting the book drawn and coloured, but in the world of crowdfunding, creators usually want to be in that safer middle ground before reaching this stage.

The project claims official licence status, yet I could not find any public declaration naming who truly holds the rights to the intellectual property. There is also no prominent studio branding from the film side, 20th Century/ Disney for example, which you might expect if the licence encompassed the full film universe. In interviews, the creative team emphasizes the stage production rather than the film sequel, suggesting the licence may stop at the stage show boundary.

The biggest clue? The sequel, *Shock Treatment*, goes completely unacknowledged. Brad and Janet got married and lived a sort of happily ever after, but in this tale, they never made it that far. The plot synopsis reveals that ex-fiancé Brad is off on his own, with *Shock Treatment* nowhere in sight. If this were a fully canonical continuation, one would expect at least a nod to the sequel. O'Brien did write and play a role in that continuation. Its absence suggests this narrative operates within a narrower rights corridor.

***The Bride of Rocky Horror* breakdown:**

Legitimately licensed: Bit Bot lists it as official, and media outlets have echoed that claim.

Limited licence: It likely only covers the stage show, not the full film rights or narrative universe that includes *Shock Treatment*.

Not a full studio-backed, creator-endorsed sequel: It does not embrace all corners of the property.

That approval structure has also affected the production timeline. According to the latest update, the script was completed and approved some time ago, while illustration is now actively underway. Bit Bot says that, as often happens with licensed properties, nearly every stage has required licensor approval before moving forward, and some of those approvals took far longer than expected. Even so, the graphic novel is now reportedly more than 50 per cent complete, with art expected to continue through the end of Q2 2026. Once the artwork is finished, final production and printing are planned for Q3 2026.

The soundtrack side is further along. The recordings are completed and Bit Bot expects the vinyl soundtrack, plush, and other campaign merchandise to enter production in summer 2026. The current goal is to have everything arrive together so fulfillment can begin in Q4 2026, timed for the holiday season. While the physical rewards will be limited editions, the digital offering is most likely not, and those coming in late can pick this up anytime.

All of that makes *Bride of Rocky Horror* feel more tangible than vapourware, but it does not erase the limitations. New music needs to be more than chiptunes. While that style of sound existed in the arcades of yesteryear, it did not truly become popular until the Commodore 64 arrived in the early '80s. Even then, that form of MIDI-driven performance does not replace the punch of glam rock guitars, piano, and theatrical energy, though people will dance to almost anything. The experience known as Rocky Horror lives through sound as much as spectacle. For me, that is part of why this continuation still feels like a partial extension rather than the full electric jolt of a proper next chapter.

Fans of this property will likely want to scratch that itch. Even without Richard O'Brien's approval or direct involvement, I still want to read it. If your curiosity is piqued too, backing the Kickstarter at its most basic level seems fair enough. Late pledges are still open for anyone who missed the campaign or wants to upgrade. That said, if you are the cautious type, waiting may not be a bad instinct. It is still unclear whether there will be a broader retail release afterwards, and Bit Bot's books do not exactly turn up everywhere. Their reach feels smaller than what many comic shop regulars may be used to. And as for whether Eddie would approve, well, just remember what happened to him in the movie.

If you missed the campaign or want to upgrade your pledge, late pledges are still open:

kickstarter.com/projects/bitbotmedia/rocky-horror-show-bride-of-rocky-horror

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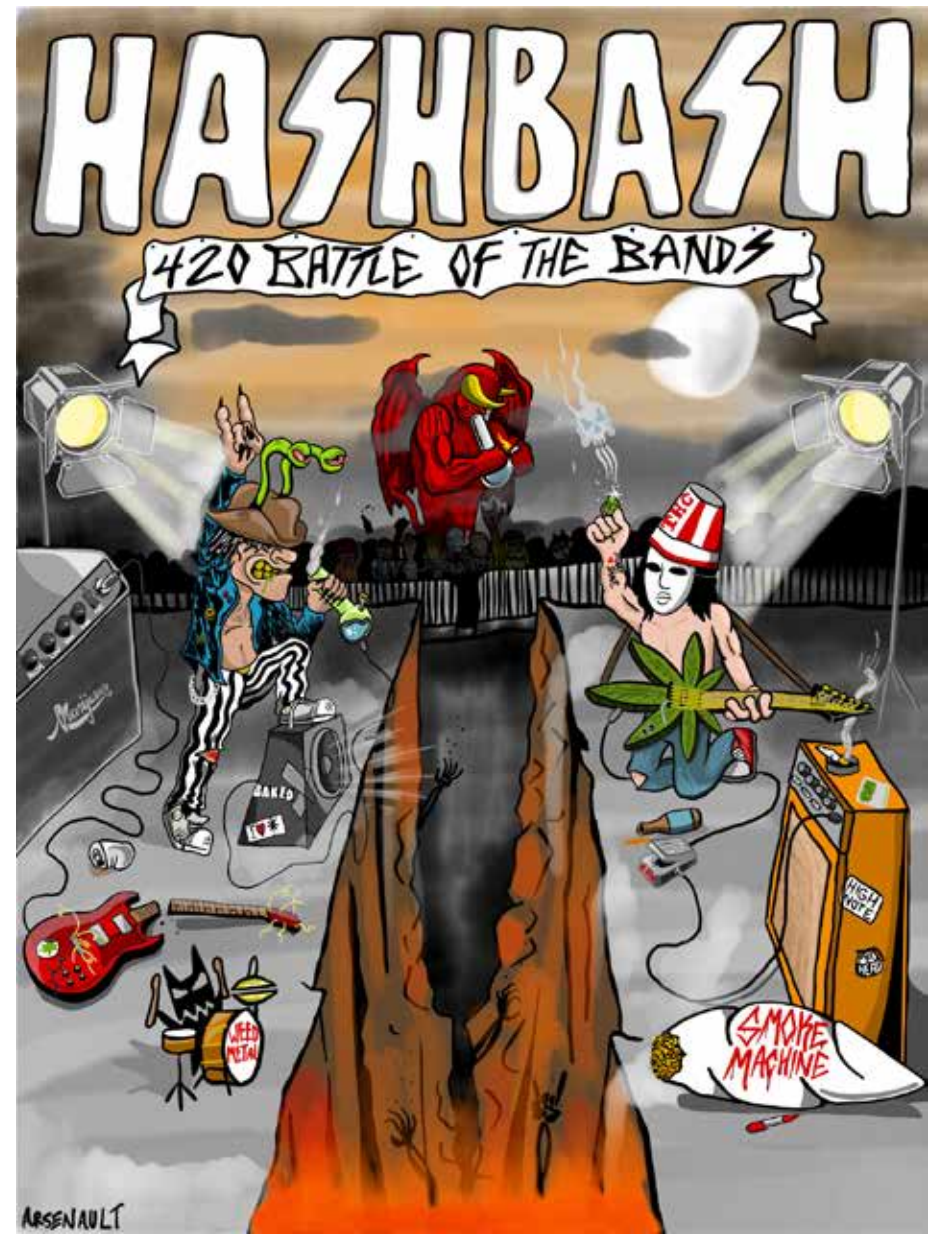


UNDER THE OUTHOUSE

lushclot

DC inspired post hardcore

Interview by Laurie Storrie

AU: Who am I speaking to and what exactly is a lushclot?

Tom: We are Tom (The Wolfnote), Rocky (Midnight Peg), RH (Banshee), and Nathan (Royal Foundry). lushclot can be beautiful or deadly. There are moments of intense joy, and times of bitter anguish.

AU: Give us a brief history of the band.

Tom: We are old and new friends that came together in 2023 to make this band a reality. I'd been stockpiling instrumental ideas for close to a decade. Right time, right place finally was able to bring together this group. RH's relentless bass, Nathan's thoughtful bashing, and Rocky's unparalleled vocal and lyrical stylings completed the framework.

Rocky: Yeah, I think I was the new friend. Got a message out of the blue from Tom through a mutual friend. We met for coffee and talked about songs we liked and stuff. Tom sent me the demos and I was like WHOA! Yes! I got really excited about it. Such a cool mix of noisy, almost psych melody on top of a thick, doomy foundation. Definitely an interesting take on punk/post-hardcore and a challenge I was pumped for.

AU: Your debut EP drops April 10th — what can we expect?

Tom: This one's a ripper, a brief salute. Four noisy post/punk post/hardcore flourishes with one hypnotically intense banger to close it out. A glimpse into what's to come. For fans of Shellac, Babes in Toyland, The Jesus Lizard.

AU: Do you have a song that stands out to you on the album?

Tom: The title track "Lice" is a standout for sure. It has a very simple structure, but builds an intensity throughout that finally releases near the end. RH and I both got chills while listening to Rocky track the vocals. The song captures the emotional shift and dynamic volume we want to achieve in this band perfectly.

Rocky: I have to agree. I mean, live, "Thick Piss" is so much fun and people get into it. I gotta make the note here and give credit to Clay Shea (Black Mastiff, Choke) for the title. He was telling me stories in the car on the way to Calgary. "Thick Piss" was one of his ideas for a band name. I told him it's mine now haha. But, "Lice" for sure. It is also the song I'm most nervous about, it feels a bit exposed in a way. But nervousness is exciting. I think this one hints at the more visceral direction we're honing for the next album.

AU: Edmonton has a booming punk scene right now, has it shaped your sound or trajectory in any way?

Tom: Absolutely! Going to shows and discovering the best bands are already in your city has always been a huge influence on me. Starting with SNFU. Realizing this band came from the city I was growing up in, to going to my first hall shows and having my mind blown wide open by bands like The Smalls and The Buddy System. This includes today where I can't wait to play with bands I haven't seen yet, to be inspired by what is just beginning, and the energy being carried forward.

Rocky: There is so much going on here, it's exciting, feels like the scene is really starting to explode diversity-wise. Not just demographically speaking, in sound too. I want more of that. It's motivation to keep pushing to experiment.

AU: If you could put together your dream lineup, who would be on the bill?

Tom: Locally there are so many bands I look forward to playing with. It's one of the things I take the most joy from being in a band. At our release we will be playing with Truster who I have yet to see, but know and love the people in that band. Hope to play with Open Eyes one day soon.

Dream lineup any band anytime? Would have to be Shellac, Fugazi, At The Drive In.

Rocky: Yeah, Truster is so good. I cannot wait. I'd add Taqbir, Pussy Gillette and Kim Gordon.

AU: What does 2026 hold for lushclot?

Tom: New and exciting experiences are what we hope for. We would like to travel to places we have yet to see as a band. See old and make new friends along the way. Play new and unusual places. Last year we played in a bowling alley and outside at the bottom of the great hill in the middle of a public park. The two places pushed us out of our comfort zone. This is what keeps it exciting. Also, tracking of our full length.

OUTHOUSE RECORDS

Rocky: Yeah, all the above. I wanna play with bands I've never played with before who are doing crazy shit. I want to hear weird noises and new sounds — 2026 is gonna be feeding time hehe. But truly, I really get so energized and inspired whenever music takes me off guard like that. Especially because it's felt like a bit of an administrative couple of months — ya know. All the stuff you have to do to release music that is not about writing or playing, I'm hankering to dive into just writing and experimenting. The catharsis after is just so good.

AU: Is there anything else you want to share?

Tom/Rocky: We love you all equally.

AU: How do our readers find you online?

instagram.com/lushclot

facebook.com/lushclot

lushclot.bandcamp.com

Photo credits:

lush cot band, Levi Manchak

lushcot Live shot, Lyle Bell

Sweat, Fuzz and Farfisa: Inside THE DARTS

By Chad Cornies

Absolute Underground: Who are we talking to and what are you most infamous for?

Nicole Laurenne: I'm Nicole Laurenne, singer and keyboardist for garagepunk band The Darts and my new neosoul project, Black Viiolet. Infamous? I guess I am infamous for never being home or around for my family and friends - let alone any kind of long-term romance - since I am always on tour. I feel like I am always having to say no to people who want to spend time with me, so that I can go spend time with hundreds of screaming strangers instead.

AU: Give us a brief history of the band, who is in the band and what are you all about?

NL: The Darts were formed in 2016, with the intention to play great garage rock with other talented women and tour the world as much as possible. I never set any limitations on what kind of music The Darts will put out, but due to the instrumentation, it leans heavily into fuzzy garage rock. I play a Farfisa organ and that really defines the band's kind of retro, noisy, spooky-circus vibe. We tour endlessly around the world, were signed to Jello Biafra's Alternative Tentacles Records label for several records and now have a big enough presence in Europe that we moved to a French label, Adrenalin Fix Music, so that the records could be more available overseas. The shows are high energy, sweaty, tall-black-boots-and-gloves, loud experiences with the audiences dancing with us and singing along on the regular. Just like we want it.

AU: What does it say on your bandmates Tinder profiles and on yours?

NL: None of us have Tinder profiles but I guess they might read something like..

Lindsay: spooky goth bassist and songwriter, sober and vegan, who likes books, punk rock, go-go dancing, and cats.

Nicole: classically-trained musician with a small stature but Tasmanian-devil energy, sober and vegan, used to be a lawyer, likes performing more than literally anything else and always has a fancy coffee in hand.

Rikki: drummer, teacher, author, and ski patroller, who goes crazy over animals and outdoor adventures, gets excited about interesting restaurants and lives on a mountain with a hot tub in the snow.

Becca: soft-spoken but instead says it all with a massive guitar tone, likes Gretsch guitars, dogs, chilling away from the noise when she's not on stage and exploring local food and drink.

AU: Where is the band from and what's the music scene like there?

NL: The band is based in Seattle. The scene is extremely supportive and viciously talented here. There are lots of venues ranging from big theaters to punk DIY spaces, everyone plays in everyone else's bands, everyone goes to each other's shows and everyone you meet has a creative streak of some kind.

AU: Describe the band's sound if possible.

NL: Someone recently called us "spooky kittens who play basement dive-bar fuzzy garage rock" and that's about right. But the songs do range outside of the standard garage rock genre, into all kinds of rock and pop, if you really listen to it closely.

AU: How would you describe your live show to the visually impaired?

NL: We take the stage wearing black - lots of fishnets, dark hair, long gloves, boots. Lindsay's hair is piled into a bouffant. Nicole's is swinging everywhere, nonstop. None of us ever stop moving. The organ is flung around the stage, on top of people and things, Nicole is crowdsurfing and then teaching the crowd a new dance to do with the band, and then everyone is moving in unison and sweat is just pouring off of everyone. Nicole is suddenly singing from on top of the bar while Lindsay is arched across the floor of the stage. Rikki can't stop smiling and laughing and singing along from her drum kit for the entire set, even though we tell her there's no smiling in punk rock. Becca towers from her side of the stage with long fish-netted legs under a gleaming Gretsch guitar, staring daggers at the crowd and playing every nuance of every note like it's her last. Nicole straddles the organ while playing and then jumps on top of the kick drum. After the last note, the crowd slams up against the merch table and Nicole and Lindsay frantically work through the line making sure everyone gets shirts, records and hugs. Rikki and Becca sign foreheads and all kinds of other body parts. Every night is a massive party.

AU: Tell us about the new album! Any particular themes or topics? What can we expect to hear?

NL: Halloween, baby! But also the devil-be-damned, mischief-night vibes in addition to the orange-pumpkin-face thing. *Halloween Love Songs* came out on March 3 on Adrenalin Fix Records (France). Every song was written with Halloween in mind. Side A is the monster-kitsch fun side of things with zombies and vampires and ghosts well represented and *Munster*-like organ parts floating on top of fuzzy chromatic riffs. Side B is the darker, heavier side of the night with songs about the end of the world and other heavy sounds and topics, for the late night Halloween bonfire. It was all recorded in just three days, with tons of percussion, vintage gear, hot solos and killer distortion. I'm so proud of this record. It's fun and serious and huge and not too much, all at the same time.

AU: Any stand-out tracks you are stoked on?

NL: I love two singles. "Midnight Creep" which has a *Munsters* kind of spooky fun going on and a dance to go along with it that people are doing now all over the world, as we have been on tour. "Apocalypse" is the second which has a great organ line in addition to a huge guitar riff with the massive fuzz bass and primitive beats. That's all I ever want from a song. Other favorites are "Devil Made Me Do It", which is about struggling to get sober and "Vampires In Love" which is pretty self-explanatory and has a great bass solo.

AU: Sex, Drugs or Rock N Roll? Or all of the above?

NL: Sex and Rock N Roll please, as long as, and only if it is mind-blowing. You can keep the boring sex and uninspired rock and no thanks to the drugs. Unless it's espresso, then I will have all of it, thank you.

AU: What should we know about you that we don't already? What don't you want your mother to know?

NL: Mom probably thinks we are still out there partying but we go back to the hotel after our merch lines are done and take off our makeup, put our hair up and start prepping for the next day's challenges. It's not boring at all. In fact, it is better now than it ever has been - the camaraderie and the giant shows are at a level we never experienced before when things were crazy behind the scenes. The truth is, the early Darts years were *insane*. I was in the middle of my third divorce, my last band had suddenly dissolved after years of huge success, all four of us were ready to just launch ourselves out into the world and burn it down, including ourselves and each other. We did a lot of the classic band-on-tour craziness back then, but as the band got bigger and better and the tours got more demanding, (plane lands from New York, repack and sleep for four hours, get on a plane to Croatia, fighting a fever in the process) the overall health of everything started showing the signs of wear and tear and we dialed it back big time. Touring and recording are the most important things in our lives, so we learned to do everything we had to to make sure it doesn't end. It's like being an athlete really.

AU: Any tour plans?

NL: Too many to list. We will be on tour basically from March until December all over the world. My solo project is also on tour whenever The Darts are home.

AU: Do you have anything else to promote?

NL: There's a new video for "Midnight Creep" streaming and it's super fun. We will head back into the studio in August to record the next album, which I wrote with bassist Lindsay. Also, check out my solo project Black Viiolet - a totally different experience altogether and one of the great loves of my life.

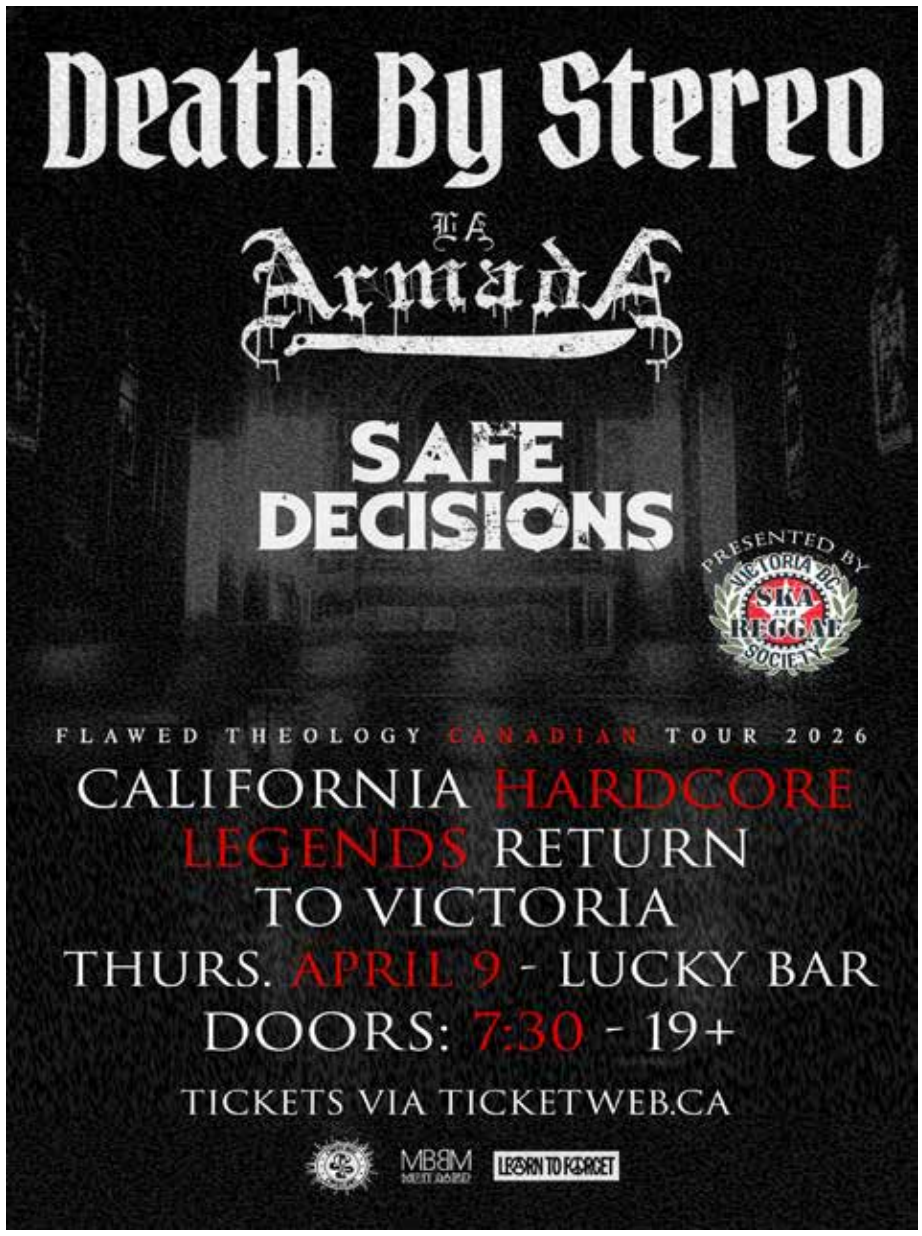
AU: Any final words of wisdom for our readers?

NL: You can do far more than you think you can. You can raise a family, work a full-time job, tour with a huge band, run a record label yourself and pretty much do anything, if you want to badly enough. Once you know what you want, arrange everything in your life to support it. Make your life the way you want it to be because you really only get one shot at it.

AU: How do people find you online?

NL: thedartsus.com

Photo credit: Tina Gross



SLIP~ons: Back in the Power-Pop Saddle

Vancouver vets rock harder than ever

Interview by Chad Cornies

What do you get when you combine two Canadian music lifers into one guitar-heavy power-pop unit that still believes in volume, melody, and sweat? You get SLIP~ons. Fronted by Brock Pytel of Montreal pop-punk staples Doughboys and anchored by Brian Minato, longtime bassist for Sarah McLachlan, this Vancouver four-piece make rock music the honest way. Plug in. Turn it up. Let it rip.

Their sophomore EP *Overtime* arrived February 20, 2026 via Scamindy, hitting the sweet spot where '90s alternative heft meets power-pop immediacy. Think Sugar-era Bob Mould muscle, Hüsker Dü urgency, and the loose confidence of The Replacements, with flashes of Ash and Dinosaur Jr. in the guitar tones. Rounded out by Rob "Shockk" Matharu on guitar and Shane Wilson on drums, the band plays with instinct and economy—nothing is overthought, everything hits when it's supposed to.

Overtime leans heavier and more focused than their debut, pairing Pytel's gravel-edged vocals with punchy, direct arrangements that waste zero time. Lyrics expand naturally, touching politics through experience rather than slogans. Recorded by John Raham at Afterlife (formerly Mushroom Studios), mixed by Dave Ogilvie, and mastered by Ronan Chris Murphy, the EP preserves the raw, guitar-forward bite that SLIP~ons fans have come to love.

Absolute Underground caught up with Brock Pytel to talk about SLIP~ons, the new EP *Overtime*, and the long road from Doughboys to Vancouver power-pop veterans.

AU: Who are we talking to and what are you most infamous for?

Brock Pytel: You're talking with me. I play in a band from Vancouver called SLIP~ons. If you were around when *Appetite for Destruction* was on the charts, you might remember another band I was in called Doughboys (from Montreal).

AU: Give us a brief history of the band, who is in the band and what are you all about?

BP: SLIP~ons kinda grew out of me recording with Brian Minato around 2012. We did a single called "Apart", and then recruited Rob (Shockk) Matharu on guitar, who I'd played with in Mongoose. He brought in Adam Fink (Actors) to play drums. Shane Wilson saw us covering "Can't Hardly Wait" at Lana's one time and drunkenly vowed he would join us at all costs. He replaced Adam not long after.

AU: Where is the band from and what's the music scene like there?

BP: We are all living in the greater Vancouver area. The music scene is pretty active around a small-ish number of venues, which unfortunately does create some competition. There's a great and growing contingent of young original bands. Based on what I hear in the building we rehearse in, I would say most land in the metal or punk/indie rock category, with a few odd exceptions.

AU: Describe the band's sound if possible.

BP: We've been compared to guitar bands from the '90s like Sugar or their predecessors, Hüsker Dü. I don't think that's too far off. Someone called us the Kings of Leon of punk rock one time, and I could kinda see it.

AU: How would you describe your live show to the visually impaired?

BP: Loud guitars and drums, occasional feedback, strong vocals and harmonies with a few sour notes for good measure. Guitar solos. Awkward stage banter followed by more loud guitars.

AU: You released an album recently, tell us about it! What can we expect to hear?

BP: Our newest record was released on February 20th. It's called *Overtime* and uses the extra period in hockey as a metaphor for how $hit is getting real in the world lately. Sound-wise, it picks up where *Heavy Machinery* (our debut) left off, although one might glean a tiny prog influence at times. I think it's still brash though. We're very proud of it, so we sure hope people will like it!

AU: Does the new album explore any particular themes or topics?

BP: Side A is about as political as I've ever been on a record. The overarching theme is figuring out which side you're going to be on. Side B wraps things up with some more familiar butthurt failed relationship type songs.

AU: Any stand-out tracks you are stoked on?

BP: I'm stoked on the whole thing. We included a one-off iPhone recording of me singing, "Hands Up, Don't Shoot" on the couch, which is definitely a first. I've always liked how bits like "The Baby Song" from *Flip Your Wig* just randomly interrupt a side of a record.

AU: Sex, Drugs, or Rock N Roll? Or all of the above?

BP: Pretty much just rock n roll for me. For better or worse, the only drugs I take these days are prescription.

AU: What should we know about you that we don't already? What don't you want your mother to know?

BP: I'm an open book. Making music is pretty much what I am living for, so other than rigging concerts and TV/film, there isn't much else. My mom might have shed a tear or two over my life choices, had she lived to see them, but I like to think she'd be proud of me now.

AU: Any tour plans?

BP: We're hoping to get out east again this summer, possibly for Büddies Fest 2. Being old and crusty, the fly-in stuff seems to work best. I've been talking to our Minneapolis pals in Rad Owl about doing a few dates in Alberta, so we'll see what pans out.

AU: Anything else to promote?

BP: We have a video for the song "Overtime" in production with Scott Gordon at Halo in LA. It may turn out pretty silly, which is ironic because the song's subject matter is fairly serious. I played my guitar wearing snowboard gloves, for example. That should be ready not long after the record comes out.

AU: Final words of wisdom for our readers?

BP: Honestly, I am coping with what's going on in the world these days largely by blocking out vast amounts of the negative stuff. I'm not sure it counts as wisdom, but I'd like my friends to know that they are not alone in feeling isolated, powerless, confused and emotional. A friend in Calgary thanked me for making the world a better place (in my own small way) this week, so if one person can think that, it says to me that any tiny effort we make can be worthwhile.

AU: How do people find you online?

BP: I'm on IG @i8brockli.

slipons.hearnow.com has all the links.

Photo Credit R.D. Cane

BUSINESS PROFILE

HOUSE MADE CO.

London's newest small-run vinyl manufacturer

By Jonathan Sohn

Absolute Underground: Introduce yourself!

Kyle Hough: My name is Kyle Hough and I run House Made Co., a small vinyl cutting and embossing studio based in London, Ontario.

I've been involved in music and DJ culture for a long time, and House Made Co. grew out of a fascination with physical media and how records are actually made. I opened the studio in August 2025, with the goal of creating a space where artists could turn digital music into something physical without needing massive pressing runs.

Most of what I do revolves around small-run vinyl cuts, embossing and handmade releases that sit somewhere between a record and a piece of art.

AU: Why vinyl?

KH: Vinyl has a permanence that most formats don't.

Streaming is great for accessibility, but it's very temporary. Records force you to slow down and engage with the music. You hold it, flip it, look at the artwork and spend time with it.

I'm also fascinated by the mechanics of it. Translating sound into a groove that a needle can physically read is a beautiful combination of music, engineering and design.

AU: How long have you been at this for?

KH: The studio officially opened in August 2025, but I spent quite a while before that learning the process and dialing in the equipment.

Cutting vinyl isn't something you just plug in and go. There is a lot of experimentation involved. You learn how audio behaves in a groove, how different materials react, and how to get the best possible results from small-run cuts.

Every project still teaches me something.

AU: You're a small-run type shop. Why did you choose this route?

KH: Traditional pressing plants are built for large runs. Usually hundreds or thousands of records.

But there are a lot of artists who only need 10, 20, or 50 copies. That's where lathe cutting makes sense.

Working in small runs keeps things flexible and creative. Artists can experiment with formats, test releases, or make special merch for shows without huge upfront costs.

It also keeps the process personal. Every project is a little different.

AU: What kinds of bands do you find yourself working with?

KH: Mostly independent artists.

That can mean punk bands, hip-hop producers, experimental artists, DJs, or people releasing music for the first time. A lot of the projects are very DIY in spirit.

I'm also working with bands that come through The Holy Diver here in London. We've been embossing records for some of the touring artists playing there. It has been a really fun way to connect the studio to the live music scene.

AU: What would be your dream project?

KH: One thing I'd really love to do is receive one of the grants I've been applying for, to document music scenes inside a city.

The idea would be to follow the entire process. Recording, mastering, cutting the record, creating the physical release and then capturing the live shows around it.

Different scenes have completely different energy and culture. I think it would be really interesting to show how those differences translate into physical releases.

AU: What's happening scene-wise in London these days?

KH: London has always had a strong DIY spirit.

There's a mix of punk, hip-hop, experimental music, DJs and art collectives all operating in their own lanes but still overlapping. A lot of people are building things themselves. Labels, events, studios and zines.

That energy is what makes a small operation like mine possible.

AU: Do you seek out bands or let them come to you? How much curation is involved?

KH: Most artists find the studio organically through word of mouth or Instagram.

Because the runs are small, I can work with a pretty wide range of projects. I like the idea that the shop can support different scenes and different kinds of artists rather than focusing on one specific genre.

There's definitely some curation, but it's more about working with artists who are excited about making something physical.

AU: Any exciting developments coming down the pipe from House Made Co. that you'd like to talk about?

KH: One thing I'm excited about is the embossing work we're doing on .060 polycarbonate.

Not many people around here are offering that, and the material opens up a lot of creative possibilities. Bands can create really interesting merch pieces. Embossed records, art objects, or small-run collectibles at a price point that is still accessible.

I'm also planning to bring House Made Co. onto Bandcamp, and I've been thinking about the possibility of eventually running a small label out of the studio. I'm still figuring out what that would look like. It could be genre based, local artists or simply projects that feel right for the studio.

Right now it's about exploring the idea.

AU: Where can people find you online and in person?

KH: You can find House Made Co. online at: housemaderecords.ca and on Instagram @housemade.co

If you're in London, you'll occasionally see releases connected to the studio through local artists and shows around the city.

SMASH TV: Noise, Nostalgia and New Waves

Post punk/Crank wave maniacs from Nanaimo, B.C.

Interview by Jay Flett

TERMINAL SESSIONS

Absolute Underground: Who are you, how long have you been a band and how would you describe your sound?

Smash TV: We are Smash TV. We originated as a band in 2022 and have had lots of lineup changes. You could describe our sound as a band that came from hardcore and is trying to make post-punk — sometimes we're successful, and sometimes it's something in between.

AU: How did you get started?

Smash TV: I was releasing music as a solo project with a producer I knew, James Cassidy. Mickey ended up hearing that and knew I wanted to start a band, so we hooked up and started looking for people. Jesse Bergunder was the middling person for Mickey, who worked at a grocery store with him, and he told him about Shaun. Then Mickey recognized Shaun at The Terminals' first Metal Monday back after COVID, and we started looking for a drummer and members.

AU: What have your major influences been, and have they changed since the band has grown?

Smash TV: I've always wanted to push the band into weird areas like post-punk stuff — Viagra Boys, Idles, Talking Heads, Butthole Surfers, Ween… anything that's off-colour.

AU: You guys are based in Nanaimo. Do you have any favourite shows you've played?

Smash TV: The GreyLab show was awesome. Every show we do is our favourite show.

AU: Has the Nanaimo scene changed since you started?

Smash TV: Yeah, big time. Seeing the rise of The Terminal and other venues like The Globe and The Queens, there is a lot more youth involvement now. The young kids and next generation of punks and metalheads are starting to create bands, and it's got a lot more support than previous years. That comes from being in a small town too, where everyone supports each other and wants to help each other.

AU: You have new music out with more coming. Tell us about it!

Smash TV: We haven't really done albums. We released three songs with Mickey Bullbucker, then did four with Derek Mattin, and one with James Cassidy. We have another one, "Clown", coming out. Then we took all those songs and put them on a cassette — it's kinda like a mix tape of all these different recordings. We have two new songs we just did with Derek Mattin that will be coming out later this year, "Clown" probably in May. We also have a video for "Custody Battle" being edited right now.

AU: What motivates you to continue to play?

Smash TV: If we didn't have music, we would have nothing. We are all very autistic and we all love music a lot.

AU: Amy Taylor or Debbie Harry?

Smash TV: Neil Diamond! Willie Nelson! Steely Dan! Oh yeah, Amy Taylor for sure. There was a lot of meth at her show. It was snowing, for sure, dude…

AU: How do you find attendance at shows?

Smash TV: It's starting to pick up, but you can still get bad attendance. Overall, more people are coming to shows. One of our problems is probably that we have so many shows.

AU: What's down the road for Smash TV?

Smash TV: We are going to keep writing, recording and releasing videos, do a small tour, and our yearly Mouse Fest. Then take over the world and play some festivals. So, if you're reading this and do festivals, hit us up! It's an all-ages show — the kids get sober and we earn the same wage… alright, alright.

Photo credit: Jay Flett

HUMAN VS. MACHINE

Interview with Master Boot Record

By Alia Synesthesia

Absolute Underground: You're about to embark on a pretty long string of North American shows. How do you feel about the upcoming tour?

Vittorio D'Amore: I'm feeling really good about it because this will be the first time we can finally cover all of America together. There are many places I've never played before. We're also bringing the new multimedia setup that we debuted on the last European tour with Igor. It's a new show, with video syncing and visuals that we didn't have before. The setup worked very well in Europe, and we can't wait to bring it to America.

AU: Your brand of synth metal is instantly recognizable. Do you feel your sound evolved over time? How did you find the direction you enjoy?

VD: The sound of MBR started more like a way to replace the real guitars with synths to make heavy metal. That was the initial concept. But then we realised that to make it truly metal, we needed a live show with real instruments, too.

On the new album, we are incorporating more real guitars together with the synths. Because the synths can get metal until a certain point, but after that, for example, if you want some palm-muted sound, or a very heavy sound, like Pantera or Sepultura, you need the guitars. You can't do without them. Yes, synths can emulate the guitar sound, but they have technical range limitations. If you go too much above that range, the sound becomes too thin. If you go below, it's hard to tell the pitch. So in both directions, you start to lose either the body or the sound. Of course MBR was evolving over time in terms of EQ, compression or other production tricks, but at its core, there always was that idea of "computer metal."

AU: When you started MBR, did you envision it as a studio project or did you know that you wanted to bring it live?

VD: Well, when I started it, I didn't think about it as a live band, because I was doing it alone. I was doing this thing, inspired by metal, but it's done with synthesizers instead. So I started experimenting with styles. The first releases were a bit more doom-black [metal], the others were a bit more classical. I just started writing songs and uploading them to Bandcamp every day for 26 days. At the same time, I was making all these games and puzzles on Facebook and social media, where listeners had to look for missing files and stuff like that. Then, when the *Checkdisk* came out, it was going on the top charts on Bandcamp. I don't know how or why. I didn't have much press anyway. It was just there. And it worked out, and this is how it started. But over the next few years, things have been evolving. I started experimenting with genres and styles, and arrangements, but at its core is the same "system" of composing music. And that system is consistent through all the albums. I think what you said at the beginning is important: you could instantly recognize that MBR sound. That's because there's a certain method to it.

And now we added guitarists to the live lineup too. Eduardo (Taddei) is one of the best guitarists out there. I am so proud of him. He's playing some stuff that feels impossible to play. When we play live, it's like humans versus machines. Because in the back you always have this machine that plays fast at a quantized speed, and the BPM is very precise. So paradoxically, you as a human add the "error", the mistake. And then the sound changes because you add the live element to it; it's impossible to be perfect at that speed. And this human intervention makes the sound more "old school", more '80s, '90s metal, which was never perfect but had this intention. And this dynamic is what we are bringing into our live shows.

Lately, we have been working on a live album; we have the capacity to record our live shows when we go on tour, and so far we have recorded over forty shows. It's eighteen songs; each song is from a different city like New York or Philadelphia or London. We can't wait to release the album.

AU: I am very excited to hear it! Besides the live album, what's next for MBR? Any grand concepts you are working on?

VD: At the moment, I am just focusing on the new MBR and the live album and it's really enough. For MBR, I am working on the visual concept for the album. For each album, I do all the artwork myself: photos are taken by me, and the symbols and carvings are handwritten. With each release, I figure out a specific meaning behind the cover art that's personal to me.

You can catch MBR performing live in Toronto on April 26, 2026, at Lee's Palace.

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Witches, Dungeons, Synths: Interview with MORTIIS

Interview by Alia Synesthesia

This April is, without question, a month touched by witchery. Firstly, there's Walpurgisnacht and Hexennacht, both celebrations associated with witches. And then, of course, there is Witches of Dystopia: the forthcoming tour featuring Mortiis and Uada, which descends upon Toronto's Lee's Palace on April 24th. In gleeful anticipation of the event, I put on my spiffiest witch attire and began murmuring incantations over the crystal ball. Before long, the dark forces obliged and from some unfathomable arcane planes emerged Håvard Elefsson, also known as Mortiis, a veteran of the Norwegian black metal scene and a godfather of dungeon synth, joining AU from his studio in Norway.

Absolute Underground: What's brewing in the studio?

Håvard Elefsson: I just finished the new Mortiis album and we'll be announcing a bunch of stuff pretty soon. I've also been preparing for the upcoming tour; we're doing pretty much the entire *The Smell of Rain* album, so I'm trying to make it sound a little better. With this type of music, you use some backing tracks, synthesizers, loops, and all that, so I re-did all of that from scratch. There are also a couple of bonus albums coming out. We've got this weird tour LP that we're putting together; I just finished working on that. And there's another bonus album for a box set version of the new record. So yeah, it's been busy [chuckles].

AU: You're embarking on the Witches of Dystopia Tour. Who came up with the tour name and the concept?

HE: I guess we were brainstorming titles for the tour for a while going back and forth, and I suppose I came up with that one. It was probably a bit selfish on my part. I have a song called "Smell the Witch" from an album called *The Smell of Rain*, and this tour leans fairly heavily on that record. It's one of those albums that a lot of the fans really seem to like. Since I'll be playing a bunch of songs from it, it felt like it made sense to give that a bit of a nod. At the time, I was planning to call the new record *Tribes of Dystopia*, so I sort of smashed those two titles together, and it kind of worked. Then Jake from Uada mentioned that they've got this pagan element going on, with an homage to witches. So that kind of gelled, and it just came together organically. [chuckles].

AU: The upcoming tour celebrates *The Smell of Rain* release. It's a very different sound from your material from the previous eras. What could the audience expect from the show?

HE: The music is vastly different. What I've been touring since around 2017 up until last year was what people refer to as "dungeon synth". That's not a term I came up with, but I suppose it's kind of what this whole sound has ultimately evolved into. And that's cool. But now I'm going back to *The Smell of Rain*, and also playing some songs from the new album, which sonically kind of mesh together. It's a mix of electronic industrial rock and somewhat gothic-sounding material. So I think it's all going to be a bit of a trip for people. Some of the songs I'll be playing are from the new record, no one heard them live yet, and I hope people enjoy them. It's definitely different; it's more arranged music, as opposed to the avalanche of darkness I used to deliver on stage, which was more atmospheric and droney. And of course, there will be others on stage with me this time around, so you get more of that organic band experience.

AU: You are considered the progenitor of the dungeon synth genre. How do you feel about that?

HE: I think that's something people still debate, because every time someone says, "Well, this is the first album in any genre," some other smartass is gonna find something that came out the year before that sounds a bit like it. And they'll say, "No, this is the one, but nobody except me knows about it." So I've seen people discuss it in those terms, and I think if you were to look at it that way, the first dungeon synth album probably came out in the '60s. But I guess it's the combination of things: the fantasy themes that I was dealing with a lot (and still enjoy), plus the type of sound I was creating with my keyboards.

INERTIA ENTERTAINMENT

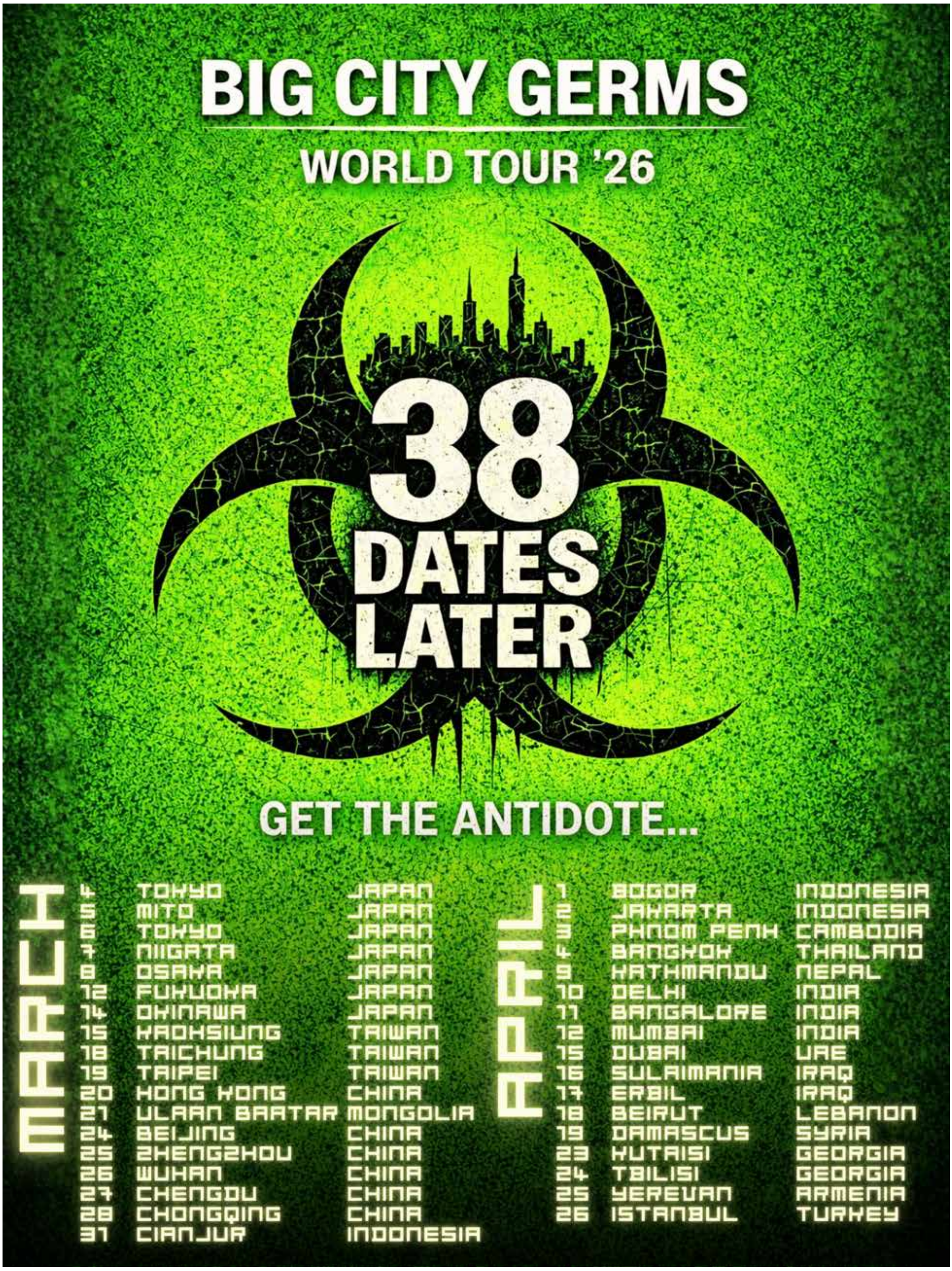
So yeah, I don't remember exactly when I found out that this thing termed "dungeon synth" became popular and that I'm considered some kind of godfather of it. It was a long time ago, probably a decade or so. Frankly, at the time, I didn't think too much about it. It took a while before I started realizing that it's a scene that's sort of growing. I did a Discogs search a few years ago and there were thousands of these releases within that genre. So I was like, "Oh, whoa." A lot of cassette stuff, right? Because it's very underground. But a lot of these dudes are now putting out real albums and stuff, so that's really cool.

That said, it's not like I created punk, so it's not the kind of thing that goes to your head. And honestly, back in the day, I feel like I had a few contemporaries, but I guess they just called their music something else, like dark ambient or whatever. But it's nice. You have to appreciate that at least you're getting the acknowledgement. So I do appreciate that.

Catch Mortiis and Uada on April 24th at Lee's Palace in Toronto, April 25th in Montreal, and April 26th in Quebec City.

instagram.com/mortiisofficial

Photo credit: Mariusz Kobaru Kowal @kobarupl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MALHAVOC

Canada's Notorious Metal Miscreants Release New Album *The Masquerade's Death*

By Ferdy Belland

"I'm just so sick of this fuckin' record!" exclaims the excitable James "Jimi Buzzkill" Cavalluzzo of Canada's metal balrogs Malhavoc. "I love making music, but I fucking hate the business of it… that's why I stopped making it for years! Having to sit here in our studio, deciding which particular mix will end up on the finished album… I hate paying for mastering, or paying for this and that. It's the bane of my existence! I'm an old man now — I'm sick of it all!"

Cynical disgust or no, Jimi has once more buckled on the armour and sallies forth with the new album *The Masquerade's Death*, to be released this Spring on Cursed Blessings Records — some of the best 2026 Canadian metal news yet.

Since Malhavoc's formation in 1983, it's been a battering uphill slog. The band achieved growing national recognition at the turn of the 1990s with their unique thrash-metal spin on the driving, pulsing, dangerous industrial-metal sounds pushing up from the American and European underground of the time (think Ministry, Nine Inch Nails, KMFDM and the other usual suspects). Even with the Alternative Rock eruption of the early 1990s, Malhavoc always had to fight unfairly harder than necessary, and they certainly bludgeoned their way towards the Millennium with power-chord aplomb.

Their recorded output is uniformly excellent, and their unpredictably explosive live shows made them one of the hotter tickets around — even as 'metal' became a four-letter word in the Flannel Age of Grunge. Despite upper-crust praise from the likes of Tool, Mötley Crüe, and Monster Magnet, continuous career frustrations (mostly record-label mismanagement) finally forced an embittered Jimi to turn away from professional music in the early 2000s and shelve Malhavoc.

"I moved into DJing and enjoyed it immensely," says Jimi. "I was still fiddling around with my guitars but I never thought about making another Malhavoc record. And then — the Pandemic! It's amazing that I never went crazy through that: my father died, my roommate died, my cat died, a few of my friends died from COVID. My entire life was one anxiety after another. I was in real danger of losing it. As therapy, I sat down and refocused on writing music again. Nobody approached me to release a new album, but I assembled a home studio and dove into self-engineering. The experience blew my fucking mind! The professional sophistication of modern home studios is way better than most of the big-room pro studios I used to record in way back when. You don't need a 30-foot Neve board anymore… you just need a laptop! And it's easier to use than I was fearing. So I became excited about music again — the joy of it, the creativity of it, as well as the CONTROL of it."

And big things are afoot for Malhavoc in the near future.

"I'm finally coming to the finish line with this album," says Jimi. "Now that I've got the music bug again, I'm hurrying to finish up this record — because I have TWO OTHER records on the go! By the end of 2026, I'm hoping to have three Malhavoc albums released to the public. And once it's out, then we're gearing up and hitting the road, coast to coast. And I want to hit Europe. We had record deals in Europe and Japan, and we did well with record sales. I did all sorts of interviews with European metal magazines and such — but we NEVER PLAYED THERE. It's time to cross the oceans and rectify that. Our new music is all the reason I need to do it."

And not a moment too soon. Jimi was persuaded to recount a few choice war stories from Malhavoc's colourful (and tinnitus-inducing) Golden Age.

"I remember playing that fucking Highwood Festival in Alberta, way back in 1992," mutters Jimi. "We got kicked offstage because the festival crew didn't like the way we were treating the microphones! I tried explaining to them: we bring our own mics because WE ABUSE mics! We were playing right after TAD, and the event was a complete shitshow. The organizers didn't know what the hell they were doing. So we made a deal with them, because we sure didn't want to hang out on the festival site. Everything was a fucking mess! None of the scheduling was on time. We let Tad Doyle and Gary Thorstensten use our amps, and we tried convincing the Highwood people to let us onstage after TAD to minimize logistical fuckaround. And they kicked us off after THREE SONGS!!! They didn't like the way I was jumping around or something, I don't know… it might have been cool for those in the audience watching the chaos onstage, but not for us!"

Anarchic frenzy was a longstanding hallmark of the Malhavoc experience, whether Jimi sought it out or not.

"We've done so many shows like that over the years, getting booted offstage — ridiculous! We once played an industry showcase in New York City for CMG, who'd been bugging us for years to come down. The venue was sold out and they got us onstage an hour and a half late! The headliner never even showed up! The people running the club fucked us around and kicked us offstage, and a riot almost broke out! And THIS was our big New York City showcase? But THAT was a memorable show, since the club security couldn't easily reach out and nab me because the crowd was so packed! Two bouncers ended up grabbing me in a submission hold and threw me out in the street! At that moment my New York lawyer was walking up the street to the club, saw what was happening, and asks me, aghast: WHAT THE FUCK IS GOING ON??? I was pissed because they threw us off 20 minutes early after making us late! CMG ended up apologizing for it all, because it was totally their fucking fault. They said they didn't like my attitude, and I replied: well, if you don't like our fucking attitude, WHY ARE YOU BOOKING BANDS LIKE MALHAVOC???"

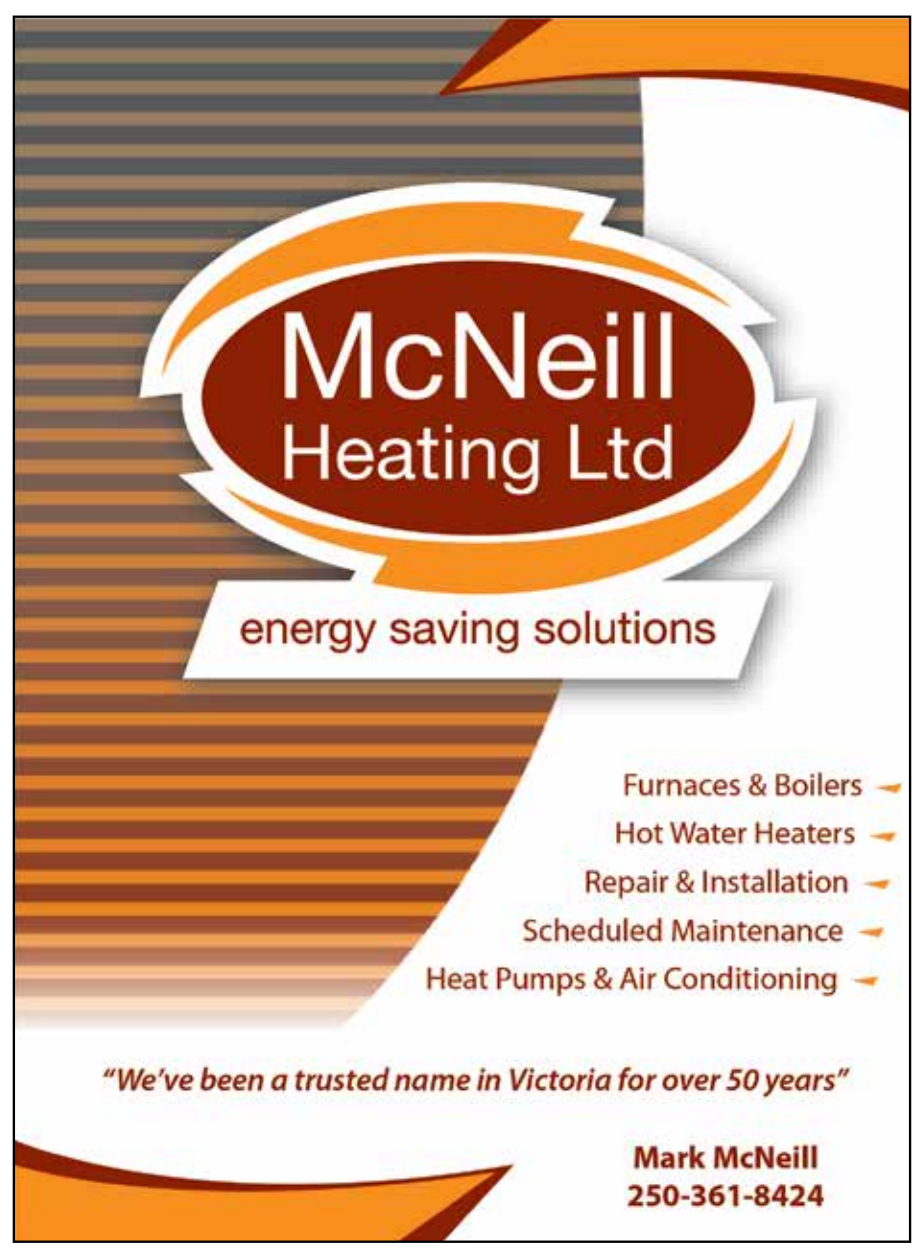
With the new album sure to reinvigorate national interest in the band, Jimi's able to look back on his rollicking musical past with a combination of annoyance and bittersweetness.

"Madness was common for us back in the 1990s and I didn't give a shit. I never collected videos or photos of that time. And now that shit's worth gold! With the rise of the Internet and YouTube and such, I wish I had videos and photos of all these incidents… and I have nothing! For years we've wanted to remaster *Get Down* and re-release it on vinyl, so I wanted to gather up pictures from that tour, which is when most of the mayhem happened. We want to add more stuff to the album! But I reach out to photographers who shot us back then and nobody returns my calls. I've been trying to gather mementos from that tour for ten goddamned years now!"

Despite the weary sneering, Jimi radiates more never-say-die pride than anything else.

"I want to get back on the horse again, even if I'm old. Everything I ever sang about in the Malhavoc songs is coming to fruition. I do believe the end of the world is coming, and I like being the harbinger of doom that rides the wave to the end. I love the idea of providing the soundtrack to the end of human civilization."

Photo credit: Natasha Rego de Assuncao



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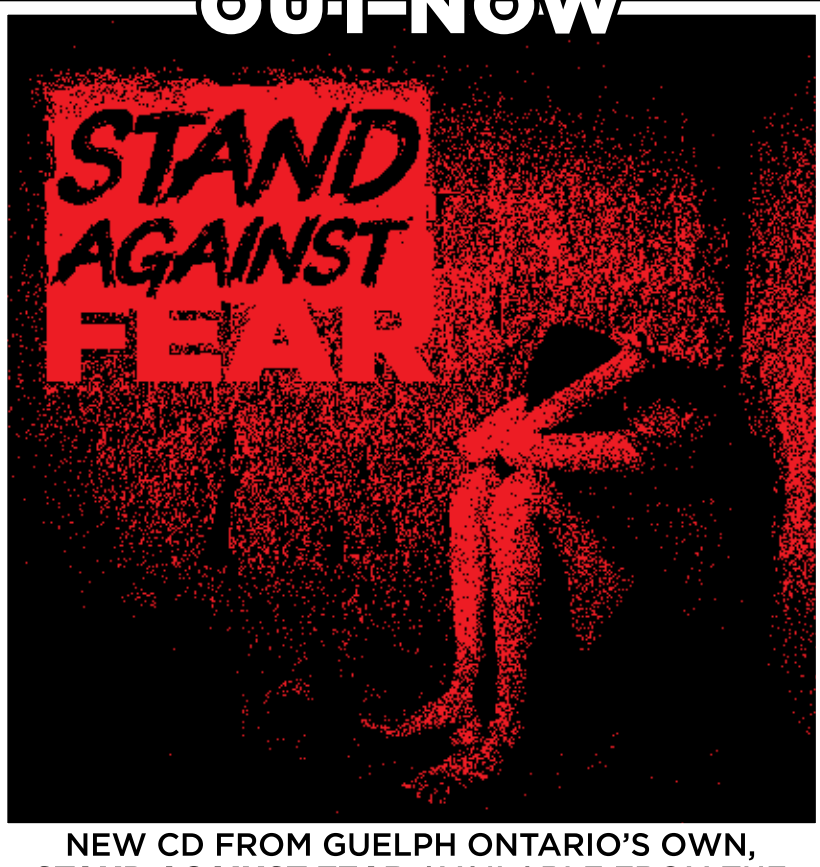

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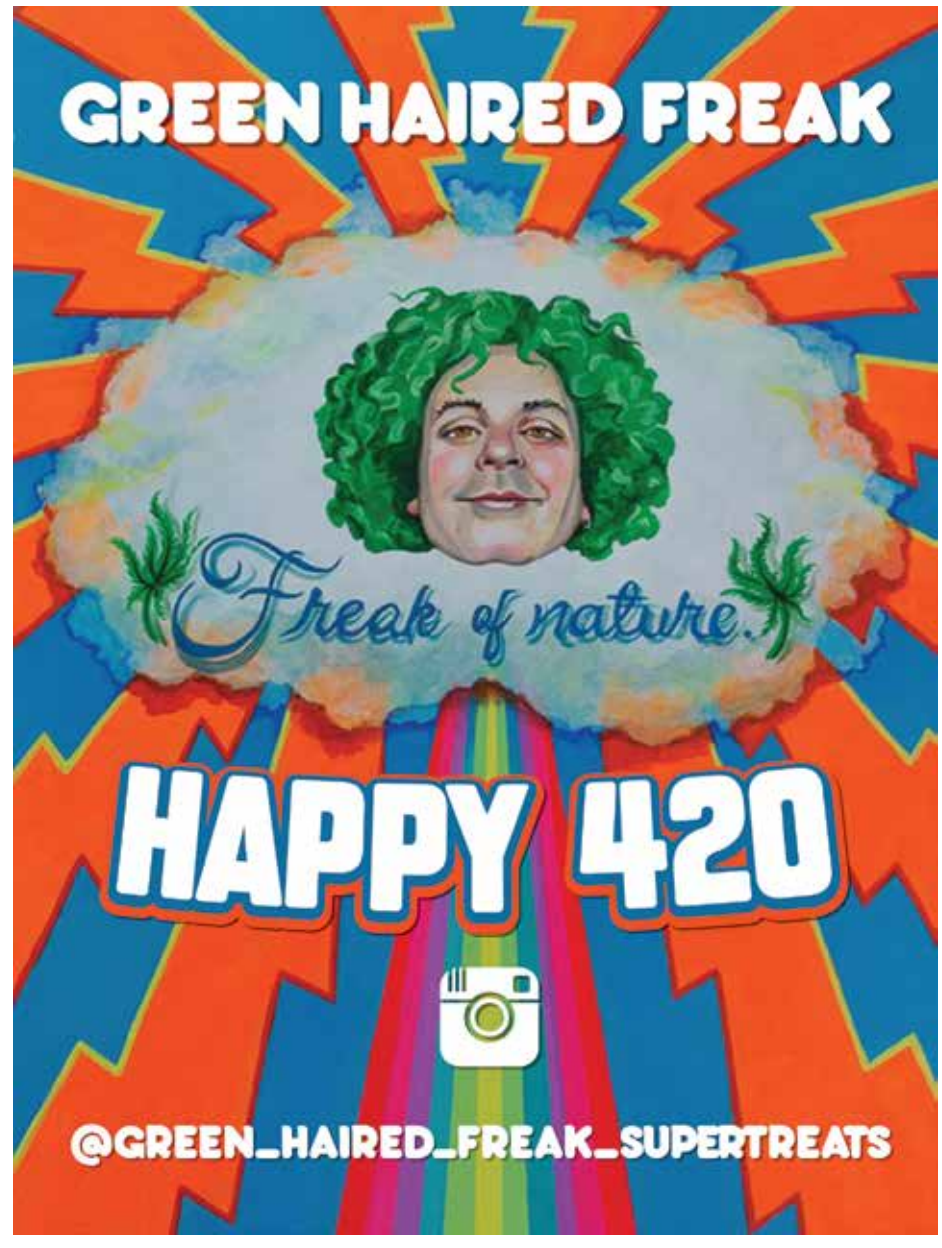


THE HERB THAT REFUSES TO BE BORING

By Lily Fawn

Cannabis. Marijuana. The rebel herb. The sacred herb. Like most powerful plants, it is neither good nor bad. It depends on your relationship with it.

You may already feel well acquainted with cannabis. I just want to introduce you to it the way an herbalist does.

As an herbalist, I am less interested in hype or reputation and more interested in relationships. What does this plant actually do? How does it work for you? When does it help and when does it hinder?

Here is the cool part. Cannabis works so well because you already have receptors in your body that are designed to respond to it. Your body has something called the endocannabinoid system. Think of it as a communication network that regulates mood, pain, sleep, appetite, immune function and stress, helping keep your body balanced.

Cannabis does not just get you high. It interacts with this built in system to support steadiness. Fascinating.

Now let's talk about the sticky sparkle. The slightly tacky coating on the flower is resin. It is made up of tiny crystal-like structures called trichomes. This is where much of the medicine lives. Cannabinoids and terpenes are concentrated in this layer. The frostier the flower and the stronger the aroma, the richer it tends to be in active compounds. That scent is not just a fragrance, it is plant chemistry!

Medicinally, here is where cannabis shines

Pain and inflammation. Chronic pain, nerve pain, arthritis. It can soften the sharp edges of pain in a way that feels different from pharmaceutical painkillers. Less numbing. More regulating.

Sleep. For some people, cannabis can be an effective sleep aid. Finding the right dose matters. More is not always better.

It also **helps reduce nausea and increase appetite.** This is one of its most established uses, especially during chemotherapy or chronic illness.

Low doses can calm anxiety, but too much can do the opposite. This is a plant that demands respect and precision.

When microdosed thoughtfully, cannabis can enhance creativity, deepen sensory awareness, help unwind or open emotional insight. It depends on how it works for you. Are you using cannabis to connect or to avoid?

Not all cannabis is the same. The plant contains cannabinoids such as THC, CBD, CBG and CBN, along with aromatic compounds called terpenes that influence how each strain feels. One may feel bright and uplifting, another grounding and sedative. They vary quite a bit, which is why learning your body's relationship with it matters.

Simple herbal preparation for external pain relief

- Use basic cannabis infused oil for topical use.
- Gently heat one cup of olive or coconut oil in a double boiler.
- Add one tablespoon of finely ground dried cannabis flower. Keep the heat very low and let it infuse for two to three hours. Do not boil.
- Strain through cheesecloth and store in a clean glass jar.
- Massage a small amount into sore joints or tight muscles. Used on the skin, it does not create psychoactive effects.

One more plant nerd detail. In raw cannabis, THC and CBD are not fully active yet. They exist as THCA and CBDA. When heat is applied through smoking, vaping or cooking, they activate. THCA becomes THC, which creates a high. CBDA becomes CBD, which does not cause a high but supports calm and balance. This is why raw cannabis feels very different from baked or smoked cannabis. Same plant. Different preparations. Different outcomes.

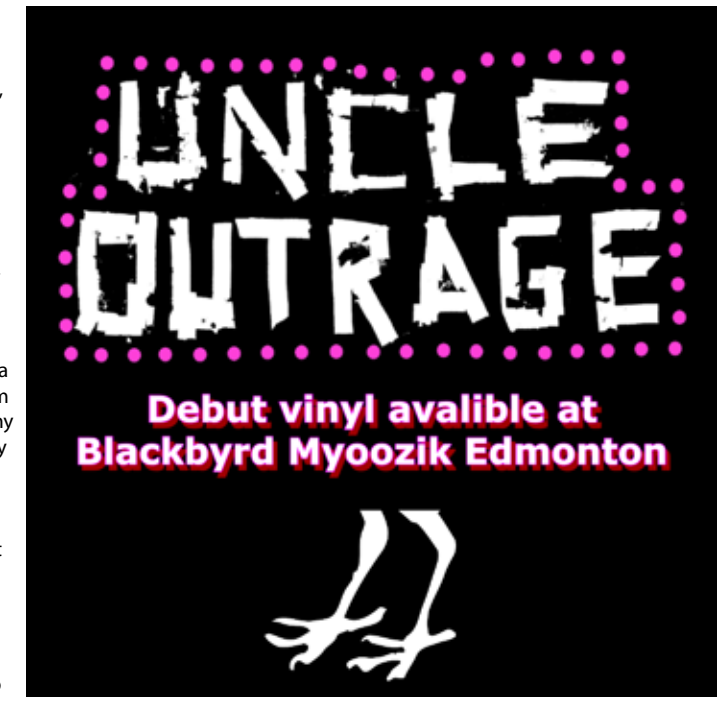
Taking this herb internally is not for everyone. Some people are sensitive to its strong properties.

HERBAL WITCH

Those with certain mental health conditions should approach cautiously. Adolescents should avoid regular use. Pregnancy is a no.

Cannabis is a powerful herb and should be approached with gentle curiosity, exploration, science, and discernment. This is the best way to work with herbs. Even the famous ones.

earthsherbal.com



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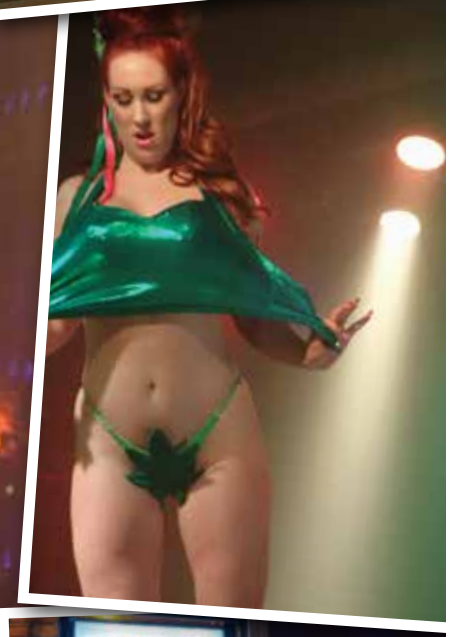

Titty Titty Bong Bong's Larrissa Champagne and April Ace.
Main Photo Credit: Matt Love Photography

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EXPO, RUSH and The FIRM's final show

A musical trip back to May 1986

By Clark'Super'Mantei

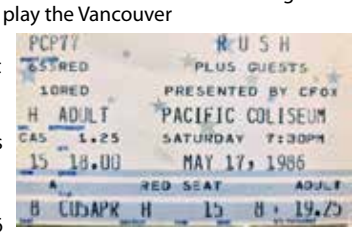
Hello again past blasters. This story continues from Issue 128. So let's trip back shall we?

Dateline April 1986: I moved from North Vancouver to East Vancouver to Trout Lake by Clark Park to prepare working at EXPO 86. The world's fair was about to happen and I wanted in. We found a cool place near the cultural epicenter of the world event. EXPO 1986 opened May 2 to October 13th.

Once settled I was ready to live life to the fullest. A life of restaurant work and concerts to fulfill my desires. What a rush for a teenager of 18 years.

Dateline October 11th, 1985: RUSH release their 11th studio album *Power Windows* and it was addictive. Steve and I listened to it for months knowing they'd tour Canada.

Dateline May 17th, '86: RUSH play the Vancouver Coliseum and my island friend Tom Ritchie (ripeace) came out to enjoy the show with me. It was my 3rd RUSH show to date. The show was fantastic as usual. RUSH are back in 2026.



Now let's move on to the legendary Jimmy Page. In 1966 Jimmy joined the Yardbirds as a fill-in on bass. He was a session musician up until that moment. He then took over guitar duties with Jeff Beck until Jeff left the group. That's when Jimmy changed the name to The New Yardbirds to fulfill a contract. In December 1968 they became Led Zeppelin and the rest is history.

On March 31st, 1969 they released their self titled debut LP. 67 years ago today in fact. Also on March 31st, 1976 they released their seventh LP *Presence* which is 50 years ago today! On Dec 4th, 1980 they announced their retirement as their drummer, John Henry 'Bonzo' Bonham had sadly passed the September prior. Ripeace.

Dateline February 22nd, 1985: The Firm release their self titled LP. Jimmy Page had teamed up with Bad Company singer Paul Rodgers to make a new group. Along with drummer Chris Slade and bassist Tony Franklin, the group quickly made a hit record. Songs like "Radioactive" and "Satisfaction Guaranteed" saw them release videos as well. In fact Les Paul is the bartender in the "Satisfaction" video. The closing track "Midnight Moonlight" was to be a Led Zeppelin song entitled "Swan Song" but they'd lost their drummer. I'm personally grateful that The Firm completed this epic journey of a track.

Dateline February 3rd, 1986: The Firm release their 2nd LP *Mean Business* and I was all ears. It's the 1st LP I played at our new East Van home. The opening track "Fortune Hunter" is sensational. The radio played the hit "All The Kings Horses" and "Live in Peace" and both had videos also. The best part was that The Firm was playing Seattle in May and I was determined to go.

Having ended my North Van job the week before, I took a few days to settle employment at Phat Phil's restaurant at EXPO 86. They wanted me to start right away yet I pleaded, "I have to see Jimmy Page in concert in Seattle and then can I start? Please?" The owner accepted as it was Jimmy Page. Whew!

Dateline May 28th, 1986: I awoke and Steve and I awaited Tom and Tony to show up and we'd all travel via the Peace Arch border to the U.S.A. Life was so easy then. Tickets were $15.00.

We arrive at the 1962 Seattle World's Fairgrounds to enter the Seattle Center Coliseum and take our seats. The energy was fantastic as Jimmy hadn't played Seattle since July 17th, 1977 with Led Zeppelin. You can find that in full on YouTube too.

Here we were and at the ready… Showtime arrived as the lights dimmed and the crowd lifted its cheers with a sensational healthy response as the band tore into "Fortune Hunter" and then "Closer" and we were in awe. Jimmy was in fine form after all that he'd been through. Both songs were the opening tracks of their two albums.

Then a terrible sight happened as I saw the crowd on the floor all fall forward as the metal barricade at the front collapsed and hundreds of people were flat on their faces getting squished and hurt to say the least. Paul Rodgers urged everyone to immediately step back. The damage was done. The show came to a halt and the house lights went up. Out came what seemed to be the national guard. It was an intense accident.

A man took the microphone and urged the crowd to "Step back" ... over and over for quite awhile. He eventually got everyone's attention when he stated "The show will not go on unless you all listen and do as I say. The band wants to play and it's up to us to obey please."

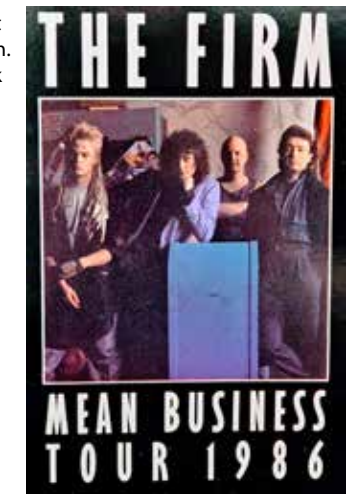
Lo and behold, everyone stepped back. After about 20 minutes of chaos the show continued for two hours and we witnessed an incredible concert indeed. The entire show is actually on YouTube.

In May of '86, Jimmy graced the cover of *Guitar World*. He claimed that Robert Plant sang like a vocal gymnast, whereas Paul sang completely orthodox and perfectly in tune. He's right. Paul's piano playing also added an extra dimension to the group's song arrangements.

Drummer Chris Slade performed a stellar solo too. Tony Franklin played his fretless bass like a true master. He was new to the scene with such famous players. His hero was bassist Jaco Pastorius ripeace. In fact, when The Firm had a night off after selling out Madison Square Garden in N.Y.C., Tony read in the paper that Jaco was performing that evening in Manhattan and he and Jimmy went to the show. Jimmy actually played with Jaco and it's also on YouTube. What a thrill for Tony.

As for Jimmy and the Seattle show, it was a highlight when he performed under a prism of lasers with his violin bow on the guitar like he did with Zeppelin. He also sat down and performed "Black Mountain Side/ White Summer" from Led Zeppelin's debut LP.

The band performed most every track from their two records. The last song before the encore was "Spirit Of Love" from the new album. To me it's almost gospel rock and roll. History shows this was the last Firm song they would ever play live.



The encore was great. Two cover songs: "Money (That's What I Want)" by Barrett Strong and "I Just Want To Make Love To You" by Willie Dixon.

The 2nd encore was a no brainer as the crowd didn't give up. The band came out for one more song as they played "Everybody Needs Someone To Love" by Solomon Burke and they all took a bow and said goodbye.

What a great show. 22 songs in all.

Unbeknownst to anyone that night, it turned out to be the final performance of The Firm as the band broke up shortly after. I am grateful I made the venture.

My friends and I all celebrated by going to the merchandise booth and eventually headed to a local 7-11 to grab munchies and refreshments for the evening.

We slept in the car and went up the Space Needle the following morning.

I bought a local Seattle paper and the review was great except for the fact that it said the ambulance team reported over 50 broken ribs at the show due to the barrier collapsing. The painful price of Rock and Roll. We made it home safely and my two friends headed back to Victoria.

Steve and I smiled "We did it!"

I started at EXPO 86 the following week.

Dateline June 29th, 2018: I met Paul Rodgers after a Robert Plant concert in Vancouver. We spent time talking about singing and I told him I'm in a large choir and invited him to come down and join us sometime to perform some songs by The Firm. He lit up as I told him how special those songs are. How wonderful that would and still could be.

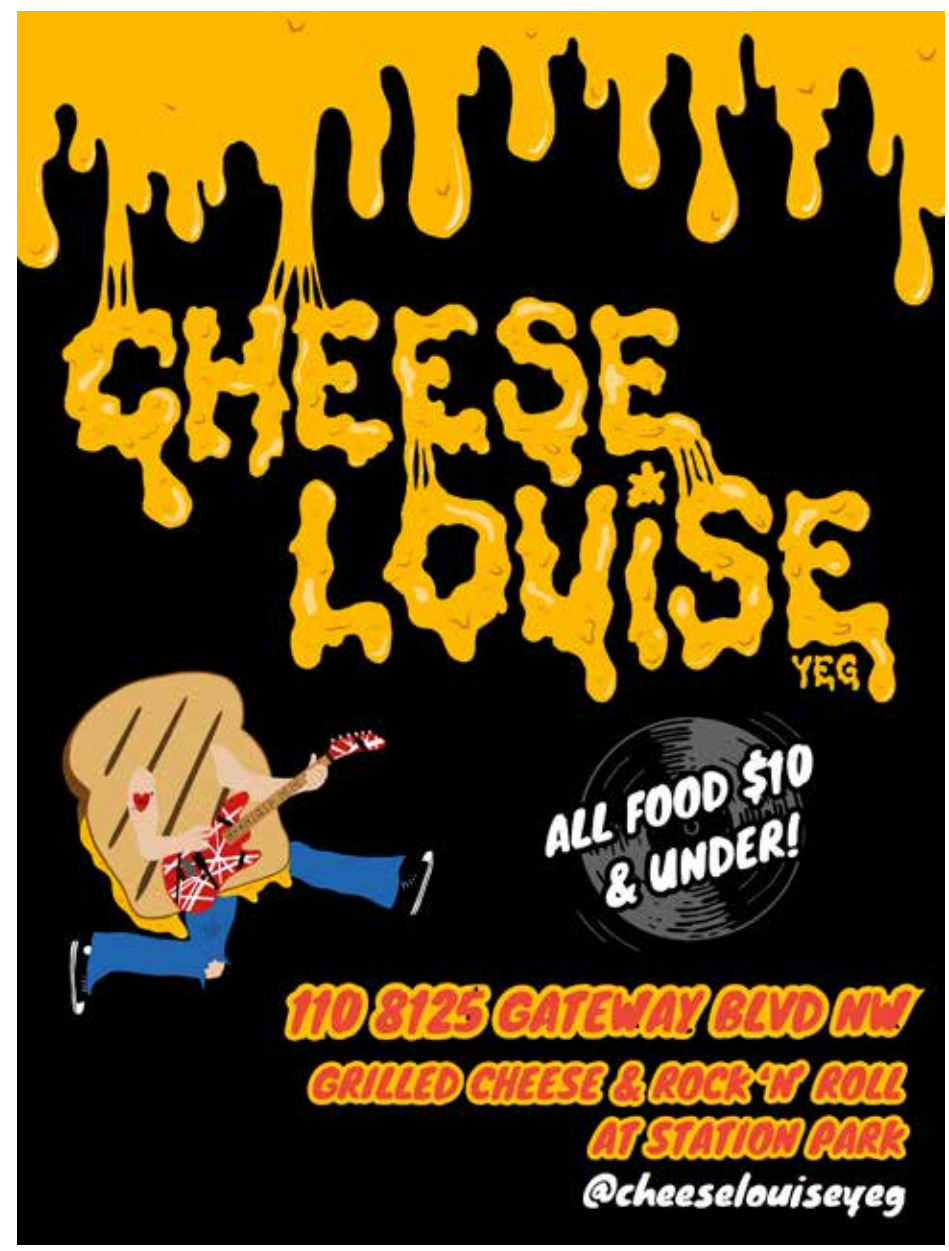
All four members of The Firm are still active and healthy today. What a great life eh?

With that I'll end this edition and wish you all a great spring. And remember...

Rock out and Rrrrroll on.

Clark'Super'Mantei.

March 31st, 2026



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THIS ANGRY PEN OF MINE:

RECOVERING THE JOURNALS OF LAYNE STALEY
Layne Staley
Weldon Owen
November 11, 2025

"The greatest gift in living is knowing someday you will die. The hardest part is finding a way to kill time by waiting… "

Over twenty years have passed since Layne Staley died, yet the music of Alice in Chains keeps resurfacing. I saw a teenager at the mall wearing a *Dirt* T-shirt, born long after Layne passed and it made me wonder what kind of legacy the band truly has. I got into The Doors at a young age, with Jim Morrison long gone, watching Oliver Stone's The Doors to glimpse into their world. The next generation has Alice in Chains still touring and making music, but it was Layne Staley's voice, lyrics and presence that cemented the band as legendary. Like the mythic Jim Morrison, Layne became a fixed figure, larger than life, yet still shrouded in mystery. Who was he, really?

This Angry Pen of Mine: Recovering the Journals of Layne Staley opens with an introduction by his mother and father. His mother, Nancy McCallum, writes:

"My idea for a book about Layne was very different. I wanted to show the fun and funny, the witty, the smart, the nice, thoughtful person behind the stories; you know, to share the quirks and the moments that others could relate to. It took 24 years, but I think we've finally got a book that honours my memories of Layne."

The book isn't a diary in the strict sense—Layne didn't record daily events. It's mostly lyrics: drafts, notes, and sketches—accompanied by drawings, childhood photos, and occasional personal observations. These observations come from people interviewed for the book, including his parents, and at the end, musicians like Scooter Ward, Sully Erna, and Dave Mustaine, who reflect on working with him, his influence and his creative approach.

The handwritten lyrics for songs like "Angry Chair", "Sickman", "God Smack" and "Junkhead" are striking. You see him crafting phrasing, experimenting with vowel sounds, and planning how layered vocal lines will interact. During the Mad Season *Above sessions*, Barrett Martin recounts that he recorded vocals at night alone, often in a single take, then stacked doubles and background lines himself. Even without the music playing, the pages reveal the architecture behind the voice you hear on the recordings—for example, penning in the "Yeah, hey-yeah" from "I Stay Away." Looking at the words on the page, it's hard to tell exactly how they might sound, but Layne always had it mapped out in his head.

What emerges from the book is a picture of Layne Staley as vulnerable, personal, playful, technically aware, and creatively meticulous. Childhood crafts sit next to addiction-era lyrics. Drum kit photos and studio sketches sit next to handwritten song drafts. One craft sheet, "I can make sounds like – rooster, dog, cat, goat, sheep," shows Layne picked "rooster." The result of all this content mingling is an intimate, revealing, and thoughtful portrait—one that shows why, decades later, his music and presence still resonate.
Ryan Dyer

THE JAR AND OTHER STORIES:

A COLLECTION OF EXTREME HORROR
Edward Lee
Crossroad Press
March 24, 2024

Fans of Edward Lee's Infernal Series should get a kick out of this collection. I'd like to have seen him lean into that and call the collection The Infernal Archives or something to that effect, since there are so many stories straight from that series. A collector's edition similar to Lakehouse Infernal. The stories are classic Lee, with one that will leave you reaching for the barf bag (nearly as bad (or is it good?) as Going Monstering). But Lee is winding down at this time, preparing for his retirement, which he sadly did last year.

Starting with "GPS". OnlyFans content creator Deb and her overly impassioned boyfriend go out to her uncle's cabin for the week to get some work done and take it easy. She starts doing her PPV content, and one particular job is with an Ouija board, in which the pair meet demon Jerry. Deb, of course, cannot get him out of her mind, and when she goes for groceries the next day, she takes a little detour following the strange coordinates of her GPS. What's the worst that could happen?

"The Baby Shower". How could a story with a name like that churn your stomach? Well, be prepared because this one goes sideways quickly. A baby shower put on by wealthy socialites goes awry when the guests don't show up. Enter one straight from hell and oh man, it turns out to be a doozy. Entertainment for Satan has never been so stomach-turning.

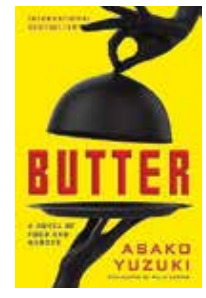
"A Very Bad Day in Hell". The title says it all. Directly thrown into the Infernal world, we have John, a troubled porn star with nothing left to lose except his number one pride and joy. In line to sell his member for some quick hellnotes, the poor bastard goes through with the deed, and if you can believe it, the story still takes a further turn for the worse for our protagonist; he is in hell after all.

"6-Thirteen". Another selection taken with the essence of the Infernal Series. We have Westermore and a street-savvy prostitute versed in occult studies right in the middle of a short-lived spatial shift between earth and hell—the location—7-Eleven, or in hell, 6-Thirteen. We see the depths of Lee's creativity when it comes to the inhabitants of hell, and his youthful wit comes out in this one 10-fold.

"Bounce House". Originally published in 2023 under Madness Heart Press. Another imaginative chronicle in the lineup. Keeping up with the Joneses in bizzaro world, which is cool to see Lee dabble in. Getting the biggest, best bounce house and putting it in the front yard just to stroke Miles' superior ego and make a statement to the neighbours—They've got it all, so don't even try to compete. A birthday party for his son is soon underway, but not before Miles and wife Becky have some fun of their own with bewildering consequences. Feeling strange when they exit, only to find their genitals have switched. Becky, feeling the sensation of testosterone for the first time, acts out with hostile misogynist power, all while they try and get this situation solved with help from the place they rented it from. Once home, they discover it just gets worse... the kids are bouncing, and this one just keeps getting more bizarre as the pages turn, concluding with a massive F you to Miles.

The title concept, "The Jar", rounds off this miscellany collection. Digital artist Alex is generously compensated for his time to visit a peculiar billionaire, Sombrack, to help round out his massive collection. The atmosphere is off from the start, including the pugnacious relationship between Sombrack and his girlfriend/caretaker, all the way to his curious collection, including Elvis Presley's last shit perfectly preserved. Things get stranger and stranger, and Alex knows he is in danger—but how much? Well, that one comes right out of left field, leaving us with a knot in our stomach.
Demonika

BUTTER



Asako Yuzuki, Polly Barton (Translator)
Ecco
April 16, 2024

I wasn't certain what to expect from Asako Yuzuki's first English-language publication. Whatever I thought this book would be, it subverted my expectations quite soundly—which seems rather fitting in hindsight. Though Butter does not fit directly into the horror genre, this novel of death, blood, milk, fat, sex, lies, and gluttony nevertheless kept me in anticipation until the very last morsel. Inspired by the real case of serial murderer and food enthusiast Kanae Kijima, author Yuzuki has fictionalized the events into a surprising and multifaceted story that centres around convicted criminal Manako Kajii and hardworking journalist Rika Machida, who submits to Kajii's misguided mentorship as she fights for an exclusive interview. The more enmeshed Rika becomes, the more her own life comes unmoored as she struggles to maintain perspective and a grasp on her own desires.

While the shadow of looming violence hovers ominously over the narrative, the events throughout the novel prove to be less brutal and more introspective, focussing largely on the interpersonal relationships at play. Be prepared for lascivious descriptions of food and consumption, with the addition of recipes you may find yourself wanting to try at home.
Laura Phaneuf

THE END OF THE WORLD AS WE KNOW IT: NEW TALES OF STEPHEN KING'S THE STAND

Christopher Golden (Editor), Brian Keene (Editor), Stephen King (Introduction), Wrath James White, Bryan Smith, Poppy Z. Brite, etc
Gallery Books
August 19, 2025

Stephen King erupted seemingly out of nowhere with the 1974 release of *Carrie* and exploded into one of the hugest American publishing phenomena of the 20th century, making horror a staple item on every household bookshelf around the world and earning popular (and grudging critical) acclaim. Even though he's now pushing 80, he still dutifully presents a new (and usually pretty good) book faster than King Gizzard and the Lizard Wizard release albums. But even having over 65 (!) novels in print and moving effortlessly (and convincingly) from horror to science fiction to mysteries to straight fiction to non-fiction and all points in between—making him the modern equivalent of Ray Bradbury—oftentimes it's still King's 1978 post-apocalyptic epic *The Stand* which many of his fans still cite as his best work ever. And even though King himself sighs wearily whenever that point's brought up, it's hard to argue. In the almost half-century since it was first published, *The Stand* has sold over 24 million copies (inspiring no less than two televised miniseries, Marvel comic-book adaptations, and songs by ABBA, the Alarm, Metallica, and Anthrax) and remains one of his all-time best-selling works, alongside *The Shining* and *It*.

And why? For the three or four of you out there who need the Cole's Notes: the story starts with a laboratory-concocted ultra-lethal mutated superflu virus which escapes from a top-secret US Army bioweapons facility and sweeps around the world in a matter of weeks, killing off 99% of humanity and destroying civilization as we know it. Only those with latent psychic tendencies make it through that ordeal alive; the good-hearted survivors

are drawn to a survivors' colony in Boulder, Colorado, and the evil-hearted survivors are drawn to Las Vegas to serve the malefic supernatural entity known as Randall Flagg, the Walkin' Dude. Hilarity does not ensue. Instead, we get all the elements of what drew millions of readers into Stephen King's orbit: believable characters (in this case, literally dozens of them) caught up in unbelievable threats and dangers and dealing (or not) with them in believable ways, and the trials and tribulations don't always have a happy (or bloodless) ending. The Stand remains one of the mightiest stories of Good Versus Evil and inspired many modern sci-fi/urban fantasy/horror writers, many of whom joined the legion of King fans who endlessly badgered and pestered King over the decades for some sort of sequel... and whaddaya know? Finally, this amazing anthology appears. Which is only fitting for the post-pandemic grittiness we find the real world swirled up in these days.

The End of the World as We Know It gathers together (through the keen editorial prowess of noted authors Christopher Golden and Brian Keene) no less than 35 intriguing and captivating short stories from 35 gifted authors—Joe R. Lansdale, Richard Chizmar, and David J. Schow among them: those who've re-read The Stand to tatters (me: guilty as charged) will thrill to be flung back into the vast emptiness of a depopulated America, seeing the Carter-era dusty apocalypse once again through the eyes of myriad new characters as believable as King's original heroes and villains: some human, some inhuman, some down on the ground, some way up in orbit, coping (or not coping) with a nightmarish new reality of post-plague survival. And even King himself opens the anthology with a cheery wish-you-well introduction, which starts off the ride.

And, like most of King's classic work, once you start turning pages it's extremely difficult to put the book down. A killer surprise for Stephen King fans old and new.

Ferdy Belland

THE WITCH OF WILLOW SOUND

Vanessa F. Penney
ECW Press
September 30, 2025

A body, chained to a tree, is burning in the wilds of Nova Scotia as an old woman watches.

This is how Vanessa F. Penney lays the scene for her folkloric East Coast tale of dark legacies and buried trauma. Fade Luck has been living rough, sleeping in cemeteries and any corner that may offer temporary shelter when she receives news that her aunt Madeline is missing. Fade hasn't seen her aunt since she was a child, but spurred on by feelings of familial duty, she travels to Madeline's remote cabin to find answers. The more Fade comes to understand about her aunt, known to nearby locals as the Witch of Willow Sound, the more her sense of foreboding grows.

Penney successfully weaves together local legend, troubled history, and interesting characters, but her story suffers somewhat from a lack of development. Once The Witch of Willow Sound approaches its zenith, events move at a frenetic pace—one which fails to spend adequate time with each new event and leads to a dramatic but chaotic attempt to tidily wrap up the loose ends of the story. Paired with a less-than-consistent tone that vacillates between gothic suspense and quips more suited to a buddy comedy, this novel would have benefitted from trimming a few ideas or, otherwise, increasing the page count to spend more time with each idea, allowing the plot additional room to breathe.

Despite these critiques, it was a pleasure to delve into a witchy tale that is so distinctly Canadian, and has such bold and expansive ambitions. I will be curious to see what Vanessa F. Penney tackles next.

Laura Phaneuf

LAST RITES

Ozzy Osbourne
Grand Central Publishing
October 7, 2025

"When the end does come, I don't want to be cremated. It's like you were never here. Just a bag of dust. That's not for me. I want to make the flowers grow."

Last Rites chronicles Ozzy Osbourne's final years, his declining health, and the struggles that made each performance, most notably Back to the Beginning, a triumph. By the end, he is deteriorating, and the countdown of his final days is inescapable.

The memoir feels undeniably Ozzy but how it was put together is open to speculation. Did he speak it aloud? Was it drafted by Chris Ayres (who is credited in co-writing) in Ozzy's voice? Whatever the process, it had to be approved by Sharon and the Osbourne team. The result is a blend of his thoughts and someone else's shaping that still rings true to him, even if imagining him hunched over a laptop writing it in his condition is unrealistic.

Aside from his reflections on health and mortality, Last Rites is full of stories from Ozzy's life. He gives a vivid account of Randy Rhoads' accident while also reflecting on Rhoads' brilliance and ambition - that he wanted to study classical music at a university, and Ozzy, ever pragmatic, joked, "Randy, the way you're going, you could buy your own fucking university."

The book is rich with encounters and friendships from the rock world. He recalls meeting Lemmy Kilmister in Hawkwind, marveling that he outlived Lemmy. There are behind-the-scenes glimpses too, like recording "Iron Man (This Means War)" with Busta Rhymes, where Ozzy felt apprehensive about joining them in smoking weed after the recording because many of the rapper's posse carried guns and he felt he'd get too paranoid.

By the final pages, the reality is stark: 2025 was the last year of Ozzy's life, and now in 2026, there will be no more commentary from him. What remains is a testament to his honesty, humor, and spirit, captured in words that are both his and, in a sense, the work of those preserving his voice.

Ryan Dyer

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PLEASE SUBMIT YOUR REVIEW(S) ON ANY BOOK RELEASED IN THE LAST TWO YEARS TO DEMONIKA@ABSOLUTEUNDERGROUND.CA

THANK YOU TO ECW

Loud As Hell Open Air Festival 2026 Announces Massive Lineup

Get ready, Alberta: Canada's most punishing metal festival returns this summer with three days of camping, chaos and carnage.

From July 31 to August 2, 2026, the Loud As Hell Open Air Festival will erupt in Drumheller, AB, at the Dinosaurs Down Stampede, delivering its 14th edition of extreme music, freak shows, burlesque acts, clinics, vendors—and yes, dinosaurs. Set against the rugged beauty of Alberta's badlands, where towering hoodoos and sweeping canyons dominate the horizon, the festival promises a weekend of unrelenting sonic assault.

This year's 2026 lineup features some of the most electrifying names in progressive and technical death metal, including Fallujah, Allegaeon, Summoning the Lich, Gravemass, Crimson Shadows, Edge of Paradise, Starkill, Super Monster Party, Mourning High, Hog Meets Frog, and more.

Weekend Passes (July 31–Aug 2) Grant Full Access To All Headbanging, Moshing, And Festival Mayhem. loudashell.ca/shop

Fallujah close out the festival with a performance built around their sixth studio album, *Xenotaph* (2025, Nuclear Blast Records). Hailed as their most technical and dynamic release to date, the record expands on the sci-fi–inspired progressive death-metal landscapes of Empyrean, promising a closing-night set of intense, otherworldly sound.

With its mix of Canadian and international extreme acts, scenic camping, and full-throttle festival chaos, Loud As Hell Open Air Festival 2026 promises to be a must-experience gathering for metal fans.

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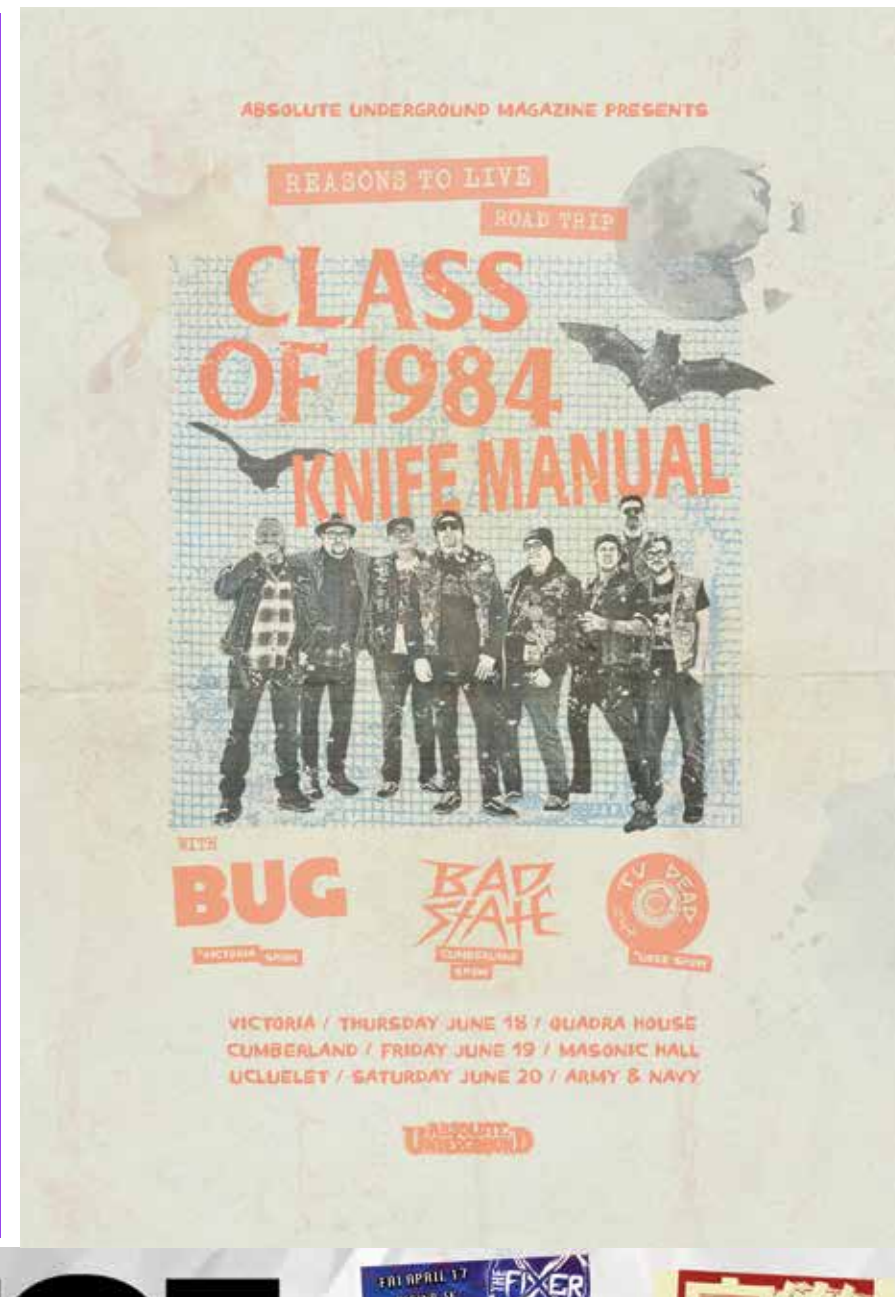

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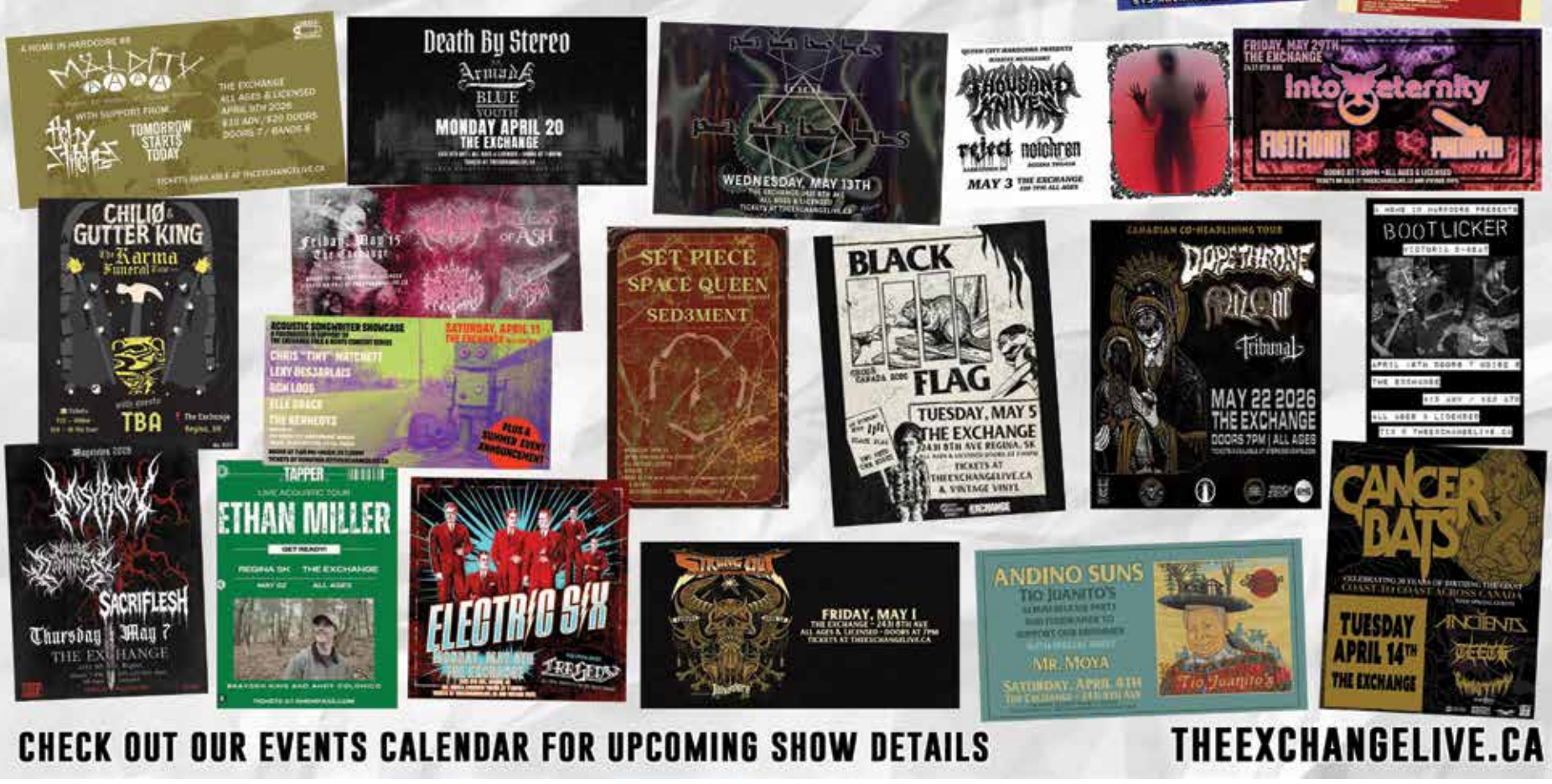

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CANCER BATS Celebrate 20 Years of *Birthing The Giant* With Cross-Canada Anniversary Tour

Canadian hardcore punk mainstays Cancer Bats are hitting the road to celebrate the 20th anniversary of their debut full-length album *Birthing The Giant*, bringing one of the most influential Canadian hardcore releases of the 2000s back to the stage in full.

The anniversary tour kicked off April 02, with two nights in St. John's, Newfoundland, before crossing the country with 21 tour dates, wrapping up on May 16 at Pouzza Fest in Montréal. Along the way, the band will make key stops in Western Canada, including Vancouver and Victoria, giving West Coast fans a chance to experience the album performed live from start to finish. While the Pouzza Fest appearance will feature a shorter set due to festival time limits, fans can still expect a set packed with fan favourites and classic tracks.

Originally released on June 6, 2006, *Birthing The Giant* helped define the band's signature blend of hardcore punk, southern metal riffs and high-energy rock swagger. Produced by Gavin Brown, known for his work with Billy Talent and Three Days Grace, the album quickly gained critical acclaim and helped launch Cancer Bats onto the international stage. Tracks like "French Immersion", "100 Grand Canyon", and "Pneumonia Hawk" became staples of the band's live shows and remain fan favourites to this day.

Following the album's release, Cancer Bats received major recognition, including winning Favourite Hardcore/Metal Group at the 2007 Canadian Indie Awards and Best Independent Video at the 2007 MuchMusic Awards. They were also nominated for Best Newcomer at the UK's Metal Hammer Golden Gods Awards, further cementing their growing international reputation.

Two decades later, Cancer Bats remain a major force in heavy music. With over 20 years as a band, seven studio albums, six JUNO Award nominations, and relentless touring across Canada, the United States and Europe, they have built a reputation as one of the hardest-working and most energetic live bands in the hardcore and metal scenes. Their influence continues to be felt across both punk and metal communities.

For longtime fans, the tour is a rare chance to hear a defining Canadian hardcore album performed in full. For newer listeners, it's an opportunity to experience the record that helped shape one of Canada's most enduring heavy bands. Either way, this anniversary tour is set to be a loud, sweaty and fitting celebration of 20 years of *Birthing The Giant*.

CANCER BATS *BIRTHING THE GIANT* ANNIVERSARY CANADIAN TOUR

April 02 - St. John's, NL - The Rock House

April 03 - St John's, NL - The Rock House - SOLD OUT

April 04 - Halifax, NS - Marquee Ballroom

April 05 - Moncton, NB - Tide & Boar

April 07 - Quebec City, QC - L'anti

April 08 - Ottawa, ON - Overflow Brewing Co

April 09 - Kingston, ON - The Broom Factory

April 10 - Toronto, ON - The Opera House

April 11 - Sudbury, ON - Headquarters

April 12 - Thunder Bay, ON - Black Pirates Pub - SOLD OUT

April 14 - Regina, SK - The Exchange

April 16 - Kelowna, BC - Metro Hub

April 17 - Vancouver, BC - The Pearl

April 18 - Victoria, BC - Capital Ballroom

April 20 - Nelson, BC - The Royal - SOLD OUT

April 21 - Fernie, BC - The Northern

April 22 - Calgary, AB - Arrowhead

April 23 - Edmonton, AB - Pawn Shop Live (formerly Union)

April 24 - Red Deer, AB - Bo's Bar

April 25 - Saskatoon, SK - Coors Event Centre

May 8 - Winnipeg, MB - The Park Theatre - Manitoba MetalFest - SOLD OUT

May 16 - Montreal, QC - Pouzza Fest* ~ Please note that while the festival slot at Pouzza Fest doesn't allow time to perform the full album, the band will deliver a hit-filled set featuring many of the fan favourites.

cancerbats.com

Photo credit: Derek Bremner

BON SCOTT TURNS 80: A YEAR OF ROCK, RARITIES, AND TRIBUTE EVENTS

Special releases, live shows and iconic memorabilia mark the milestone

July 9, 2026 will mark what would have been the 80th birthday of legendary AC/DC frontman Bon Scott, and the celebration is shaping up to be a global tribute worthy of one of rock and roll's greatest frontmen.

The Bon Scott Estate has announced a wide-ranging series of events, collectibles, collaborations, and tribute celebrations planned throughout 2026 to honour the singer's legacy. More than four decades after his death in 1980, Scott's influence on rock, punk, and heavy music remains undeniable, and fans around the world will have plenty of opportunities to celebrate the man who helped define the sound and attitude of AC/DC.

COLLECTIBLES AND LIMITED RELEASES

Several major collaborations are planned to coincide with the birthday celebration. **German audio company Neumann** is partnering with the estate on a limited-edition signature product set to be released on July 9, 2026.

Meanwhile, **The Perth Mint** will release collector's edition gold and silver bars featuring Scott's name and likeness, following the success of a previously sold-out silver coin released in 2024.

Rock and roll collectibles company Knucklebonz will also release a new Bon Scott statue based on imagery from AC/DC's 1978 Powerage tour, adding to their previous sold-out Bon Scott figures.

APPAREL AND MERCH COLLABORATIONS

On the apparel side, **Dixxon Flannel Co**. will release a new limited-edition Bon Scott flannel shirt in the official "Heritage" tartan, while **Copa Football** will produce a collectible Bon Scott football jersey using the same tartan pattern developed with **Gordon Nicolson Kiltmakers** in Scotland.

Additional merchandise, including new shirt designs and limited items, will be available through official Bon Scott online stores throughout the year.

TRIBUTE EVENTS AROUND THE WORLD

Several major events are planned in 2026 to celebrate Scott's life and music. The long-running **Bonfest festival in Kirriemuir, Scotland — Scott's birthplace — will celebrate its 20th anniversary from May 1–3, 2026,** featuring rock bands, AC/DC tribute acts, and special guests including former AC/DC drummer Chris Slade.

In **New York City, the third annual Bon's Birthday Bash will take place in July 2026**, featuring guest vocalists performing songs from Scott's catalogue.

The Rock and Roll Hall of Fame will also host a special one-night theatrical screening of AC/DC: Let There Be Rock, accompanied by a limited Bon Scott memorabilia display.

THE LEGACY LIVES ON

Even decades after his passing, Bon Scott's music continues to reach new audiences. AC/DC's ongoing PWR/UP tour continues to feature numerous songs from the Bon Scott era, performed to massive crowds across North and South America.

Scott, born in Scotland in 1946 and later raised in Australia, joined AC/DC in 1974 and helped write and record some of the band's most iconic albums, including *High Voltage*, *Let There Be Rock*, *Powerage* and *Highway to Hell*. His lyrics, humour, and unmistakable voice helped define the band's identity and influenced generations of rock musicians.

Bon was inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame as a member of AC/DC in 2003, and his legacy continues to be celebrated by fans worldwide.

With tribute festivals, exclusive collectibles, new media releases, and global events planned throughout 2026, Bon Scott's 80th birthday will not just be a celebration of the past — it will be a reminder that his music, attitude and spirit are still very much alive in rock and roll today.

bonscottofficial.com

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Photo credits:

Live band, George Chin 1979

Studio recording, Philip Morris 1976

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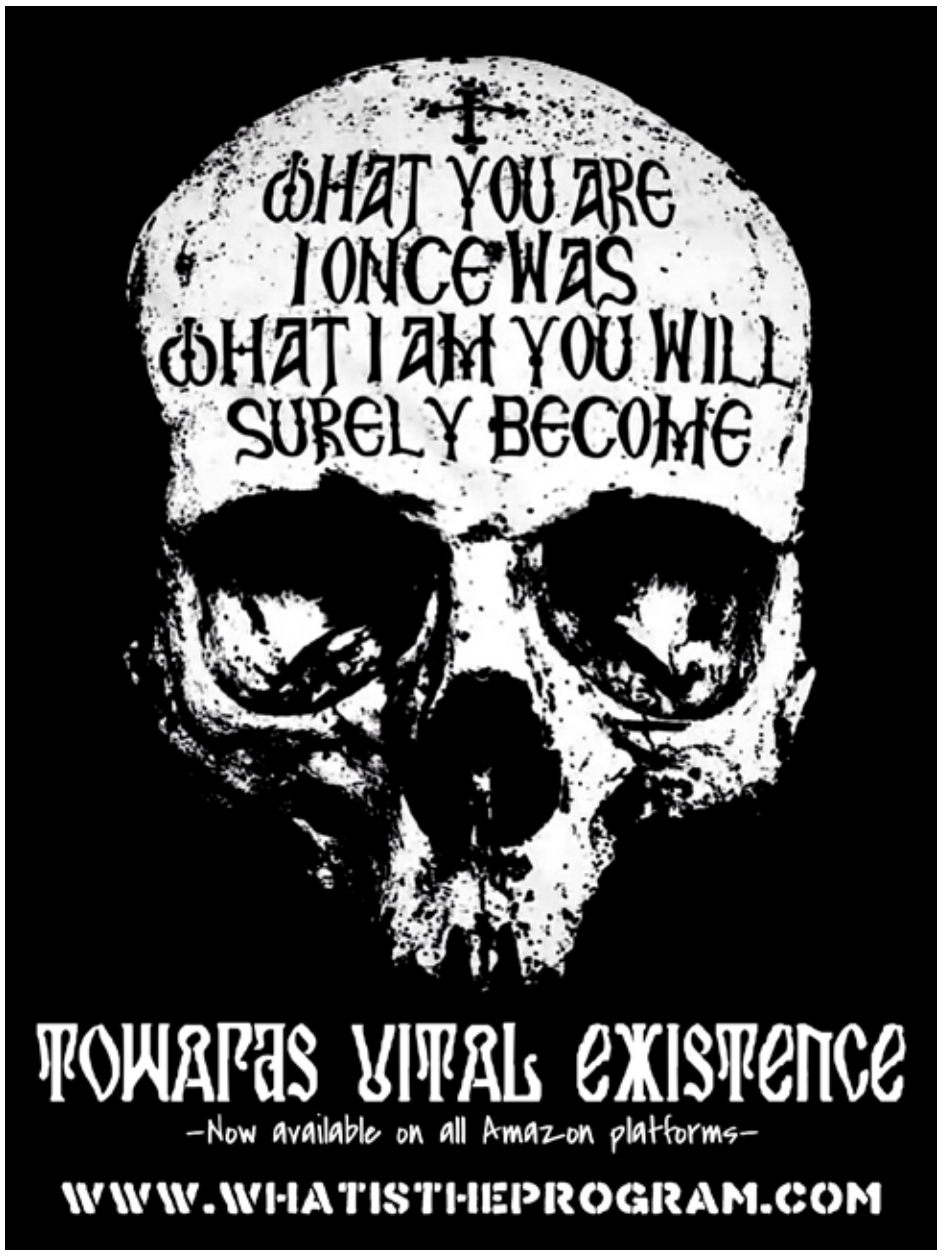
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by Keenan Poloncsak
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But I only HAVE TWO DOLLARS.
THE BRIBE OF FRANKENSTEIN

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Puff Puff Pass?

Underground in Recovery

By Peter Barrett

"Puff puff pass," right? That's the ritual, or so I've heard. The punchline everyone likes to repeat, just like Willie Nelson. Weed is just popular culture now though. Like beer, wings, and watching hockey at the local sports bar, marijuana is legal, taxed, and no longer any sort of underground social rebellion.

The truth nobody wants to say out loud is that all drug dependency sucks. And addiction to cannabis is no different.

The risk profile of "refer madness" may be significantly lower than alcohol, stimulants, or opioids, but frequent use definitely turns into dependency. Emotional and psychological dependency eventually turns into addiction. And you can see the addictive element when some people try to quit. A casual habit became a lifestyle trap. Quitting isn't always dramatic, but it's shitty enough when nobody wants to hang out if you aren't getting high. Or you become intolerable because you can't get high. Irritability, insomnia, anxiety, depression are common in people who stop weed after significant prolonged use.

A joint at a show, or the occasional social session with friends isn't the kind of use I'm talking about here. It is the daily, chronic use that represents the real thief of potential. In every creative field I have been involved in, I've seen lost inspiration, lost motivation, and lost determination in people who are high every day. People that could have accomplished great things, settling for mediocrity, because they consistently chose to be "slow stupid & hungry" instead. (Yeah, MDC had it right with that one.)

And the people it affects worst are the kids who get into it young. The same youth who are only starting to become who they're actually supposed to be. Who actually thinks it makes them creative. The human brain doesn't fully develop until around age 25. That means if you start as a teenager, smoke often, chronic for months or years, the risks will have stacked up: dependence, anxiety, depression, or paranoia at the least. Psychotic episodes, hallucinations, or triggered underlying mental imbalances at worst.

That's not just fear-mongering. That's scientific reality.

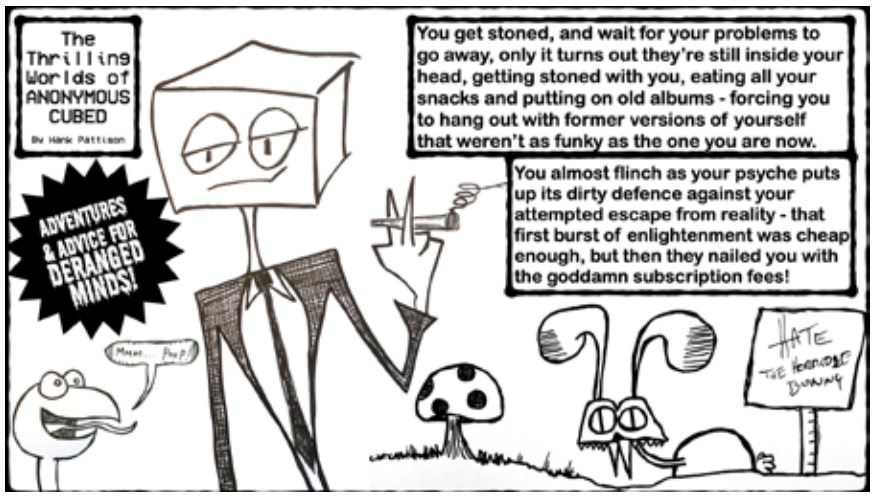
Studies show that long-term cannabis use deteriorates mental faculties. Memory and attention eventually slow. Learning becomes harder. Decision-making is hindered. These show up in real life and disrupt your future potential. School, work, relationships, career, and family all can be affected. So addiction doesn't just fuck with your head. It spills into everything. Your health, social life, project performance. Your financial future. All of it suffers when you abandon responsibility because you "prefer to be high". Modern neuroscience is also finding what chronic users already feel. Dependent marijuana use can actually re-wire the brain networks responsible for attention and cognition. So the longer and more regular you use, the more your brain adapts around the habit, until you end up a "burnout".

We all know that our reaction time slows down, coordination drops, and our attention fades. Drive a vehicle or run equipment like that and you gamble with real lives… including your own. That road literally leads to injuries, or death.

Don't get me wrong… I know quitting isn't always easy. This isn't about purity politics or pretending that smoking weed is like smoking speed. Plenty of people use it and manage functional lives. But overt abuse is a different story. Are Cheech and Chong supposed to be role models though? Drug abuse of any kind turns sharp people dull. With weed, unrealized potential literally goes up in smoke.

I once thought we were supposed to be part of a scene that represented rebellion, honesty and self-determination. But if you let a habit turn you into a spectator in your own life, maybe it's time to put down the bong, and start getting your shit together.

Thanks for your time either way. If you are interested in more intolerant takes on reclaiming tradition and making sober lifestyle choices, find my book Towards Vital Existence on Amazon. There will likely be something in there to piss you off…



Absolute Album Reviews

BLACK LABEL SOCIETY — Engines of Demolition

Engines of Demolition is here and it's amazing. Easily the best the band has done in a long time. Riffs are heavy, solos are shredding at peak Zakk level, and vocally he channels both the intensity of early BLS and some southern feels of *Book of Shadows*. This album is heavy, dark and feels like it is soaked with Sabbath-inspired doom. Then there is "Ozzy's Song". For me, it's as impactful as Dimebag's "In This River". Tracks like "Name In Blood" even carry a nod of AC/DC energy in the intro. The artwork is a major step up from previous albums covers - this time Zakk merges the BLS mascot Skully with a motorcycle and a mix of his Bullseye and Vertigo design from his Wylde Audio guitars.

13 tracks 52 mins. There's no filler. The record hits hard.

Zakk Wylde proves he's still at the top of his game. *Engines of Demolition* is a must listen. Brace yourself for the power, the riffs and yes, the emotional punch of "Ozzy's song".

SDMF

— Allan Johnson

MCAULEY SCHENKER GROUP — *Bad Boys: The Mcauley Schenker Group Story 1987-1992*

Cherry Red Records

Not as well-known as Schenker's more lauded work with UFO, and his early work with MSG, but worthy in its own right, and it's good to see these albums finally getting the reappraisal they deserve.

Our four CDs (with 19 bonus tracks! Great value!) Michael's excellent axemanship doesn't disappoint and Robin McAuley is a truly excellent singer.

The music herein is more

commercial than Schenker's previous work, but that was the way of the times, and we have to remember 'hair metal' like Whitesnake and Cinderella was huge!

Overall, anyone who loves commercial 80s metal will find much to love here.

— Steve Earles

MASTER'S ASHES — *How The Mighty Have Fallen*

Time To Kill Records

You would expect from a band comprising members and former members of Voivod (all hail!), Crisis and Mindrot to be, at the very least, the sum of it's parts.

Yet this is not the case!

For, not only have Master's Ashes exceeded my expectations and created an album of such intensity and sincerity that it mirrors the frighteningly violent world we find ourselves trapped in, but they have also succeeded in creating an album of hope.

An aprt comparison would be an Amebix for the 21 st century. There is a primal fury here that sounds both ancient and modern at the same time.

Master's Ashes do not sing of the supernatural, there is no need to, mankind (unkind?) is more than capable of exceeding any imaginary horrors.

This then is brave new music for our grave new world, and I urge you to listen well to it. It is the voice of freedom railing against bigotry and hatred. The voice of courage castigating cowardice. The voice of democracy against dictatorship. The voice of cooperation against big corporations.

Long may Master's Ashes reign!

— Steve Earles

STAND AGAINST FEAR — *Too Little Too Late*

Today I had the absolute pleasure of sitting down with *Too Little Too Late*, the new album from one of the best punk bands coming out of Southern Ontario: Stand Against Fear. Hailing from Guelph, these guys have clearly put in the work, delivering 14 incredible tracks, just banger after banger.

They kick things off with "Punk Rock Song," an opener that wastes no time. It's energetic, punchy, and instantly sing-alongable. "Bomb" follows with a melodic intro that feels like taking shots with your best friends before a night you'll never forget.

If you're in the mood to move your body and crash into your homies in the pit, "Road Rage" is your anthem. Its fast paced rhythm refuses to let your feet stay still. Prefer to hang just outside the pit and whip your hair around? "Stupid Song" has you covered. With bold, clean vocals and a chant-ready hook, it's impossible not to bop along.

Then comes "Parents." This track has "high-school classic" written all over it, funny from a parent's point of view, relatable from a teenager's, and catchy enough to stick in your head for days.

Front to back, it's never *Too Little Too Late* to pick up this album. No punk collection feels complete without it. I've got a feeling this is one of those records future generations will be hunting for, desperate to find a first press copy. So don't sleep on Stand Against Fear's *Too Little Too Late*.

— Dennis Lightheart

WILD HORSES — *Standing Our Ground: Complete Recordings 1978-1981*

Cherry Red Records

The short-lived Wild Horses was the brainchild of Thin Lizzy legend Brian Robertson and former Rainbow bassist Jimmy Bain.

Now, Robbo-era Thin Lizzy was the best period of Lizzy's history, albums like *Jailbreak, Bad Reputation* and *Live and Dangerous* are stone cold eternal classics. While *Rainbow Rising* is one of the greatest albums of all time.

So, did the partnership of Robbo and Jimmy Bain result in sonic-sorcery? Well, certainly on their first album, titled *The First Album* in rather unimaginative fashion. Songs like "Reservation", "Blackmail" and "Dealer" have the Robbo magic all over them. However, while Bain's voice is decent enough, he's no Phil Lynott and it's hard not to imagine how magical these songs would have been recorded by Thin Lizzy.

Their record label also dropped the ball by not pressing sufficient quantities which is baffling given the pedigree of the band.

By the time of the recording of the second album, *Stand Your Ground*, Bain and Robbo's relationship had turned toxic and the band broke up shortly thereafter.

But this excellent six CD collection is a fitting tribute to their fiery collaboration

— Steve Earles

LYSERGIC — *Towering Altars of Misanthropy EP*

Raise your gas masks, knives, and inverted crosses. Kyle Ball continues to channel Lovecraftian forces, transmitting their rumble and roar through audio programming on Lysergic's new EP, *Towering Altars of Misanthropy*. The altars begin to rise immediately in the intro, "Under the Dying Sun of Golgotha," where grimacing riffs slice through faint, indecipherable feminine vocals. "Necrotic Desecration in the Flesh of Nazarene" follows, introducing the EP's true core: relentless shredding and Ball's ever-evolving demonic vocal presence, which has become his signature. From there, the release never lets up—blistering speed, industrial textures, jackhammer rhythms that feel like a malfunctioning typewriter, all wrapped in a heavy occult/blackened sensibility. Despite the extremity, Ball never loses control. Years of refinement show in the flow and density of the material; each track remains engaging without collapsing under its own weight. Years of doing this has allowed him to perfect the flow and density of extreme music so that it always feels interesting and never too overwhelming as to be unenjoyable.

— Ryan Dyer

HAWKWIND — *Hawkwind*

Cherry Red Records

Hawkwind's self-titled debut is not just Year Zero for Hawkwind, but Year Zero for the Space Rock genre they gave birth to. So, by any criteria, *Hawkwind* is an album of mighty cultural significance!

To me, it combines Dave Brock's skill as a busker (witness the catchy "Carry On Sundown") with the otherworldly sax of Nik Turner and the electronics of Dik Mik, this is the genesis of Hawkwind's Uniqueness.

In seems to me, in this increasingly dark world we find ourselves trapped in, we need Hawkwind's cheerful optimism more than ever. They are, like the legendary King Arthur, there when they are needed the most. The once and future band!

There is a sonic alchemy to Hawkwind, magically, whoever plays in Hawkwind, becomes part of Hawkwind.

This is an excellent reissue. The sound is just perfect. There are some excellent bonus tracks, including some fine demos. The liner notes and photos are excellent. Dig the groovy picture of Hawkwind playing at Stonehenge, a magick place they would go on to become synonymous with!

I cannot emphasize Hawkwind's importance enough. Their counter = culture influence, pro-environment, anti-capitalist, utopian, optimistic stance.

They are the future we still hope to have.

— Steve Earles

ROB ZOMBIE — *The Great Satan*

Release Date: February 27, 2026

Nuclear Blast Records

Rob Zombie is a visionary who deserves a legendary introduction, yet his reputation as the reigning king of industrial horror precedes him. On February 27, 2026, Zombie returns via Nuclear Blast Records with *The Great Satan*, a 15-track masterclass in cinematic mayhem that proves he hasn't lost an ounce of his macabre edge.

A RELENTLESS SONIC ASSAULT: The album opens with a classic Zombie-esque soundscape—dripping with atmosphere and cryptic verbiage—before detonating into "F.T.W. 84." It's a high-octane opener where Ginger Fish's pounding percussion meets Rob's signature vocal grit. With an anthemic chorus—"*Fuck the world, this is 1984*"—and seamless production transitions, it sets a blistering pace for the record.

The momentum is sustained through "Tarantula," a track so lean and aggressive it feels like a direct continuation of the opener. It clocks in at a tight 3:02, leaving the listener breathless and checking their player to see what just hit them.

THE STANDOUT ANTHEMS:

"I'm a Rock N Roller": Already a fan-favorite pre-release single, this track is the heart of the album. It captures that quintessential "Classic Zombie" groove—infectious, heavy, and tailor-made for arenas.

"Heathen Days": A short, sharp shock of a song that invokes the raw energy of White Zombie. Reminiscent of the industrial stomp of "More Human Than Human," the guitars and drums here are designed for maximum headbanging.

"Black Rat Coffin": A guitar-heavy standout that provides a literal "ear-pounding" for fans of Zombie's heavier, distorted roots.

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"Lord Acid Wolfman": Serving as the album's dark centerpiece, this track slows the tempo just enough to let the haunting atmosphere soak in, showcasing Rob's ability to pivot from chaos to controlled, eerie tension.

CINEMATIC WORLD-BUILDING: True to the Zombie aesthetic, *The Great Satan* is interspersed with surreal audio interludes. From the trippy existentialism of Track 5 to the prophetic messaging of "Welcome to the Electric Age" (Track 12), these clips aren't just filler—they are the glue that holds this nightmare together.

The journey concludes with "Grave Discontent," a one-minute atmospheric finale that wraps the narrative in the only way Rob Zombie can: with a cinematic sense of dread and dark storytelling.

THE VERDICT: While every album has its deep cuts, *The Great Satan* is a remarkably consistent ride. Even the briefest tracks, like the 90-second blast of Track 13 or the guitar-driven "Unclean Animals," contribute to an album that feels like a relentless fever dream.

If you are a devotee of the Zombie legacy, this record is a triumph. It's a high-speed collision of horror and heavy metal that won't disappoint.

Rating: 9/10

"A masterclass in industrial horror. Rob Zombie continues to redefine the genre with a record that is as fast as it is filthy."

— Stan Schinners, Broken Neck Radio
brokenneckradio.com

GRAVEMASS — *This Is the Way*

Release Date: March 6, 2026
End Game Records

When a band features alumni from titans like 3 Inches of Blood, Zimmers Hole and Revocation, the expectations aren't just high—they're astronomical. Vancouver's Gravemass doesn't just meet those expectations; they incinerate them. Their debut LP, *This Is the Way*, is a 30-minute masterclass in sonic violence, proving that three decades of collective experience in the West Coast scene has been sharpened into a lethal edge.

THE TRACKS: The onslaught begins with "Slaves to Pain," arguably one of the most punishing opening tracks I've heard in years. The drum work feels like a physical assault, perfectly synchronized with Mayan Hate and Murderer of Colonizers' razor-sharp riffs. Lorde Heathen's vocal performance here is staggering, complemented by structural breaks that give the listener just enough room to breathe before the next beating.

The momentum carries straight into the title track, "*This Is the Way*." It's a rhythmic juggernaut that forces a rhythmic headnod before devolving into full-on kinetic chaos. Heathen's versatility is the secret weapon here; his ability to scale from guttural growls to piercing highs remains some of the best in the business.

"Horned King" stands out as a mid-album peak, radiating a dark, infectious energy that captures the "evil" aesthetic the band promised. Later, "Fallen" hits with a mid-tempo, crushing weight that provides massive Bolt Thrower vibes—a high compliment in the world of death metal.

The final stretch, including the devastating single "Gravemass" and the closing ritual of "Poison Temple," ensures the album never lets up. At a lean 29 minutes and 41 seconds, there is zero filler—only pure, high-speed execution.

THE VERDICT: *This Is the Way* is a flawless debut. It manages to feel nostalgic for the golden era of death metal while sounding fresh, mean, and modern. If you crave music that is "brutal, angry, fast, dark, and evil," this is your new obsession.

Essential Tracks: "Slaves to Pain", "Horned King", "Fallen".

Rating: 10/10

UPCOMING LIVE DATES: Catch Gravemass live this summer at the Loud As Hell Open Air Festival 2026 (July 31 – August 2) in Drumheller, AB, alongside Fallujah and Allegaeon.

Official Site: gravemass.com
Label: endgamerecords.com

— Stan Schinners, Broken Neck Radio
brokenneckradio.com

JOHNNY TRASH — *Belly of the Beast*

Catchy catchy songs, creative dynamics and chorus after chorus make this Vancouver band a must see live act to be reckoned with, an album worth your hard earned bux for sure. My roommates were singing along almost immediately and through a tequila buzz it was apparent they appreciated and approved immediately. My buddy was fully immersed and said this band would kick fuckin ass live and he was gonna look them up for any local shows so he could go and see them. I'm a fan of great music and this is punk but it's also rock n roll. I am now a fan as well. Whatever genre they are dipping into I approve, as will you. Give them a listen.

Johnny Trash is multi-talented with great vocals, collaboratively layered hooks and strong production. Each member shines through adding depth and charisma kicking in the oomph and the girth to thicken this into a very viable band and sound. Let's say pro and ass kicking just so you get the point. The guitar solos are ripping good.

Belly of the Beast is loud and unapologetic, it's the new soundtrack for fun and energy at parties and live events in whatever city or town you are in. Song after song of true catchy anthems made for the modern underdogs. Like I said, give it a few listens and I guarantee you'll agree. Great band, great dynamics and kick ass songs. Every band member delivers talent and obvious dedication. Thumbs up.

— Matt Norris

SIX FEET UNDER — *Next to Die*

Formed in 1993, x Cannibal Corpse frontman Chris Barnes's Six Feet Under have released 15 albums of genre ripping no holds barred Death metal, and new album *Next to Die* is another monster of brutality. Guitarist Jack Owen lays down the best riffs in metal, punishing and menacing and the rest of the band pulverize the senses. This is pure headbangability, masters of the mosh pit and a non stop intensity you'd expect from a voice that defined a genre and continues to wave the flag.

It's a wall of repetition on the parts of Barnes though, and man I bet his old throat hurts like fuck after doing this live. He has one note and he growls and gurgles like a drowning demon inside of that one note. The band is playing their ass off and that much is guaranteed but by song ten the repetition vocal gets a little old. The instrumental sections are like a breath of fresh air giving the songs room to expand and dimensionalize. The last song on the album "III Wishes" is by far the best track and most unique, it should have been third on the album not last.

This is death metal for fans of true death metal. No questions asked. The band is on fire regardless of a one dimensional aging Chris Barnes, but he suits the songs and could still possibly still try to hit a second note or two or an extra octave. It's a great album.

— Matt Norris

ALIEN ORCHESTRA — *Under My Pale Skin*

Album opener and title track "Under my Pale Skin" feels like art happening in real time, it's genuine and not unlike being submerged in an epic adventure. It's finding a mission of tranquil yearnings and indulging in the epicness through music and its emotional limitlessness. These are instrumental movements and pieces in time really that shine, mesmerizing and beautifully tantalizing. Mellow yet intense, simplistic in its diverse arrangements and emotional consequence.

Formed in 2014 this is experimental songwriting combining elements of jazz, hints of metal, and cinematic grandeur with a sound fit for movie scores and late nights of stargazing and dream analyzing. Tremendously talented musicians creating a soundscape for the awesome. Introspection and art, creativeness and a calm understanding of ear candy and orchestration.

— Matt Norris

KERRIGAN — *Wayfarer*

For fans of true heavy metal, look no further. Torchbearer has riffs that would fit perfectly on *Somewhere in Time* or even a Queensryche album. Comparisons aside, the song Asylum could fit on a modern day Helloween album. Guitars for days, soaring vocals and a modern production. This band could play any of the big metal festivals and first time listeners would have horns in the air, as do I. Elements of the new wave of British heavy metal reign supreme, and the Steve Harris references can continue in a most respectful way.

Endless elements of the great 80s best bands shine through and live on with a modern sound and fresh zip. I love true metal and to me this band is true metal, great guitar solos, huge choruses and brilliant musicians. It's power metal but it's also got 80s rock radio undertones. For fans of everything hard and heavy from a past era into the future. This style is in renewal. Why? Because it rocks and it's actually fun to listen to. With all the clone vocaled growling metal bands competing in aggression and minimal complexity this is a breath of fresh air. Why? Because the singer can actually sing and the songs actually have dynamics.

Go listen to the song "Blood and Steel" if you love metal and you will be happy you did. Horns up and volume loud. True metal played by pros.

— Matt Norris

SPIRITUAL AGGRESSION — *Ghost of my Dead Wife*

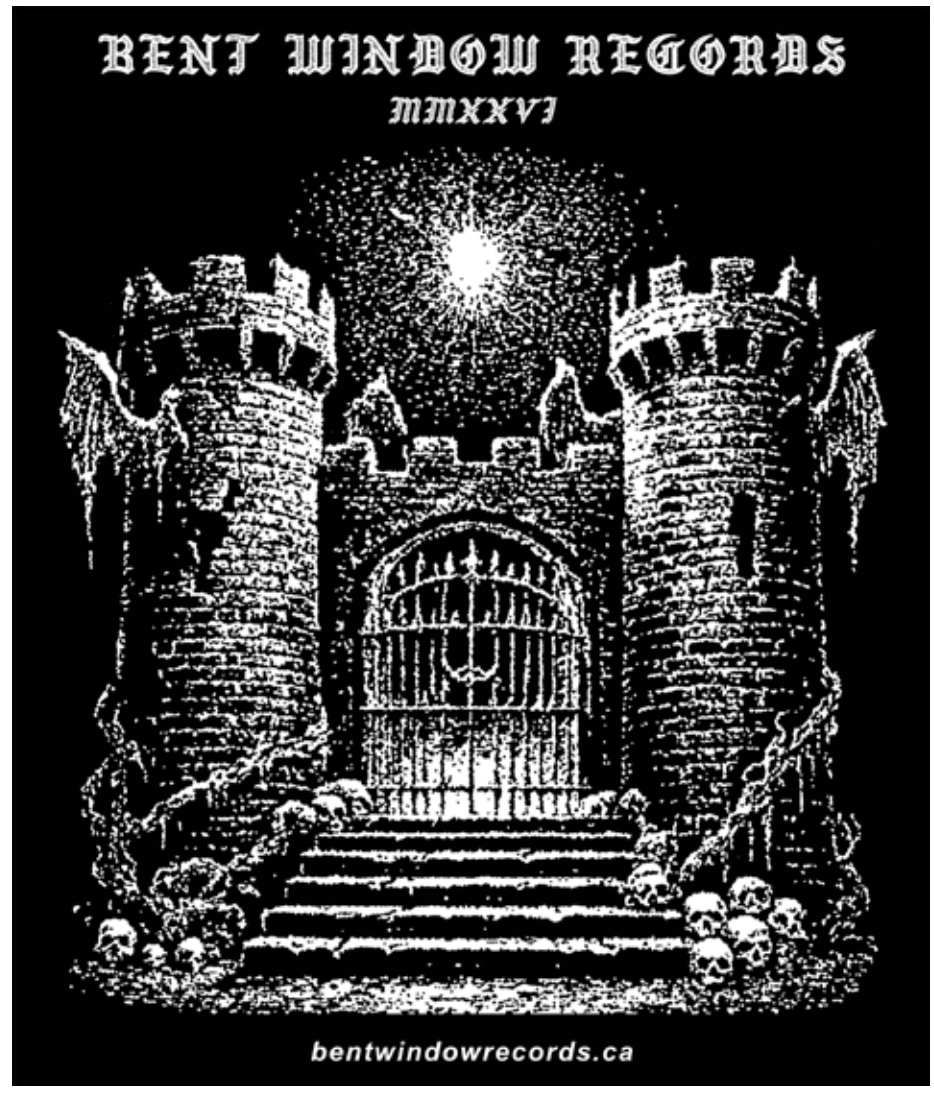
I'm a little in shock, and I'm in awe of the horrible reality of till death do us part. When we are young and in love you never picture really watching the one you love possibly dying young, or for that matter ever even wanting them to age.

This album is a perfectly produced metal album, genuine awesome riffs and the band to blow away your senses. The singer is a rabid beast, but the lyrics shine through clear and easy to understand which I am always thankful for. The band is extremely talented and intense.

The lyrics, the lyrics. They are about trying to survive daily life after having the one you love pass away too young. It's a concept album of tragedy and self introspection and heartbreak. It's about trying to stay strong and find yourself in bouts of pure devastation. The concept is beyond deep and the music is as mesmerizing as it is profound and something humans have to deal with. It hurts me deeply to feel a pain so self introspective and to share it with us is a step towards a strength we need in moments of lonely bleak desolate loss. I feel the pain and this album really made me shed tears. It's an emotional rollercoaster, a musical monster, a psychological ride through our lyrics writers darkness and attempts at finding an answer most will never find.

This album is a beautifully dark reminder to love truly and deeply and respect the concept of live each day with respect because time is short and love and true friends are the world to each of us. Great metal, very intense to say the least. This band oozes pure talent and a pain I hope most will never feel.

— Matt Norris



Absolute Film Reviews

WHEN NASH THE SLASH RISES AGAIN, HE'S NO REAPER

Nash the Slash was never the sort of artist who could fade into the background. Wrapped like a mummy, hidden behind dark glasses and a rigid top hat, he turned himself into something between a horror host, a phantom, and an electronic prophet. Even for those who know the name better than the music, his image lingers. Tim Kowalski's documentary, *Nash The Slash Rises Again!*, understands that power immediately, presenting a thoughtful and deeply researched portrait of a musician whose work always felt ahead of its time.

Though Nash did not invent theatrical rock spectacle, he belongs in the same haunted corridor as early Pink Floyd and Alice Cooper. His style ran on a parallel track, embracing shock, mystery and noir without feeling derivative. Horror was never just an influence in his work, it was part of the language. Whether or not he appeared onstage channeling The Invisible Man, the performance itself always carried an unsettling dramatic weight.

What makes this documentary especially compelling is how clearly it frames Nash as more than a cult musician. He was also an innovator who reshaped how music could interact with film. His scoring work, including *Highway 61*, forms part of that legacy, as does his approach to reimagining silent cinema through electronic accompaniment. That instinct to modernize older works without stripping away their spirit reveals an artist deeply engaged with the past while still sounding like the future.

Kowalski also highlights the range in Nash's music. Progressive rock, punk attitude, experimental electronics, and electrified violin all collide in a body of work that resists easy categorization. He was not just playing instruments, he was building tools to produce the sounds he heard in his imagination. That restless inventiveness made him more than a performer. It made him singular.

The film is at its best when considering how Nash carved out his own path in an industry that often did not know what to do with him. When corporate interests pulled away, he kept going, handling his own promotion and defining himself on his own terms. Interviews with artists and admirers including Gary Numan, Iggy Pop, Steve Hillage, Don McKellar, and others reinforce the reach of his influence.

Rather than treating his death as the centrepiece, *Nash The Slash Rises Again!* honours the life and work first. The result is not a eulogy, but a vivid reminder that Nash the Slash remains one of Canada's most distinctive and uncompromising artists.

4 Stars out of 5
— Ed Sum

MARTY SUPREME

Set in the 1950s, Marty Reisman strives for ping pong world domination in this Josh Safdie directed action-humor twisty flick. Expect the unexpected, and without giving too much away... accidents happen! Accidents with life altering consequences. A movie about going for what you want as hard as you can. For the good and the bad. Inspirational with a hint of caution.

Odessa A'zion and Gwyneth Paltrow serve as love interests complicating Marty's path. A surreal performance by Kevin O'Leary (I didn't know *The Dragon's Den* had actors on the panel) serving as high powered rival.

Even though this is a great movie, there is a key element that earns my personal repulsion. I hate the Leonardo DiCaprio / Tom Cruise style protagonist played by Timothée Chalamet. The type of man that always has a genius solution immediately available and always charms the girl. The slick salesman politician type. Yuck! And speaking of yuck, there is one scene... just be prepared when they start talking about taking honey back to camp...

— Luke Lester

EVIL UNBOUND

Evil Unbound Unit 731 is one of those topics where filmmaking becomes a no-win situation. If you show too much, people call it exploitation porn. If you show too little, people call it sanitized or dishonest. If you dramatize it, people call it propaganda. If you go clinical, people call it cold or disrespectful. So it's basically impossible to "win."

That's why most Unit 731 films end up being relegated to extreme cinema circles. *Men Behind the Sun* and *Philosophy of a Knife* may contain historically accurate elements, but their extreme content automatically limits their audience. *Philosophy of a Knife* in particular plays more like a barrage of fragments — brutal snippets of atrocity without much of a linear story to hold onto.

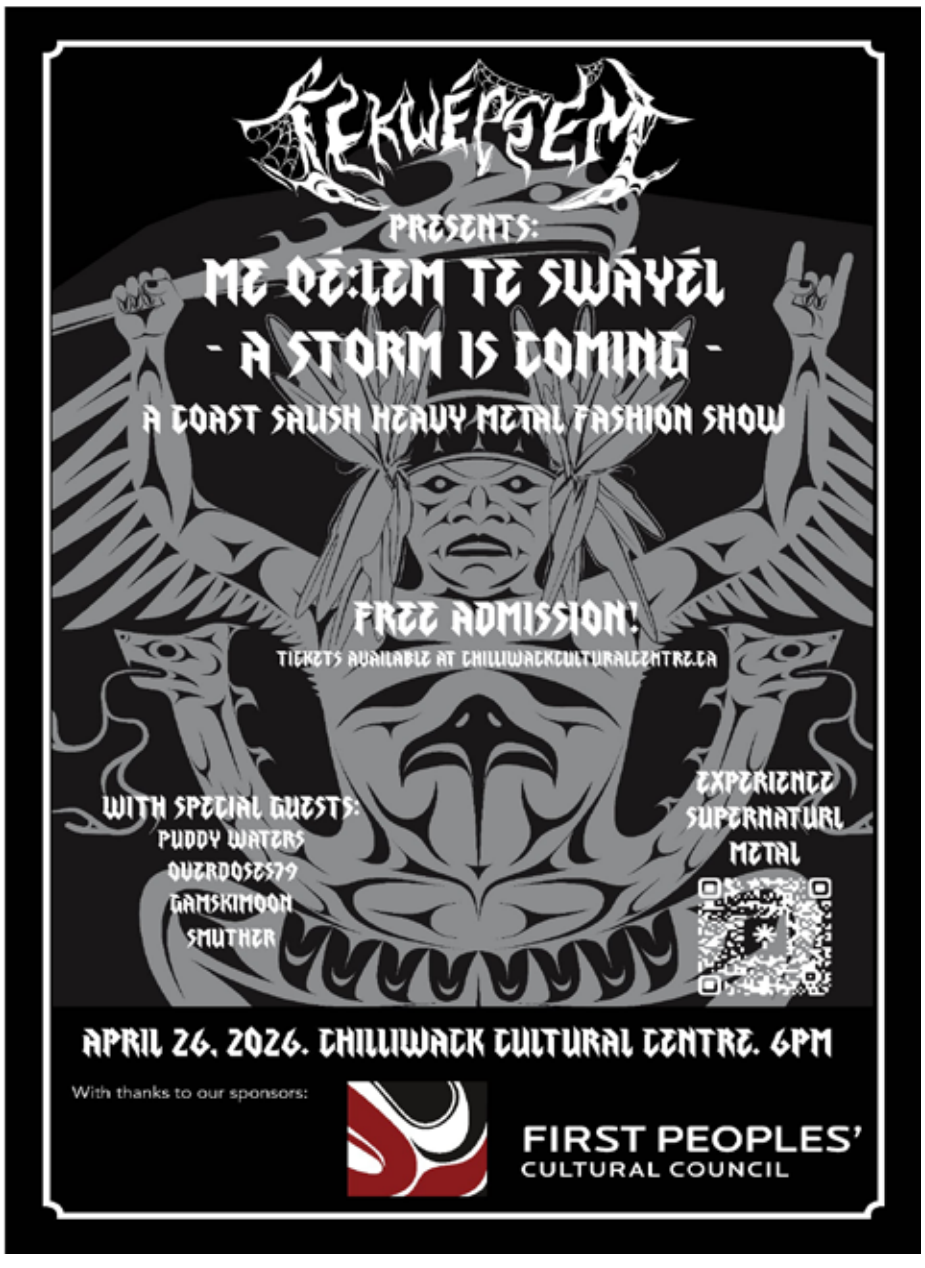
Which is what makes *Evil Unbound (731)* such an interesting entry: it tries to do what most of these films don't — build a legible narrative with characters you can follow through the machinery of horror. And as someone who has visited the Unit 731 museum in Harbin, I recognized many of the devices and methods depicted here. At the museum they're presented as dioramas, letting your imagination fill in the blanks. Here, we actually see actors tied to crosses as a dirty bomb is dropped in front of them.

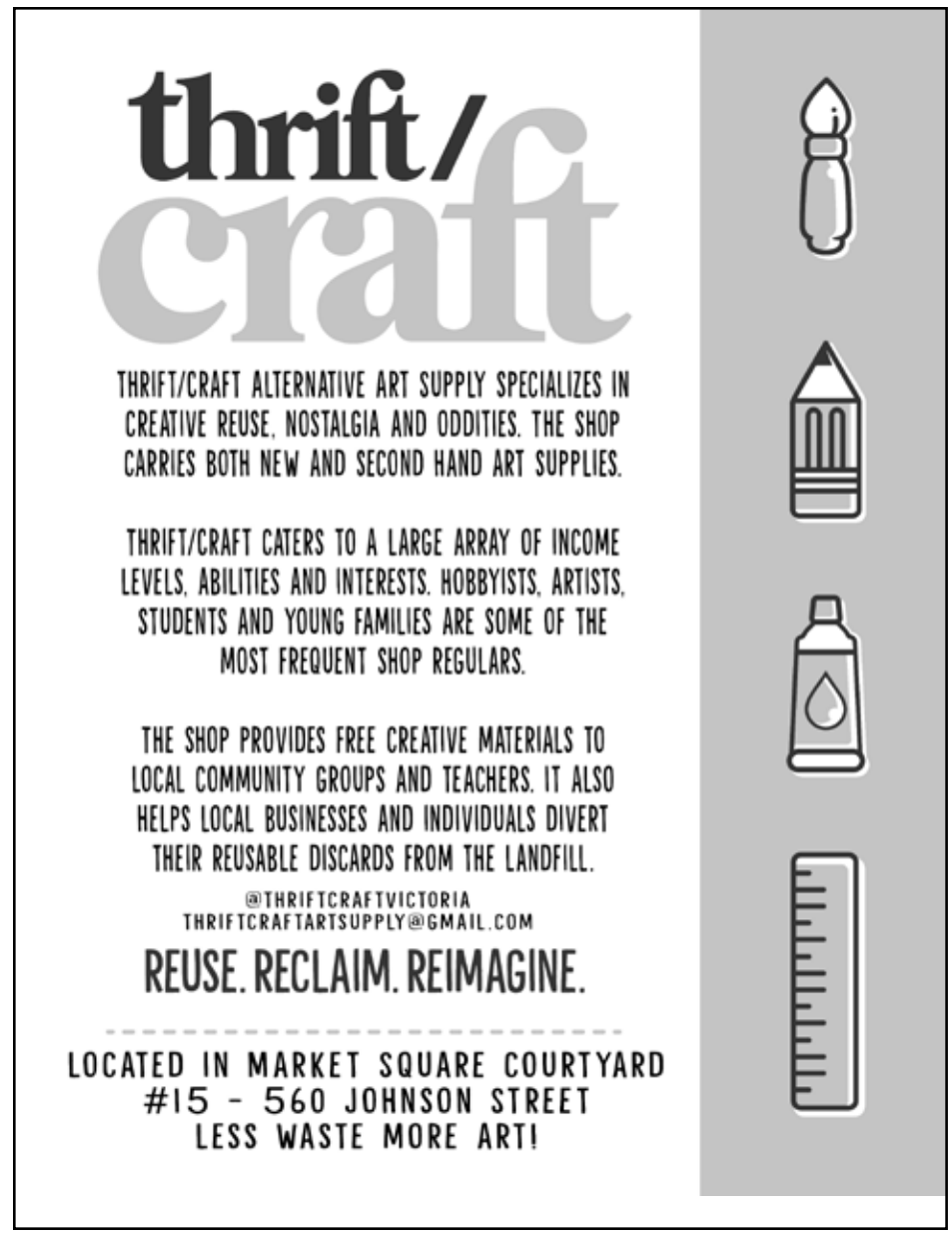
The film's approach is also its biggest point of controversy. It's undeniably dramatic and emotionally guided in the way Chinese historical war dramas tend to be — complete with "Remember my name!" pleas from the characters and an extended ending clearly designed to wring tears from the audience. But I can't deny that, from a writing perspective, the decision to anchor the story around people trapped inside the system is what makes it watchable as an actual film rather than a sequence of horrors.

The reaction to the film has been polarized. *Evil Unbound* broke records in China (over 108 million yuan in pre-sales and roughly 269,000 screenings on its first day), yet it reportedly saw close to a 90% drop between its first and second weekend — with much of the online discussion focusing on "review bombing." I understand the backlash, but I also don't really get what people expected. A mainstream Chinese film about Unit 731, released on a major historical anniversary, was never going to be tonally neutral.

In the end, *Evil Unbound* isn't the most extreme Unit 731 film — and it isn't the most "objective" either — but it is the one with the highest production value: the *Titanic* of Unit 731 films. It might be the most narratively functional one. That alone makes it worth discussing.

— Ryan Dyer





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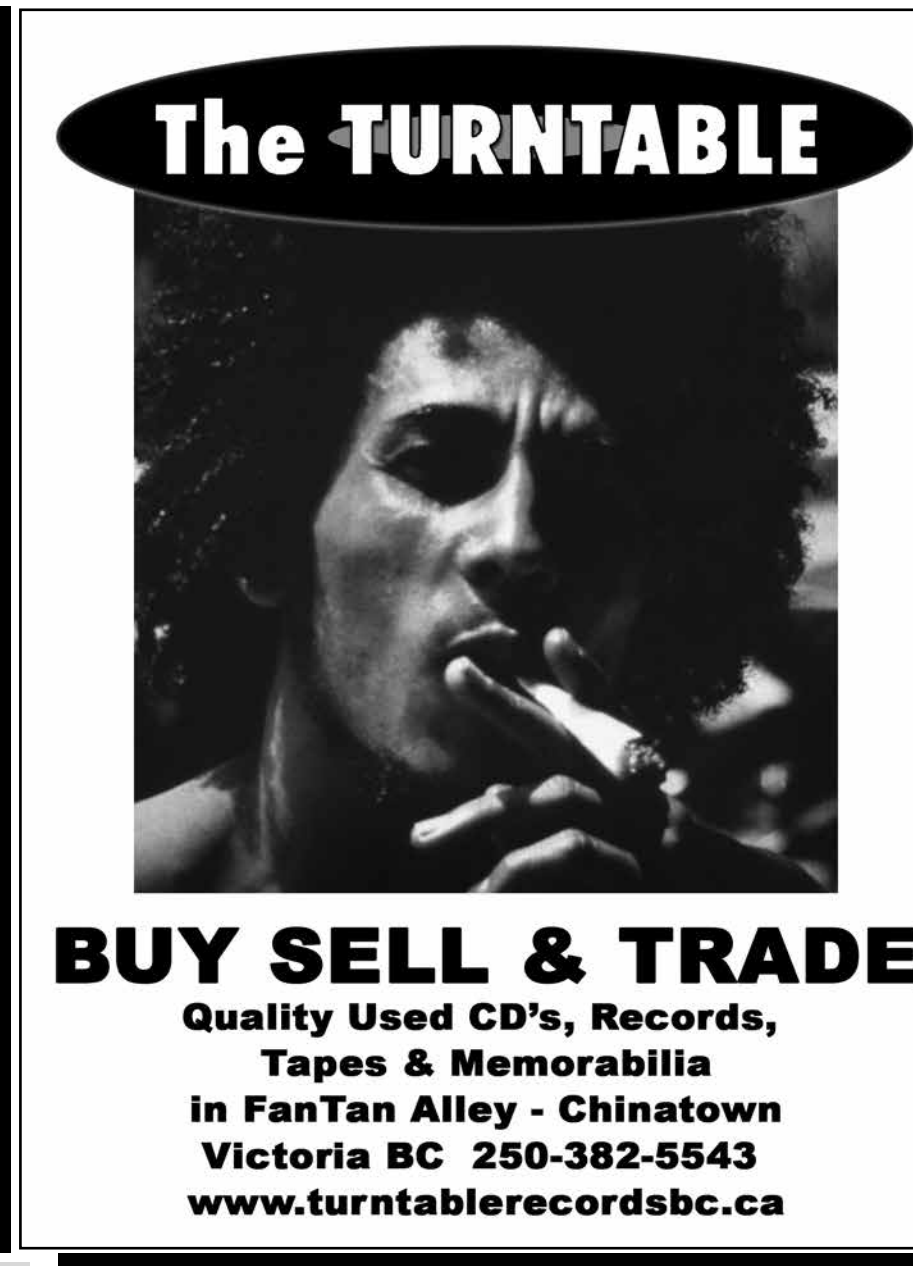
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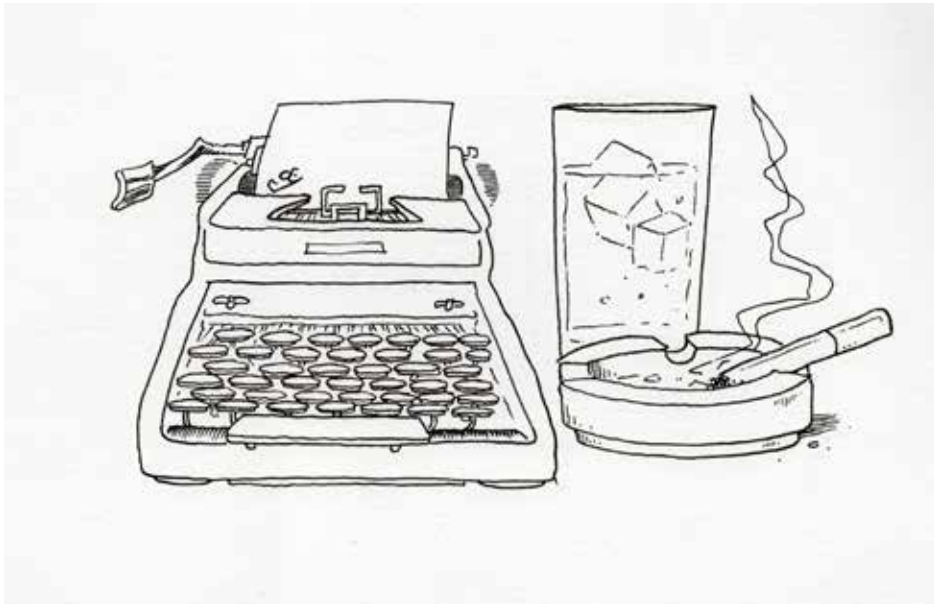

Tips & Tales from the Typewriter: DÉJÀ VU

By david eugene everard

It was precisely 4:20 pm when Ira Hunter delivered the April edition of *Absolute Underground magazine* to Flitcraft's Bar & Grill. I watched him leave, nodded to Billy Sparks and ordered a Double Déjà Vu with a twist. After a brief pause to settle an outstanding tab, Billy carefully placed an oversized, two ounce shot glass on the paper napkin in front of me and winked. I was leafing through AU's annual marijuana issue when Crowbar Louie (who was setting up the stage for a show later that night with his band, The House Wreckers), came over and asked me if I could give him a hand with something or other out back on the loading dock.

On our way there, Louie pointed to a handbill he had designed for a Flashback Friday event they played at the Purple Onion (with support from Soul Junction and Echo Flex) a few weeks ago. As we continued down the hall, he reminisced about the time he spent working as a freelance illustrator for a variety of alternative magazines back in the '70s.

Once we arrived at our destination, Louie pulled a Zippo lighter from the pocket of his self-patched blue jeans, found a spark, and brought that well-rolled blunt into play with ritualistic ease. Satisfied with the effort, he proudly announced that what we had here was a righteous new strain of Alaskan Thunderfuck called Déjà Vu; because, as he happily extrapolated, this shit will get you so fuckin' high you'll swear to god you just smoked the same joint twice. He smiled in anticipation, inhaled deeply and held his breath until his eyes started to spin. Exhaling as slowly as possible, he blinked once, coughed twice and passed it my way. As we traded tokes, tips and tales, he brought me up to speed on the evolution of underground comix.

The movement began, he said, with crudely drawn, eight page, single stapled, black and white comics known as *Tijuana Bibles*. Pornographic by nature, they were printed in the United States from the early '30s until pin-up magazines like *Playboy* and *Gent* arrived on the scene in the mid '50s. Cheaply produced, these palm-sized publications relied on the fictionalized sexual escapades of movie stars, comic strip characters or any other well-known public figure who could be exploited for a buck. Yet, despite their salacious nature, *Tijuana Bibles* provided a basic template that legitimate titles like EC, with their over-the-top, graphic depictions of horror and the contemporaneous humour of *Mad Magazine* later improved upon.

These, in turn, provided inspiration for up-and-coming creators like Gilbert Shelton (*Rip Off Press*), Robert Crumb (*Zap Comix*) and Trina Robbins (*Wimmen's Comix*); along with her contributions to *Tits & Clits*, a publication that offered a valid pro-feminist rebuttal to the over sexualization of women in the male dominated underground press.

However, as far as Louie was concerned, when it came to jokes about getting high, the Fabulous Furry Freak Brothers ruled the roost.

Shelton's iconic cast of characters included Freewheelin' Franklin Freek, Phineas T. Phreak and Fat Freddy Freekowski; along with his unnamed cat, a thin-skinned, orange tabby with an attitude issue. Eventually, Fat Freddy's Cat was given a feature strip of his own with storylines involving alien abductions, militarized cockroaches and a long-standing gag about defecating directly into his owner's precious pair of stereo headphones.

Not surprisingly, most of their adventures centered around the pursuit of pot for both pleasure and profit. With that in mind, the Freak Brothers were often seen hunting down Dealer McDope for an ounce or two of Acapulco Gold, heading out to Hiram 'Country' Cowfreak's farm to score a truckload of his legendary homegrown grass or simply out-witting their arch-nemesis, Norbert the Narc (quite possibly the most inept government agent in the history of the DEA.

Crowbar Louie took a last toke, held it in until he started to turn several rather interesting shades of candy apple red, exhaled methodically and then slowly disappeared behind a large, aromatic nebula of thick, white smoke as he told me how Carlos Castaneda's pseudo shaman, Don LongJuan, had once rescued the 'Brothers' from a Mexican jailhouse.

I coughed once, blinked twice and turned to thank him for both the toke and a tale well told, but he was nowhere to be seen. As I slowly navigated my way back to Flitcraft's, I noticed that the handbill had gone missing as well.

Thankfully, there was plenty of room at the bar, so I sat down, ordered a Double Déjà Vu, and watched as Ira Hunter delivered the April issue of *Absolute Underground magazine* at precisely 4:20 pm. After a brief pause to settle an outstanding tab, Bartender Billy Sparks carefully placed a somewhat familiar looking shot glass on the freshly folded paper napkin in front of me and winked.

Artwork by Gareth Gaudin

Crossword Answers

FOUR-FOUR TIME

1 P	2 U	3 N	4 K		5 A	6 S	7 T	8 A		9 R	10 O	11 C	12 K	
13 A	T	O	I		14 S	T	A	R		15 E	L	L	A	
16 G	E	T	A		17 S	A	M	E		18 A	C	O	R	19 N
20 E	R	O		21 M	O	T	I	F		22 L	O	V	E	R
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JOHNNY TRASH

Belly of the Beast

Vancouver based punk outfit Johnny Trash have officially released their long-awaited new album *Belly of the Beast*, a record the band describes as nearly two years in the making.

Recorded at Rain City Records, the album represents a major step forward for the band, both musically and personally. "Man what a ride recording the album was. Truly one of the hardest things I've ever done. Amazing studio with the best staff in Matt And Emily. They really helped guide our work to the final product."

Belly of the Beast is described as a sociopolitical punk record with a sense of fun still intact — something the band feels reflects both the current state of the world and the spirit of punk rock itself. Musically, the album explores a range of punk styles while maintaining the band's signature mix of high-energy punk and melodic rock influences.

Originally formed in 2018 as a gritty punk reinterpretation of Johnny Cash, Johnny Trash has since evolved into a fully original band with its own identity and sound. The band was re-formed in 2023 by founder members Joe (Ireland) and DK (Wales), joined by Goose (Ottawa) and PhilGood (Montréal). Together, they've built a sound driven by bouncing bass lines, dynamic drumming, fast-tempo twang-influenced guitars and a gruff vocal delivery that blends punk energy with melodic rock influences.

Also featured on *Squamish Punk Night – The Compilation Vol. 6*, released in December 2025, the band continues to build momentum within the growing Squamish and Vancouver punk scenes.

With the album now available on Bandcamp and streaming platforms soon to follow, Johnny Trash are turning their focus to live shows — including their upcoming vinyl release party!

APRIL 9, 2026 in BURNABY at REVS Bowling

APRIL 12, 2026 in VANCOUVER at GREEN AUTO

APRIL 24, 2026 ***VINYL RELEASE CONCERT***
in SQUAMISH at BRACKENDALE ART GALLERY

johnnytrashband.ca
johnnytrash604.bandcamp.com
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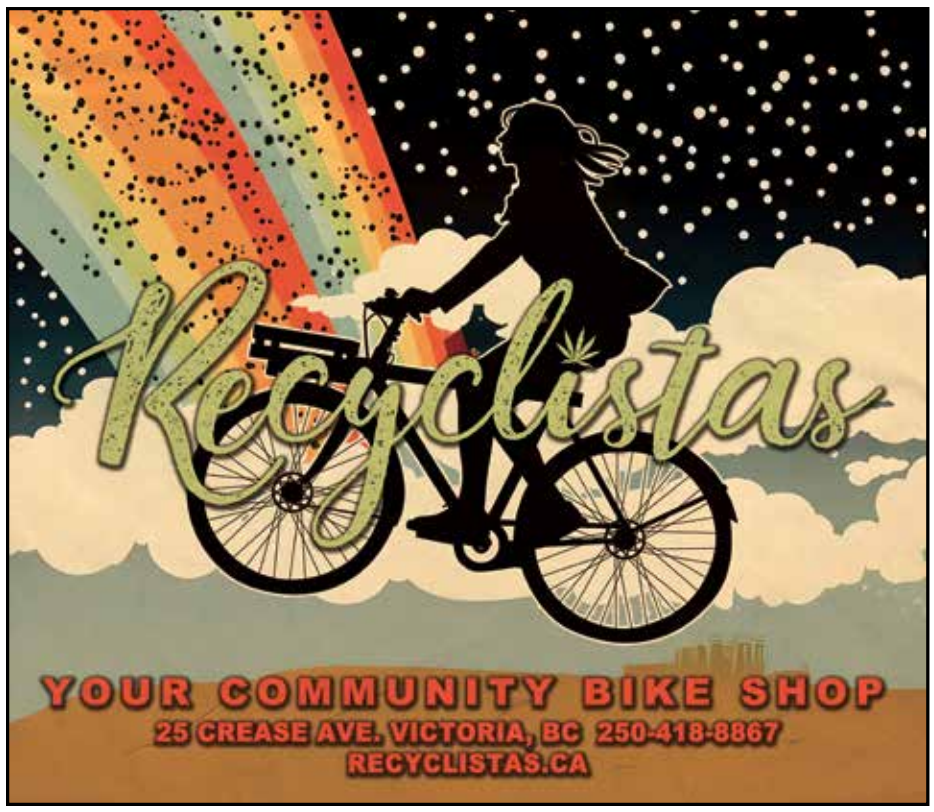

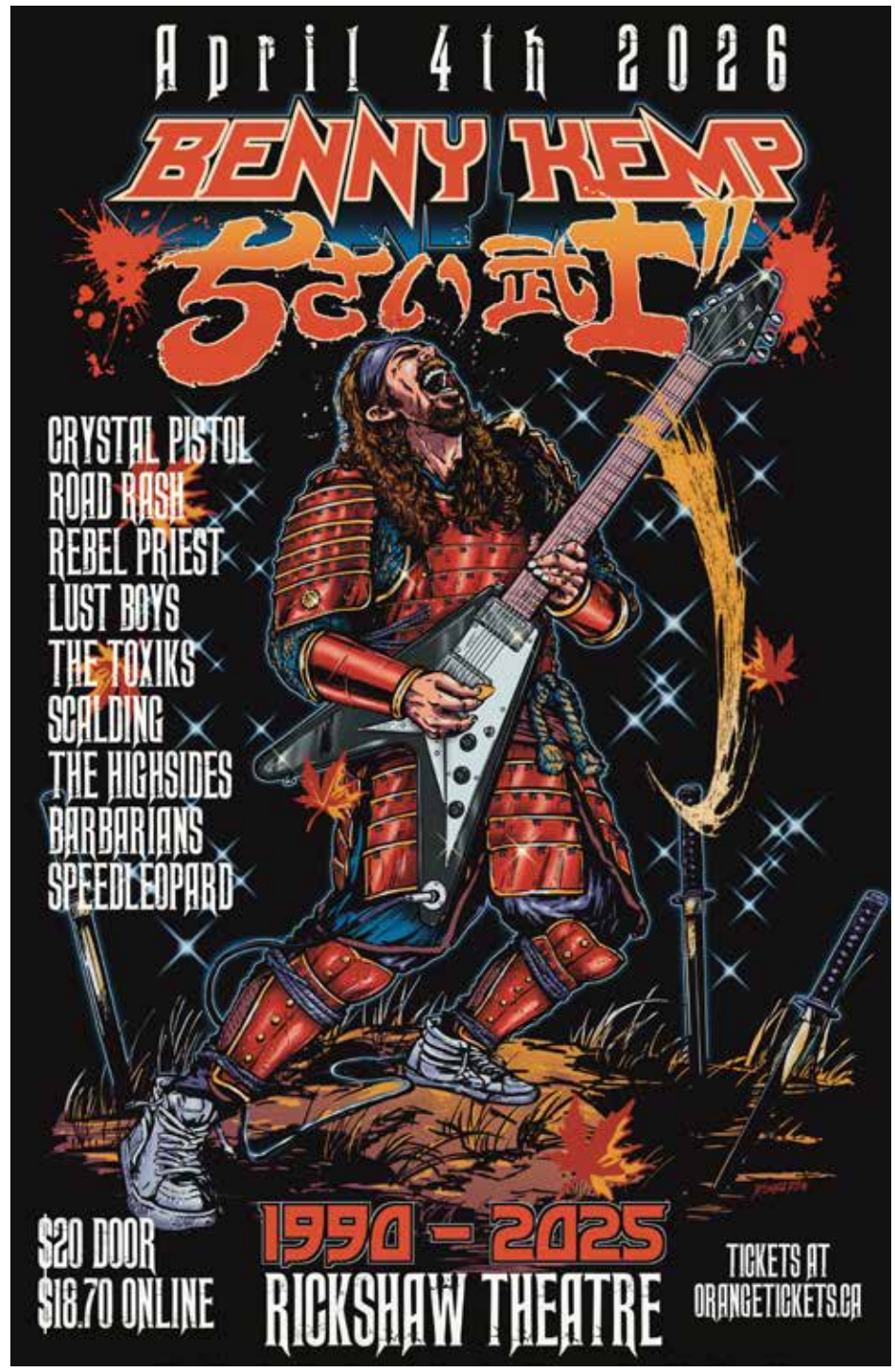

Absolute Live Reviews

BLACK LABEL SOCIETY / ZAKK SABBATH / DARK CHAPEL

March 17, 2026, Vancouver, BC, Orpheum Theatre

Presented by Live Nation

Black Label Society turned the Orpheum Theatre into a full-on metal sanctuary on March 17, with Zakk Wylde pulling double duty in a night that never really let up.

The evening opened with Dark Chapel, led by BLS guitarist Dario Lorina. The set was short but sharp, with "Afterglow" quickly grabbing attention. Lorina stepped out of the sideman role and owned the stage, showing off a gritty vocal that caught plenty of people off guard.

Then came Zakk Sabbath, Wylde's love letter to Black Sabbath. The trio ripped through staples like "Children of the Grave" and "War Pigs," with Wylde stretching solos into wild, high-speed territory all while jumping into the crowd several times. The set ended up turning into both a tribute and a celebration.

By the time Black Label Society hit the stage, the energy was already high. They leaned into both new and classic material, including the crushing "Name in Blood" from their upcoming album Engines of Demolition. The biggest reaction came during "No More Tears," a track Wylde helped write during his years with Ozzy Osbourne, which had the entire room locked in.

The whole night was loud, a little chaotic, and exactly what fans showed up for.

What a great night.

BLS forever

SDMF!!

— Allan Johnson

MEGADETH / ANTHRAX / EXODUS

February 15, 2026, Save-On-Food Memorial Centre, Victoria, BC

Presented by Live Nation

If you weren't in the building for this one, you missed a straight-up thrash masterclass from Megadeth, Anthrax, and Exodus.

Getting into the venue was fast — way faster than expected — which is always a solid way to start the night. Merch line was chaos but the crew behind the table were absolute machines. Prices? Yeah… brutal. About $70 plus tax for a shirt. Did I still buy an Exodus shirt? Of course I did. No regrets.

Seats were killer — basically floor energy, just one step up. Perfect view of the carnage.

Only downside on the venue side: security felt a little loose. Saw more bottles and cans on the floor than you'd normally expect at a show like this.

Exodus — Set the Night on Fire

I've seen them before with Zetro, so seeing them fronted by Rob Dukes was something I was really looking forward to — and he absolutely delivered. Dude commands a crowd like few people can.

Behind him, Tom Hunting was an absolute war machine. The pit started early and never really stopped.

Only complaint? They deserved more stage time. Period.

Anthrax — pure thrash energy

Anthrax hit the stage and just kept the momentum rolling.

Scott Ian, Joey Belladonna, Jon Donais, and Frank Bello were locked in like a band that's been doing this at the highest level for decades — because they have.

Singalongs, crowd interaction, riffs for days. Exactly what you want from Anthrax.

Megadeth — Next Level Performance

I've seen Megadeth multiple times before. Always good. Sometimes great.

This night? Different beast entirely.

Dave Mustaine played like a man possessed. Vocals drifted a little here and there, but honestly — after everything he's been through — completely understandable. His guitar work though? Unreal. One of the best live performances I've personally seen from him.

By the time they closed out the night, the place was completely spent — in the best possible way.

Final Verdict

Only real complaint: Exodus should have had a longer set.

Everything else?

10 / 10 show.

If this is the bar being set for this tour, do yourself a favor — don't miss it when it hits your city.

— Stan Schinners, Broken Neck Radio

MEGADETH / ANTHRAX / EXODUS

February 20, 2026, Calgary AB, Saddledome

Presented by Live Nation

In this instance, the advertisement matched the show, as Vic Rattlehead riding a moose across the cold Canadian tundra matched the reality of walking across the cold Calgarian parking lot towards the Saddledome for this late February concert. Now, let's get this out of the way: is this Megadeth's final Canadian tour? I'm going to treat this show like it was. At the end of the concert Mr. Mustaine did say to drive home safely because he wanted to see us again. Again? Nevermind, this is the last one. It must be.

Exodus have been through Calgary four times in four years, the past three with Steve "Zetro" Souza, who endeared himself to Calgarian fans by always wearing a Flames jersey. Well, he's out and Dukes is in, but Dukes came prepared, also wearing a Flames jersey on this night, albeit the ugly horse design. This version of Exodus felt less like a friend and more like a violent force, bringing to mind their opening slot on the Slayer/Rob Zombie tour in 2011. In the span of 25 minutes, we got "Toxic Waltz," "Bonded by Blood," "Blacklist" and others. The merch line wrapped around the entire damn Saddledome. I'm sure some people missed half the Exodus set for a T-shirt. In 1983, Exodus would've had a word for them: posers.

Anthrax was allotted an hour set and an extra 30 minutes can do wonders in making an impression. The "fun" band of the night, they also piled on their most known songs including "Caught in a Mosh" and "Indians," in which they restarted the war dance section so that those sitting in section 230 could get off their asses and move. Belladonna, all smiles and high notes, kept things loose without sacrificing intensity.

If this was Megadeth's final Canadian tour, Mustaine performed like a man who knew it. Soft-spoken between songs, hard to hear at times, grateful and faintly melancholic. Dave seems to be mixing up the setlist on this tour. For Calgary, he slid in new songs "Let There Be Shred" and "I Don't Care," cuts "Trust," "Mechanix" and "Tornado of Souls," and the staples of "Peace Sells" and "Holy Wars" to close out the night. It was good to see Megadeth headline a packed house and witness the appreciation for Mustaine's craft one final time. As a metal composer, his work is already immortal. It may just be that with his bowing out they will be treated similarly to classical compositions and future generations will then swing to the "Symphony of Destruction."

— Ryan Dyer

SEBASTIAN BACH / BLAZE CISCO / STITCHED UP HEART

March 4, 2026, Victoria, BC, Capital Ballroom

Blaze Cisco and Stitched Up Heart opened the show for Sebastian Bach. Both great opening acts. Blaze Cisco with their alternative sound from LA had great stage presence and great songs. Stitched Up Heart was very Ministry-esque with their stage lighting and presence. Lead singer Alecia 'Mixi' Demner - wow could she sing. A vocal rage to be inspired by. She could scream, she could growl and when she sang her voice belted out with melodic elegance. Well suited for their genre of music. Check them out on YouTube. Both great bands.

As for Sebastian Bach, the man is still as powerful as a front man as he ever was his stage presence and interactions with the crowd. He kept the show moving along smoothly as all the fan favorites were played. He even had a small tribute to the Fallen rock stars of the past month including Ozzy Osbourne with a powerful rendition of "I Don't Know". He even played Frisbee with the audience, then signed the Frisbee and threw it back out for a lucky fan.

I saw them play here about a year and a half ago at the start of the tour, and now that they've been playing together for some time, they have really gelled as musicians and were pretty tight on this night. If you ever get the chance, Sebastian is one of the best frontman of rock and roll with a voice to match.

— Rouge

VICIOUS CYCLES / FUZZPEDDLER / GLOBAL FAKE

March 13 & 14, Victoria, BC, Wheelies Pub

Vicious Cycles played Wheelies on Friday and Saturday night. I had the opportunity to go to both shows and what a great band to see. Their ska punk attitude and style is fun to watch on stage. You can tell they're five long time friends the way they banter with each other between songs. They have a lot of fun and you can tell they love what they do. Non-stop energy from start to finish. They have great sing along songs. It's just so much fun to watch them. The use of the instrument, the Theremin (Star Trek opening theme song) fits in nicely with their music and gives it a unique sound for a band that is as unique as the Theremin itself. I highly recommend going to check them out if you ever get the chance. You will be entertained and will want to hear more.

As they played two nights, there were two different setlists which was great. The fresh variety of each night made each stand out on its own. The opening band on Friday was a local Victoria band called Fuzzpeddler, a doom metal trio at its finest, who play hard and gave their all to their music. Saturday's opener was another local Victoria band called Global Fake another trio who had their own unique sound and played it to their heart's content. You can check out Fuzzpeddler and Global Fake on YouTube or Spotify.

— Rouge

DEVIN TOWNSEND - THE MOTH

March 28, 2026, LIVE STREAM

Sometimes an idea brews in your head for a long time and you don't feel fulfilled until it is fully realized and put out there into the world in some form or another. *The Moth* was an idea Devin Townsend had for a decade and on March 28, 2025, he unveiled this idea, a composition about human experience from birth to death, to the world via livestream from Groningen, Netherlands.

The Moth sees Townsend moving closer to a Danny Elfman-esque type of performer/composer, with it being a rock opera performed with the Noord Nederlands Orkest symphony orchestra, including seventy musicians, a sixty-member choir, and Devin's own band (which includes Mike Keneally, Joseph Stephenson, Darby Todd, and James Leach) who serve as a backbone for the heavier moments of the piece.

Townsend standing in front of the symphony sans guitar brought to mind his early days fronting Steve Vai's band, allowing him to emote more of the story through more of a performative role, interacting with the mainly sitting musicians aside from his band and additional vocalists like Ou's Lynn Wu. The rock opera on stage was more or less strictly musical besides, though video screens behind Townsend brought the lyrical content of *The Moth* to light during the performance. The livestream's cameras focused mainly on the musical performances though, meaning that those who attended The Moth in person and focused more on the videos were likely to pick up on the storyline better.

The musical and lyrical content of *The Moth* itself was another in the long line of Devin Townsend compositions (this going about an hour and twenty minutes) which will be studied and examined in the years to come. It was inspiring to see so many performers working together with Townsend on stage to bring this vision to life, especially considering that it is still what you'd expect to hear from Townsend, a form of "Devy Metal" - Devin's signature voice and dynamics, (on first listen, a few of Townsend's recurring motifs could be heard in some arrangements, such as a portion from "Babysong") with a symphony and choir as the backing instruments.

Townsend's music may be like a butterfly to his fans, but in the grand scheme of things he is still the Canadian dark horse, the moth that flutters below the grand spotlight of unanimous worldwide recognition, though this achievement has brought him that much closer to it.

— Ryan Dyer

THE STORY OF NIRVANA WITH EL NIVEN

April 4, 2026, Jubilee Auditorium, Calgary, AB

Stars & Stories Live have been bringing tribute/storytelling concerts to the Jubilee Auditorium for the past few years, mostly focused on country and classic rock. Shows centered on Johnny Cash and The Eagles are a couple I've caught before. The format is straightforward: a semi-chronological walk through an artist's career, mixing live performance with narration to highlight why they mattered.

Choosing Nirvana feels like a shift toward heavier material, especially with an Ozzy Osbourne show teased beforehand. These productions aren't strict tribute acts—there's no real attempt at visual imitation. The goal is the story, not the likeness. El Niven leaned lightly into the aesthetic (a bit of flannel here and there), though only the lead guitarist occasionally resembled Cobain. The rhythm guitarist/vocalist, with his mustache and stage presence, didn't quite channel Kurt. Ironically, it was late in the set, during "Where Did You Sleep Last Night," sung by the lead guitarist, that things came closest to feeling like we were back in 1993.

— Ryan Dyer

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12" MLP | 1968 | Garage Psych
Nanaimo, BC, Canada

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SE65

PYTHON
Shock Treatment b/w Pink Ladies
7" 45 | 1972
Hard Rock / Proto Punk
Vancouver, BC, Canada

SE54

DEBT OF NATURE / CREPITUS
Imminent Purge, Eternal Unrest
12" LP | 1991-94
Extreme Death Metal
Victoria, BC, Canada

NEW! SE64

SUBURBAN SLAG
Suburban Slag
7" EP | 1980
Punk Rock
Calgary, AB, Canada

SE52

SIKPHUXZ
Sikphuxz
7" EP | 1980
Punk Rock
Victoria, BC, Canada

SE49

THE NERVE
Self Autopsy
12" MLP | 1978
Punk Rock
Edmonton, AB, Canada

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BLUDGEONED PIGS
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Punk Rock
Vancouver, BC, Canada

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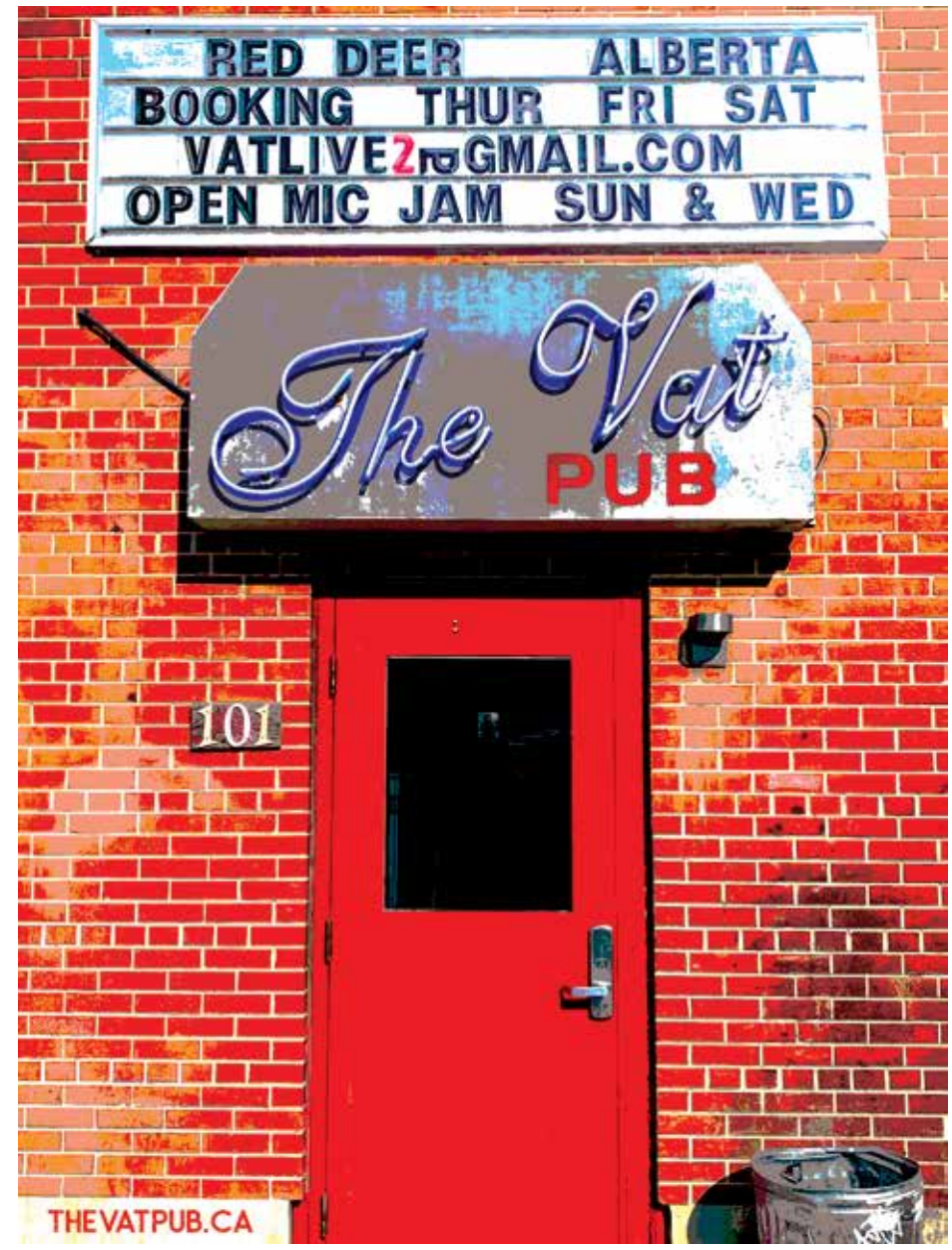

TRIUMPH / APRIL WINE — Live Review / Tour Preview

Triumph reunites with April Wine.

Yes folks. TRIUMPH has rebooted the 1970's 80's Canadian band after a 30 plus year break. Special guests April Wine will open the concerts.

Triumph hit the scene in 1976 as a rock n roll trio. Gil Moore on drums and vocals and Mike Levine on bass soon added Rik Emmett on guitar and vocals and the trio made several albums of blissful glorious magic. Radio hits "Lay It On The Line", "Somebody's Out There" and " Magic Power" among many more made them a culture staple on Canadian radio. For me? Grade 7 until grade 12 seemed to have a new album every year. I saw them in Vancouver on March 16th 1985.

I interviewed Rik Emmett in 2020 and that made a 2 part story for this very magazine. Triumph has decided to reunite for a spring tour in 2026. It's called TRIUMPH - The Rock and Roll Machine.

RELOADED 2026 w/ APRIL WINE: The tour starts in early April in Florida and then starts a 10 date cross Canada tour starting on April 22nd in Sault St. Marie to Calgary on May 8th.

April Wine has been a Canadian music staple since 1969 when songwriter Myles Goodwyn and his friends the Henman's formed the group. Along the way there were many changes in the lineup yet Myles remained as the key songwriter though out their career. They started as a 4 piece band, yet in 1977 Myles recruited Brian Greenway as a guitarist and harmony singing songwriter. Their new album 'First Glance' was released in 1978. They toured non stop until 1984 releasing 4 more LPs and radio friendly smash hits. The band took a 8 year break and came back in the early 90s. April Wine released 16 albums in all.
In 2023 Myles Goodwyn retired and April Wine was asked to continue with Brian leading the way. Sadly, Myles passed away in December of 2023.

In 2024 April Wine started to tour and during the show newcomer Marc Parent (who replaced Myles) told the audience how grateful he was to be performing to honor Myles Goodwyn.

And of course Brian holds the legacy as he's been in the band for 49 years.
I had the opportunity to interview Brian this past February 23rd and it was almost 2 hours of history. So much was discussed indeed.
In the next issue I will include many insights of the questions discussed. Of all the history there have been 17 members in total.

I recently saw April Wine on Friday the 13 of this year in Victoria at the McPherson Playhouse and they were so great. Highlights? Yes. The opening song "Oowatanite" opens with a drumstick on a firebell and the whole audience is instantly captured for the night. Marc plays Myles parts to a Tr.

Drummer Roy Nichol and bassist Richard Lanthier complete the new group.

What I love most is the deep cuts that they play from a long history of songs.

"I'm On Fire For You Baby" and "Rock And Roll Is A Vicious Game" brought back memories and I had goose bumps.

Brian's harmonica solo was a showstopper. "Weeping Willow" was also incredible. Sung by the drummer in honor of original bassist Jim Clench. All 19 songs made the evening fantastic.

Meeting the band was fun too.

April Wine will be performing 10 songs as the opening act for Triumph on this tour. I almost think that April Wine could headline next year with Triumph opening the show.

I'm very grateful to be attending the show on May 5th in Winnipeg and am looking forward to a group photo with Triumph.

I have family from Winnipeg too. Originally I am from Toronto...

As is TRIUMPH!

April Wine has also been the best opening act as of late. They've opened as of late for B T O; Uriah Heep, E.L.O. and now the reunion of Triumph.

As Rik Emmett wrote once...

"Rock Out...Rrroll On."

— Clark'Super'Mantei

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DEAD BOYS Live Bootleg Series Mark Cleopatra's Punk 50th Anniversary

THIS YEAR, PUNK ROCK TURNS 50, and Cleopatra Records is celebrating with a bang. Los Angeles–based Cleopatra, long known for preserving the first wave of punk rock giants, is honoring the milestone with a series of special releases, starting with Cleveland legends the Dead Boys.

Though punk's earliest days in New York City and London were chaotic and revolutionary, the impact is undeniable: a movement that demanded change, upended musical norms and gave voice to a generation. Cleopatra Records may not have been there at the start, but over the past three decades, the label has become a custodian of punk history, keeping alive the work of The Damned, Johnny Thunders & The Heartbreakers, Cherie Currie, Sid Vicious, Eater, The Vibrators, The Dickies, The Germs and more.

Now, Cleopatra's ongoing connection with the Dead Boys reaches a new peak with The Dead Boys Bootleg Series, an archival collection capturing Stiv, Cheetah, Johnny, Jeff, and Jimmy at their absolute prime. The first two installments, *Down On The Bowery* (1977) and *From The Sleaziest Catacombs* (1978), will be released May 22, 2026, across two CDs and a raucous double-vinyl edition.

Recorded live at CBGBs, the Dead Boys' favorite stomping ground, both shows brim with raw energy, sweat, and the unrelenting savagery that defined their reputation. Classic tracks such as "Catholic Boy", "Caught With The Meat In Your Mouth", "Son Of Sam", "Ain't It Fun" and the anthemic "Sonic Reducer" roar through the recordings, proving that the band's ferocity still resonates nearly five decades later.

The Dead Boys Bootleg Series is only the beginning. Later in 2026, volume three, *Time Warp Baby*, will drop, keeping fans immersed in the chaos and intensity of the band's live performances. Meanwhile, Cleopatra encourages exploration of past releases, including the band-approved demos collection *Younger, Louder, Snottier*, the 1986 reunion N*ight Of The Living Dead Boys*, the Dead Dolls' benefit gig, and rarities compilation *Ignorance In Action*.

Fans also have more to anticipate with the promise of a brand-new Dead Boys album on the horizon. For a band that shook the foundations of punk rock 50 years ago, the sound remains as immediate and electrifying as ever.

As Cleopatra Records celebrates a half-century of punk, the Dead Boys remind us that some music doesn't age—it simply grows louder.

cleorecs.com

BON VICTORIAGE! Returns for Season Two, Exploring Victoria One Ride at a Time

Victoria's streets, stories and communities take centre stage once again as *Bon Victoriage!* returns for its second season, continuing its unique blend of travel, conversation and local storytelling.

Created and hosted by Victoria-based filmmaker, tour guide and media producer Johnny Brenneman, the documentary video podcast series invites local guests to hop into a pedicab and explore the city while sharing personal stories, community perspectives and the places that matter most to them. The result is part travel show, part interview podcast and part community documentary, all set against the backdrop of Victoria, B.C.

Season Two premiers April 14 on TELUS Optik TV Video on Demand and Stream+, with the first episode also launching on the show's YouTube channel the same day. New episodes will continue to roll out weekly through early June, each featuring a different guest and a different perspective on the city. The series is produced with support from TELUS STORYHIVE, which funds local film and media projects across British Columbia and Alberta.

The guest list for the new season reflects the show's eclectic and community-driven spirit, featuring a wide range of voices including members of legendary Victoria punk band DAYGLO ABORTIONS, record-breaking ocean swimmer SUSAN SIMMONS, Federal MP WILL GREAVES, and other local personalities, artists and community members. Each episode focuses not just on the guest, but on the neighbourhoods, streets and landmarks that are meaningful to them, offering viewers a different way to see familiar parts of the city.

The concept behind *Bon Victoriage!* is simple but effective: put interesting people in a pedicab, drive through the city, and let the conversation and surroundings shape the story. The show has been described as a mix between *Comedians in Cars Getting Coffee*, Anthony Bourdain's *Parts Unknown*, and *Humans of New York*, combining humour, personal storytelling, and local culture into a format that feels both casual and meaningful.

Before moving to Victoria in 2021, Brenneman spent 15 years working as a radio host, travel journalist, podcaster and radio play producer with the Austrian Broadcasting Corporation in Vienna, working in both German and English. His background in travel media and storytelling is evident in the show's relaxed interview style and focus on personal perspectives and place-based storytelling. The series is co-directed and shot by cinematographer David Malysheff of Gamut Productions, who brings decades of film and video production experience to the project.

At its core, *Bon Victoriage!* is about community and perspective — showing that even when travelling the same streets, every person sees the city differently. By highlighting diverse voices and neighbourhood stories, the series aims to give viewers a broader understanding of the community around them and the people who help shape it.

As the second season rolls out over the coming weeks, the show continues to build a portrait of Victoria that goes beyond tourism and postcards, focusing instead on the people, stories and communities that define the city from the inside out.

bonvictoriage.com

POACHED RECORDS

Poached Recs & Step Kid Events present: POACHED PUNK FEST 2026

By Martin Splatterpants

You vile sacks of excrement thought I was gone, didn't you? Wrong again. I'm sure by now you're all used to it. I was away on maternity leave after birthing a kidney stone the size of a basketball. No one in the office even had one taste when I brought it in for lunch on No Shirt Friday last week. Fucking unappreciative, silver spoon-fed swine. The Egg suspended me a while back for "workplace misconduct," but I still think photoshopping a wild boar with hot dog utters eating a pile of dead babies for the record label's annual family X-mess cards was a great idea. How was I supposed to know a boar ate Randy's baby last summer? I never get invited to the lake.

Enough small talk. I'll get you all caught up, and then I've got a hot date with a can of Dust-Off and a bag of mushroom soup.

Poached Fest is MAY 8/9, 2026, in Saskatoon.

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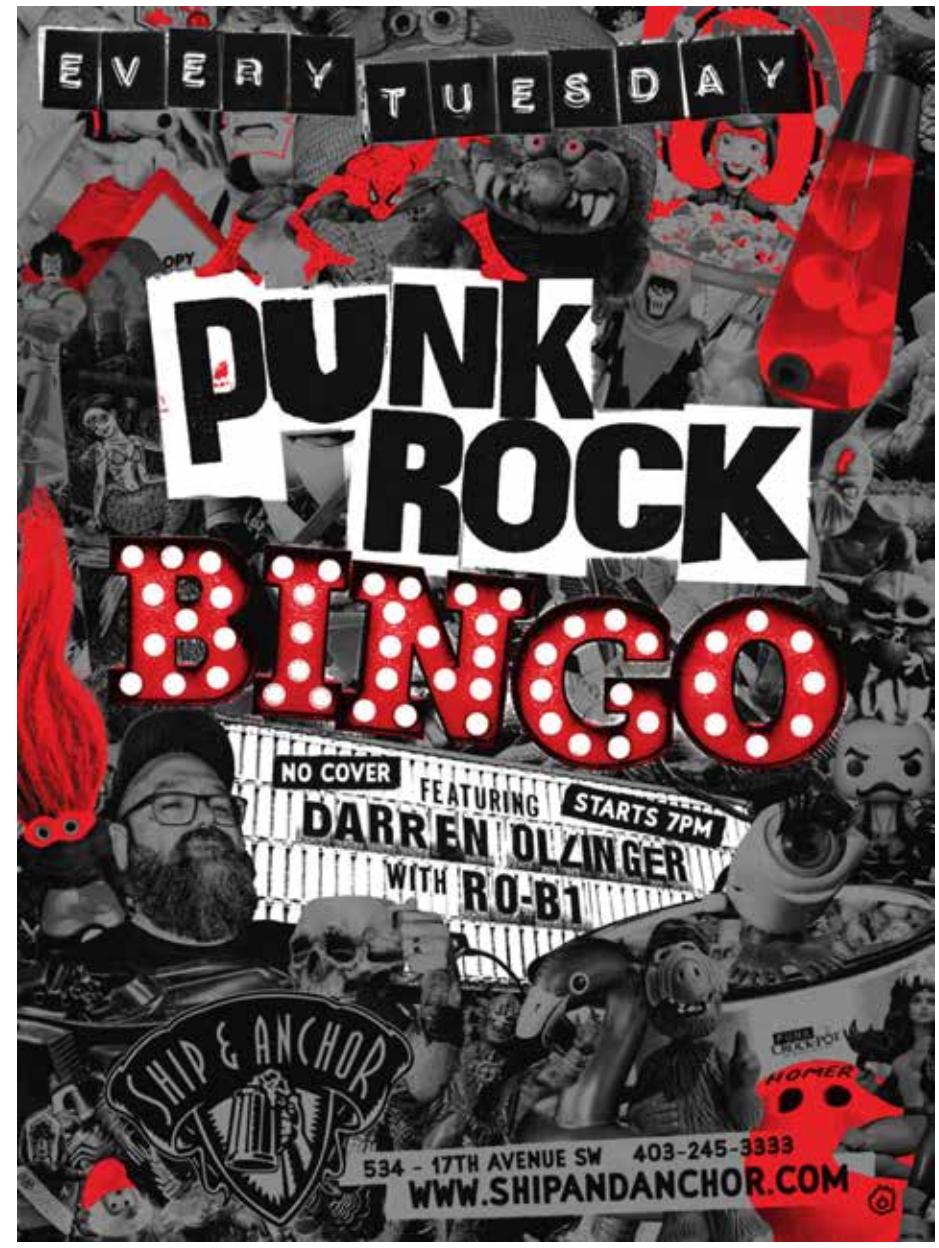
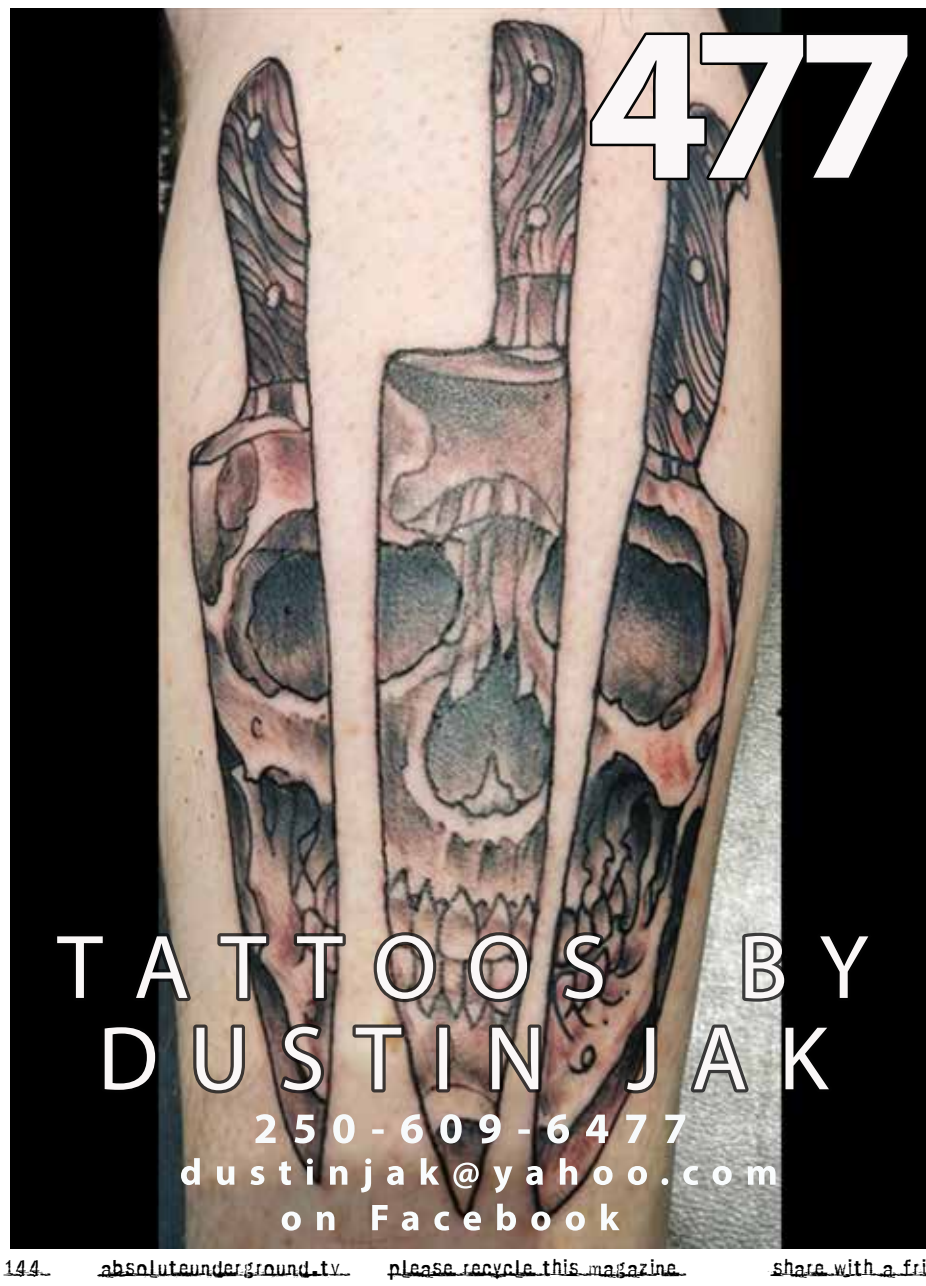
Hit up the Poached Records social media pages for links.
Instagram: @poachedrecords

Big love to the homies:
Step Kid, Attack With Force, Fortress Rehearsal, Totally Rad Skateboarding Co., Black Cat Tavern, Green Room, ROP Tattoo, Crow 9, Tuckers, Squints, Vinyl Diner, Noktvrnal Nails, Monsterhed, Crate Diving, Tooth & Nail, Beefy, CFCR/TV Party, *Absolute Underground*, Good Guys Go Grind, Unrest Rec., *Inspite Magazine,* Ryse Fingerboards





Canadian Prog Rock is alive and well with ART GRIFFIN'S new Soundchaser CDs

Interview by Ian Gregson

Absolute Underground: Welcome Art Griffin to *TransAtlantic Express Radio Show* – so tell me about yourself.

Art Griffin: I am based out of Collingwood, Ontario. I've been a touring musician since I was 19, which is 1979, and spent the decade of the 80s always on the road. Most of the 90s was spent working on an original band called King Size and we did the regular rock of the day, sort of like Bon Jovi. But my background in things I like most in music was always Progressive. Yes is my favourite band and I was fortunate enough to see them many times in the 70s, and Brand X and all those sorts of things. You know, options, and that's one of my favourite artists of all time. I absolutely love Jean Luc Ponty.

That takes us up to the 2000s. I sort of stopped playing live at that point and over the course of time built up my home recording studio, which technically is a no-microphone studio — a project studio, but I do everything I need to do here right now. Drums and things are never done here.

Around 2013, a mutual friend introduced me to my guitar player, Kelly Carillac, and we hit it off. I had a bunch of instrumental tracks I was working on and asked him if he'd like to work on them with me. He said he'd love to. To finish, at the very last minute, another mutual friend introduced me to Victoria, the violin player. She really put it over the top for me. I said to my friend Murray, who was listening, "This is fantastic." He said, "Yeah, I know, but I hear violin in it." He goes, "I got a girlfriend from the Brad's on the rest of the tracks."

AU: Derek Sherinian is on one track, I believe?

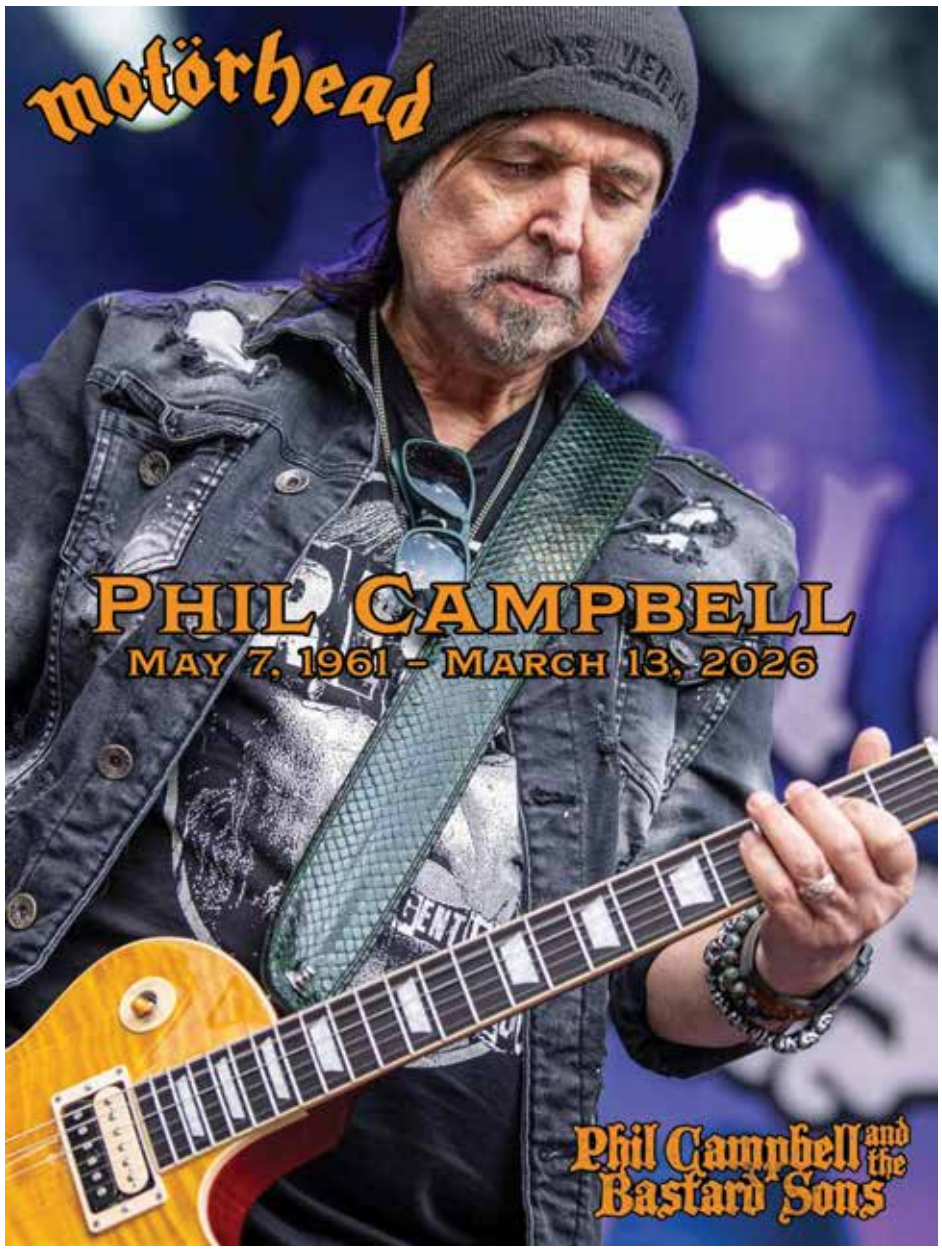
Art Griffin: I wanted a Hammond B3 solo, so I reached out to him and he said sure. I sent him the track and he got it perfectly.

With an amazing line up of classic prog rock musicians, Art's albums are well worth the listen and download.

For you closet prog rockers out there, **Art Griffin's SoundChaser 3 CD collection can be found online: artgriffinssoundchaser.bandcamp.com**.

Ian Gregson is the host of TransAtlantic Express Radio show, streaming on houseofprog.com Fridays 12–2pm Pacific, 3pm Eastern, and 8pm UK. The show is re-broadcast locally on CJSF 90.1FM Tuesdays 10pm and Thursdays 7am. CJSF is based at Simon Fraser University, streaming at http://cjsf.ca.

Submissions for the show can be sent to: iangregson62@gmail.com (any style is ok except for country and hip-hop).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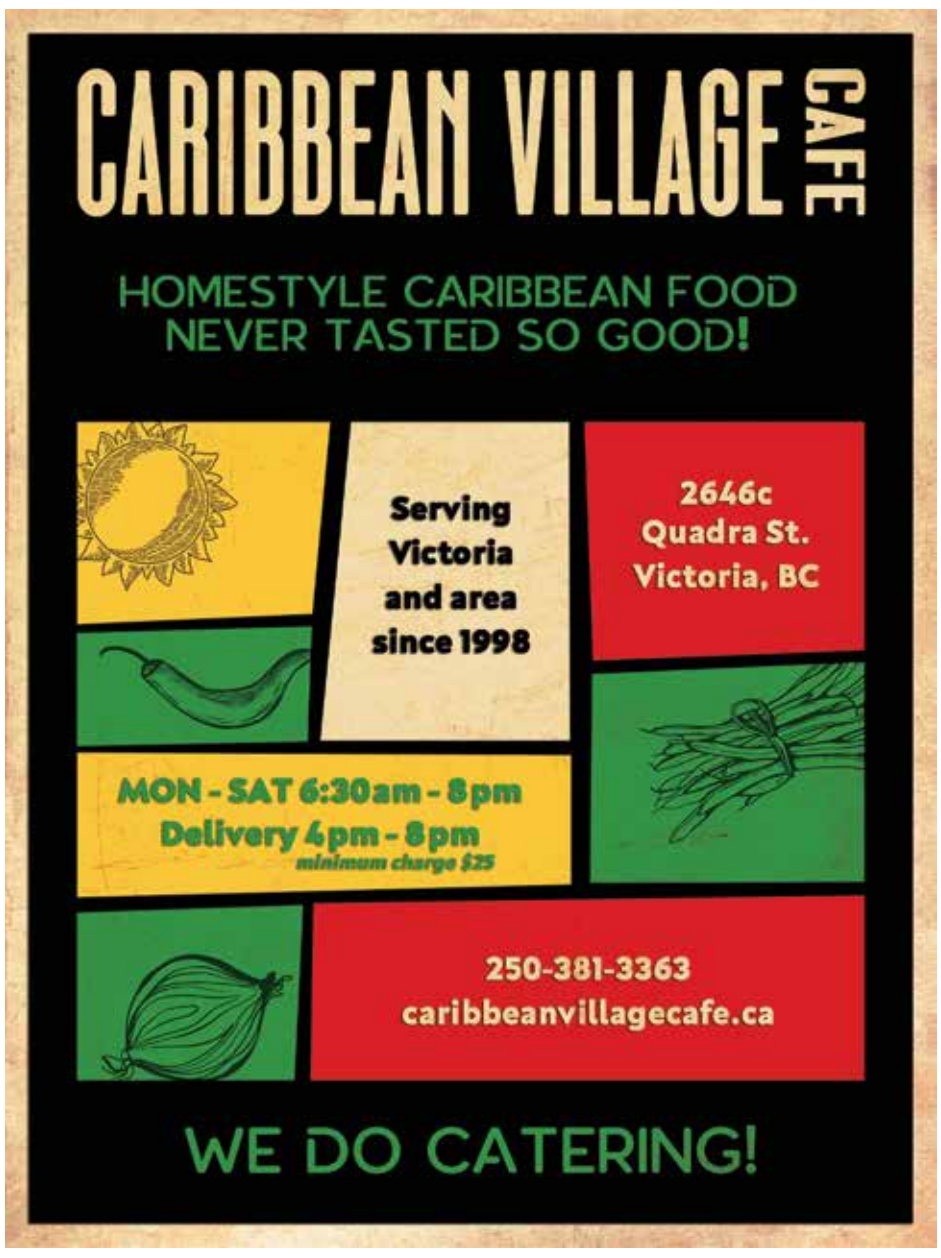
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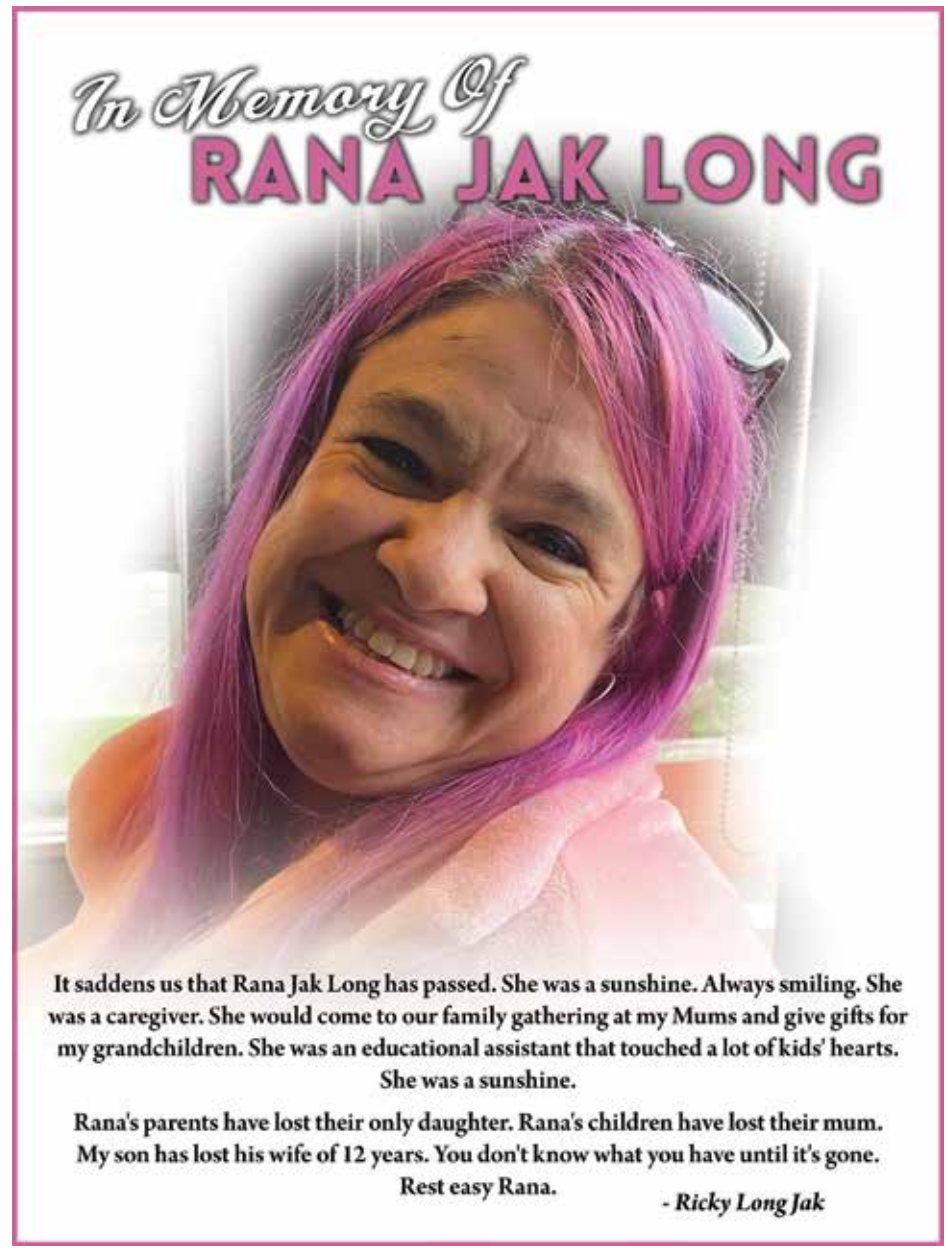
In Memory Of
RANA JAK LONG
It saddens us that Rana Jak Long has passed. She was a sunshine. Always smiling. She was a caregiver. She would come to our family gathering at my Mums and give gifts for my grandchildren. She was an educational assistant that touched a lot of kids' hearts. She was a sunshine.
Rana's parents have lost their only daughter. Rana's children have lost their mum. My son has lost his wife of 12 years. You don't know what you have until it's gone. Rest easy Rana.
- Ricky Long Jak

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