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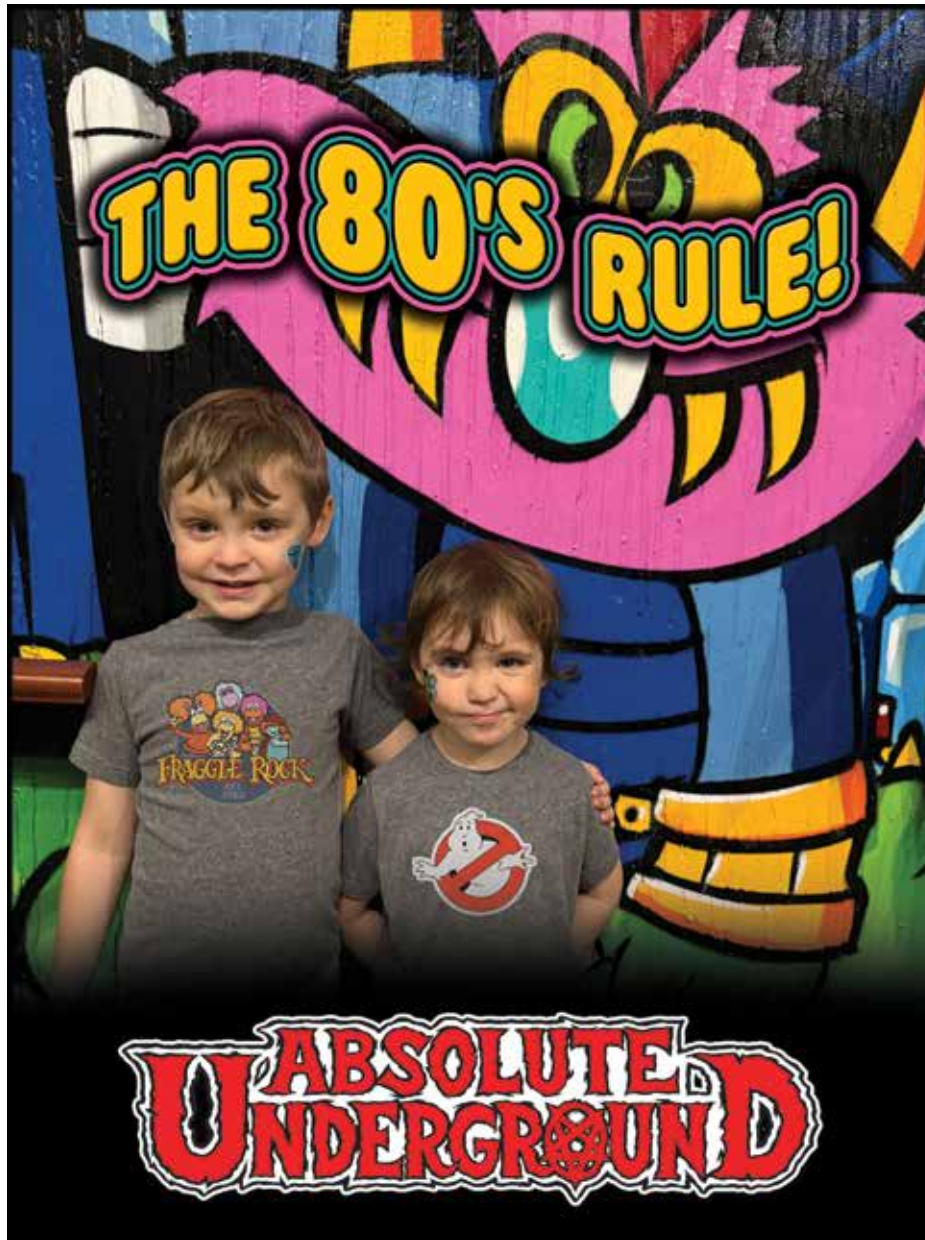
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

VICTORIA'S LOCALS ONLY - MUTUAL TRAUMA.....	6
CROSSWORD BY PAUL GOTT	9
MONTREAL MASSACRE - BOAR GOD	10
ARMSTRONG METALFEST - INTERVIEW WITH CO-FOUNDER JESSE VALSTAR.....	12
STOMP RECORDS - WINE LIPS	14
VANCOUVER VENGEANCE - WITHOUT MERCY	15
CALGARY CARNAGE - BAT LEATHER	16
SHR-EDMONTON - FAMOUS STRANGERS.....	17
TORONTO TRASH - GUTTER GIRL	18
SASKATOMB - PYTHONIC.....	19
ABSOLUTE ASIA - SCARE THE CHILDREN	20
INK SLINGERS - BIGGIE JAY - ROYAL ANCHOR TATTOO.....	23
TALES FROM THE DARKSIDE - NUKE 'EM ALL	24
ABSOLUTE HORROR - WELCOME TO '86	25
SHRED SESSION - SHEGLANK'D SHOULDERS	26
SHRED SESSION - LOGAN FULMER.....	28
SHRED SESSION - 1978 - SKULL SKATES RETROSPECTIVE	29
BUSINESS PROFILE - PLEASANT MOUNTAIN MUSIC	30
CHEST FEVER - 50TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE LAST WALTZ	31
NEW DAMAGE RECORDS - CANCER BATS	32
THE SOPHISTOS.....	33
CARTRIDGE HEART - LYFE SKILLZ - EVELYNS	34
SPACE QUEEN.....	35
LONGSHOT MUSIC - CELEBRATING 30 YEARS.....	36
PURE PUNK - BAD COP BAD COP	38
AIRBOURNE - JOEL O'KEEFFE	39
CHRISSY STEELE.....	40
HISTORY OF PUNK ROCK AROUND THE WORLD	42
ARMORED SAINT - JOHN BUSH	44
SOMETHING BETTER CHANGE - JOE KEITHLEY: FROM D.O.A. TO CITY HALL.....	46-47
1986 - IRON MAIDEN - SOMEWHERE IN TIME.....	48
1986 - BIG TROUBLE IN LITTLE CHINA	49
1986 - SLAYER - REIGN IN BLOOD	50
1986 - METAL MELTDOWN - DAVE LOMBARDO – PART 2	51
1986 - MEGADETH – PEACE SELLS... BUT WHO'S BUYING?	53
1986 - METALLICA - MASTER OF PUPPETS	54
1986 - CLIFF BURTON – AN APPRECIATION.....	55
1986 - TEAR IT DOWN: HOW CROSSOVER BRIDGED METAL AND HARDCORE PUNK	56
1986 - THOR REISSUES 1986'S RECRUITS WILD IN THE STREETS.....	57
1986 - 1986: THE YEAR HEAVY MUSIC WAS REBORN - 1986 THRASH ALBUMS.....	58-59
1986 - DARK ANGEL - FLOTSAM AND JETSAM	60
1986 - METAL CHURCH - THE DARK - ONSLAUGHT - THE FORCE	62
1986 - VENOM: INTO OBLIVION - EINE KLEINE NACHTMUSIK.....	64-65
1986 - OZZY OSBOURNE - THE ULTIMATE SIN	67
1986 - ABSOLUTE MIXTAPE 1986 LPS	68
1986 - ABSOLUTE METAL - THOUGHTS ON THRASH ORIGINS - WHIPLASH.....	69
1986 - RPM - STAN BUSH - TRANSFORMERS: THE MOVIE - 40TH ANNIVERSARY ...	70-72
1986 - MOTÖRHEAD - ORGASMATRON - KISS OF DEATH - RIPCORDERZ TOUR TIPS ...	74-75
1986 - BLAST FROM THE PAST - EXPO 86 - REMEMBERING THE MAGIC	76-77
VER-NAC-U-LAR - GARY BRAINLESS	78
SEASON OF MIST - MISCREANCE	79
QUE PASO, CANADA? - AARON BEHRENS OF GHOSTLAND OBSERVATORY	80
CANNABIS CORNER - EARTHWOLF FARMS.....	82
CANNABIS CORNER - VCBC - THE GOOD WEED BOARD PART 12	83
TURNBUCKLE SANDWICH - CANAM WRESTLING	84
TURNBUCKLE SANDWICH - VANCE NEVADA.....	87
PROTEST THE HERO	88
ODDITIES & CURIOSITIES EXPO VANCOUVER	91
RECORD ROOMS - PATRICK MCEACHNIE.....	92
EMPALEMENT	93
ARC OF DYAD	94
CROWDSURF COMEDY - JOEY COMMISSO — NACHOSFERATU	95
NEW MUSIC SHOWCASE - LAWREN JUPITER.....	96
POWDER SEEKERS - THE STORM OF THE CENTURY PART 9	98
POWDER SEEKERS - SHOWCASE SHOWDOWN.....	99
SHOOT TO KILL - BEV DAVIES.....	100
KARASU KILLER RECORDS, BOOKING & TOURING.....	102
CLEOPATRA RECORDS - RIDE THE RAINBOW - HERBAL WITCH.....	104
MR AWESOME.....	106
INERTIA ENTERTAINMENT - FRIZZI 2 FULCI - FABIO FRIZZI	108
INERTIA ENTERTAINMENT - KAMELOT	109
CURSED BLESSINGS RECORDS - HET UP!	111
NO RULES - BLACK MARKET HEART	112
INCANDESCENT TRANCE RITUAL	113
HEAT SCORE - AWARD-WINNING SLEAZE FROM EDMONTON	115
LOWEN	116
HOPELESSLY DEVOTED TO YOU - SHONEN KNIFE - BILLY HOPELESS	118
ARMSTRONG METALFEST REVIEW.....	119
38 DATES LATER TOUR REVIEW - BIG CITY GERMS	120
HENRY ROLLINS - THE CRAMPS - AUDIO ARCHEOLOGY.....	121
DNR - DO NOT RESUSCITATE - DO NOT READ	122
COMIC-GEDDON - FIVE SUMMER SCARES.....	123
ABSOLUTE LIVE REVIEWS.....	124-125
SKA & REGGAE FESTIVAL PHOTO COLLAGE	126
ABSOLUTE REVIEWS - FILM - ALBUM - GRAPHIC NOVEL- SNACKS -	127-130
GREGORIOUS - FOOTSTEPS TO NIHILISM.....	130
ABSOLUTE COMIX	132-133
TIPS & TALES FROM THE TYPEWRITER: LIGHTS OUT	134
THE AMAZING DIGITAL CIRCUS: THE LAST ACT	136
TERMINAL SESSIONS - LORDS OF APATHY.....	137
FALLEN SOLDIERS - SICK OF IT ALL'S LOU KOLLER - L7'S JENNIFER FINCH	138



COVERING THE UNDERGROUND MUSIC SCENE SINCE 2004





MUTUAL TRAUMA

Victoria, BC

John Carlow/ Finding Charlotte Photography

Absolute Underground: Introduce yourselves.

Mutual Trauma: Hi, we're Mutual Trauma. We're best described as a modern metal band. We blend crushing, rhythmic, down-tuned guitars with melodic hooks and a healthy sprinkle of electronics for that extra bit of atmosphere. We cap it all off with emotionally driven lyrics, delivered clean or growled.

AU: Tell us how the band came together.

MT: We came together after members from a couple of local bands found themselves wanting to keep writing and playing heavy music. Some of us had played together before, while others connected through the local scene. As the lineup evolved, everyone brought different influences to the table, from modern metalcore to melodic death metal. The band's sound naturally grew into what it is today. More than anything, we formed because we still had the drive to create. Writing music is something we're all passionate about, and Mutual Trauma gave us the opportunity to build something new that reflects who we are as musicians.

AU: What's the story behind the name?

MT: The phrase "Mutual Trauma" was first coined after Trustin and Damian survived the *Hot Ones* hot wing challenge together. What started as an inside joke eventually became the band's name.

Over time, the name has taken on a deeper meaning. Everyone carries different struggles and experiences, and just as shared challenges can bring people together, so can music. We hope our songs create that same sense of connection by exploring emotions and experiences that listeners can relate to in their own way.

AU: Which bands inspired your sound?

MT: Every member brings different musical influences to the table, which is why it's hard to fit us into one specific subgenre. Bands like Invent Animate, Soilwork, In Flames, Spiritbox and Killswitch Engage have all influenced our sound in different ways.

AU: What's your creative process?

MT: Most songs start with Trustin bringing in a riff or rough demo, and then everyone starts adding their own ideas. Mike has also become a big part of the writing process, often taking songs in new directions with melodic death metal influences and additional layers.

Chris usually comes up with vocal melodies and chorus ideas, while Brandon writes the lyrics

and builds the verses around the emotion of the music. By the time we're done, every song has evolved quite a bit from where it started.

AU: What are your songs about?

MT: We tend to write about things that have affected us or the people around us: betrayal, loss, anxiety, resilience and relationships. Those themes keep coming back because they're things people genuinely experience. We'll also branch into broader social, historical or environmental topics if a song calls for it.

It comes naturally because we're a metal band called Mutual Trauma. A lot of the lyrics come from darker emotions and thoughts that I think most people have at some point but don't always talk about openly. We try to face those things head-on and, even when the subject matter is heavy, find some sense of resilience or hope rather than simply dwelling on the darkness.

AU: Have you released any music?

MT: We've released three singles so far, the latest being "Left Inside," in mid-June. We poured a lot of time into that one, and we're proud of how it turned out. Our focus now is getting it in front of as many people as possible. Hopefully it catches the attention of more fans, promoters and festivals while we continue writing new music.

AU: Any shout-outs in the local scene?

MT: First, thanks to John Carlow and *Absolute Underground* for the spotlight!

A big shout-out to our manager, Royal Savoie of Royalty Entertainment, for everything he does to support the local metal scene. We appreciate all the work he puts into organizing shows, promoting bands and creating opportunities for artists like us. Be sure to check out his weekly radio show, THRASHCAN, on CFUV 101.9 FM, where he shines a spotlight on local and independent metal bands from Vancouver Island and beyond.

VICTORIA'S LOCALS ONLY

We'd also like to thank Journeyman Productions for having us out on some great shows around B.C. It's been awesome getting to play for new crowds and share the stage with so many talented bands.

And finally, thanks to all the bands we've shared the stage with so far. We've already met some great people along the way, and we're looking forward to playing with many more.

AU: Tell us an unusual or funny story from a live show.

MT: Our drummer, Chris, somehow managed to play our Lucky Bar debut with a slice of pizza in the cargo pocket of his shorts. None of us knew it was there until after the show.

Mike has also jumped into the crowd only to realize there wasn't an easy way back onto the stage and, on another occasion, split the crotch of his cyberpunk pants mid-set.

AU: What's next for Mutual Trauma?

MT: Our immediate future involves playing our first set of 2026 at Mosh the Rock Island Metalfest for the second year in a row. We hope to top last year's performance with a few new songs—and our electronics will not give out like they did last time! After that, we're once again going to focus on recording. The goal is to knock out five yet-to-be-recorded bangers at the same level of quality as our most recent release, "Left Inside."

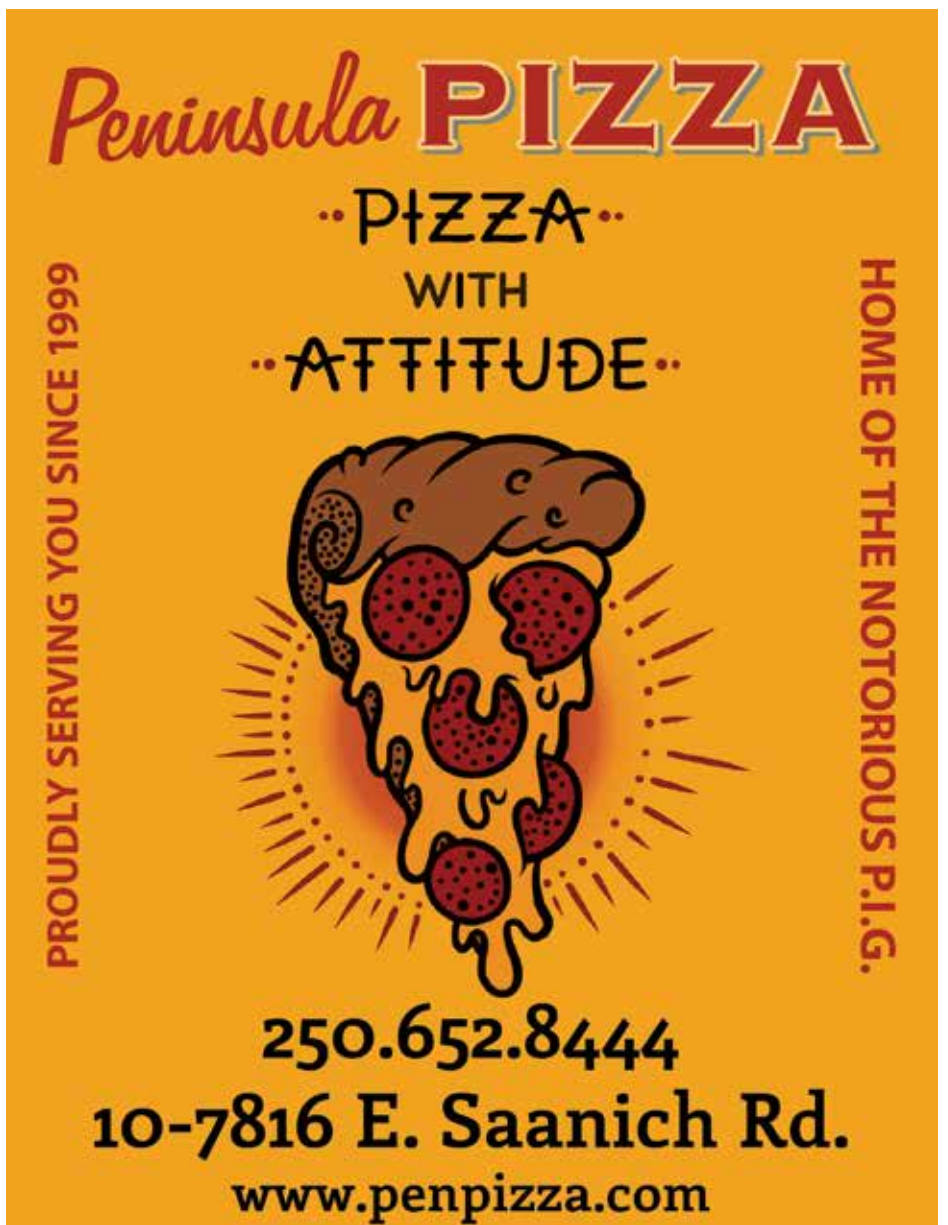
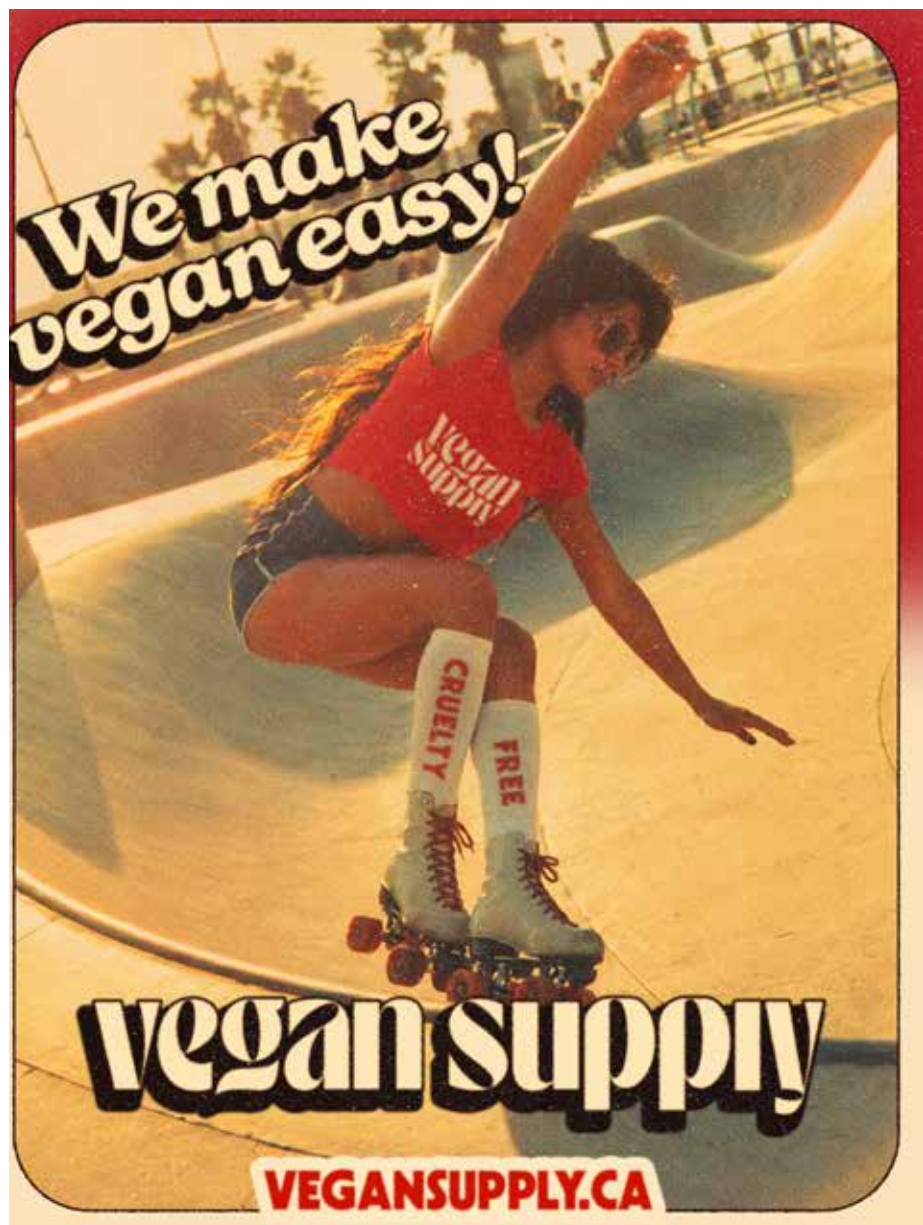
AU: Any final thoughts?

MT: Check out our latest single, "Left Inside," and come catch us live at Mosh the Rock or whenever we come through your town. Thanks to everyone who's supported us so far—we're just getting started.

AU: Where can people find your music?

MT: We're on most streaming platforms including Spotify, Apple Music and YouTube.

mutualtraumaband.bandcamp.com



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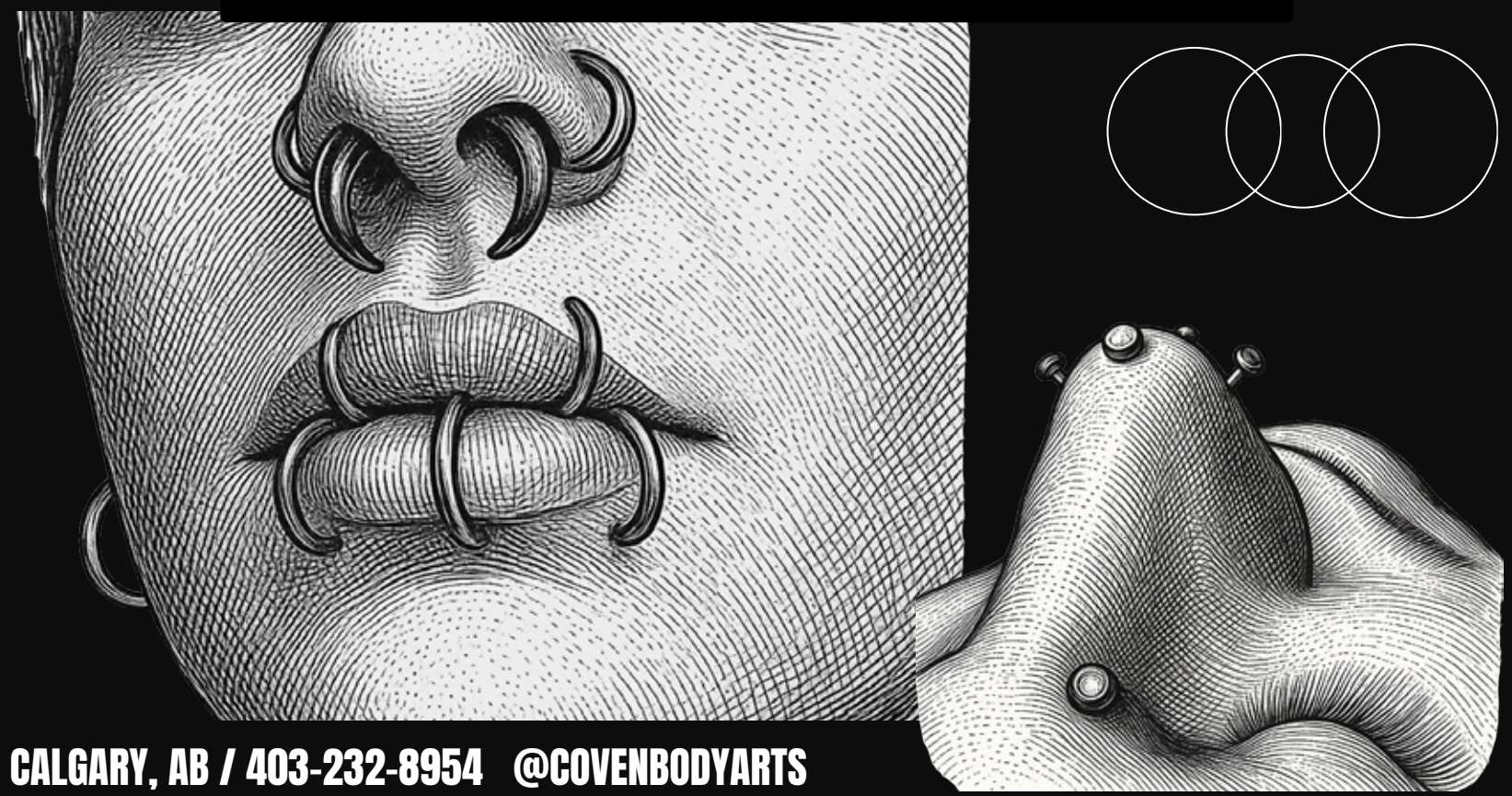


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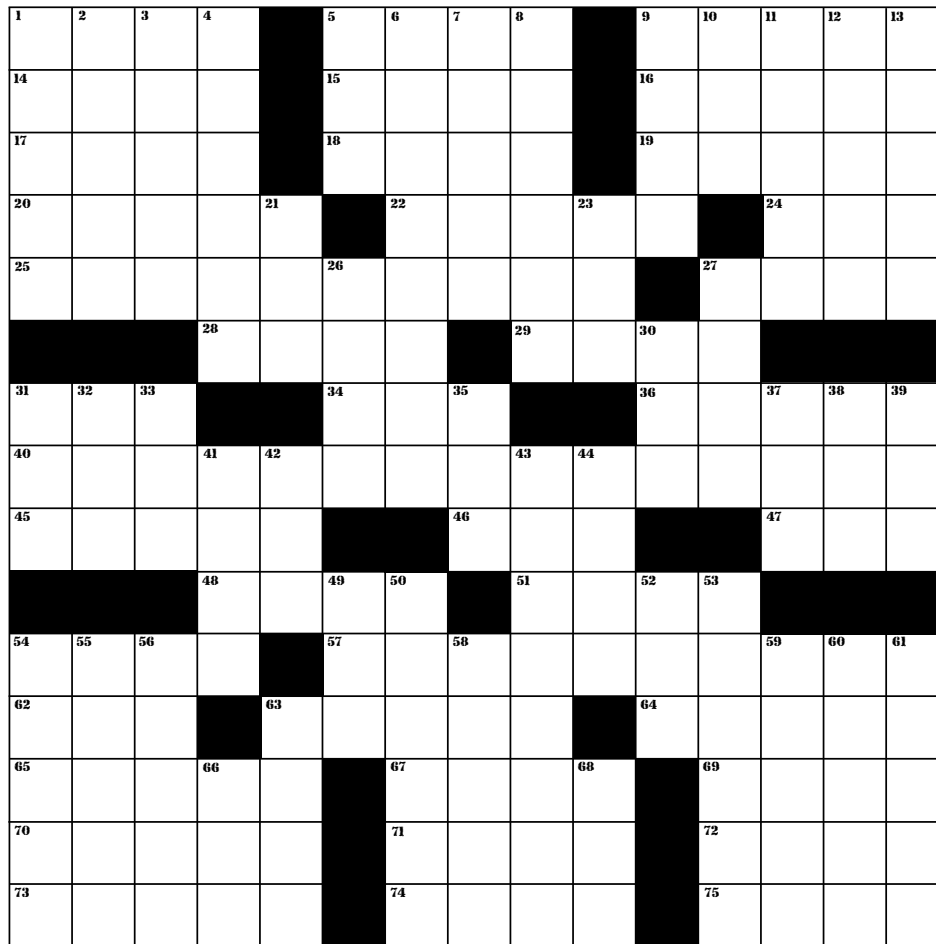
THINKING OUTSIDE THE BOX

ACROSS

1. They can be political, physical or Google
5. Dangerous diet?
9. *Cramps song about beheading
14. A gangster may smell one
15. Ret.'d medical professional
16. First wave British Punk band with "Thinking of the USA" 45
17. Hardware chain
18. Relaxation centres
19. You may hit this on skis
20. The last Oldsmobile ever made
22. Musical ensemble
24. Stimpy's pal
25. *Group fronted by Tom Verlaine
27. Saucy or impudent
28. "Death ____ 2000"
29. Small skin opening
31. Word in the first line of many fairy tales
34. Yadda yadda yadda
36. "You Are Not ____"
40. *Jello's message to a media giant
45. Post-Punk band the Au ____
46. Card count in ancient Rome?
47. Abbr. on many tour skeds
48. She-Wolf of film
51. Home of The Hague (abbr.)
54. Tiny pest
57. *Misfits song about addiction?
62. VCR button
63. Home of the Rumkicks
64. Actor Hammer
65. Typesetter's measure
67. Home in the 'hood
69. Paul who wrote "My Way"
70. Rome fiddler and "Star Trek" villain
71. Too
72. Drunks
73. *Stooges song about the CBS logo?
74. Salon stock
75. Word with ink or vacation

DOWN

1. French revolutionary killed in a bathtub
2. Supervised release
3. A type of van
4. Peeping Tom?
5. They're played at luaus
6. Familiarize with
7. Actress Lords



CROSSWORD NO. 124

SUMMER, 2026

8. Many flights, but not bus rides
9. Try out
10. Actor Kilmer
11. A dep or the Sev, for example
12. Soccer goalie
13. Nine Inch Nails singer
21. Eggs, anatomically
23. Original synth player for Roxy Music
26. Rapper who played a cop
27. One-named soccer legend
30. Cheerleader syllable
31. Big part of a band set-up
32. Canada's largest urban area
33. Nickname of the NHL's all-time goal scoring leader
35. Home of the Als and Bombers
37. Bit of barn food
38. Pen point
39. Historic period
41. John Wayne film "True ____"
42. Class for the newly-arrived
43. Finish up
44. Evens up
49. Beginning of many Quebec place names
50. The heart of guacamole
52. It's yours in Italy
53. Bother
54. Permit or allow
55. Israeli desert
56. More cognizant
58. Moe's younger brother
59. Alphabet run
60. Popular platform
61. It gets a rise out of bakers
63. Middle name of President Seko
66. SNFU's "Broken ____"
68. British pear



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11 - BELLVILLE @ BELL PUB
12 - OTTAWA @ BLACK & BLUE GRASS
16 - BARRIE @ BRUD BAR
17 - TILLSONBURG @ COPPER MUG
18 - WINDSOR @ CHERRY ROCK LOUNGE
19 - DETROIT @ CORKTOWN
20 - GUEILPH @ TBA
25 - NIAGARA FALLS @ CAMP CATARACT



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BOAR GOD

Interview by FLORA

Absolute Underground: For readers discovering Boar God for the first time, who are we talking to today, and how would you describe the band's evolution from *Forma* to *Hunting Season*?

We are Boar God from Montréal. As far as what we have become over the years since formation, we would describe our development thus far as something akin to a seed becoming a plant in its first floral bloom: thicker, more complex, more grandiose.

AU: *Hunting Season* has been described as your most ambitious release yet. At what point did you realize these songs were becoming something bigger than simply the follow-up to *Forma*?

BG: The greater ambition of *Hunting Season* was more recognized by us during the recording process than the songwriting; we knew from the beginning that we wanted to make something that surpassed of any of our other recordings in terms of sound and production quality by way of a more densely layered approach, but periodically in the midst of the studio sessions

we were completely taken aback by how the sounds worked out better than we imagined.

AU: You describe Boar God as "ghost punk." What does that term mean to you, and why does it best capture what the band creates?

BG: "Ghost-punk" means something that evokes the spiritual and supernatural, yet very much exists in

the physical world. It strives for a numinousness as we follow the White Reindeer on its path through the land.

AU: Across the album, themes like paranoia, mental illness, self-destruction, ghosts and the end times all surface in different ways. Were those ideas present from the beginning, or did they emerge as the songs came together?

BG: The music always dictates the lyrics, and so the lyrical subject matter comes out as a consequence of melo-harmonic actualization. It wasn't a predetermined concept for the album, but the chaotic energies channeled through our fingers, plectrums and drumsticks engaging with the strings and skins.

AU: One of the things that stands out is the contrast between crushing walls of noise and quieter, more atmospheric passages. How important is that balance between tension and release when you're writing music?

BG: Very. Dynamics and a sense of relativity are of paramount importance to us. We find that just being one or the other at all times gets tedious and predictable, and is something that does not warrant repeat listening experiences. Rather, we prefer to keep the listener on their toes.

AU: As a two-piece band, there's nowhere to hide sonically. Does working with such a stripped-down lineup force you to approach songwriting differently than a larger band might?

BG: "Stripped down" would seem to be an inaccurate way to describe us, considering our maximalist approach. While there are but two official full-time members of the band, we fully operate as a trio live and in studio with Zef playing the drums. He had as much of a hand in the making of this album as us, so consequently we approach songwriting and arrangements as most other trios would.

AU: "Hunting Season," "Broken Clock Brain," and "Homeless... Dreaming" were chosen as the first three singles. Why did those songs feel like the right introduction to the record?

BG: It was difficult to pick just three singles, but we chose the three for different reasons: "Hunting Season" is our sonic statement and declaration of intent, "Broken Clock Brain" is our purest exercise in aggressive energy, and "Homeless... Dreaming" is our furthest exploration of melodic consonance. This was the ideal trio of songs to introduce the album to the world.

AU: Montréal has produced some incredibly heavy and experimental bands over the years. Has the city's underground music scene influenced Boar God's sound or philosophy?

BG: We are creatures of the underground and are guided by its ethos. We initially took inspiration

MONTREAL MASSACRE

from the scene of the beginning of the previous decade (AIDS Wolf, Black Feelings, Omegas, Grand Trine, and many others), but in the past few years there has arisen a new scene in our quadrant of that which is loud and noisy such as Pnoom, Yoo Doo Right, Death As It Shook You, Dirty Milk, Power Drop, Last Waltz, and so many others

who have been pushing sonic envelopes. We feed on all that and take inspiration from it.

AU: Now that *Hunting Season* is complete, does it feel like the culmination of everything Boar God has built so far, or the beginning of a new chapter?

BG: We would say without question the beginning of something greater. The gestation of *Hunting Season* was long, laborious, and fraught with painful metamorphosis, and so now with the current lineup and

album we truly do feel like a new and refreshed band. Further material is already in its genesis...

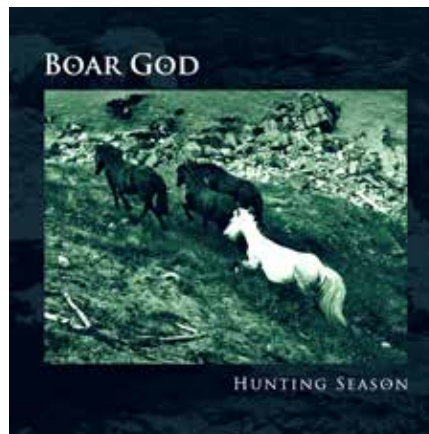
AU: *Hunting Season* arrives on November 6. Where can readers keep up with Boar God, hear the new singles, and find the album once it's released?

BG: We can be found on most social media platforms; Instagram is where we are most active. The album and all the singles will be available for streaming on all major services, though our Bandcamp page will provide the most satisfying user experience.

boargod.bandcamp.com

[instagram.com/boargodband](https://www.instagram.com/boargodband)

Photo credit: Hugo Rodas



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INTERVIEW WITH
JESSE VALSTAR,
CO-FOUNDER
OF ARMSTRONG
METALFEST

— Stan Schinners, Broken
Neck Radio

AU: Looking back to Year One when you and Bretton Melanson threw the first “Armstrong Open Air” using a flat deck trailer with a tarp roof, did you ever imagine that you’d be hosting heavyweights like Dying Fetus and Rivers of Nihil inside a full arena? What is the most surreal part of that evolution for you?

Jesse Valstar: I have imagined it, honestly. I have been using my imagination to guide me this entire time. I have been trying my hardest to continue to dream big and build something that everyone who calls AMF home for one weekend a year can be proud of. It is definitely surreal, I can’t deny that.

I remember the first time I had Cam Pipes from 3 Inches of Blood text me; I was at work in the lunchroom. I couldn’t believe Cam was actually texting me. I told the deli lady I was sitting with what just happened. I mean, she couldn’t care less honestly, but she could see that I was stoked so she was happy for me. For about three hours after that text, I felt seven feet tall. Right now, the most surreal thing is that we continue to pull it off year after year.

AU: In the festival’s second year, attendance unexpectedly doubled, prompting your co-founder’s parents to gently suggest you find a new venue. When a grassroots event blows up that fast, what goes through the mind of a young organizer, and how did it shape your approach to festival logistics now in 2026?

JV: There were many hard lessons in the early days. Unfortunately, over the years some of those lessons came at the cost of relationships with some of my best friends. At the time I thought



that if someone said they could handle something, I believed them. I know now that everyone has a capacity, and everyone’s capacity differs, and not everyone is aware of their own limits. It’s my job to step in and make sure people aren’t overworking themselves. I wish I could go back and do a few things differently, but this is how we learn and grow as humans. Scars remind us we can be hurt.

AU: You grew up in Armstrong, worked at the local grocer, and even ran for City Council a few years back. How has being so deeply embedded in the local community helped you bridge the gap between conservative small-town BC and thousands of invading metalheads every summer?

JV: I am currently a city councillor for the City of Armstrong. It truly is a privilege to serve the community I live and play in. All it took was time to bridge the gap. Consistency: our ragtag group of awesome individuals came back every single year whether they liked us or not and we came to party, and party we did. When we left every year, people began to see we were great people. Most people in the world would judge us for how we present ourselves. I can’t blame them really. If you aren’t a part of the scene, you wouldn’t even know any different. Now that we are entering our 16th year of Armstrong Metalfest, the people of this town are damn near part of the scene as well!

AU: It’s famous within the scene that Armstrong local businesses fully lean into the weekend, with staff throwing on metal shirts to serve breakfast. How did you manage to build that level of mutual trust and economic symbiosis with the town’s business owners?

JV: I didn’t do shit. All I did was put on the festival. The patrons of this festival managed to earn the trust and respect of this community. Honestly, our scene could earn the trust of any community. Metal rules.

AU: Beyond the music, AMF is legendary for its unique community traditions like the

Thrash Wrestling ring, the Yeti Games, and the iconic Beer Helmet March. Why has keeping these distinct, interactive fan activities alive remained such a priority as the festival has scaled up?

JV: Because AMF is a wild cocktail of many flavors. The only way to keep that flavor strong is to keep the traditions alive. Thrash Wrestling is a huge part of the scene here, the beer helmet march is amazing, and the YETI games are an amazing recent addition. I am actually making the jerseys right now while I am writing this interview. The first 8 jerseys this year will feature the original 7 Mortal Kombat characters and Shang Tsung, and the second 8 jerseys will feature 8 characters from N64’s GoldenEye.

AU: You’ve previously mentioned that you use a specific proportional representation-based algorithm to balance sub-genres (death, thrash, tech, power) and geographic locations when booking the band roster. How does this mathematical approach protect the festival from leaning too heavily into one trend, and how did it help shape the massive 2026 bill?

JV: Bretton and I poured over the bill for a couple of months and eventually came up with the bill we have today! Overall, it’s fairly well balanced and I think this year’s patrons will find it very enjoyable. Leaning into the math part of the bill formatting keeps us honest. This way we don’t just have a full Edmonton roster of bands. Shout out to the Edmonton scene, it’s got a lot happening right now!

AU: Your band, Odinfist, is celebrating a massive anniversary this year with a special FINAL set on Saturday. How did you mentally transition from the high-stress, radio-headset role of “Festival Promoter” to the creative, high-energy role of “Thrash Bassist” on the exact same weekend for all these years?

JV: Sometimes you just gotta give ‘er, and when it’s time to give ‘er then you get down and get it done. It’s another job, another mindset, another thing that must be accomplished. It’s not easy to transition, but that’s when I need to trust the crew to handle anything that comes their way. Nothing’s ever perfect, and that’s okay. As long as

everyone has tried hard and did their best, then it’s probably fine.

Mentally after the show, I should be a write-off; this is likely going to be the most emotional show I will ever do. I am saying goodbye to my band, the guys who stood beside me for twenty years. I love them, and we are making the call to pack it in and call it a good couple of decades. It’s going to be tough playing We are Gods for the last time. I am both looking forward to it and incredibly sad about it.

AU: AMF is a key player in the Western Canadian Metal Festival Alliance (alongside fests like Loud As Hell). In an industry where promoters are often cutthroat, why is the philosophy of “world domination through cooperation” so vital for the survival of the independent Canadian metal scene?

JV: We are Canadian damn it. We need to work together! Being cutthroat is dirty. The way forward is through cooperation, hard work, and perseverance. It takes just as much energy to build a bridge as it does a wall.

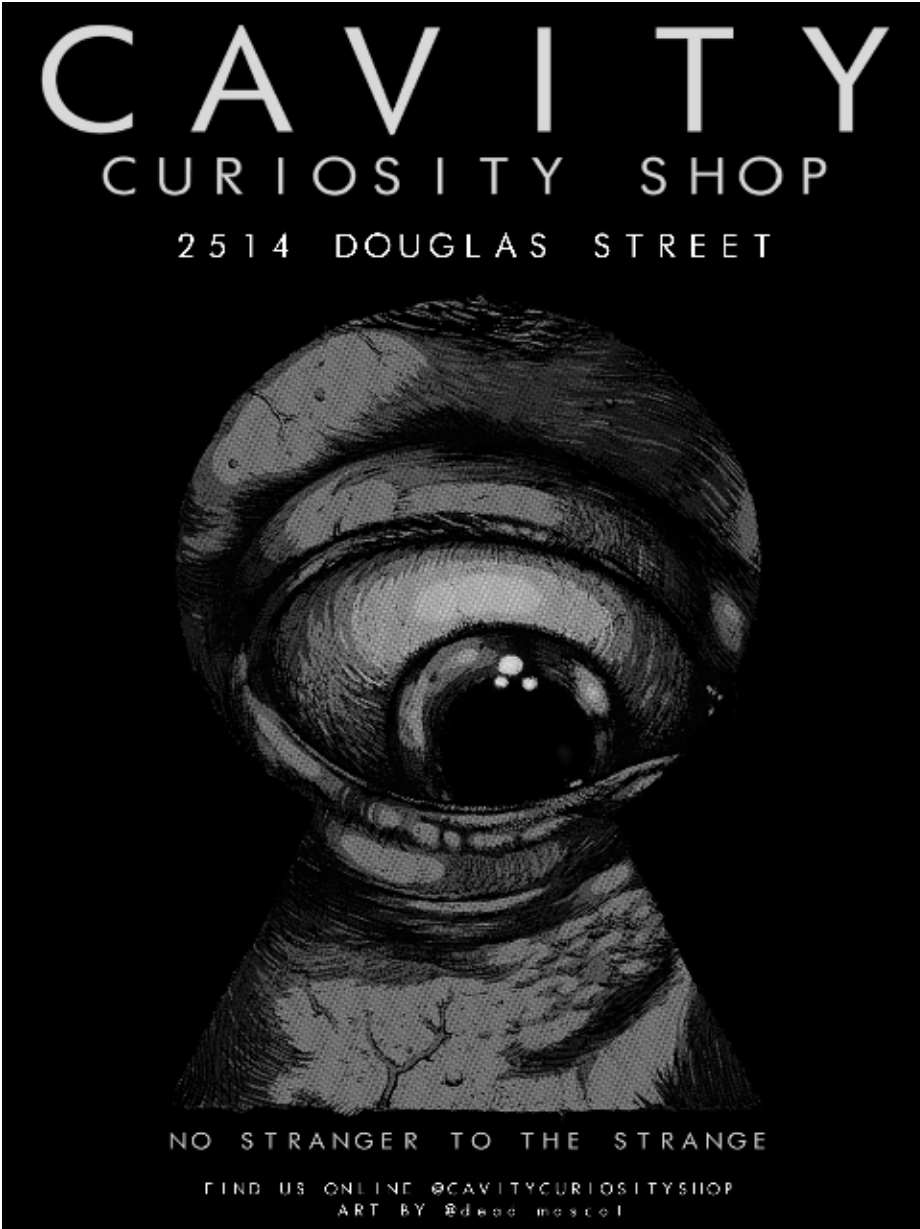
AU: After months of spreadsheets, budget-tracking, and midnight logistics, there is a specific moment every year when the arena doors open and the first mosh pit erupts in the Okanagan mountain air. What is the one thing you look at or experience over the weekend that makes you say, “Yeah, this is why I don’t know how to stop”?

JV: Yeah man. It’s the thousands of smiles I see throughout the weekend. It’s the love I see blossoming in newly found relationships. It’s the endless high-fives. It’s the look on someone new to the festival’s face experiencing it for the first time. It’s the beauty in the mosh. It’s the sun setting on Rose Swanson and the campsite singing Oh Canada. It’s the best weekend of the year!

[instagram.com/jessevalstar](https://www.instagram.com/jessevalstar)

Stan Schinners AKA DJ Zang is the Owner and contributor for Broken Neck Radio, covering the heaviest releases in the global metal scene.

[brokenneckradio.com](https://www.brokenneckradio.com)



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WINE LIPS

Interview by Chad Cornies

AU: Who are we talking to and what are you most infamous for?

Hey, this is Aurora. If anything, I suppose it would be for playing drums in Wine Lips.

AU: Give us a brief history of the band, its members and what you are all about.

We've been around for a little over 10 years now. Forming in our basement apartment as a 3 piece with myself, Cam, and our buddy/roommate at the time, Justin. Over time as our sound got beefier, we required that second guitar, so we've been 4 for almost 6 years now, and have Andrew Donofrio on guitar and Wes Martin on bass.

AU: What does it say on your bandmates tinder profiles and on yours?

You know... not one of us has one. So I'm terribly sorry to disappoint.

AU: Where is the band from and what's the music scene like there?

At this point we're from all over. Andrew and myself are in Hamilton, Cam's in Wakefield, QC and Wes is out in Hagersville. We'll say Toronto to keep it simple sometimes though, as that's where we started. I've just moved to Hamilton and have got to enjoy a lot of shows either at one of our free festivals, or in a smaller club. It does get passed on a few tour schedules for sure, but it's

nice when bands do come through!

AU: Describe the band's sound if possible.

Our sound channels a particular type of punk rock 'n' roll energy. Guitar-heavy, solo-heavy, and wake-you-up-like-three-espresso-shots heavy. And though we're often on the supersonic, tonic-high-energy end of the spectrum, we're still mindful of shifting our dynamics back and forth from chaos to calm. But all in all, we love a pit.

AU: How would you describe your live show to the visually impaired?

Find a buddy, and hang on tight. At a good show, with a good crowd, it doesn't take long before the front of the room erupts into a battle scene. It can be contagious.

AU: Have you released an album recently? Tell us about it! What can we expect to hear?

Brace yourselves for the release of *TV Dinner* coming to a platform near you on August 28th! We're super proud of this record, we really, really believe that we've got a special record for you guys. We definitely emit our root, punk-rock sound, and keep it true with a handful of short and fast rippers, which is very our style. Short attention spans over here. But there is 100% a new flare with this one, and I'm excited to share that with everyone.

AU: Does the new album explore any particular themes or topics?

I'd say that it unintentionally does. We've crossed into our mid 30's, so naturally themes are going to be a little different from when we were 21. There's certainly some subtle reference to growing up, getting older, knowing yourself and not taking any shit.

AU: Any stand-out tracks you are stoked on?

Personally I'm excited for "Fried V" to drop. We've dropped a new "Fried" track on all 4, soon to be 5, records that we've put out. We'll often tie them together in one way or another, and for the first

time on this one I'll be singing the full track, which is a new feature of the band that you can expect to hear on this record.

AU: Sex, Drugs, or Rock N Roll? or all of the above?

Hail Rock n' Roll. But all is swell in moderation.

AU: What should we know about you that we don't already? What don't you want your mother to know?

Tour has led me to pooping on the side of the road... twice. Sorry mum.

AU: Any tour plans?

Several! We hit the road on August 28th kicking off our Album Release Tour in Europe with support from The Boojums. Then we do some time with Death From Above in North America come October through to December. All of our dates and tickets are posted on our website, so you can check if we'll be in your area on this run!

AU: Anything else to promote?

STOMP RECORDS

We've been working hard with a couple of different teams on our music videos, so definitely go to our website and watch a few of those if you like.

AU: Final words of wisdom for our readers?

If you're a musician yourself and are looking at getting into touring, be good to your body while on the road. It can feel like an endurance challenge at times. Make sure your body and mind are ready to tackle late nights, early mornings, questionable dietary options, constant social stimulation and a physical beating.

AU: How do people find you online?

Our website is winelipsband.com our Instagram is [@winelipsband](https://www.instagram.com/winelipsband) and our music can be found on all your mainstream streaming platforms.

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WITHOUT MERCY Into The Void

By Asher Thrasher

AU: Welcome back to *Absolute Underground Magazine*. What is Without Mercy up to these days?

DJ Temple: Right now, we're preparing to release our new EP, *Infinite Loss*. It's three songs that represent where the band is creatively at this moment. We took a very deliberate approach this time by stepping away from normal routines, isolating ourselves, and committing fully to the recording process.

We're also preparing the visual side of the release with lyric videos, visualizers, and music videos. There's even a new website launching alongside it.

AU: *Infinite Loss* was created during a period where you uprooted your lives, left home and lived inside the recording process for ten days. How did that isolation and discomfort reshape the band creatively, and what did it reveal about who Without Mercy is right now?

DJ: That period stripped away a lot of comfort and distraction. When you remove the normal rhythms of life, and you're just living inside the music for ten days straight, everything becomes

more intense.

There's nowhere to hide from the material or from each other. If something isn't working, everyone feels it immediately. That pressure forced us to be brutally honest about what the songs needed to become.

What it revealed about the band is that we're at our best when things are uncomfortable. Without Mercy thrives in that environment. It pushes us toward something darker, heavier, and more focused. It also relied on us looking to each other and forming an even tighter bond in what we do for each other and for the band

collectively.

Reshaping is an interesting question. One of the biggest factors was learning from our producer and listening to an outside opinion we could trust. That showed us several ways to tighten our processes both in the band space and in the writing room.

AU: Each track on the EP represents a different kind of pressure: being hunted, being enslaved by the land and being fractured by reflection. How did you ensure these themes stayed cohesive while still allowing each song to push the boundaries of your sound?

DJ: We treated the EP almost like three perspectives of the same world. The themes represent different forms of pressure, but they all exist within the same atmosphere: inevitability, tension, and collapse.

Musically, we allowed each song to go where it needed to go, but we kept the sonic identity grounded in what Without Mercy is. Aggressive riffs, strong rhythmic movement, and an underlying sense of unease.

So even when the structures or textures changed, the emotional weight stayed consistent. That's what ties the songs together.

AU: You've said this EP was built on ruthless honesty, challenging each other, rejecting ideas and letting only the strongest material

survive. Can you walk us through a moment in the writing or recording process where that tension directly changed the direction of a song?

DJ: There were definitely moments where parts we originally thought were strong just didn't survive the process. One example came during the arrangement stage when a section we'd been playing for a long time simply stopped feeling right once we were in the studio environment. Instead of forcing it to work, we stripped it back and rebuilt the section entirely. That moment changed the pacing and weight of the song in a way that ultimately made it much stronger.

It's never comfortable to kill something you've spent time on, but that willingness to let go is what sharpened the EP.

AU: "The Saint" marks the furthest departure from your usual writing approach, shaped heavily by collaboration with your producer. What did stepping back and trusting outside guidance teach you about your own identity as a band?

DJ: It reminded us that collaboration can open doors you wouldn't normally walk through on your own. Sometimes when you're deep inside your own writing habits, you can unintentionally box yourself in. The classic "can't see the forest through the trees" scenario.

Our producer challenged some of those instincts and encouraged us to explore directions we might not have pursued otherwise. Instead of weakening our identity, it actually clarified it.

We realized that the core of Without Mercy isn't tied to one specific formula but rather a constant evolution of unease and intensity.

AU: The artwork for *Infinite Loss* captures a desolate forest and a void carved into the earth, a visual metaphor for inevitability and being pulled toward something inescapable. How does that imagery reflect the emotional state of the band during this era, and what do you hope listeners feel when they enter that

VANCOUVER VENGEANCE

world before hearing a single note?

DJ: The imagery reflects a sense of gravity and a sense of something larger than you pulling everything downward. That feeling of inevitability was very present during the writing of this EP.

The forest represents isolation and the unknown, while the void in the earth suggests that something massive has already happened or is about to happen. It's meant to feel unsettling before you even hear the music.

Ideally, when someone sees the artwork, they already feel like they're stepping into a world where the outcome isn't going to be comfortable. To write this EP we got uncomfortable. To record it, we got even more uncomfortable. There was definitely a theme brewing throughout the entire process.

Infinite Loss was born from pressure, isolation and discomfort. The music is simply what survived.

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

DJ: We're grateful to still be creating and pushing forward. The underground scene has always been about dedication more than anything else.

Make sure to join our mailing list and follow our social media for updates. We're constantly giving away tickets and merch.

Thanks to the readers of *Absolute Underground* who have supported us for so long. Both the readers and this publication have done a lot to keep the underground alive. Publications like this are part of the reason bands like ours still have a place to exist.

For anyone reading this, keep supporting the bands you believe in, go to shows and stay involved in the scene. That's what keeps this music alive.

We're looking forward to everyone hearing *Infinite Loss* soon.

withoutmercy.bandcamp.com



BAT LEATHER

Interview with Cory Martinez

By Ryan Dyer

Bat Leather is a noise rock project led by Cory Martinez alongside Luke Meat, Rob Smelter and Ethan Muzychka. The name feels like something Martinez has stitched together from sound and image, like a pair of earmuffs made out of bat leather. With Bat Leather connected to your ears, the whole world turns upside down. Or maybe just you.

AU: Bat Leather are from Vancouver and Calgary. Who is from Vancouver?

CM: Technically, we're spread out within the Calgary/Vancouver/Badlands. I (guitar) live in the Badlands, south of Drumheller, Luke Meat (vocals) lives in Vancouver, Rob Smelter (bass) and Ethan Muzychka (drums) live in Calgary.

AU: Each project you're in has unique live attributes - Drug Sauna is two guys playing sludge from inside a van. Breathe Knives had interesting stage lighting. What is the new entrée on the table with Bat Leather?

CM: Hahaha! It's true. We haven't talked a bunch about the live show accoutrements. I think we just

want to deliver a loud show with less "pageantry." Hahaha

AU: You will be opening for Unsane on September 22. What's your history with Unsane and what does this show mean to you?

CM: I've played with Chris Spencer in some form, I think, almost every time he's come out this way. I was in a noise rock band called Bionic VI that opened for Unsane in '98 on the original Occupational Hazard tour at the Night Gallery, so to play the 30th anniversary tour of that record is pretty ace.

I also played with him when he came back a few years later with his new band Cutthroats 9. He's been a pretty big influence on me, and a super nice fella! He once told me about touring with Slayer and being the only thing between Slayer and Slayer fans was the most terrified he's ever been. Haha

AU: I had an insane, aggravated, slightly euphoric time listening to Pageantry. Every track feels different, "Gloom Beach" feeling more rock n' roll and "Accouea" has a light, dizzying beginning. What is the spectrum of moods for this project?

CM: We consider it all to be a certain flavour of rock n' roll, but... yeah, we draw from stuff like Rectal Hygienics to Cherubs I guess, as well as a few stops in between. The common thread here I think is texture. The new 7" has some different vibes as well. We're not trying to mimic anything, we just want it to sound loud.

AU: A favorite track of mine is "Resting Cop Face" - I tend to like your stuff with samples and effects being a more noticeable layer. What can you say about this method?

CM: We like "studio trickery." The samples on that song are Luke's doing, actually. We had the "sample" talk and both agreed we didn't want to saturate everything in samples, but the odd one is super fun! I don't think your live show needs to sound exactly like your record. It's art. Cover your own song. Make it art.



AU: Your "Rebuttal" video has some savage chicken fighting, which reminds me of something you'd see in Faces of Death. Where did it come from?

CM: Are we still allowed to use the term cockfight? Who knows hahaha. I've had that idea for a video for a long time. I just pasted clips together that I've found along the way. I sent the first draft of the video to Luke and he said, "Take all the people out. Make it just the beautiful birds." So that's what we did. Same with the "Dance Craze" video... an idea I had a long time ago. It's really fun putting visuals to the sounds.

AU: What is the significance of the album cover photo and Jim Jones imagery?

CM: The Pageantry cover photo is just a public domain photo. "The pillowed chic on the couch" as Luke calls her.

Luke and I have bonded over being fascinated with Jim Jones for a long time. The perfect cult leader that actually executed the plan.

AU: You are on Sonic Church Records' Tribute to Jay Reatard. What are the details regarding this?

CM: That tribute album is a quick thing my little pork and bean label put out. I'm a big JR fan. Bat Leather and JR are not necessarily on the same musical spectrum, but that's what makes it fun... to crossover and do a version of something in your own style.

AU: Dark Arts, your new 7-inch, will release on September 4. What did you want to continue or reveal with this batch of songs?

CM: The overall textures are still pretty consistent with Pageantry, but maybe it's a bit more dynamic and a little more structured. Don't get me wrong, we're not talking "songwriting" or anything, but there's a couple songs that have two(!) riffs!

AU: The cover for this album reminds me of "yoga class for cats" but the words Cat Leather

CALGARY CARNAGE

come to mind, too. Tell me about this piece of art.

CM: Hahaha! It's a photo I took of a sculpture I have. I think licking your own buttohole would be considered a dark art, yeah?

AU: Often songs begin with a certain shade of feedback, which reminds me of listening to Eyehategod. Could you tell me a little about the art of feedback?

CM: That's how you know the song is starting! Haha. I've always appreciated the art of feedback. I like it so much I had it piped straight into my head that's on a 24hr loop! Didn't Bukowski say "Find what you love and let it make you deaf"... or something like that? Anyways... spend the money and get good earplugs when you're still young — cautionary tale.

AU: Your song titles always make me think. They suggest things and my mind connects the dots, going into an ominous space, a perfect example being "... ThenHeWasPulledIntoAMachine." But what comes first - the title, the lyrics or once you have the music panned out those come to finalize it?

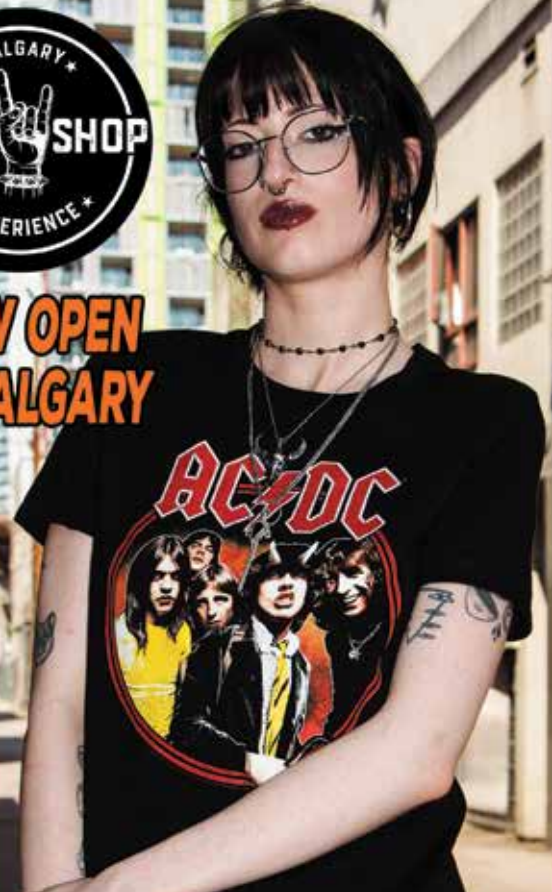
CM: For the most part, the song titles come last... and by last I mean they all have working titles like song7, song9, etc until we've finished four or five and we're like "K, let's just name these songs and call them done." Sometimes they don't even have anything to do with the lyrics. Usually in pop music or whatever, the song title is something from the chorus. Maybe this would be easier if we knew how to include a chorus. But I love the idea of "It's whatever you think it means."

AU: Who wears Bat Leather? Batman? Dracula? Bat Boy? Wait, is Bat Leather made from Bat Boy?

CM: We're currently in talks with Fluevog about making bat leather boots. So soft! [instagram.com/batleathernoise](https://www.instagram.com/batleathernoise)



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FAMOUS STRANGERS

Interview by Asher Thrasher

Edmonton's Famous Strangers bring together heavy metal and hard rock influences on their self-titled debut album, set for release August 21, 2026. The band features Amanda Kiernan (lead vocals), Jeff Kittlitz (guitar, backing vocals), Braden Sustrik (bass, backing vocals), and Brian "Beej" Jolly (drums, backing vocals).

AU: Welcome back to *Absolute Underground Magazine*. What has Famous Strangers been up to since we last spoke with you?

Jeff: It's been a very exciting time. Very busy year for us. We recorded our first full-length record. Pre-production started in October, November. We finally got in the studio in December and January, tracked, had mixes done through February and March, signed off on it, and set the release date for August 21st.

We were direct support to Riot City at Decimate Metalfest 2026. We got the honor and luxury of playing with Danko Jones at Festival Place, our first official hometown show in Sherwood Park, Alberta.

We finally released the "Deepstar" video, which was our very first music video for a song we'd released. Thank you to Brad Thompson Visuals for that. We made another video for "Ghosts of Men", and we have another video coming out for As Your Leader pretty soon here, all made by Art Szabo, cartoon style.

We've been lucky to play a few more shows with some friends in Shacked to the Throne. We did a southern Alberta run. And yeah, lots of things coming up.

AU: Your debut album revolves heavily around themes of self-worth, vulnerability, and personal growth. How did stepping into such emotionally raw territory influence the way you approached the music, especially given the band's roots in decades of heavier, more aggressive genres?

Jeff: It's not necessarily stepping into it, because you already are. That's daily life, to experience these things. The only difference is we just started writing about it, expressing our daily emotions into our music.

The music on this one, like most of our stuff, has always been written before the lyrics. And when Amanda comes in and puts the lyrics in about self-worth and how vulnerable she is and the personal growth, that influences the way we all play the song. Maybe we get to a chorus sooner because we want to hear that triumphant self-worth and praise and love and growth. We just

put it all out on this record.

Amanda: This is the first time I'm writing about my emotions and my personal, seriously personal, situations right out for the whole world to see.

We're okay with not sticking to our past heavier genres. I guess that's part of growth. We want to show our roots in the rock era and the blues, and essentially what we all grew up on.

AU: Many of the riffs and song ideas on this album have lived on hard drives for over ten years, while others, like "Ghosts of Men", were written days before entering the studio. How did blending decade-old ideas with last-minute inspiration shape the identity of the final record?

Amanda: That's the identity of the band. "Ghosts of Men" was the newest song to make the record, but it was one of the oldest riffs we've had. We've worked forever to make this record. It's old, it's new. But it all flows together because even though there are songs that came about decades ago, the new songs are really cool because we're actually finding our sound. And it comes from those old songs. We're just becoming more and more ourselves as we keep writing together.

Braden: That riff even pre-existed me playing hard music with Jeff and Beej. We've worked forever to make this record. It's old, it's new. But it all flows together, and we're lucky to have had those songs already written.

Jeff: For me, it's been a pleasure to see the old songs take shape alongside the new ones and be able to fit on a record together. Something that was written in 2025, or even brand new today, alongside something that was old at one point. By the time we all get to the studio and record it, it's fresh, it's new. Everybody's parts are refined, and old songs become new songs.

AU: You've described the band's chemistry as "pure magic," especially once Amanda joined and the original songs suddenly clicked. What was the moment when you realized Famous Strangers had shifted from a casual jam project into a fully committed creative force?

Jeff: All of a sudden, I'm picking Amanda up and going to jam every day. It was this energy that just took over.

Our art and design director at the time, Art Szabo (now manager), had inspired us to at least let the public know what we were doing. And the day that happened was a very special day. It was the anniversary of my dad's passing, and when that day hit for me, it was just... whoa. Here we go. This is perfect.

AU: Your sound pulls from classic heavy rock, punk energy, blues influences, and even playful storytelling, sometimes all within the same album. What guides your decision to push genre boundaries, and how do you maintain cohesion while exploring so many different musical worlds?

Amanda: I am so honored to be with a band that wants to try anything and

explore anything. I think it's important for every member to push themselves. I understand being professional and sticking to what you know, but as artists, it's our job to be creative and have imagination and think outside the box and do things that we're not used to. Even if we're just playing around, most of the time with this band, especially with my vocals, anytime I'm playing around, that's when the magic happens. And that's what's stuck.

Jeff: Famous Strangers captures that in-the-moment emotion. And if that day we feel like blues or we feel like metal, or we feel like jazz or whatever we want, there's no limits. It's all fun. And that's the whole reason we're doing this, because we just love to play music and create art. Once we have an idea that we all can get

behind, that energy, no matter if it's a different genre or not, the cohesion part of it all comes together as one, as Famous Strangers. It's our sound and our band, whether it's metal or rock or blues.

AU: The album features everything from deeply personal tracks like "Rain" and "Ghosts of Men" to playful concepts like alien abduction in "Far Away From Home". How do you balance emotional honesty with the freedom to be silly, theatrical, or experimental when the moment calls for it?

Amanda: I think it just happens because every day we're just playing around. There's no set expectations. We're not playing the same songs every jam. Every day we walk in to jam and it depends on how we feel and what mood we're in. Of course, if there's a show, we hunker down and we do the shit. But I like that we come in and if we're feeling goofy, then we almost just start off being goofy and see where that goes.

How many times have I thrown away songs on this album, and the boys were the ones to be like, "No, no, no, no." And they pick it back up and they're like, "No, that's good. Let's keep this."

Jeff: I think music is all about taking people on a journey, whether that's touching a vibe, a real life reality for them, or taking them on a fantasy ride. There should be no limits on what you can do. So if you want to go to space with the aliens or know your self-worth and stay in the Rain, it's all good with us.

Braden: Everyone in the band has their own different corners of music that overlap and don't overlap, and we all bring it to the band. Everyone respects each other's tastes. So someone's bringing a little spicy flavor from some genre that someone else doesn't know. Every time we write a song, we're all willing to be open to it and accept it and create with it.

AU: Your live shows are known for crowd interaction, spontaneity and even conga lines. How do you plan to translate the emotional depth and genre-bending nature of the album into the stage experience during your

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upcoming Western Canadian tour and album-release shows?

Jeff: So I guess this will be a bit of a spoiler for those that weren't at our first debut all-ages hall show. We played our record for the audience front to back. And the comment that I got from somebody that I respect very much in the audience was, "Your show flow and song flow and emotional journey of the set was perfect." I've never really heard a comment like that. And it sticks with me to this day because it's exactly what we're trying to do.

I don't want to be repetitive. I don't want to let people get bored. I want to give some breath of air and space and then hit you and bring you up, bring you down, and let's go. That's the point of it all.

Amanda: We're not trying so hard to be out of the box. It's just happening because we're opening up and allowing it to happen.

Braden: I thought this would be the band of mine that my dad liked the least, but somehow it's the one he likes the most. He's so supportive. So strong.

Jeff: Other than that, we have some stage show stuff that we always want to keep adding to our shows. And for the release, we'll probably have something very special. So come and see it.

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

Famous Strangers: We love you and we hope you're having an incredible day. Please know that you are worthy and you are really incredible, and you're gonna kick ass. And please, please support *Absolute Underground* magazine because they are amazing.

famousstrangersband.com

famousstrangers.bandcamp.com

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Photo credit: J Kiernen Photography



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Mon Aug 24	Wax Mannequin, The Kettle Black, Grim Stone	8PM 18+ BLAKBAR
Sat Aug 29	Avltas, Jerry Bludd and Guests	9PM 18+ BLAKBAR
Sun Aug 30	The Leaky Shack Travelling Road Show, Lower than Landon, Pixie	8PM ALL AGES BLAKBAR
Tue Sept 15	Another Damn Dissapointment & Guests	8PM 18+ BLAKBAR
Sat Sept 19	Dead End Drive In, Ghost Factory, Hewson Grey	5PM 18+ THE BUCKINGHAM
Sat Sept 19	Scene 17- Ep Release Show W/Guests	9PM 18+ BLAKBAR
Sat Sept 26	Music Day In Canda Showcase: Buckingham	5PM 18+ THE BUCKINGHAM
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AUG. 19 -Weapon world & Herb with Creeping Chill & Cranial Spewage - Floor Show

AUG. 22 -FAMOUS STRANGERS Record Release Party with BLACK FRIDAY, COSTECTOMY & AXIOM ANNA

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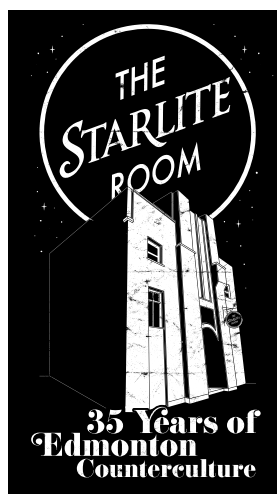
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GUTTER GIRL

Interview by Scarlett-rose Stewart

Absolute Underground: Who are we talking to?

Ali: Gutter Girl from Toronto by way of Newmarket. I'm bass and vocals.

Simon: Drums.

Ed: Guitar.

AU: Give us a brief history of your band.

Ali: Me and Edward met at math tutoring in high school when I was in grade 11.

Ed: And I was in grade 10 so... 2018, 2019?

Simon: The band was formed in 2018.

Ed: (Me and Simon) were already trying to work on some stuff since grade 9. Ali was originally going to play drums for us.

Ali: But I couldn't do that. Then we had my other friends in the band.

Simon: Yeah we had a bass player and a vocalist.

Ali: Sean on vocals and Aidan on bass.

Simon: Then they both left and you just did both.

Ali: I did what I had to do... I think we're at peak performance right now, each of us knows our job and we just do it.

Ed: Then we started playing shows in 2023, (our first show was) tail of the junction Halloween.

Ali: Oh my god I never want to play that fucking venue again.

Simon: Fuck that.

AU: does your band have a specific message to give?

Simon: Towards Ali thats on you.

Ali: That's on me.

Ed: No comment.

Ali: There's so much fucked up stuff going on in every corner of the world that it just sickens you at a certain point, and that's kind of what Gutter Girl is I guess. It's not a very empowering band, it's kinda misanthropic, we don't really... I don't know. We aren't a straight edge band, we aren't inspiring people to be better, this whole project is just kinda wallowing in misery, we're all miserable. Yeah Gutter Girl is about being miserable and living in a miserable world I guess, living in the gutter.

AU: Describe the band's sound if possible.

Simon: Power violence? Leaning towards grindcore.

Ali: I say we're a grind band, most of our influences are grind bands, but if we come up with something that isn't particularly of the genre we don't discard it. So we do a little bit of everything as well.

AU: Who are your biggest influences? Are there any musicians who inspire you? What qualities do you admire about them?

Ali: I'd say the bands that inspired our sound the most when we first started out were grindcore and powerviolence bands like Nails, Napalm death, sex prisoner. In terms of lyrics I really admire Serj Tankian from System of a Down, I try to emulate him a bit whenever I write about politics or social issues in our music.

AU: What is your creative process like?

Ed: Usually Ali has an idea first, then we figure it out together and Simon does all the drums.

Simon: And then I finalize it, help arrange it.

AU: What's been the most challenging part of being in your band?

Ed: Tabbing whatever bullshit we write, and recording everything in one take.

Simon: Drumming. This band being one of many.

Ali: Writers block mostly. Just trying to come up with stuff I don't hate.

AU: Have you released an album or any songs recently?

Ali: We released an album in April last year called *A Silence In Heaven*. I think it's our finest achievement. I love it. I'm really proud of it, and we also have a split out with Oklahoma from Edmonton and it rips. It's probably our best sounding.

TORONTO TRASH



Simon: It's two of my favorite songs (we've made).

AU: In your opinion, what is wrong with the music scene now.

Simon: Drama between bands, bands not getting along.

Edward: We don't get paid enough.

Ali: I'd say the main problems with the music scene are the same problems with the rest of modern life. Venues close people get priced out of their scene, have to pack up and move, just because everything

is getting so corporate and people are just getting priced out of life.

AU: What are some of the things your band does to give back to the community?

Ali: We don't do as much I'd like to be honest. We play fundraiser and mutual aid shows when we can and we try to keep our merch, music and shows accessible. All our songs and albums are PWYC on bandcamp, and whenever we plan or organize a show ourselves we make sure it's NOTAFLOF. But you could always do more I guess.

AU: What are some of your best songs about?

Ali: Most of our best songs I'd say are just about people who take whatever they want regardless of the cost. States, corporations, individuals. "World of Filth" is about the afterlife being bought out and privatized, "Cape Fear" is about the strange incongruity of growing up and living in a country that was bombing your place of birth, but we still have some shock songs like "Alarm Force" and "Crocodile Ravaging a Human Corpse". I'd say lyrically we're a deeply political band, but recent unreleased stuff we've written has been more personal.

AU: Describe your band's live show verbally if you can.

Ali: I'd say it's very workman. It's in my opinion our greatest strength and weakness simultaneously. I don't do any crowd banter if I can help it, we play almost exclusively in drop c so no need to waste time tuning, we just get up there and bang out the set as fast and as perfect as we can.

Simon: We don't waste our time and we don't waste yours.

Ali: I think it works for us, the most common compliment we get is that we play a tight set, and I try to move around as much as I can. Edward couldn't be fucked though.

Ed: Hey my neck pops every now and then!

Simon: Sure it does.

Ali: Edward is an eighty year old man if he moves around his geriatric bones will crumble into dust.

Ed: My arthritis will kill me.

AU: Any shows or tours planned?

Ali: All quiet now.

AU: What should we know about you that we don't already? Anything else to promote?

Ali: New music incoming, our best music incoming.

AU: Any final words for our readers?

Ed: Final words? Why are they final?

Ali: Just take care of yourselves.

Simon: Fuck music, make noise, suck my dick, fuck you.

Ali: Yeah I'm gonna do all that.

AU: How do people find you online?

Ali: We're on Bandcamp, streaming and Instagram unfortunately.

guttergirl2.bandcamp.com

@guttergirlwastaken



PYTHONIC

Interview by Asher Thrasher

Pythonic rhythm guitarist and backing vocalist Vincent Kohut discusses the band's new EP, *Laws of Karma*.

AU: Welcome back to *Absolute Underground* Magazine. What has Pythonic been up to since we last spoke with you?

Vincent Kohut: We have been up to quite a bit! We just released our third EP, *Laws of Karma* on July 10, 2026. The EP is being very well received, and people are loving the tracks. We did a bit of touring with Exit Wound, which was a ton of fun.

We hit up some Manitoba cities, Brandon, The Pas, and Winnipeg, and also some Alberta dates in Calgary and Edmonton. Our live sound was very well received in every city. We definitely turned a few heads while we were out and started up some pits. We also have been working on new tracks for our next release and we are getting very close to being ready to record some more material!

AU: *Laws of Karma* marks the end of the "rewriting old riffs" era, and the beginning of Pythonic's fully reborn sound. How did shedding the past, musically and personally, shape the aggression, heaviness and emotional intensity of this new EP?

VK: The title track, "Laws of Karma", definitely highlights the negativity we were shedding. Bringing Morgan to the front of the band added so much raw aggression to all the tracks we have released on this EP, and we couldn't be happier with how the tracks have turned out because of it! Being able to regain control over subject matter really helped to shape the tracks into what we always wanted them to be. "Sentience" hits so much harder because of this and the fact we were able to channel so much emotion into the riffs and lyrics to drive the original point across of what

"Sentience" was supposed to be about.

AU: The EP artwork depicts a figure impaled on a liberty scale in a hellscape, directly tied to the themes in the title track. How did the visual concepts of karma, consequence and judgment influence your approach to songwriting and lyrical direction throughout the entire release?

VK: We definitely felt a heavy push to make this sound as impressive as possible because of it. We wanted to come back better than ever and really drive that message across. "Sentience" can be seen as the track of us coming to our wits and regaining control from situations that could feel like "Venom" running through your bloodstream. The "Set You Free" title, although the subject matter is not as pertinent to karma, definitely ties into the concept as we have set people free to impose our own karmic justice on the situation. "Laws of Karma" is the direct juxtaposition to the point we wanted to share through the tracks, and it drives the message home very well. And lastly, "Feed the Flames" also helps to drive the message through the tension in the riffs and the subsequent tempo burst at the end of the song. When you do negative things to people, the evil will creep up and chase you down, and this track outlines musically the feeling of being chased down and taken out, which karma will instinctively do to a person with negative traits.

AU: Many of these songs were born from real hardship, surgery recovery, disability struggles, abusive relationships and existential fear. How did channeling such raw personal experiences change the way you write, collaborate and express yourselves as a band?

VK: We definitely got more open with each other as a band because of this, and it helped everyone connect on a deeper level to really push that raw energy into our playing. When we are playing live, you can feel the raw emotion coming out in these songs as we play them. The bits and pieces every person puts of themselves into the tracks can be felt. Everyone in the band has learnt to imprint themselves more into the music we are writing. This helps us get to the more raw core of what we want people to feel, and it helps us to connect with people as well because many people have gone through very similar situations, and we are here to say you are not alone.

AU: Pythonic's sound has shifted toward a heavier death-groove and slam-leaning direction, with tracks like "Sentience" and "Set You Free" showcasing that evolution. What sparked this push into more extreme territory, and how do you see that trajectory

SASKATOMB

continuing on future releases?

VK: Morgan moving up to vocals definitely helped to make that push come to fruition. His vocals fit so well with very heavy, hard-hitting riffs. He can channel so much emotion through his gutturals that we definitely want to write more riffs to help push the animosity and anger he can portray so well. Ryan has always been a very slam-leaning writer with his riffs, and being able to showcase that a lot more has made the songs we are working on come out so much better. We are definitely playing into our strengths a lot more as a band now with the more extreme writing, and the riffs have only been getting more brutal and disgusting as time goes on. We have a few unreleased songs that we have made staples in our live sets, and they are some of the most praised songs after we leave the stage. The songs "Clubbed" and "Grave Bound" definitely get asked about where they can be streamed at nearly every show we play, and this has solidified our push into the heavier territory as these songs contain some of our heaviest riffs we have written. We all really love death, slam and groove metal, so it just makes sense to take the genres we love and combine those elements into tracks we enjoy playing and hearing ourselves. It has just happened to be a plus that other people have seemed to enjoy listening to them as well!

AU: Your live shows have become known for breaking expectations, mosh pits during opening slots, praise from veterans like Stu Block (Into Eternity) and Matt Cuthbertson

(Untimely Demise, Into Eternity), and invitations to tour from bands who barely knew you. How has this surge of live momentum influenced your confidence and creative decisions going into *Laws of Karma*?

VK: We definitely felt the need to try to capture our live feeling as best as we could during the recording process of *Laws of Karma*. We want to keep writing and releasing music that makes people want

to move and feel moved. After touring as well, we definitely feel a lot more comfortable on stage with everyone and have learned how to execute the feelings we are trying to push in our tracks a lot better. It has also made us feel very solidified in our writing capabilities, and there isn't as much banter among the band anymore of "Is this riff any good?" and there is a lot more "Check out this sick new riff." We are also feeling a much larger push to try and play more shows around the country as well as trying to branch out to other countries in the future. The positive reinforcement has definitely made everyone feel more sure of themselves as musicians and writers, and it is pushing us to write some of our best material yet!

AU: Three tracks on the EP, "Sentience", "Venom" and "Feed the Flames", carry intense emotional narratives tied directly to the band members' lives. When listeners hear these songs, what do you hope they take away from the vulnerability and catharsis behind the brutality?

VK: We hope people take away the message of "you are not alone". In many instances of extreme hardship, it is easy to think the world is falling around you and no one will understand, but if you open the narrative with people you trust, you will find that many others have shared in these hardships. Retreating too far inward and not talking about it will eat a person alive, and it has pushed many to an untimely end. The more vulnerable you can be, the more connected you will become, and the more connected you become, the stronger everyone becomes. There is strength in numbers.

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

VK: Support your local metal scenes and support one another. Keep working hard at your dreams and stay metal!

pythonic.bandcamp.com

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SCARE THE CHILDREN

Forsaken

Interview with Psy Sadako

By Ryan Dyer

Beijing's Scare the Children return with *Forsaken*, a concept-driven release that expands their horror aesthetic into a more immersive and philosophical space. Moving beyond earlier work rooted in dark fiction and cinematic influence, the project frames death as a transition rather than an end, exploring what lingers afterward—memory, guilt, identity, and judgment. In this interview, vocalist Psy Sadako discusses the album's central ideas, the evolution of the band's characters into post-death forms, the deliberate narrative structure hidden within the tracklist, and the group's growing commitment to presenting a unified world across music, visuals, and

performance.

AU: What was the starting point for *Forsaken* compared to your earlier releases?

Psy Sadako: *Forsaken* started with a simple question:

What happens when you die? Is there silence? Is there judgment? Or is there something waiting?

This album is our vision of the afterlife and also was based on numerous nightmares I had over the last few years.

Forsaken opens the grave, abandoned, buried, forgotten. But death is not the end. It's a passage. Before, we were telling horror stories inspired by movies and dark

fiction. Now, we go further; we explore what remains after death. Not the body, but what stays: memories, lies, guilt... things that don't disappear.

AU: You've introduced new characters and costumes for this era. What are they?

PS: The characters you see are not new. Rather, they are what they have become after death. Lady Sadako was once a mourning widow, consumed by grief. Through a dark ritual, she becomes the Raven Witch, a supernatural force guided by spectral ravens, leading others into the abyss. VLADS is one and many. The result of a failed experiment, multiple personalities trapped in one body, constantly shifting, never stable. Yuriko was once admired for her beauty, but her soul was rotten. After being exposed and executed by her village, she returns as an evil spirit, repeating her violence again and again. MORT is something older, once a ghoul, now a shapeshifter born from

the grave, evolving beyond death. In *Forsaken*, they are no longer characters. They are what remains when everything human is gone.

AU: Each song title contains capitalized letters that form a full sentence, "FOR A LIAR TO GRIEVE." Was it planned from the beginning or discovered after the tracklist came together?

PS: Yes, from the beginning. "FOR A LIAR TO GRIEVE" is like a hidden sentence inside the album, something you don't see at first, but once you do, it changes everything. It represents judgment. Not from others, but from yourself. In the world of *Forsaken*, you don't escape your past. It follows you beyond death. And eventually, you have to face it.

AU: What was the concept behind the latest video for "InfesTer"?

PS: "InfesTer" shows what happens when something survives death with you. It's not an external force. It's something already inside such as guilt, lies, memories, that keeps growing. The video feels like a loop. Because in this world, death doesn't free you, it traps inside what you carry. A bit like those very real nightmares when you feel like you are being chased and you wish to wake up but you can't, or sometimes you think you did but you are still trapped inside and will have to wake up a second time ... for real.

AU: For this album, you have gone all out with promo materials/lyric videos and so on. How determined are Scare the Children at this point?

PS: Everything has to feel like one world. Music, visuals, costumes, stage decor, they all tell the same story. Everything we create is part of a horror experience, not just music. We are not trying to do more; we are trying to make

ABSOLUTE ASIA

something complete. Something you don't just listen to. Something you enter. That's why it took us so long to come back. We are really determined to do things right.

AU: Looking at Scare the Children now - you have the songs and the lore to be a major force. This brings us to your upcoming festival shows, such as Rock the Lakes with Powerwolf, Arch Enemy, Mushroomhead, etc. Nine Treasures will also tour with Mushroomhead

in the US later this year.

It feels as if the years of hard work are paying off for a lot of the bands. What can you say about your inclusion? It feels like things are opening for a lot of bands.

PS: It feels like things are finally moving, not just for us, but for a lot of bands. You see bands like Nine Treasures touring abroad and playing bigger shows, and it shows that all those years of work can really lead somewhere. Being

part of a festival like Rock the Lakes alongside bands like Powerwolf, Arch Enemy, and Mushroomhead is a big step for us, and we're really excited about it. But we don't see it as something to celebrate yet, we see it as a moment to prove that what we do belongs on that stage. We've spent years building our sound, our visuals, our whole universe. Now it's about bringing that to a bigger audience and seeing how people react. That's where things start becoming real.

But yeah... we'll definitely celebrate after the show.

scarethechildren666.bandcamp.com



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ROYAL ANCHOR TATTOO

AU: Please introduce yourself. Who are we talking to and what are your skills to pay the bills?

Jason Wainwright: Hi my name is Jason Wainwright - I'm known as Biggie Jay. Saving lives and tanning hides are how I make my living.

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

JW: I have been tattooing for 27 years now. Being at the right place at the right time was how I started. Getting tattoos at 15 back in 1990 was when my fascination began. A tattoo parlour was



a scary place back then and I loved all the magic inside of this taboo world. It was a different time for sure.

AU: What tattoo styles do you specialize in?

JW: I specialize in making the clients ideas come to life..I think I'm pretty versatile - I can do anything a client asks for.

I like to do nautical and aquatic themes - I scuba dive as much as possible and therefore I tattoo a lot of the dive community which usually entails some sort of fish and aquatic scene...I'm



always down with some sort of dark imagery, new school, cartoon, graffiti kind of stuff and traditional. After 27 years, I'm pretty versatile, you can throw me a portrait or some photo realism too, I like it all. It's mostly about people and getting to know them.

AU: What shop are you working at and what is the shop's origin story?

JW: I'm an owner and work at Royal Anchor



Tattoo. I opened my doors 13 years ago when I bought a place out in New West. I figured why commute? At that time there were only two other shops... Now there's probably 20. I had a huge walk-in shop just below Douglas College, but after Covid, I decided to downsize. I also didn't enjoy being a manager. Now I have a nice private studio that faces the Fraser River in downtown New West which I share with two other artists; Sean Cox and Brandy Bones.

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

Being able just to support my family with my



Tattooing has been difficult the last two years as our economy is struggling and expendable income is less for households. Not to mention there are way too many tattooers. I'm still tattooing but ferries are keeping me busy for the summer months.

AU: Would you rather have a dick that looked like a toe, or have all your toes look like dicks?

JW: Dick toes. Obviously.

Instagram: @seas_ink

Website: royalanchortattoo.com

Email: bigtattoo@gmail.com

art. That's something to be proud of. Opening a studio in my community and creating jobs for my community is something else I pride myself on.

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

JW: A marriage proposal in the skin that turned into a massive cover up... and titty bat requests.

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

JW: I got a Star Wars themed Jar Jar in a jar that's looking for a home. I've also got a deadly design of the Necronomicon that I'd love to do! Hit me up!

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

JW: I just started a deckhand role with BC ferries.



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NUKE 'EM ALL

By Vince D'Amato

1986 was kind of a pivotal year for indie New York film filmmaker Lloyd Kaufman and the whole of the Troma Team, when Lloyd Kaufman was forced to get involved with the directing duties of the now-Tromatic classic *Class of Nuke 'em High*. Until he was forced to take over the reigns of that film (after only a couple of days of shooting), Kaufman's and Troma's plans were for him to step away from directing altogether and to start producing projects for other like-minded directors. And certainly, original *Nuke 'em High* director Richard W. Haines was like-minded, having directed the Troma pick-up *Splatter*



University, though he may have been slightly out of his depth for the disorganized chaos that is an actual in-house Troma production. With Kaufman forced to step in in order to save the production, Kaufman then held onto the tether of directing his own company's films; and although he and partner Micahel Herz did hand off the following two *Nuke 'em High* sequels (to the like-minded Eric Louzil), the sequels remained firmly in the Troma universe, even getting all meta about it, and allowing Kaufman and Herz to move on to directing *Troma's War*, *The Toxic Avenger Parts 2 & 3*, and *Sgt. Kabukiman NYPD* before Kaufman split off from their directing partnership to solely helm the classics *Tromeo and Juliet*, *Terror Firmer*, and *The Toxic Avenger IV*... And ultimately directing two more *Nuke 'em High* sequels in 2013 and 2017. His films have inspired countless other

TALES FROM THE DARKSIDE

independent filmmakers, some of whom have even set their own films in the outskirts of the Troma universe (seemingly with Troma's blessing), like *Mulva: Zombie Ass Kicker*, *Mulva: Kill Teen Ape!* and most recently, *Mulva: Demon Ass Kicker*. Our company Darkside Releasing has worked with Troma in the past, but this time the loose and chaotic *Mulva* trilogy came to us in a really roundabout way – via an L.A. partner who was helping out *Mulva: Demon Ass Kicker* producer JR Bookwalter, whose name may sound familiar to a few niche fans of VHS-era genre films (and I mean *shot* on VHS), as the director/producer of *Ozone*, *Bloodletting*, and *Witchhouse 2*, themselves serving as ample



inspiration for indie filmmakers in the nineties, through a whole other microcosm of genre movies. Just like Lloyd Kaufman and Troma, JR Bookwalter is still at it today.

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...WELCOME TO '86

By Vince D'Amato

The HBO Max series *IT... Welcome to Derry* is possibly one of the best horror shows out there right now. So far, I've

enjoyed it more than most of the feature horror films that have been produced over the last few years, and although this may be a wildly unpopular thing to say, I actually liked it more than Netflix's *Stranger Things*. The reason for that comparison is because both horror series revolve around the inner world of a group of kids – but truthfully, that's about where the similarity ends; other than both series being Stephen King-"ish" in their first seasons, the tones are completely different. To its absolute credit, *IT... Welcome to Derry* delivers more balls-out horror than I've seen from even the unrated versions of feature horror films, and in this regard, it shares more with Stephen King's original novel (where the gore is not held back) than any of the other adaptations ever did. I won't go into detail here as I hate giving anything away, but the special effects in this HBO Max series are definitely impressive, and the young actors are honestly the best I've ever seen – you're free to disagree, but I'll stand by that statement; often the young actors in *IT... Welcome to Derry* are able

to convey more emotion, horror, charm, and romance than a lot of their adult contemporaries in other modern horror films. This compliment credits the directing of the series too, of course; and the fact that the gore effects, editing, pacing, and the basic *daring* of the episodes that serve to thrust the plot forward like an intense locomotive of horror while expertly toying with our emotions and expectations comes as something of a shock to those of us who are used to the more by-the-numbers streaming series. Setting-wise, *IT... Welcome to Derry* is definitely cued more from the recent film adaptations of *IT*, but there are important plot points that have been ported over from King's original 1986 novel and used as the core structure for the new series. '86 also saw a couple of other King adaptations (*Stand By Me*, also featuring a group of young kids, and his self-directed *Maximum*



Overdrive), and which happened to be one of my all-time favourite years in horror ever; giving us Stuart Gordon's *From Beyond*, Ken Russell's *Gothic*, and two of the three Tobe Hooper post-*Poltergeist* Cannon releases, *Invaders from Mars* and *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre Part 2*. This brief era in Tobe

Hooper's career is significant as it not only contains two of the best films of his career: *Lifeforce*, released the year before, and '86's *Texas Chainsaw 2* – which commercially failed to revive his standing as one of the best horror directors of all time after the *Poltergeist* debacle that saw audiences and the media portray

Steven Spielberg as the actual director of the film. For me, I'm team Hooper all the way, I think anyone familiar with Hooper's filmography has only to look at *Poltergeist* to plainly see that it has far more in common with



immediately when he attempted film one in '83 as part of the *Twilight Zone* movie, adapting a segment from the original series called *The Monsters are Due on Maple Street*, which was

to be a wild, over-the-top social-commentary alien-invasion horror setpiece, until real-life horror struck the set during the filming of John Landis' segment where veteran actor Vic Morrow and two young child actors were horrifically killed. After that, with Spielberg unable to walk away from his *Twilight Zone* contract with Warner Brothers, he instead shrunk himself back into a hushed corner and quietly directed one of the most genteel *Twilight Zone* segments ever produced over six uneventful days. Spielberg wouldn't get to have his wild alien-invasion horror story until 32 years later, when he made *War of the Worlds* with Tom Cruise, which to me was

one of Spielberg's better films. In the course of those 32 years, Spielberg had hired Tobe Hooper again to direct episodes of his alien series *Taken*, and he also purchased the rights to the Stephen King / Peter Straub fantasy-horror novel *The Talisman*, which to this day has never been

Hooper's films than it does Spielberg's from that time period. But if we want to really delve into this, we should start nine years before those 1986 Cannon Films... back in '77, when *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* was first capturing audiences' imagination

for UFOs and alien lifeforms... After the success of this film, Spielberg was under contract to give Columbia Pictures another *Close Encounter*-related IP for release the following year, and he came up with an alien-invasion horror film titled *Night Skies* that he had asked Tobe Hooper to direct. Ultimately this project fell apart, and the commissioned script, written by John Sayles (*Pirhana*, *The Howling*), was splintered up and sold off as the pieces that became *E.T.*, *Poltergeist*, and *Gremlins*, with

Hooper given *Poltergeist* instead of the original *Night Skies* project. Of course this meant that Spielberg wasn't going to get to produce his original alien-invasion horror story, which seems to have haunted him indefinitely over the past four decades. He tried to rectify this almost

produced into any type of visual content, and which may or may not share a literary universe with King's *The Dark Tower*, *The Colorado Kid*, *Lisey's Story*, and of course, *IT*. Fast-forward to now, and screenwriter David Koepp (*A Stir of Echoes*, *Panic Room*), who co-wrote *War of the Worlds* for Spielberg, has collaborated with the director once again for this summer's alien thriller *Disclosure Day*, which by the time this article is published will have probably already been forgotten about, despite it being the most exciting Spielberg film in decades. *Disclosure Day* is non-horror and I thought it had more in common with *Raiders of the Lost Ark* than it did with *Close Encounters* or *War of the*



Worlds – but I'd better stop talking about this, as I might be making it sound better than it is. Yes, it was exciting, but I think Spielberg's excellence ended with *War of the Worlds*, as Tobe Hooper's certainly did not end with *Poltergeist*; I still believe Hooper's most creatively impressive years were in that window of '85-'86 while he was working for Cannon Films. Somewhat following in the more

ABSOLUTE HORROR

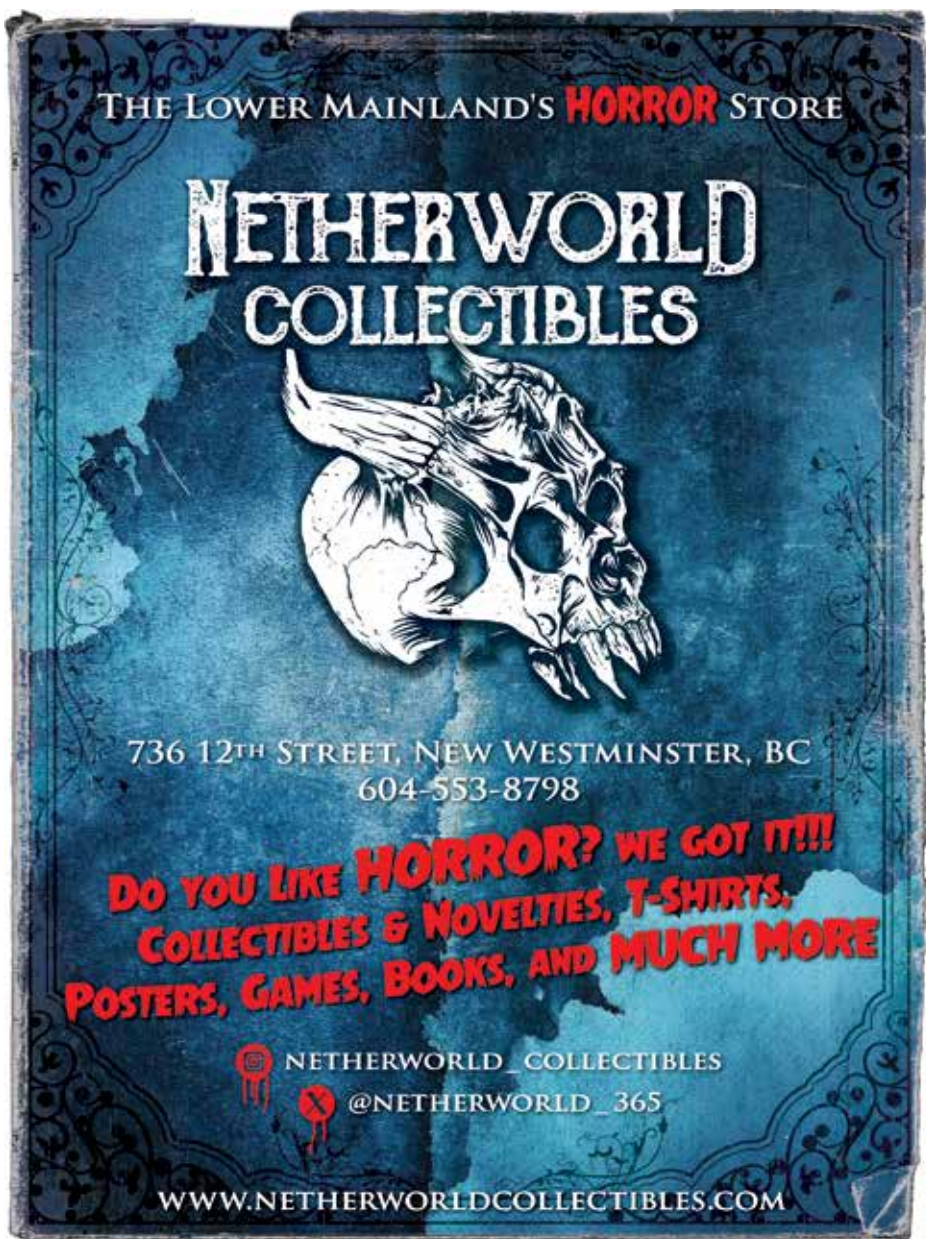


humorous style of Hooper's films from that era (was it Hooper or was it the time period?) 1986 also brought us another absolute killer alien-horror comedy, *Night of the Creeps*, although David

Cronenberg's own sci-fi horror masterpiece *The Fly* may have slightly overshadowed this one, and James Cameron's *Aliens* definitely did. Ironically, in 1986, another sequel to one of Hooper's earlier horror films also happened, *Poltergeist II: The Other Side*, which also boasted special effects designed by H.R. Giger (*Alien* / *Aliens*). But 1986 was also, weirdly, a specifically concentrated point in horror that saw

crossovers in horror with alien & sci-fi themes, which included Hooper's own *Invaders from Mars* and Stephen King's *Maximum Overdrive*, and the then-budding outer universe of gods and monsters in King's novel *IT*; the mythology of which is still being expanded upon forty years later in *IT... Welcome to Derry*.

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SHEGLANK'D SHOULDERS

Back to the Endless Grind

By Ty Stranglehold and Ira Hunter

AU: Who are you and what are you know for?

DI: Dan Izzo. Best known for being the singer of the Sheglank'd Shoulders, obviously.

AU: Who else is in the band and what does it say on their Tinder/Grindr profiles?

DI: Tiemen Kuipers on guitar, Adam Oberg on drums and Todd Harkness on bass. They're all in serious relationships so they're out of the Tinder game, but maybe you can help me write mine?

AU: What's the origin of Sheglank'd Shoulders?

DI: When I met Tiemen he had a radio show called Teenage Depression. I didn't know him but I'd listen to the show and read his fanzine. I sent him the debut CDR by my band the Motherfuckers, he gave it a bad review, and we became friends shortly after. We were both unemployed at the time so we started skating together and listening to a lot of skate rock and shitty Oi! He was in a band called the Diabetics with Adam and his brother Paul, and I ended up going on stage with them to do a few cover songs, and the idea to do a skate rock band kind of grew from there. Our original bass player was Al Drinkle from the band Rum Runner. We played a few shows and recorded a few demo tracks with that lineup, then Todd Harkness took over on bass and we recorded the *Endless Grind* album. It basically started as a joke band with a stupid name, but ended up being one of my favorite bands that I've been in.

AU: Were any other band names on the table at the time you formed? Gronked Groins? Annihilated Ankles? Split Skulls?

DI: Man, I wish we'd thought of Annihilated Ankles! I've never really been known for my ability to come up with good band names. I think I wanted to call it CürbRipper (with as many umlauts as possible) but Tiemen pointed out that that was really lame.

We were watching The Search for Animal Chin and Tiemen said "We should start a band called 'Rippin' Style, Holmes'" but about 5 minutes later I decided "Sheglank'd Shoulders" was way better. How do you spell that? Who knows... but it should definitely have an apostrophe!

AU: Your album *Endless Grind* is 20 years old. Where did that time go? What have you guys been doing the last couple of decades?

DI: Shit, man, where DID that time go. Tiemen moved to Victoria not too long after that album came out, so the band never did a lot, but we

did release a couple 7"s after that and played a few shows here and there. Todd and I had a band called the Spastic Panthers for a few years, and I'm still playing with the Motherfuckers. I think Tiemen's been in about 37 bands since then. Adam just started a sweet Oi band with our original bass player Al and Niall from the Spastic Panthers. They're called the Separate Beds and I think they're going to be Calgary's top band within a year.

AU: What were some of your most popular songs and the stories behind them?

DI: I'm not sure any of them were really popular, but a few of them have cool stories. One of my favourites is "Wake Shake". Tiemen told me his Wake Shake recipe (a bastardized version of the Wake Shake recipe from a mid to late 80's Thrasher... generous amounts of instant coffee, energy drink and ice cream... delish) and we decided we needed to start making them at shows. I honestly don't remember what came first, the song or the "incident", but one night before playing a show at a bar called the Stetson we went and bought a cheap blender and paused mid-set to start whipping up wake shakes. We threw a bunch of instant coffee and coke and red bull into this blender... for some reason we decided to use ice cream sandwiches instead of ice cream, and then decided to just throw them into the blender in their paper wrappers, so we had this disgusting brown mess with chunks of white paper floating in it that we were pouring into cups and handing them out to the crowd.

"American Nomad" was Tiemen's idea, because Bill Danforth was one of his favorite skaters. He came to me with the chorus, which was "American Nomad... grrrrrrrr!". When *Endless Grind* came out I sent promos out to a bunch of companies trying to get sponsorships. The only person who wrote back to me was Jay Kelly from American Nomad skateboards, who ended up sending me some clothes and decks. Thanks for believing in us, Jay! "Skate Trip" is about a road trip we took when the Great Falls, Montana skatepark first opened. We were really into getting to parks early before the crowds showed up (see "Paradise is an Empty Skatepark") so we decided we had to leave Calgary at midnight or something so we could arrive in Great Falls right at sunrise. Unfortunately this meant crossing the US border at 3 AM or something, looking all sketchy, sleep-deprived and Red Bull'd up. I think they were mid-way through questioning us when some dude just drove right through without stopping so they let us go and started chasing after him instead.

AU: Did you ever find out what happened to Frankie Hill?

DI: He was actually just inducted into the skateboarding hall of fame this year! So was Bill Danforth. Obviously I think we played a small part in both of those.



SHRED SESSION

The other guy who sent me free stuff back then was Scott Star, who ran the Tail Devil company. I don't think I even sent him an album, but he came across the "Frankie Hill" song somewhere, where I call Tail Devils "gay" and got in touch with me by e-mail. For those of you who missed it, the Tail Devil was a little skid plate with flints in it that you'd screw onto the tail of your board, so it would throw up sparks when you dragged the tail. He ended up sending us a case of them, so for a week or so we were trying to stick as many as we could onto our boards and doing a bunch of dumb shit with them. I still have ONE in the original packaging, which I'm saving for our upcoming tour. Frankie himself e-mailed me at some point as well, saying he liked the song. In retrospect, it was kind of a mean way to pay tribute to a skater I really liked, but he was cool about it.

AU: You guys were already singing about being broken from skating in your 20s-30s... How are your 40s-50s treating you?

DI: I think I'm probably in better shape at 48 than I was at 28, but I definitely don't skate as much as I used to, and I'm even more of a pussy than I was back then. But I still love skateboarding and try to get out as often as I can. I live in Edmonton now and there's a lot of good parks nearby, as well as some pretty sweet secret curb and bank spots.

AU: The album, *Endless Grind*, is coming out on vinyl for the first time. Does it feel good to revisit it? How does it hold up? What record label is releasing it?

DI: I just got the test pressings a couple days ago, so I've been listening to it a lot, and I think it still holds up. When the album was recorded skateboarding and punk rock really were my life, and it feels good to look back on those days. We had it re-mastered by Grant Howarth at Audiohouse in Calgary, who did all of the original recordings, and I'm happy with how it came out. It's going to be on Todd's label, Debt Offensive Records. The original was on my now-defunct label Handsome Dan, and he really wanted the picture of me with a mustache on the re-issue, so we're calling it a split release between the two labels.

AU: What makes this a "Deluxe Reissue"? Any bonus features info you can share?

DI: Well, I wanted to do a fancy gatefold sleeve with a big fold-out poster and a bunch of bonus crap... but I also didn't want to invest a lot of money in it, so it ended up being not-so-deluxe. We upgraded the original layout and I think it looks a lot nicer, and it also includes bonus tracks from two 7"s and a flexi disc that we released, so it's pretty much every Sheglank'd song you could want on one chunk of vinyl. At some point we decided to cover the entire Black Flag *Nervous Breakdown* EP, but those songs were only released

on a super-limited lathe cut 7", so this is the first time they're available in a really good-sounding format. There are a couple songs that were released only on a flexi disc, so I don't imagine there are a lot of those floating around in good condition anymore.

AU: Is there going to be shows to go along with the release? Where will we see you play?

DI: Yes! The record should be out at the beginning of September, so we've booked a little tour to promote it. We'll be playing the Palomino in Calgary on Sept 18th, Club 97 in Edmonton the 19th, the Phoenix in Victoria on the 25th, and the Terminal in Nanaimo on the 26th.

AU: What's kept you in Skaterock this long?

Who are some other skate punk bands people should check out?

DI: I still love skateboarding and punk rock, and I don't really have anything better to do with my time. When it comes to skate punk bands... The Hoosegow, The Hoosegow, and nothing but The Hoosegow. If the Hoosegow are reading this, please get back together to play with us in Victoria. Oh, and Bronxxxxxx from Osaka, Japan. Those guys are cool too.

AU: Has your feelings about longboards changed at all over time?

DI: I've become more tolerant as I age, but I wouldn't ride one myself...

AU: Will "Too Twanked to Skate" make the setlist?

DI: I think we need to play pretty much every song we have to fill a 20 minute set!

AU: What 5 pro skaters from any era would you want to have a session with?

DI: Obviously we've gotta have Frankie Hill and Bill Danforth. Natas has to be in there as well, because he's the greatest skater in history. I'd round it out with Kevin Staab, the punk rock pirate, and Mike McGill, just cuz everybody seems to hate Mike McGill. The real question is WHERE are we skating?

AU: Anything else to mention or promote?

DI: Ever since Thrasher Magazine did their first "King of the Road" I've wanted to incorporate daily challenges into a tour. For some reason no one wants to play along. Tiemen's agreed to daily challenges, but skateboarding ones only. This means some of the more interesting challenges like "Tiemen gets his eyebrow pierced" and "Todd gets a perm" are off the table, but I think it will still be fun. I'm planning to document it all in a video journal so we can all enjoy it for years to come.

AU: How do people find you online?

DI: We've got a Bandcamp page where you can buy our stuff digitally, and you'll be able to order the LP there once it's out. I'm pretty hopeless at social media but I've been trying to revive our Facebook page... We're up to 420 followers!

sheglankdshoulders.bandcamp.com

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LOGAN FULMER

Interview by FLORA

AU: For readers meeting you for the first time, who is Logan Fulmer, and how did skateboarding first become such an important part of your life?

Logan Fulmer: I'm a 40-something skateboarder, father, husband and general fun guy. Like a lot of other 80s babies, I was heavily influenced by Marty McFly and Christian Slater. When Marty dodged Biff Tannen by breaking the bars off a scooter and skitching on the back of his car, I was intrigued. But when I watched *Gleaming the Cube* with my family and saw Slater launch himself off a jersey barrier and through the window to save the babe, I took my Dominion scooter/skateboard to my dad and said, "I need you to take these bars off my skateboard, now."

It wasn't long until I had mowed enough lawns to go into Pro Skates and buy my first setup. A Firm David and Goliath board where Goliath looked like RoboCop—it was so sick. I was obsessed with skate videos too. *The Chocolate Tour* video got worn out from my rewinding.

AU: A lot of people step away from skateboarding as life gets busier, but you've stayed with it. What keeps pulling you back?

LF: It's the feeling you get from skateboarding. This satisfying feeling of doing something completely pointless that brings you so much satisfaction and then just feels so good. There's not a lot of things as a father you get to do that are just for you. A front side slasher in the driveway, on my quarter pipe is just for me. Honestly I think a lot of 40-year-old men would have better lives if they could just scratch a little coping in the backyard. I think it would solve a lot of people's problems, man, because once you do that, a few times, anything that was bothering you doesn't really seem to be a big deal anymore. There's so much noise and bad shit in the world but it all goes away when ur shredding. You got real bad ADHD? Not after you drop in you don't. I think it's Jay Adams who said "You didn't quit skateboarding because you got old, you got

old because you quit skateboarding."

AU: You've introduced your son to skateboarding. Has becoming a parent changed the way you look at skating?

LF: Oh, man. Well, first of all, I was never a helmet guy. And now I never let my kiddo ride without his helmet. I understand why it used to bum my mom out so bad that I would never wear a helmet. Sorry mom, I get that

one now. During the COVID days I built a whole skatepark in our driveway just to teach him how to skate. Well kinda, I mean he was 2 years old then so maybe it was for me, but either way it was awesome to teach him how to roll around but he still hasn't really fallen in love with it. I used to joke that the worst thing in life would be if my son started to ride a scooter. Well, my little man wanted tried out the scooter for the first time and he absolutely loves it. Nooooo! My own son, a scooter kid. Ha ha. I quickly realized the only thing really terrible would be having parents that don't support the things that you love. If he's into scootering, I guess now I'm into scootering. Just having a healthy kid I can go to the park and roll around with is as good as it gets. I am working my ass off to teach him proper park etiquette though.

AU: You've found a way to give back by passing along used skateboards to kids at local skateparks. What inspired you to start doing this?

LF: That whole thing just sort of came up randomly. I had a friend give me a board at work. Shout out Yaz! I ended up at the park one day and I saw a kid riding this tattered, beat up old board. He was a good skater, so I grabbed it out the car like "Man you want this? Someone gave it to me and I am plenty old enough to buy my own boards anytime I want to. You should have it." He was just over the top thrilled. And then I gave a board to a young lady that goes to school with my son, and it just feels really good. I grew up as a pretty poor kid, and my parents didn't exactly have a ton of extra money for skateboards, so, getting a brand new setup from a stranger would have been the coolest thing. The fact that I can find these boards on Facebook Marketplace from some university kid who's moving back to Ontario or wherever, just getting rid of an old WHIP for \$20, and then getting it into the hands of some kid who really wants to skate it? Buddy, that's about as good a feeling as one could get, you know?

AU: Has there been one moment or story that has really stayed with you?

SHRED SESSION

LF: The one that stands out the most felt so good. I saw this dude riding down the street with a board that's just kicked. With the gouges you get in a truck when you've skated it to the point where it's fully beat down. The grip tape was really beat up too and when it's that shredded, that's a guy who skates a ton. So, I yelled out "Yo homie, you need a new setup?" "What do you mean? Like, of course, I do." I said okay, and pulled the car to the side of the road and popped the trunk. "Yo, grab one out of the back." I could hear him as he opened the trunk up like "What the fuck, which one?" "Whichever one you want homie." He pulled out a board - a Boo Johnson DGK with brand spankin' new thunders on it and a fresh set of wheels too. "Ooh yeah, dude, that one's sick. It rips right?" "Dude, thank you so much!" "It's all good homie."

As I drove away I could see him looking at it in disbelief and it felt so great. The best thing is, I've seen him at the park and he doesn't recognize me at all, and this kid shreds dude. The dude just rips, loves skating, in his 20s and obviously did not have extra money. Times are tough right now man and a full setup like that can run you a buck eighty to two fiddy, so the fact that I was able to get it from some family garage and into his hands was 20 bones well spent.

AU: You've talked about helping other skaters. What is it about the skate community that makes people look out for each other?

LF: A skatepark has a certain, almost family vibe to it, you know? Once you've even been to the skatepark enough times, people don't give a shit about how good you are, they just know that you're out there trying to get it right. I've never been that good in my life and have had some moments where I've done some pretty gnarly stuff. I've never been one of the best skaters in the park but there is this camaraderie when you're trying to learn a new trick, or battling something, no matter what level of skill it takes to get that trick, when you do get it, and people have seen you battling it, There's an all around celebration. Everybody gets super pumped. Everyone gets stoked for it. If it's a kid learning how to do a rock fakie, or if it's a guy trying to do a tre flip down a big set of stairs, it doesn't really matter, when it happens, people are fuckin stoked for it. The level of stokeage is always there no matter the skill level.

AU: This issue celebrates 1986: The Year of Thrash—40 Years of Crossover. What role did heavy music play in shaping your skating and the culture you grew up in?

LF: Oh yeah, *Dirty Rotten Imbeciles*, *Thrash Zone* was a big one for me back in the day. I had a cassette in my yellow Walkman with that on one side, and Operation Ivy on the other. Suicidal Tendencies had that song "Possessed to Skate", 'Cause he rips when he skates, cuz he never hesitates. That had the sickest video, too. 'Remember, no skateboarding until you've done your homework.' Suicidal Tendencies show up in his house with Natas (Kaupas) I think, and skate his house. Doing bonelesses on the wall, then they drain the pool, so sick. The *Tony Hawk* game had ST on the soundtrack, and I think DRI too.

Thrash always reminds me of the greatest skateboard movie ever, *Thrashin'* (1986). Corey and the Ramp Locals vs. The Daggers. The Daggers are as cool as it gets man. The freaking Dagger earrings and leather jackets. They skated their house and crushed beer. I wanted to be those guys so bad.

AU: Underground music and skateboarding have always been closely connected. How did that relationship shape your experience growing up?

LF: There was always this culture with skateboarding and punk rock. The first time I heard a lot of bands I love was through skate videos. Mosh pits and skateboarding were my jam. Warped Tour always had a pipe. I remember watching Steve Caballero skate and listening to Less Than Jake in 2001. My mind was blown. As a young dude growing up in Halifax, the only place you could see punk rock bands was at the Pavilion which was right outside the Commons, which was the only skatepark in almost all of Nova Scotia. They even had punk shows in TKO, the short-lived but epic indoor park in the north end. You'd get a 40 of OE and go crush it at the Commons and skate for a bit before you'd go see D.O.A. open for Propagandhi. I saw Choke once, and a guy broke a 40 and got in a fight with some guy right outside the show. I'll never forget cuz I learned crooked grinds that night, so it has been part of my life forever.

AU: Skateboarding and punk rock gave you a sense of belonging. What do you hope the next generation of skaters finds in that same community?

LF: Skateboarding and punk rock always gave me a sense of belonging. There was this lil secret community that I was a part of and we were so different but all so much the same. Everybody's a dude when we're getting gnarly — in the park, at a spot, or in the pit. We're all just friends watching out for each other. I hope they find that first. I also hope they don't take it too seriously. Big cash prizes and the Olympics make me worry that kids will start to feel this need to constantly be moving up the ladder and collecting tricks and clips like a financial portfolio. Progression is dope but just doing slashers with ur buds is really in my mind the most important part. The real hammers were the friendships we made along the way. Ha ha what a kook.

AU: For readers who want to support their local skate communities, what are some simple ways they can help the next generation of skaters?

LF: The biggest thing is to shop at your local skate shop. Don't buy online because the skateboard scene is supported 99% by local shops. Without them, there are no contests. Where else can you get bushings for a set of Indys? Shout out to the boys at Influence! Also remember a skatepark is not a 'drop-off-your-kids zone.' They gotta learn basic park etiquette and how to navigate without getting hurt. It doesn't take long, but it's super important to be involved at the beginning. Soon the skatepark will become a place of joy and friendship for the next 50 years.

Most of all, be kind to each other, keep making art and never stop pushing forward on a skateboard or just in general. Much love.

HAVE AN OLD SKATEBOARD YOU WANT TO GET INTO THE HANDS OF A KID WHO WILL USE IT?

Hit up Logan: logancwd@gmail.com

SUPPORT YOUR LOCAL SKATE SHOPS: Rude Boys (Banff), The Source (Calgary), Society (Revelstoke), Pro Skates (Halifax), and Influence (Victoria), and all the others supporting the scene!

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1978 - SKULL SKATES RETROSPECTIVE

Interview with PD, founder and
owner of Skull Skates/PD's Hot Shop/
Pop Cult Museum

By Ira "Hosoi
Hammerhead" Hunter

AU: What's new with you,
PD?

PD: Every day is something
new in the land of Skull,
the design and production
of our stuff takes a fair
amount of effort but
mostly seems worth the
time.

AU: Tell us about your
newest exhibit at the Pop
Cult Museum at PD's Hot
Shop in Qualicum Beach
on Vancouver Island.

PD: The idea was foisted
that it would be a
reasonable concept to tie our illustrious history
to our current worldwide headquarters now
anchored in Qualicum Beach. Starting with the
earliest examples, we are showing the ongoing
evolution of the brand in our Pop Culture
Museum.

AU: Skull Skates has
been kicking since the
late '70s, longer than
most brands, longer
than some of us have
been alive. What's it
like seeing your own
history in a museum
setting instead of
just out there in the
streets?

PD: Truthfully - the most
legitimate place for skateboarding really is out
in the streets, but we learned when we did an
exhibit with the Vancouver museum years ago
that people outside of skating had a interest in
the culture and we felt reluctantly qualified to tell
that story.

AU: Have you ever attempted to put something
like this together in the past?

PD: Our exhibit at the Vancouver museum and
some of the exhibits here in Qualicum have
touched on Skull's history in context with other
artifacts, but this is the first one to focus on
specifically the Skull story.

AU: Tell us about some of the pieces on display.

PD: We've unearthed some very ancient Great
North Country skateboard decks which we are
showing. Great North Country Skateboards
became GNC skates and GNC Skates evolved into
Skull Skates.

AU: Is there something in this retrospective
that even surprised you when you dug it up,
something you'd basically forgotten you
made? Anything you thought, we should bring
this back?

PD: Some of the collaborations are very
interesting. For example, people may not

remember that Skull has
collabed with Tracker Trucks,
Gullwing Trucks, Spitfire
Wheels, etc.

AU: How long will this exhibit
be running?

PD: We're just in the process
of planning an official opening
event probably in September
with more details to be
announced, from there we
see this becoming a long haul
exhibit. Likely until next spring
or until we get sick of it!

AU: What do you attribute
Skull Skates longevity to?

PD: Our number one reason
is we are really completely
clueless and are just making
it up as we go along, ignorance is known to be a
form of bliss. And we are some of the most blissful
people we know.

AU: You've made skateboards, longboards,
bikes, skimboards, even
snowboards at one
point. Anything else
you still want to try and
create one day?

PD: Skull has done our
best to focus on the
most functional of the
machines avoiding
anything gimmicky,
contraption-like or web
hyped. We essentially
don't make anything
that we don't participate
in with the exception

of surfboards which have been released in very
small numbers by different shapers mostly to
show respect for surfing as the foundation of
skating and more specifically surf style skating.

AU: The Skull Skates logo and your DIY ethics
have never changed while everything else



SHRED SESSION

in skating turned into a
massive industry. How'd
you manage to not get
swallowed up by that?

PD: The best course of
action we have found is
to steer clear of industry
douchebags which takes
some negotiating as they
seem to be lurking almost
everywhere these days.

AU: If some kid with zero
clue about skate history
wanders in, what's the one
thing you want stuck in
their head walking out?

PD: I think the thing we see
often with these exhibits,
and especially with younger
visitors, is that people
tend to be pretty blown away how advanced
skateboarding had already become in previous
decades and how the pioneers created moves
and styles on skateboards that
would now be considered
to be inadequate by today's
standards.

AU: After spending time
revisiting the archive for this
retrospective, has it changed
how you think about where
the brand goes next?

PD: The steering of the brand
has often more to do with our
daily influences. We receive a
lot of feedback from the people
who use our stuff, including
both sponsored and everyday
skaters, but yes it doesn't hurt
to be able to refer to what's
been done in order to maintain
a level of continuity moving forward.

AU: What do you hope the next generation of



skaters takes away from seeing Skulls history
laid out?

PD: From our point of view, we just like to lay the
stuff out and let people draw
their own conclusions. As
much as this is a study in our
history, the word history is a
bit of a misnomer as it means
something that would be
completed, but we look at it
like a continuing process.

AU: Anything else to
mention or promote?

PD: We love *Absolute
Underground* magazine and
the opportunity to collaborate
with AU and other like-
minded forces to promote
this awesome culture that
encompasses skating, music,
art and more.

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PLEASANT MOUNTAIN MUSIC

By FLORA

AU: For readers discovering Pleasant Mountain Music for the first time, who are we talking to today, and what inspired you to create a music school that welcomes everyone from complete beginners to working musicians?

You are talking to Chris and Sarah, two co-owners of Pleasant Mountain Music who are linked through music and bands! The school started as a pandemic project, when 2 of our 3 owners were already teaching one-on-one and their students were very excited to get back to in-person lesson again. We had an opportunity to combine forces with one another to form what is now Pleasant Mountain Music. Our music school welcomes everyone from complete beginner to working musician. We have a firm belief that music is an accessible skill for anyone to try and/or master, and that if you wish to improve any aspect of your musicianship, you should be able to do that!

AU: There are plenty of places that offer music lessons, but Pleasant Mountain Music feels more community-focused than a traditional studio. What philosophy guides everything you do, both inside and outside the classroom?

The philosophies that guide us are Learn to Play, Love to Play, Live to Play. Which means we encourage beginners just getting started, including youth, teens, and yes, even adults, to try lessons. It also means we encourage a life-long learning approach to music which is tailored to the desires of the student. This can include busking, songwriting, taking exams, playing as a hobby, or learning how to impress everyone at the office's annual karaoke event. We also host a lot of public events, from metal karaoke and sing-along nights to open mics in partnership with other local musicians. (shout out to Eddie Lam!) We encourage community by providing a space for students and members of the public alike to show off their skills and get to know other music enthusiasts.

AU: Your programs range from private lessons to choirs, rock bands, drum circles, and karaoke events. How important is it to create opportunities for people to make music together rather than simply learn an instrument?

The more opportunities to learn, the better in our opinion! Playing and enjoying music is fundamentally a social experience, so we love offering group lessons that create that feeling of being part of something.

Of course, there is also a lot of joy—and in some ways, less pressure—in a private lesson setting. One-on-one lessons allow students to build skills and confidence with an instructor invested in their progress and musical goals.

Some students thrive in a group environment, while others prefer private lessons because they are shy or want to develop a specific skill. Wherever someone is in their musical journey, we want to offer an option that works for them.

AU: Pleasant Mountain Music offers lessons for students of virtually every age and experience level. Do you find that adults returning to music after years away have different goals than children just starting out?

Yes, we do find many adults who return to lessons after years away have different goals compared to children who are just starting out. There are a few different types of adult students, but generally the ones who find themselves back at the piano, violin, trumpet, or cello are coming from a place of re-learning. Children who went through private

lessons and took exams sometimes grow up into adults who never touched the instrument again because the experience wasn't all that fulfilling (or worse, they actively disliked the process). The grind of taking exams overshadowed the joy of learning to play. So for those children who are now grown up adults, they often come back to the lessons with an intense desire to reacquire themselves with the instrument on their own terms! And we are more than happy to help because again, the more music is being pursued in the world, the better we think. We also have retired adults who finally have the time to explore their chosen instrument, as well tech. and other knowledge workers who want to partake in something that is AWAY from a computer screen.

AU: Beyond teaching technique, how do you help students build confidence and overcome the fear that often comes with learning or performing

music?

We offer a lot of encouragement during lessons, but we also create performance opportunities designed to help students become comfortable stepping onto a stage. We host recitals twice a year, including both all-ages and adult-focused events, where the emphasis is on support and encouragement.

We also host open mics like the Lam Jam, hosted by Eddie Lam, giving musicians a place to share covers or original works. Our carolling and sing-along nights provide another low-pressure way for people to gain confidence while performing and connecting with the community.

AU: One of the more unique features is the Small Hands Piano Club. What first led you to explore alternative-sized keyboards, and what kind of response have you received from students since introducing them?

The Small Hands Piano Club was the brainchild of owner and piano instructor Sarah. As an adult, she spent a decade training in conservatory piano. Her teacher pushed her to play music that some might have considered impossible, but despite her success, the physical demands eventually caused a repetitive motion injury, specifically tendonitis. The struggle was largely due to her hand size compared to the width of standard piano keys. Sarah's hands weren't too small—the piano keys were too big.

The first organization she learned about was the D.S. Standard Foundation, but because they were based in the USA and focused primarily on acoustic pianos, the cost of shipping and purchasing an instrument was not realistic for her or PMM. Three years later, it was an incredible moment when Sarah opened a brand new Athena 301 Narrow Keys piano on Christmas morning. The piano was designed by Victoria, BC's own Linda Gould, who had experienced similar frustrations with standard-sized keys.

Younger students who have tried the Narrow Keys keyboard definitely notice the difference, but they also love exploring the built-in sound bank. Adults who have tried it are often surprised by how much easier playing becomes with a slightly narrower key. It isn't for everyone—those with larger hands may have no trouble with a standard keyboard—but it gives students with smaller hands the opportunity to play comfortably and without strain.

AU: Some of your programs—like Metal Choir, Heavy Metal Karaoke Night, and Summer of Screams—stand out from what people might expect from a music school. How did these ideas come about, and what makes them popular?

That's where our Metal Specialist teacher Kelsey enters the picture. She has been an incredible resource when it comes to singing a variety of unclean vocal styles and has been the driving force behind our metal-focused programming. We now have a couple dozen singers working on growls, fry screams, and other extreme vocal techniques.

The idea for Metal Choir came from a conversation with an old roommate who wanted to join a choir but couldn't find one that connected with her musical interests. When we asked what kind of choir she would want, she said "METAL!" From there, we ran with it. The Metal

Choir has been a consistent and popular program since 2023.

Summer of Screams began as a drop-in program for students who wanted to learn the basics of screaming without committing to a weekly summer class. It has continued to grow in popularity, and we will likely continue offering it as a group class moving forward.

AU: Your instructors all come from different musical backgrounds and specialties. When building your teaching team, what qualities are just as important as musical ability?

Building our teaching team has definitely been an interesting and rewarding process. We put value on our instructor's musicianship, but also their ability to connect with their students and keep them engaged in lessons week over week. A student's relationship with their instructor can last for years, if properly nurtured. We want to make sure students look forward to their lessons every week. By keeping them engaged and challenged, but also making sure the repertoire is suitable for them, our teachers do a fantastic job of balancing their lessons. Aside from that, we also make sure we have a wide range of instruments, genres, and timeslots available to have something for all potential students. We also encourage performance opportunities when appropriate in an extremely welcoming and supportive environment. Our teachers bring a lot of fantastic energy to the classroom, and that contributes to the good vibes.

AU: Looking ahead, are there any new classes, workshops, community events, or ideas you're excited to introduce over the coming months?

We've recently launched a new How To Drum Circle class with percussion teacher Arturo and a Fiddling Fun for Adults class with teacher Sara. Our Adult Rock Band with Hugo has grown enough that we will likely split it into two bands in the upcoming months. We're always looking for more musicians to join, especially drummers!

BUSINESS PROFILE



We also have a brass ensemble that is currently dominated by saxophone players, so trumpet, trombone, euphonium, and French horn players are invited to join us.

Our biggest upcoming event is actually a series of events celebrating our five-year anniversary, beginning September 15 and continuing throughout Fall, Winter, and Spring 2027. Watch this space!

AU: Where can readers learn more about Pleasant Mountain Music, explore upcoming programs and events, or book a lesson for themselves?

We keep our website updated with a calendar of events and classes. Readers can sign up and book a class or lesson or give us a shout

inquiries@pleasantmountainmusic.ca

778-872-8422

pleasantmountainmusic.ca

Instagram @pleasantmountainmusic

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CHEST FEVER Announces Most Ambitious Tour Yet In Celebration of The 50th Anniversary of *The Last Waltz*

By Adriana Stanzione

Following the announcement of their live album *The 21st Century Last Waltz – Live At Massey Hall* being released this September, Chest Fever is taking its celebration of The Band’s music on the road for its most ambitious venture to date: a cross-Canada and U.S. tour commemorating the 50th anniversary of *The Last Waltz*.

The tour follows the release of *The 21st Century LAST WALTZ – Live At Massey Hall*, a live album documenting Chest Fever’s sold-out performance at Toronto’s legendary Massey Hall. Captured on November 18, 2023, the concert reimagined The Band’s historic farewell performance through a distinctly modern lens, bringing together musicians from multiple generations and musical backgrounds. Rather than recreating the original concert song-for-song, Chest Fever expanded upon its spirit of collaboration, assembling a cast that included original collaborators, acclaimed Canadian and American musicians, and rising artists united by a shared admiration for The Band’s enduring legacy. For Grammy-winning guitarist, songwriter, and longtime Band collaborator Colin Linden, the sense of community and continuity is exactly what makes the music endure. “The Band were always my favorite,” says Linden. “They combined elements of blues, country music, folk music, rock and roll into a totally unique sound, and the power of their music continues to grow.”

Having performed alongside Rick Danko, Garth Hudson, Levon Helm, and Bob Dylan throughout

his career, Linden sees Chest Fever’s work as a continuation of the fellowship that made The Band so influential: “The commonality that we shared was the love and respect for the music and each other,” he explains. “That’s what The Band was all about, and that’s something timeless and not restricted by generation.”

That spirit was on full display at Massey Hall,

where veteran collaborators shared the stage with emerging artists who grew up inspired by The Band’s catalog. Among them was Niagara Falls singer-songwriter Nicole Cerminara, who recalls the remarkable chemistry that developed among musicians meeting for the first time: “It was basically like walking on stage in front of three thousand people and looking at everyone and going, ‘Hey, nice to meet you,’ and then immediately playing a song,” she says. “That was sort of how we met, by doing the thing that brought us all together.” Despite being strangers, she adds, “We all speak the same language. We just sunk into it, and it seemed like we’d been playing together for years.”



For Toronto folk artist John Muirhead, the experience was equally memorable. Sharing the stage with Canadian folk icon Sylvia Tyson for “Four Strong Winds” became one of the defining moments of his career. “It was an incredible experience,” he says. “It was great to not just be in the spotlight, but to be a part of something bigger, and to cheer on some of my peers

within the music scene.”

That sense of community extends to artists whose connections to The Band stretch back decades. Cindy Cashdollar, who performed and recorded with Levon Helm, Rick Danko, Garth Hudson, and Richard Manuel, praised the ambitious production and its carefully curated cast of performers. “The variety of artists was very impressive to me,” says Cashdollar. “I thought that Chest Fever did a great job in choosing the songs for each guest’s vocals and instrumentation.” Having known members of The Band personally, she believes the emotional power of the music remains wholly unique. “It makes you feel so much when you hear these songs, because of the way they were performed, with such integrity and such musicality.”

Former Black Crowes guitarist Marc Ford, another special guest to share the stage with Chest Fever, agrees. For him, the appeal of The Band lies in the authenticity of the music:

“They were very down to earth and very real,” he says. More importantly, he believes the material deserves to continue reaching new audiences: “It deserves to be played again. It’s important to celebrate that era of music where there weren’t a lot of tricks—it was just people making music together and songs, great songs, and people collaborating. It’s the humanness of it.”

The tour also carries the blessing of musicians who helped shape the original era. Tom “Bones” Malone, legendary horn arranger for *The Last Waltz* and former *Saturday Night Live* band member, contributed to the Massey Hall production and sees a direct connection between the original concert and Chest Fever’s modern interpretation. “The Band had a unique sound that makes their music timeless,” says Malone. “I enjoyed playing with The Band a lot. I was friends with all of them.”

As Chest Fever embarks on its largest tour yet, the goal remains the same: celebrate the music without simply reproducing the original material, and bring audiences together through songs that continue to resonate half a century after *The Last Waltz*. “It is so heartwarming to see a younger generation experience this music and the fellowship that it brings with it,” Linden reflects.



“The songs are true. They have such imagination. They prove the heart. What’s not to love?”

The 21st Century The Last Waltz – Live At Massey Hall will be available September 18, 2026.

Chest Fever’s 50th Anniversary of *The Last Waltz* tour begins this fall, kicking off in October and wrapping up in Southern California, the band’s hometown.

For more updates, releases, tour announcements, and other exclusive content, visit: chestfeverofficial.com

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CANCER BATS

Canadian Hardcore Heshers Give Absolute Underground The Dirt

- Part 1

By Ira Hunter and Rory G.

AU: Who are talking to and what are you most infamous for?

Liam: You're speaking with **Liam Joseph Cormier**. Being the singer of Cancer Bats is what I'm most infamous for. But I'm also a motorcyclist, a DJ, an artist, a clothing brand designer.

AU: Give Me Dirt, your eighth album is coming out on August 7th, 2026.

Liam: Album eight, we finally figured it out. We cracked the code. This is us putting all 22 years of everything we've learned, all of the experiences, all of the producers we've worked with, and all of the songwriting that we've done. It feels in a lot of ways like we're finally minting what we love about Cancer Bats onto an album. The Cancer Bats record we've been trying to write for this long. Then finally just linking up with someone like producer Kurt (Ballou), who can translate that into it sounding gritty and dirty. But also clear enough that you can make out all of our playing and everything that's happening. I feel like *Give Me Dirt* is the full circle Cancer Bats album that we've been thinking of for so long.

AU: What is the meaning behind the name? Just give it give it to me dirty and grimy?

Liam: The name *Give Me Dirt* comes originally from a song that I was writing about reconnecting with nature on a motorcycle trip in Nepal. I was surrounded by mountains and all of these people that are so connected to the natural world. But the more I was thinking about that song and of all of those lessons and experiences, the more I realized it actually represented the whole record itself. The artwork, me kind of feeling a rejection toward digital and wanting to make something more old school back to the beginning of the band. Back when we were wheatpasting and using photocopiers to do the art. It's like all of this stuff that kept coming back to like yeah, give me dirt. Then the sound of it we wanted it to be raw, I was like yeah, give me dirt. It becomes this thing that you just keep saying. I was getting so into it that I was like I'm going to stencil Give Me Dirt almost like a chant around the front of the album. I'm just like supercharging it with this mantra in a way. It kind of took on a life of its own.

AU: Can you take us through the tracklistings on the new album?

Liam: The first half, we have loaded up like a secret weapon. Because it's everyone's heard the singles now. They'll have heard "Stay Stuck" and they'll have heard "Long Tooth" and "Give Me Dirt" is going to come out the day the record comes out. But nobody knows that "World Wide Fire Death Race" is going to rip their faces off. Nobody's ready for that song. Then "Don't Trip" is also a crazy Cancer Bats song. There are these extra bits like on "Bright Eyes of Gold", Chris Cresswell from The Flatliners sings on it. It's got these little surprises that I can't wait for people to dig into. Then there is "Ocean Crash", that is going to crush people. I'm so excited for everybody to hear "Positive Grid" and "Prognosis". I think all Cancer Bats fans are going to be pleasantly surprised.

AU: On "World Wide Fire Death Race" you have Nate Newton featured on the track.

Liam: Yeah, Nate Newton sings and plays bass in Converge but more importantly, Nate Newton

is the singer of Doomriders. The Cancer Bats are all huge Doomriders fans. For those who don't know, it's like a thrashier Danzig. We were lucky enough to go and record in Salem, Massachusetts with Kurt. While we were there, Nate was like, "You guys should come skateboarding, I'll take you to my local DIY skate spot." So me and Jaye and Jackson went skateboarding. I had already kind of had this in mind because Nate likes Entombed and this song kind of sounds like Entombed. So while we were skating I was like, "We have this song that to me has totally a Doomriders kind of vibe. Would you be into singing on it?" and he's like, "Yeah, for sure." I said, "I kind of want you to sing the whole second verse." He was like, "I'm so down."

He hadn't even heard it and he was just like I'm in. Then we went back to skateboarding.

AU: "Long Tooth" is a duet

with Brooklyn Doran. I am kind of obsessed with your song "Hammering On" from *Psychic Jailbreak*, the first song that you did with her.

Liam: So Brooklyn's kind of like our fifth band member now. She comes on tour with us, she sells merch. Every show that she's there, we play "Hammering On" and it's become such a fun, awesome part of the set. So when we were doing this song I had already finished all the lyrics and the melody for "Long Tooth" and I said to the dudes, "This is my plan, let's get Brooklyn to sing this song and then when playing live Brooklyn's on stage for two songs." We just finished doing this last month in Europe and it was the best. It's such a rad part of the of the set.

AU: On the new album in the song "Positive Grid", you say "I'd rather be a dreamer than die on the inside." and on "Stay Stuck", you say, "You can pry my dreams out of my cold dead hands". Are you still maintaining a positive mental attitude and living your dreams?

Liam: Yeah I do think so. I think that in a lot of ways it's easy to be positive and stoked and in some ways not give a shit. Like, I don't care what society thinks, I'm going to do my thing. When you're 20 years old, it's super easy to be like F.T.W. man. But I do think that it's so much harder to do that in your 40s. To be on this positive tip and to be doing these things. Not to say like I'm the best. But more just like as an inspiration for people to keep it going. Dude, keep going to shows, keep skateboarding. Keep doing what you love. Because it is not easier the older you get. There's more distractions, there's more responsibility. When old dogs are in the pit, a white-haired dude in the pit is so much gnarlier than some 20-year-old trying to stage-dive.

AU: The second-to-last track, "Prognosis", it seemed to have a slightly more laid-back pace, kind of like going for a walk with an old friend and in no rush to get anywhere fast. What's it all about?

Liam: Oh, yeah, that's literally what the bridge is all about, going for a walk with my old friend Jordi. Who is from Barcelona. That whole story and everything is about Barcelona and the conversation that we had. It's the street that my friend used to live on it was a cool time and place. But yeah that song, I think musically we were trying to do something different. I think originally when we were doing the riffs and everything we were felt it was kind of sludgy Neurosis-y stuff. But then we had this idea to try to make the bridge, instead of having a thrash part, I presented it to the dudes as what if we had it like Mogwai? It's still within the world of heavy music, but what if we presented it in this different kind of way that we all really like? Everybody liked the idea and Jaye definitely like was like, "I love Mogwai, I totally get what you're saying." So that was where that kind of direction started. But I also don't want to yell over this. I wanted to make this kind of like a cool spoken word part. But yeah, I'm really happy with that song and I really pushed to keep it on the record too. Because it's different and it's weird but I feel like it's still Cancer Bats. It still makes sense on this album.

AU: The last song "Fools Like You" features

Efrem Schulz from Death By Stereo.

Liam: We've been friends with EF forever. When we were writing "Fools Like You" I felt like we should have a thrash part in the middle. Like the song stops and it goes into a thrash part. While we were riffing on these ideas, I started doing this kind of Efrem impression and because Jaye's also a huge Death By Stereo fan we were kind of talking about how Efrem is almost like this wild character? What if we had a part like that?

Then when Ignite and Death By Stereo were on tour, I saw him in Edmonton. I was like, "Dude, we have this song, I haven't even written the lyrics but I've written the bridge. I basically thought of it for you to do this song." He was just like, "Oh, bro, dude, I'm so in." I was like, "Okay but I got to finish the rest of the lyrics." I was also kind of really inspired at that point by seeing Efrem physically being at all the protests happening in LA against ICE and everything that was happening down there. Him really being about it, not just the fact that he talks about all these things. He was at all the protests. To me it was like full circle of just him being the realest dude ever. So I was even more pumped. So the lyrics I wrote are inspired by someone like Efrem but also about how he inspires other people. That song really turned out super cool and is a perfect closer for the record.

AU: Did having *Psychic Jailbreak* be Juno nominated open any doors for the band?

Liam: I mean, at this point we've happy to be nominated. It's definitely cool. But we're I think five-time nomms at this point and I feel like

NEW DAMAGE RECORDS

the acknowledgment is more than the win. But obviously like now that we have *Gimme Dirt*, I'm like *Gimme Dirt* crushes *Psychic*, so probably time for us to win one, I guess.

AU: Any plans for touring the new album yet?

Liam: We're going to tour it a ton. It's going to be crazy and epic. The thing too is because we keep raising the bar on so many kick-ass tours. We did the Comeback Kid and then it was Birthing the Giant 20 year with Ancients, Teeth and Single Moms. We've had all these different cool tours. So the next tour that we're going to do has to be like nuts across Canada. But on a side note, I'm going to be in Victoria in September to DJ at Lucky Bar. But also because I really want to come and hang out at Wheelies for The Flatliners show.

AU: This issue is dedicated to the year 1986. What does 1986 mean to you?

Liam: I was 6 years old in '86, so I was ripping BMX bikes and definitely living the hesh lifestyle. I was living in Newmarket, Ontario. So yeah, very hesh. But I wasn't a part of the thrash scene at that time, other than maybe if people were playing it on a boombox at the BMX track. For me, it was BMX bikes and sleeveless Snoopy shirts.

Join us next issue for Part 2 where Liam shares more deep Cancer Bats lore...

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THE SOPHISTOS: The Long Road to Vinyl

By FLORA

Nearly three decades after its original recording, *Don't Want No Gorilla Rock* finally gets the vinyl release it never had.

Absolute Underground: For readers discovering The Sophistos for the first time, who were the band, and what was happening in the Victoria music scene when *Don't Want No Gorilla Rock* was originally recorded?

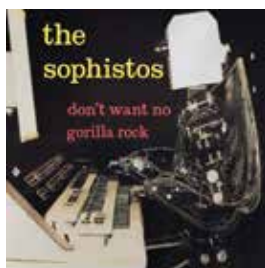
Mike: The Sophistos were David Barclay, Duncan Gidney, Andre Arraiz-Rivas and myself (Mike Croy), and at the time when we recorded the album *Don't Want No Gorilla Rock*, there was a minor resurgence of punk rock/garage rock happening in Victoria and in BC in general.

AU: The album was recorded in 1998 in a very DIY setting—including a laundry room at your parents' home. Looking back, what stands out most about making those recordings and the mindset the band had at the time?

M: One of the things that stands out the most was that it was the first time recording for almost everyone in the band and the whole project was very much a DIY/fly by the seat of our pants thing, including the person recording/engineering it. But, we had a blast capturing everything. It was also a fast and furious process done over two days, if memory serves me correctly.

AU: After nearly three decades, you recovered the original DAT master recordings and finally gave *Don't Want No Gorilla Rock* the vinyl release it never had. What made you decide that now was the right time to bring the album back?

M: Having recovered the audio from the DAT tapes, it felt like it would have been a huge missed opportunity to not do something with the recording; give it the love it deserved that it didn't receive the first time around. I also wanted to do something special for the rest of the band to commemorate it and help preserve a piece of the Victoria music scene that may have vanished by the wayside otherwise.



AU: What was it like hearing those original DAT recordings again after almost 30 years? Did they transport you back to that period, or did you hear something completely different with fresh ears?

M: Hearing the original recordings again was a complete timewarp for me, frankly, and it was a lot of fun to hear those songs again after such a long time. My son Steven, who is currently the same age now as we were when we recorded them, was critically instrumental in helping out with the digitization process. He really enjoyed getting to hear all these songs for the first time ever as well and was pleasantly surprised by it overall.

AU: The Sophistos built a reputation for wild live shows—and even managed to get banned from a few venues along the way. Looking back, what are some of your favourite memories from those years?

M: We were total little assholes, punk rock

kids who were just trying to have as much fun as possible and we definitely got into a lot of shenanigans along the way. One memory that stands out for me was the show at the Cadboro Bay Scout hall, that was completely way oversold, and the floor ended up severely warping from all the dancing and moshing. Dave also got whipped during our set at that show by a young lady who had brought a riding crop!

AU: Your sound has been described as surf garage/noise punk, drawing influence from bands like The Mummies and The Evaporators. How would you describe what made The Sophistos different from the other bands coming out of Victoria at the time?

M: The Sophistos had a different sound built on all of us coming out of the Lansdowne concert band program - us not having any preconceived notions of what we were really doing initially, or really caring what other people thought. If it made us laugh or we thought it was cool to us then we went with it; nothing was really off the table!

AU: The late-'90s Victoria scene was full of memorable bands, and Hot Hot Heat even played one of their first shows opening for The Sophistos. Looking back, what made that local scene so special?

M: The Victoria music scene has always been, from my perspective, about cooperation, collaboration and like minded parties working together to create a vibrant and diverse scene that blends different genres of music together at shows. You can have a punk band playing with metal bands, playing with ska bands, playing with art house noise bands etc... and it has been great to have had that experience and to have been a part of it. It was all very eclectic and very much helped create, in part, the sound of The Sophistos.

AU: The album has gone from a 30-copy CD to a professionally pressed vinyl release through Wrecking Crew Studios. How satisfying is it to finally see these songs receive the physical release they always deserved?

M: It has been extremely satisfying to have the record receive a proper physical release, as it

gave me an opportunity to reconnect with the other guys in the band after 28 years, who were all scattered to other parts of the world including Nova Scotia, Italy and Amsterdam. They were all kind enough to let me run with this project, as pressing a vinyl record has always been on my bucket list.

AU: Nearly 30 years later, *Don't Want No Gorilla Rock* is reaching listeners who weren't around the first time. What has the response been like from longtime fans as well as people discovering The Sophistos for the first time?

M: The response so far has been unanimously very positive across the board! Because it had so few copies produced initially, it has turned into a bit of a hidden gem for listeners new and old alike. I appreciate the response immensely that it has received, especially after such a lengthy time sitting dormant. It seems to have hit a chord for nostalgia purposes with many listeners and people are all saying, "What an absolutely fun record!" And are surprised by it, overall, as we really captured a moment in time when we were young, naive and having a lot of fun doing what we were doing as friends.

AU: With the album finally back in circulation, do you see this as closing a chapter, preserving a piece of Victoria punk history, or has revisiting these recordings inspired you to create something new?

M: This is 100 percent a nice, closing chapter for The Sophistos. We also released a very gritty, live recording on our Bandcamp page that is a perfect companion piece to the studio recording as it is a total juxtaposition in audio quality. With everyone in the band being scattered so far apart geographically, new music from the band most likely will never happen and everyone is in different places in their lives, but this does really help preserve a tiny little piece of the Victoria music scene and our own unique contribution. Personally, however, pressing a record has inspired me to want to continue to do more with my own current projects Two Man Bear Trap and Karen and the Managers.

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Interview with LYFE SKILLZ

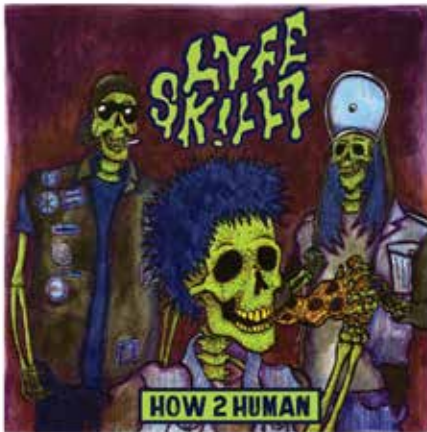
By Jonathan Sohn

Absolute Underground: What is the name of your band and why are you called that?

LYFE SKILLZ: LYFE SKILLZ. We had a couple names and only one of them felt like something. My really bad suggestion was LYFE HAPPENZ and then we butchered the spelling.

AU: How long have you guys known each other?

LS: 10-12 years. We all played in a band called Father Bodies: a band that was part of the Kitchener/Waterloo scene for a bit. We were the backing band for this one guy. Years later, COVID happened and we decided to get together.



AU: If you were to compare your sound to an industrial tool, which tool would you say you sound most like?

LS: A sawzall. That counts as a power tool. You can do whatever you want with a sawzall. Or maybe a jackhammer. Just destroying concrete and ground...

AU: What is your favourite part of playing in the Kitchener scene?

LS: Just the warmth of knowing some people and playing to people you're familiar with from time to time. And lately there's been a resurgence of younger people showing up. There's spots like The Union where we can have all-ages shows. The next generation of punks both coming and playing and having a blast. Also we have this Band Crawl happening a few times a year and that's beneficial for our scene. The last few years there's definitely been a resurgence.

AU: You have a song called "Punk Rock Saved (My Life)". What did punk rock save you from?

LS: Losing my mind. Knowing that I have a community and friends, it's like another life. We have a singer that didn't want to sing in a band, a lead guitarist that didn't want to play lead guitar.

It's all our drummer's fault. He just wanted to play in yet another band. But we enjoy playing with each other so it works out. We spend 6 hours a month jamming and it's awesome.

AU: You have a couple short songs: "Bumblebee" and "Pizza Guy." What's the story behind those?

LS: Those were lullabies I keep singing to my daughter. It's been five years now. I sing those songs every night. When the band got together I told the guys "I have these songs. Let's play them."

AU: Are you still writing more songs for her?

LS: She helped me write the song "Dad!" I'm writing this song called "Give Me Pizza Or Give Me Death". She listens and she helps me out. She gives me the thumbs up or thumbs down. Usually it's the thumbs down but what can you do?

AU: What's the best part about playing live?

LS: The cardio. All the cardio you get in that half hour set. Just letting everything go. You put your body down and your soul and you let your mind go and lose control. That's the best feeling in the world.

AU: How do you cope with the travel that comes with being in a band?

LS: Not well. We have this system where we consolidate and get inside this little car. Travel light. Don't bring that 8x10.

AU: Describe your relationship with pizza.

LS: Cheesy. Kind of hot. I'm a big fan of extra sauce, extra cheese (not double cheese) and pepperoni. I eat it twice, maybe three times a month.

AU: You recorded your newest record *How 2 Human* with Bill Morton. What's your most memorable story working with him?

LS: We went for a conversation about what we were going to do. It was a smokey day and it



got smokier and smokier. It may have been the smokiest day that Milton's ever experienced. We played this song "What A Day" and it felt so right. It has this big climax and as soon as it ended we had a moment of quiet. Bill is so friendly. And he's so talented. It's bizarre trying to play in front of someone who is that good and he's going to hear it if you mess up. But he's so encouraging so that feeling dissipated. He really understands the band and the record.



AU: What do you feel is the most valuable life skill for surviving as a band?

LS: Get a bandmate that tells the rest of the bandmates when to show up. LYFE SKILL #1742: be passionate. Love what you're doing. And just be understanding with your bandmates. Let it roll. Don't let it be so stressful. Just let it roll.

lyfeskillzpunx.bandcamp.com

Jonathan Sohn has contributed to publications Plastic and Wax, Wavelength, Crapnation and most importantly this one. He has way too many records and also not enough records.



Interview with EVELYNS

By Jonathan Sohn

Absolute Underground: What is the name of your band and why are you called that?

Evelyns: After changing our band name countless times we decided on the name 'Evelyns'. The name comes from the infamous killer from Hamilton named Evelyn Dick who is pretty well known inside the Hamilton area.

AU: What brought you together to start a band?

E: When I first started playing guitar years ago I attended this music school in Burlington. My teacher Brad showed me a lot of the music I was missing out on. He also helped us a lot in our early days surrounding the band. Brad was in a band called Grade and Somehow Hollow and I couldn't be more thankful for the professional tips that he gives us.

AU: How would you describe your music to a space alien who's never heard of punk rock?

E: I would say that our music is very gritty and raw, but has nice catchy choruses and fast and high energy.

AU: What's your approach to songwriting?

E: I usually record a crappy demo and I bring it to the boys and we make a new song out of it. They usually turn out way better than I expect.



I usually take lots of inspiration when writing. Mostly from early Gob, Trunk, and Bigwig etc.

AU: Is your new record *Tomorrow's Another Day* better than your old record? Why?

E: Yes.. I would have to say that our new record is way better than our last EP. Our last EP was rushed and was more like a demo. The album we released in January we took a lot of time to make sure it was perfect.

AU: What's the best part of playing in and around the Burlington scene?

E: Okay, even though we are sometimes referred to as a Burlington band, I would say that we are more of a Hamilton band. Live music in the Burlington scene isn't really the best anymore. Hamilton is where it's at right now.

AU: You have a song called "Doug?" Who is this guy?

E: I wrote this song about a scum who sang in the Burlington band Trunk in the late 90s. As we are fans of the band Trunk we make fun of the singer all of the time. Doug Grozelle leaded a multi million dollar ponzi scheme.

AU: How did you get connected with AP Records?

E: The owner, Bee Gee of AP Records is a big part of the Niagara scene. I got connected to Bee Gee from going to local shows and playing around the area. He does a lot of good things for the scene.

AU: What are your plans for what's left of 2026?

E: We are planning to release an EP before the end of the year so look out for that.

AU: Is there anyone you'd like to give a shout out?

E: I would like to shoutout our friends in Convikt, DEW, Collider, Second Empire Justice and Brad Casarin for making this band thing possible.

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SPACE QUEEN

By Lisa July

Space Queen are a stoner-rock trio from Vancouver. Active since 2020, they've been hitting stages across Canada with even more intensity this year than before, preparing to release their second full-length. AU talked with Jenna (guitar & vocals), Karli (drums & vocals), and Seah (bass & vocals) about their artistic progress, being on the road, and honing their sound.

Absolute Underground: You toured Western Canada with Temptress this spring and have had God knows how many shows in Vancouver since then. All along the way, you've been presenting some of your new material. How do the audiences react?

Jenna: People really connect with our new music. One thing that touches me, and we've talked about it with the girls, is that a lot of people cry

at our shows. Some will come up and say, 'I was crying because your vocal harmonies touched me, and then I look over at my friend, and he's crying!'

AU: One of the things you did on tour was support the vinyl release of your debut LP *Nebula* (2023), while having your second LP already recorded. There is not always progress per se, but there's always a difference. What would you say is the biggest difference between your first and upcoming albums?

Karli: I think the development of the songs. They're fully fleshed out, fully realized.

With *Nebula*, we were writing a lot of songs in the studio, whereas this new album also let us see how the songs actually work with people. Also, our individual playing improved because we were on the road for so long.

Jenna: It is a more refined version of what we do now. This album feels like we've figured it out – it's

us.

AU: Would you say that during this time that you've been working on this album, it drained you or did it, on the contrary, sustain you?

Seah: Definitely helped sustain us for the last year. We've had to take some time off in between because I had knee surgery, and we were in and out of the studio, so it wasn't consistent. But it kept us going for a year. It was really awesome to have that to work on during that time.

Karli: Especially in the winter months, it was good to have something to look forward to. Our producer, Michael, was a lot of fun, too.

AU: Are the three of you active songwriters?

Karli: Yes, we all write collaboratively with just a couple of exceptions. Sometimes one of us has more of a starting point for a song, but it is never done until each of us gets their stamp on it.

Jenna: We were about 19 when we wrote the first song together. And even then, we still had harmonies!

Seah: Recently, we realized something, though. We used to have this elevator pitch– (all three start to laugh)– so that when people ask what we sound like, we would say, "Like Black Sabbath meets Crosby, Stills & Nash," hoping people could actually picture it. On this recent tour, we had to leave Edmonton right after our show to get all the way to Kamloops and play another show, which is

11 hours on the road. I was driving, and I was like, "What can we listen to?" You know, just to keep ourselves going. And we all agreed on the Spice Girls. We put on both albums and came to realize that our vocal harmonies do so much of the same thing... So, suddenly, we have that realization that we actually sound like Black Sabbath meets Spice Girls!

Karli: Yeah, we all listened to them a lot as well as to many others. In our early 20s, when we first moved to the city, we didn't have any money at all. We lived in a little basement suite, where we would spend hours listening to Crosby, Stills & Nash, the Beatles, or the Eagles, just trying to emulate what they were doing, and then writing our own folk songs, because we were a folk band before. A big part of it was trying to figure out our sound, seeing how our voices sound together, and learning to sing with each other.

AU: Now that you say your sound is all figured out, what are your next steps?

Jenna: As we're in talks with labels about

our upcoming album, we want to be able to spread our music further, beyond our own reach.

Karli: We have a lot of goals and ambitions. We're always looking toward the future!

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CELEBRATING 30 YEARS OF LONGSHOT MUSIC

Interview by Chuck Andrews

AU: Who am I talking to and what is Longshot Music for those who might not know?

Hey. This is Mike here, and Longshot Music is a one-man insanity project. Yes, insanity project, not vanity project! Haha. To be serious, the label began 30 years ago after a few years of doing a small, DIY distro that I started after a trip to the UK.

AU: When and where was Longshot Music started?

The distribution started in about 1994, and then the first release came out in 1996. At the time I was living in a small city in the mountains in BC (Kamloops). Since then, the label/distro has followed me like an ominous dark cloud to Vancouver, NYC, SF, Portland, back to Vancouver and now I am based in Tacoma, WA of all places!

AU: What initially inspired you to start putting out records?

Honestly, it was a purely selfish act – I was in a band and all I ever wanted was to have a record with my music. So the first release was just a simple 4-band/4-song 7" EP compilation and one of the songs was the band I was currently in at that time.

AU: Was there a specific catalyst or even a government grant for the arts that pushed you to make Longshot Music into a career instead of just releasing a couple records and calling it a day?

Oh, Longshot Music is far from a career. It is a passion project / hobby at best. I still work a normal job to help offset the costs of doing the label!! And there has never been a dime of government money. In the USA there is definitely no funding for the arts (at this level at least), and in Canada while there are grants, that is a pretty exclusive "who you know" club as far as I can see...

As for the catalyst, per the above answers, it was purely self-serving! And yes, maybe I should have just put out a couple of records and called it a day. Haha. All kidding aside, I have had some amazing experiences and met so many great people over the years. So all in all, no regrets.

AU: What were the first couple of releases on the label?

The first releases were all compilations. Before the advent of computers and all the streaming services, compilations were a big thing! They were a great way to explore music and discover new bands. Also, it was not as easy for bands to record their music back then. So it was far more practical for bands to record a handful of songs at a time

after scraping together some cash from playing shows, rather than bands now that record a full-length before they have even played a live show!

AU: Has distribution of records changed for the better over the last 30 years with the growth of the internet?

I honestly don't know.... I mean, yes the internet has created a global market at the click of a button of course! But somehow I think people were more motivated to seek out physical music more in the past. When it was not just a matter of streaming music, you had to go into record shops, or place mail-orders, etc. So as much as I can email hundreds of people in a matter of minutes to advertise a new release, that email is potentially just spam and ignored anyways.

AU: Are people still buying underground punk rock records like they used to?

Definitely! Indie/DIY music is alive and well in my opinion. It is of course a drop in the proverbial bucket and while I sell "hundreds" of any given release, the mainstream is selling literally millions!! So it is still very much "underground", but not dead yet. There are definitely peaks and valleys and the interest in music is cyclical. From year to year (and even month to month) you will see the rise and fall of specific genres within the "punk" genre.

AU: What is the relationship between Pirates Press Records and Longshot Music?

PPR and LSM are just 2 different record labels. There is obviously a very close relationship as I work for the parent company of Pirates Press, but Longshot Music is independent. Over the years we have done a lot of co-releases, as I have done with many labels over the years like Contra Records, Rebellion Records, TASM Records, Randal Records, Step-1 Music, Tough Ain't Enough Records and many more (sorry to any labels I missed!!). I love working in collaboration with other labels, especially with European labels as that really helps expand the scope of the distribution and mitigates overseas shipping costs, etc.

AU: Longshot Music has put out a lot of records by mostly punk bands from all around the world. Would you be able to hazard a guess as to exactly how many different releases your label has done in the past 30 years?

Oh man. SO many. I really meant to try to make a complete discography list when I hit this 30 year mark, but thus far I have not had the time. If I was to hazard a guess, I would say close to 400 releases? There have been 3 iterations of 'Longshot Music' over the years for various reasons, as well as a side label focused more on rock'n'roll bands (Meaty Beaty Records) that only lasted about a dozen releases. The current era of the label is at 50+ releases and of the other 2 eras the last one hit about 80+ releases and the original incarnation of the label was well into the mid-2000s I think. Hence the ballpark of close to 400 releases as my best guess...

AU: Where has Longshot Music taken you as far as traveling the world? And what have been some of the biggest highlights?

I would like to say that I have hit all 4 corners of the globe, but so far probably more like only 3.... It has been great though and definitely UK and Europe as well as Canada and the USA have been very well traveled over the years for gigs, festivals, tours, etc. I hit Australia about a decade

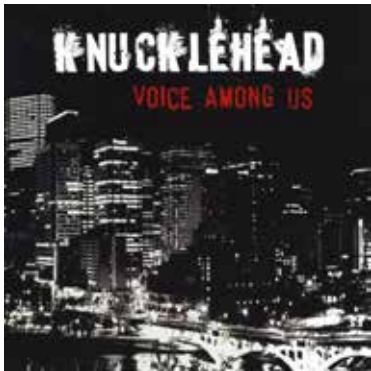
or so ago and finally last year I hit Japan! I really hope to make it to South America some day...

As for highlights.... It is hard to pinpoint that as there have been so many. The one that is obvious for me was seeing Marching Orders play in Melbourne (Australia, not Florida!) for what I thought would be their one and only reunion show a few years ago when they opened for Cockney Rejects. Turns out that they followed that up with a European tour which I joined them on, so both of those were great. Incredible band and really great guys!

AU: On top of putting out bands from all around the world, Longshot has given

exposure to some pretty great Canadian bands over the years. Some examples would be Wednesday Night Heroes, Cleats, New Town Animals, No Heart, Alternate Action, Excessives, Sub City Dwellers, to name a few. I bet you are pretty proud to have helped out so many great Canadian musicians over the years!

YES! When I first started, there was a definite agenda to work with Canadian bands. Then when I moved to NYC, the doors kind of opened up and I explored the idea of growing the label. Probably the first non-Canadian band that I worked with was the aforementioned Marching Orders from Australia! I just looked, and that was release #33, so there was a solid foundation based on all the great Canadian talent prior to that. I was actually just listening to the seminal album *Lost Voices, Broken Strings* by The Cleats on the weekend and was texting with Nik (singer/bass player) telling him how much I still loved that album and how important it was to me and the label (release #8). Another band not mentioned above is Knucklehead! That is a band so iconically Canadian and who (along with Wednesday Night Heroes) were logging thousands of miles in old tour vans, all over not just Canada but also the US in the late 90s/early 00s. Those 2 bands were not just talking the talk (singing the songs) but also walking the walk (driving long haul, overnight) for years, and they deserve massive credit for that. And to say 'proud' doesn't sit well with me as I don't feel any credit for the band's hard work, but yeah.... Not sure what word to use but it does feel good to see things like Knucklehead getting it together again this fall and selling out their hometown gig in 7 hours, and to see guys like Graeme (Wednesday Night Heroes) and Clint (Dance Floor Disasters) touring the world now



with Home Front.

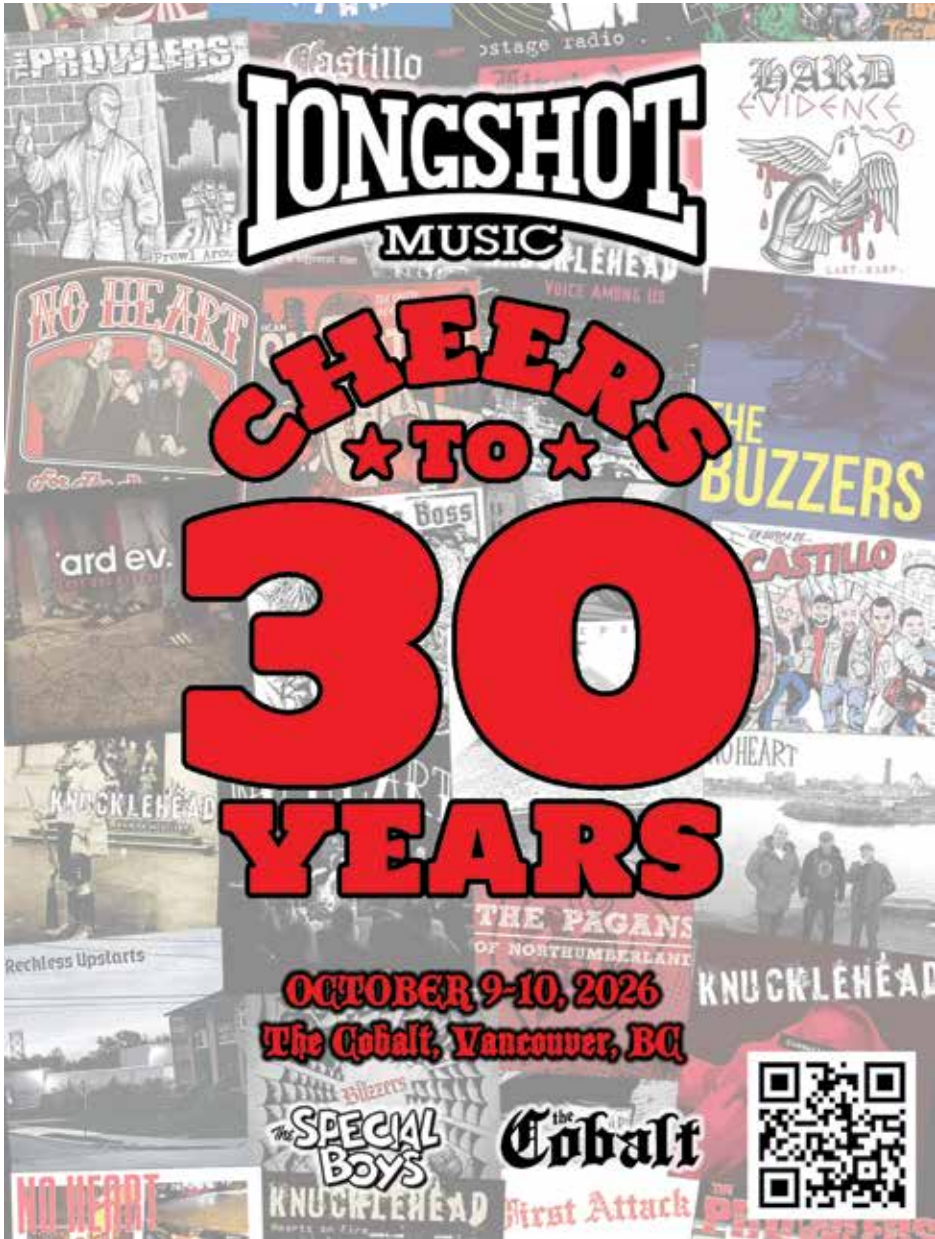
AU: To celebrate 30 years of Longshot Music you are throwing a party this October in Vancouver. Can you give us all the details?

Yes! This is gonna be such a fun weekend... There have been a couple 'showcase gigs' with all Longshot related bands in the past over the years, but I have never attempted a full weekend like this. We'll have 10 bands (barring any changes): Toy Tiger, Pagans Of Northumberland, Reckless Upstarts, Castillo, Buzzers, No Heart, First Attack, Hard Evidence, The Prowlers and Knucklehead!! This will be over 2 nights at The Cobalt in Vancouver on Friday/Saturday, October 9th/10th. To kick it off we'll have a DJ night on Thursday for any locals and out of towners arriving early. This will be more of a party kick-off with punk, glam, etc. Then on Sunday we will do the 2nd installment of the Reggae Recovery with DJs Your Man Flint and Big Punch Sound plus guests. As the name indicates, this will be a more relaxing afternoon of reggae to chill out to on Sunday. With Monday being a holiday, hopefully people will plan to stick around for that.... Venues for the DJ events are still TBC.

AU: Thank you for taking the time to talk to us! Is there anything else you would like to add?

I think I have said way too much already! All I would add is a BIG thank you to EVERYONE that has ever supported not only Longshot Music, but all the other labels, venues, etc. and especially THE BANDS that make this all possible.

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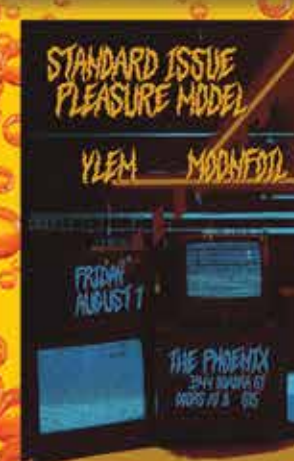
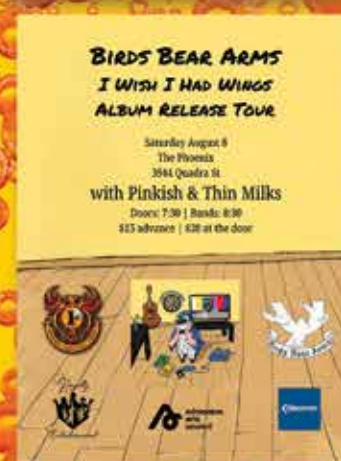
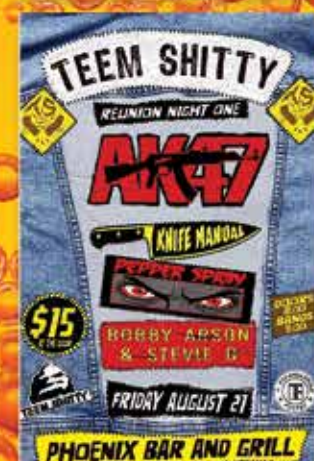
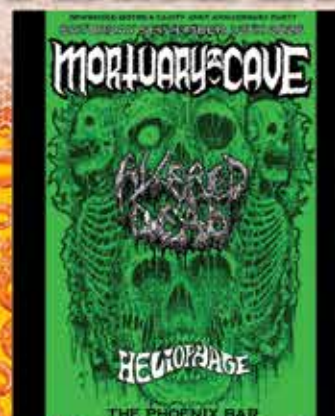
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BAD COP BAD COP

By FLORA

AU: For readers discovering Bad Cop Bad Cop for the first time, who are we talking to today, and how would you describe the band's sound and identity?

Stacey: We are an all grown up lady band that totally frickin rips! We have been on Fat Wreck Chords since 2014 and have a fast, melodic, up-beat punk sound. We have three part harmonies, important lyrics and cool chords!

AU: Bad Cop Bad Cop formed in 2011 and have built a strong reputation within the punk community. Looking back, what has kept the band together and motivated you to continue creating music?

Stacey: Being in a band of all women means that we have to talk everything through in order to stay together. We are good to each other. We aren't weird and judgy, we let everyone be themselves and hope that everyone brings their originality to the band. We constantly work on our relationships with each other! We are real friends that hang outside of the band. We have been living our lives together for so long now, and are just so grateful to still be able to do this! Going on 16 years, we still feel like a baby band!

AU: Your fourth album, *Lighten Up* (released 2025, Fat Wreck Chords) explores resilience, personal struggles and finding beauty through

difficult moments. What inspired the themes and direction behind this record?

Stacey: We write about our personal lives in hopes that people relate and feel seen and connected. These are all of our personal stories and we hope by sharing them, we can get other people to feel like they can overcome the hard parts of life too. It's my life mission to get people to choose happiness rather than hurt!

AU: The band has continued to evolve its sound over the years, and *Lighten Up* explores new ideas while maintaining the melodic punk foundation BCBC are known for. How do you approach pushing your sound forward while staying true to the identity of the band?

Stacey: *Lighten Up* really is our favorite record by far. And we got here by being able to be ourselves this time. We made the choices on what we wanted to do with our songs and I think that really shows. We took everything we know from working with others, and that maintained our sound, but we didn't have anyone telling us NO either and that is why our sound evolved to be much cooler and totally us! Personally it was the first time I didn't care what anyone else thought or was doing musically. I had blinders on and only gave a shit about what we were doing. And it really shows on this record.

AU: BCBC have been part of the Fat Wreck Chords family for many years. What has that relationship meant to the band, and how important is it to have a label that understands the punk scene?

Stacey: We have been so so so lucky to get to be on Fat. They are our family. They have looked out for us and made sure we got a chance at this from day one. I'm eternally grateful to have their support!!! We wouldn't be where we are without them!

AU: This *Absolute Underground* issue celebrates 1986 – The Year of Thrash, marking 40 years of crossover between punk, hardcore and metal. Throughout punk's history, bands have often borrowed ideas and energy from other underground scenes. Have those connections influenced the way you approach music or your place within the punk scene?

Stacey: For sure! Everything I've ever heard and loved has contributed to what I've written! Everything!!!

AU: The band has always been known for strong vocal harmonies and melodic punk songwriting. How important is the balance between the energy of punk rock and the emotional side of your lyrics?

Stacey: We take our lyric writing very seriously. We are not vague. We write with absolute intention. We stay away from just writing love songs (tho' we have a few) and know that with our age comes wisdom. It's time for us to try to help humanity see things differently. That yes, life is hard but it is still wonderful and beautiful. I know a lot of people like to connect over negative ideas and feelings... but we purposefully write from a positive perspective in hopes that folks sing the songs and own them, giving people a chance at feeling the good, powerful stuff too!

AU: Punk has always provided a space for people to challenge expectations and create their own paths. After 15 years in the scene, how do you see BCBC's place within punk today?

Stacey: There are not a lot of grown women who give their entire lives to punk rock. We are those women. We are not young girls. We are here to represent grown ass, bad ass, women in the world! We are not a demographic that is represented often, that is why we are important. We are here to show the world, older ladies can still rock, rock out hard, travel the world and talk

PURE PUNK

about important issues. I believe that is why we were chosen to do this now and not when we were young. Shit, if I had been signed to Fat in my 20s this band would not exist. It was supposed to be now and we were supposed to be the women to do it.

AU: The band continues to tour extensively and connect with audiences around the world. What continues to excite you about playing live?

Stacey: We just love it. We love each other. We have a great time together and we love to travel and perform. We love connecting with people that get it, or need us in ways they don't get from other bands. We are a shining light in the world!

AU: Looking back at the band's career, what moments or milestones stand out as especially meaningful?

Stacey: I think putting our last record out was one of those achievements. We didn't have the team of people that we had on previous records and personally I wasn't sure we'd be able to pull it all off. But we did and we REALLY DID! Which I am so proud of.

AU: What's next for Bad Cop Bad Cop, and how can readers stay connected with the band online?

Stacey: We are playing The Warped Tour (25 July) and we leave for Europe on Monday for three weeks. That's what's immediately next! But I have about 30 new song ideas I'm going to start working on when we get home later in the year so hopefully it will be another cool new record! Just hoping people wanna listen.

badcopbadcopband.com

badcopbadcop.bandcamp.com

Photo credit: Colin Smith Takes Pics



AIRBOURNE

Vocalist-guitarist Joel O'Keefe gushes about Canada and all things Fair Dinkum

By Ferdy Belland

"We're currently in Zagreb, Croatia," says vocalist-guitarist-bandleader Joel O'Keefe of Australia's titanic rock machine Airbourne. "We've got a day off from our European tour and we've just finished signing 30,000 bloody posters to help promote our new album! It's a non-stop train we're riding these days...we just played with Judas Priest, and those guys are just sounding better than ever. It's actually really amazing to see Rob Halford and the guys performing so strong. We'll be busy touring Europe through to the beginning of September before we go back home, where we'll do an Australian tour with Guns N' Roses, which will be great! After that, there's talk about possibly touring South America and elsewhere."

It's a busy year for Airbourne, with their sixth and latest self-titled album hitting the shelves on August 28th. It's their first album since 2019's *Boneshaker* and the likely lads from Warrnambool have lost none of their power-chord punch in the years between.

"The advance response to the new album has been quite overwhelming," says O'Keefe. "And it's been a real relief. We put a lot into it - a lot of time, and a lot of sweat. And it's so great to hear so many people are genuinely loving it."

O'Keefe is especially excited to explain the intriguing 'Canadian Content' which brought this new album to life. "Production-wise, we wanted to recreate the classic Little Mountain Sound vibe as best we could. All those classic albums that came out of that studio back in the 1980s were massive

influences on Airbourne. Which is why we flew Mike Fraser and Brian Howes out to Australia, into a literal jungle - Music Farm Studios, near Byron Bay! We worked with Bryan Adams on a few songs for this record as well... we really wanted that Canadian Sound, which was such an amazing thing that happened in those days. You had these state-of-the-art revolutionary engineer-producers like Mike Fraser and Bob Rock and Bruce Fairbairn, producing all these killer albums by Aerosmith and the Cult and Motley Crue and Metallica and so many others... and you can't just casually replicate that sound and that feel in any old studio with any old bloke behind the mixing board. That sound is a particular, specific thing. You need to invest a lot of time and effort and all sorts of technical genius to make the songs end up big and bombastic. That's why there's a team involved. We wanted that Canadian Team! And we got it!"

O'Keefe's excitable pride almost makes one wonder if he isn't already applying for Dual Citizenship, and scanning the Real Estate listings in Saskatoon.

"Almost every day, if we weren't tracking a song,

we were laughing!" says O'Keefe. "We were having so much fun. I'm surprised you can't hear any laughing on the record, actually - there was that much hilarity going on! Making this record was a more involved process, with us taking this serious-production mindset. Looking back on it all, every song was treated like we were a pit crew working around a Formula One car. We tweaked and tweaked and tweaked, and tuned and tuned and tuned. We'd put it on the track, we'd run it around, we'd say: 'it's gotta be faster!' Or: 'more fuel here, more economy there! Increase the air intake!' We agonized over all the songs until we felt they were the best they could be. We always took that sort of meticulous approach to songwriting and recording in the past, but we've never taken it quite to this level before. The Canadian Team was absolutely hands-on with every thing, beat by beat, bar by bar, section by section. All the parts of our songs were already written before we started recording, but once we got into the studio with Fraser and Howes, the parts really evolved."

Airbourne has been proudly parading its post-AC/DC brand of stripped-down no-bullshit rock and roll for a quarter-century now, and like all good Aussie rockers they are no strangers to the pubs and bars and taverns and dingy nightclubs which provided their earliest showcases and venues. When one thinks of Australia, it's the long string of big eastern cities along that country's Pacific Ocean coastline that usually come first to mind: Sydney, Brisbane, Adelaide, Canberra, Melbourne, and such... with the western city of Perth stuck way the hell out on the Indian Ocean side of the country, with thousands of kilometers of scorching, sandy nothingness separating them. These days it's easy enough for Airbourne to simply fly into Perth, but O'Keefe solemnly shudders at the thought of overland touring.

"Ahhh, the Nullarbor Plain," remarks O'Keefe. "We never dared to drive over that. I mean, there's a bloke out there in Wolf Creek who's shooting

people, so it's never something I've wanted to do. The Nullarbor Plain is a serious fucking thing, mate. It takes a few days to get across it. It's like Mars, right? You can look at pictures of Mars, and you can look at pictures of the Nullarbor Plain, and you can't tell the difference. And once you're out there, you're on your own. Twenty-four hours into that drive, if your vehicle gets a flat, or breaks down, or if something else goes horribly wrong, you could seriously die. It's not a trip you just casually take. I wouldn't advise it. In Australia, we have what's known as Road Trains - massive long-haul trucks, pulling three or four full trailers. They can be 175 feet long and weigh up to 200 tonnes - the biggest road-legal vehicles anywhere! And they'll drive that distance. It's a whole other world out there, mate. A lot of people don't realize it, but Australia is a very dangerous place."

Driving from Melbourne to Perth reminds one of driving from Winnipeg to Vancouver, and the conversation shifts back to O'Keefe's sincere love of all things Canadian.

"We were talking about a future Canadian tour the other day," says

O'Keefe. "When to get over there, and how to do it. We talk about touring Canada a lot. The plan is getting put together. We can't wait to come back. We really miss Canada. It's such a great place to tour. Canadians in general are so great. Australians and Canadians are very similar, in many ways. Canada is a snowier version of Australia, and Australia is a sandier version of Canada. Both countries have a hell of a lot of space, but not a lot of people living in those spaces. You've got King Crab, and we've got massive Tiger Prawns! But we will be in Canada - we don't know when, but we're coming back! We fucking love you all, and we really can't wait to see you soon. We really look forward to sinking a beer with our Canadian friends again!"

Photo credit: PR Brown



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FRIDAY, OCT. 16 EDMONTON THE DIVE BAR	THURSDAY OCT 22 REGINA THE EXCHANGE
SATURDAY, OCT. 17 RED DEER THE VAT	FRIDAY, OCT 23 CALGARY (*CHUNK TO BE CONFIRMED)
SUNDAY, OCT. 18 LLOYDMINSTER THE STICKS	SATURDAY, OCT. 24 CRANBROOK

VENUES

40



By Duane Chaos

Chrissy Steele: My musical journey probably wasn't the typical path into hard rock. I actually started in a much more classical world. Growing up on Vancouver Island, I studied classical guitar and performed in choirs and school operas. My older brothers were professional musicians. In particular, my brother Phil was a classical guitarist and teacher, and I was lucky enough to study with him for several years.

AU: When did you pivot to rock, and what was the attraction to the genre?

CS: I clearly remember getting carded at a club in Comox when I was 17. A singer named Emi Canyn (who later married Mick Mars of Mötley Crüe) was performing at a place called The Loft, and when she sang Heart's "Barracuda," it absolutely blew me away. That was the moment I knew I wanted to be a rock singer.

Back then, British Columbia had an incredible live music scene. Most of the top bands were booked through the Sam Feldman Agency, which pretty much controlled the club circuit. Landing a Vancouver gig wasn't easy, but if you were good enough, you might find yourself playing venues like the Metro or Club Soda. Vancouver was packed with amazing bands, and it was the perfect place to watch, learn, and figure out what it took to survive in the business.

As a female vocalist, though, breaking into that scene wasn't easy, and it took me almost a decade to get signed. I spent years trying to get on the radar, and when I finally did, Sam ended up becoming my manager. I guess he taught me the business the long way around.

AU: Can you tell us about your brief stints in Reform School and Ace Koden, and how the heavy metal sound affected your songwriting?

CS: I was actually going to UVic at the time and playing in a cover band, learning the ropes. We were pretty middle of the road, playing mostly Top 40 stuff like Honeymoon Suite, and frankly I just wanted to get the hell off the island and expand my horizons. The problem was, I was terrible at promoting myself, so it took me a while

to get going. Reform School was on the road and looking for a new singer to tour with them on the mainland. They were playing songs like Dokken's "Tooth and Nail" and Ozzy, and I jumped at the opportunity. It was a solid year and a half on the road, playing every club from Winnipeg to Victoria. The boys in the band were seasoned pros, and I also learned how to roll cigarette machines and

to never trust a 7-Eleven burrito.

AU: Did you find the musical theories and dynamics of one genre easy to apply to another?

CS: Somewhat. Going from classical to hard rock as a vocalist isn't something that is easy to do. I hear some symphonic metal singers that can easily traverse the genre from opera to rock as singers—they sing beautifully and perfectly, but they're not belting, and I feel that the grit is missing.

Having an ear for what sounds good, along with the ability to come up with melodies that don't sound repetitive and boring, will always be a challenge. So I try to use variety in my vocal runs, incorporating a bit of R&B and whatever else I've been listening to.

I don't really pay much attention to music theory. Unless you're writing charts, what's the point? I have a built-in tuner that automatically can transpose, so I don't need theory. Haha.

AU: What was the single largest component of classical music structure (i.e., major/minor, soft/hard, or quiet/loud) you transferred from one genre to the other?

CS: For me, it was technique and dynamics. Classical training taught me breath control, vocal placement, and how to use dynamics to tell a story rather than singing at full power all the time. Those skills translated directly into rock, where I could sing demanding material consistently while still protecting my voice.

Also, identifying where your *passaggio* is (the vocal transition area) can influence how well the song suits you. This can really affect what key you're writing in. There's nothing worse than recording bed tracks only to find that they don't suit your range. I try to test a song as much as possible so there aren't any weak spots where there should be power.

AU: One of your recent singles, “Insidious,” has powerful imagery in the video that might be associated with a more Baroque style, yet the music is definitely in a different direction than classics such as “Love You ‘Til It Hurts.” While some artists tend to write within a consistent theme, your musical style does appear to be evolving. What is the driver for your newer sounds?

CS: The song has a bit of a religious and fatalistic, dark component to it. It's about the feeling of helplessness that can come with an existential crisis—reaching a point where you surrender control and leave your fate to forces beyond yourself. That idea echoes the religious imagery of the Baroque era, when the Church held immense influence over people's lives and the belief that one's destiny rested in the hands of a higher power.

AU: Thank you for your time today, Chrissy. Do you have any final thoughts for our readers and/or up-and-coming artists?

CS: Yeah... I was lucky that there was no social media when I started. You need to be able to suck in the beginning. Nothing is perfect right out of the gate—you learn by doing, and you get better with experience, so don't give up!

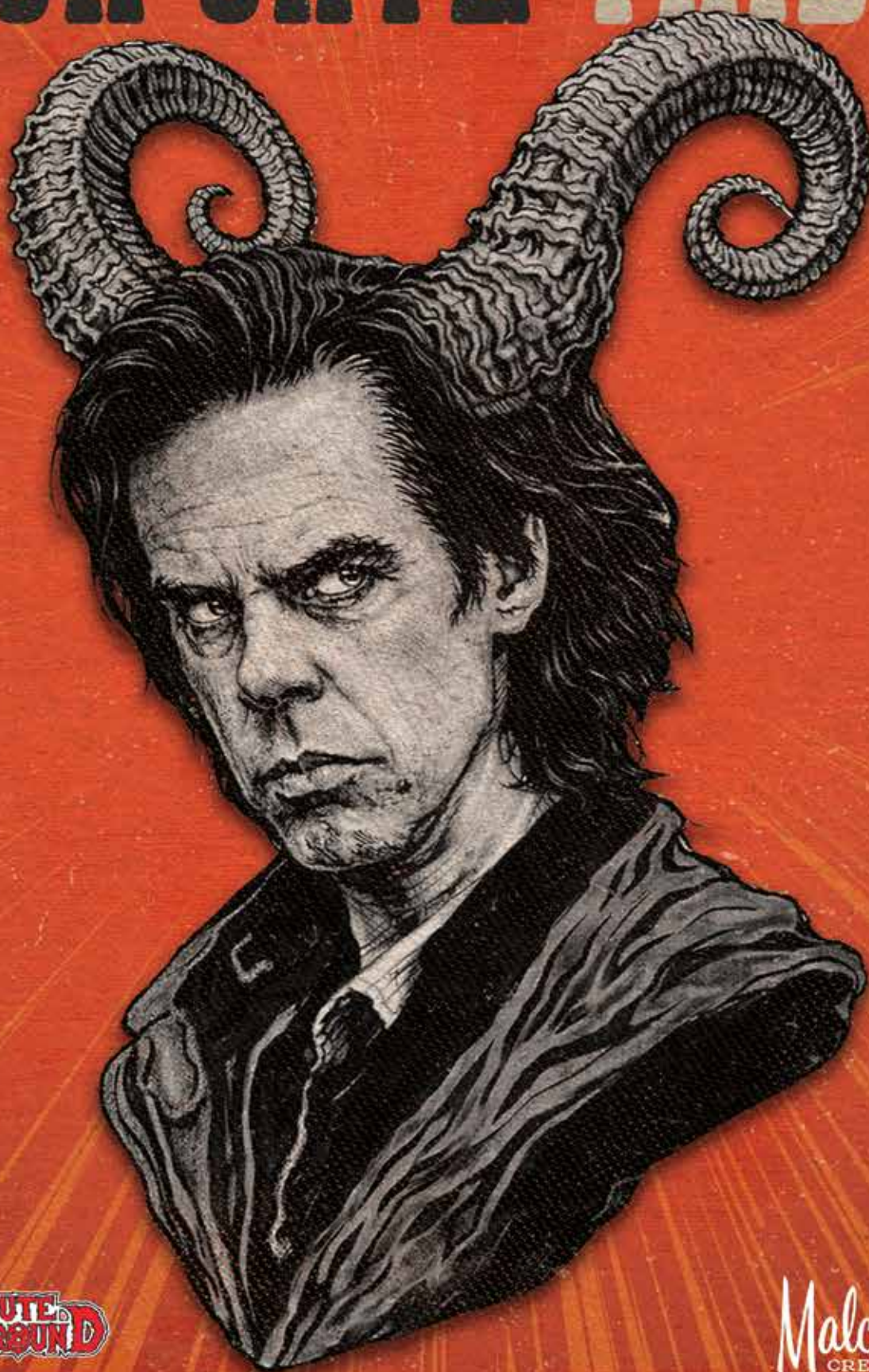
AU: For readers or fans who want to stay in touch with your future endeavours, what is the best way to stay in touch?

CS: ChrissySteele.com—you can find all my new material and links there.

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From Local Scenes to a Worldwide Movement

Punk has often been told through the stories of New York, London, and a handful of influential bands, but *History Of Punk Rock Around The World* takes a broader approach. Written by Czech authors Vítek Formánek and Eva Csölleová, the book examines how punk developed across continents, highlighting the similarities—and differences—between scenes that emerged under very different political and cultural conditions.

Published by Sastrugi Press, the book combines historical context with original interviews featuring musicians, artists, promoters, writers, and other contributors who helped shape punk communities around the world. Rather than focusing solely on well-known names, the authors explore the people and DIY networks that kept local scenes alive in countries across Europe, North and South America, Asia, Africa, Australia, and New Zealand.

One of the book's central themes is that while governments, cultures, and circumstances varied, punk's core values remained remarkably

consistent. Drawing on their own experiences growing up in former Czechoslovakia, Formánek and Csölleová reflect on how punk became an outlet for individuality and self-expression on both sides of the Iron Curtain. Whether confronting censorship, political pressure, or social expectations, many of the stories share a common thread: the desire to create something independent and authentic.

Alongside interviews with established figures from punk history, the book also shines a light on artists and bands that are often overlooked in mainstream accounts. It extends beyond the music itself to examine fanzines, independent labels, graphic artists, filmmakers, promoters, and others whose contributions helped shape punk as a culture rather than simply a genre.

For readers interested in the international history of punk, *History Of Punk Rock Around The World*

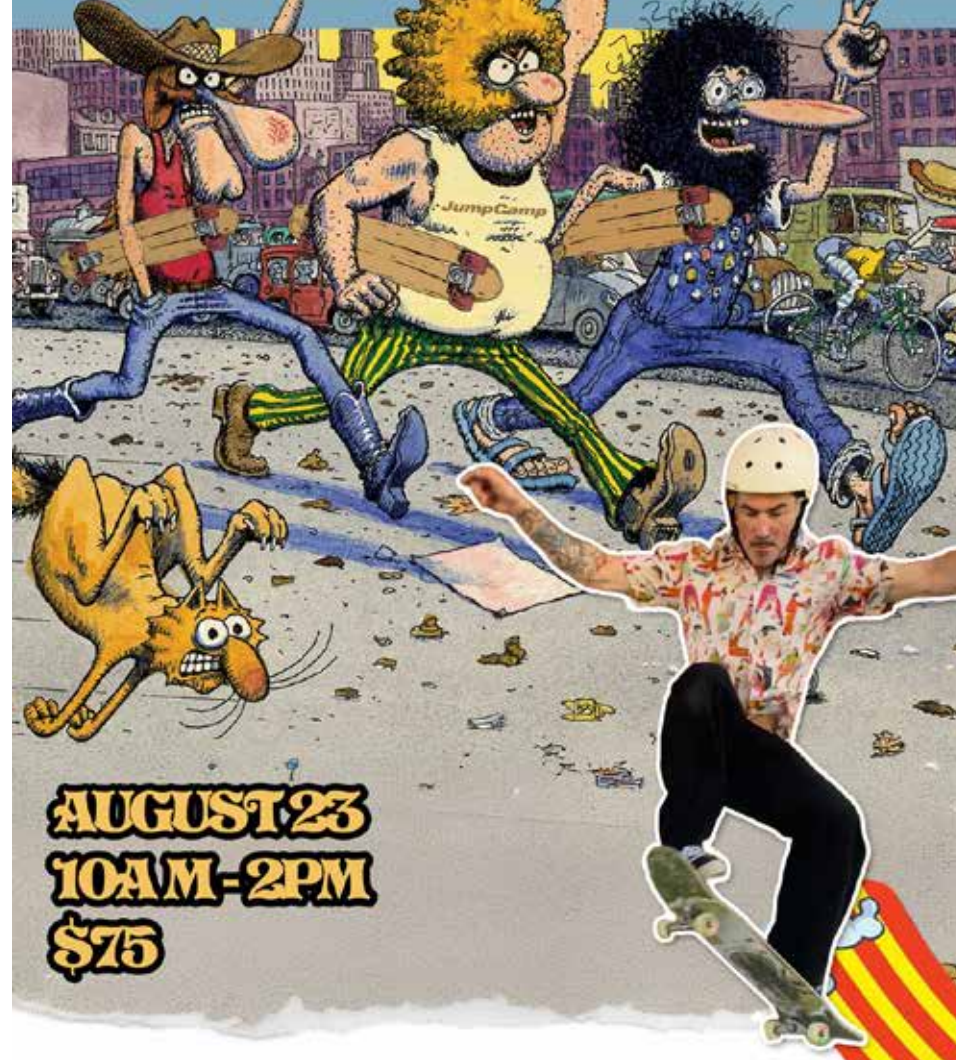
offers a perspective that reaches well beyond the movement's best-known origins, documenting how local scenes around the globe developed their own identities while remaining connected through a shared DIY ethos.

For more information or to order *History Of Punk Rock Around The World*, visit:

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MALHAVOC RELEASING EARLY OCTOBER
THE MASQUERADE'S DEATH





ARMORED SAINT

Vocalist John Bush talks about new album *Emotion Factory Reset* and other Worldwide Adventures

By Ferdy Belland

"Life in the band these days isn't too frustrating," says vocalist John Bush of American metal legends Armored Saint about the band's overall creative process of late. "Usually, everyone's on the same page, for the most part - especially me and Joey (Vera, Armored Saint bassist). Joey oversees most things... he produces the recordings, he's the main songwriter - even though he does welcome and accept ideas from the rest of us - and he'll make these elaborate demos for us to peruse. Him and I then work with these demos and track vocals, and a lot of that will end up carrying over to the finished album itself.

"It's a very fun way to make music. Joey's a very good engineer. His demos sound truly awesome. The stuff he lays down is as high-quality as anything most bands would create in a dedicated studio, as far as I'm concerned. It's so enjoyable to work like that. But all of us are involved in the creative process, whether it's musical ideas or lyrical ideas, and then we run with it. We've done our last few albums the same way, and we all fall into a good working groove. Sometimes the whole writing and recording process is a lot longer than we prefer to, especially when our album turnarounds seem to take five years! But that's the way it goes, and as long as at the end of the day the songs and the whole album is top-notch quality, then that's the most important thing. You can't be in a hurry to make a substandard album."

Armored Saint's new album *Emotion Factory Reset* is certainly not substandard at all: since its release in May 2026, the overwhelming critical response to it (the band's ninth full-length since their formation in 1982) has lauded Bush's ongoing strength and vitality as one of the best vocalist-frontmen in American metal, with Joey Vera's hands-on no-nonsense focus behind the mixing board making the album yet another sonic triumph from a well-oiled Metal Machine which shows no sign of rust or wear after almost 45 years of deafening hordes of heshers worldwide.

"We wrote 14 songs in total for the new album, and we narrowed it down to 11 strong tracks. We were conscious about writing somewhat shorter songs than we'd done on previous albums... not so we could make the Spotify Top 50 or anything, but if only so when the album's released on vinyl we're not cramming too much stuff onto a physical format where the audio quality deteriorates after 22 minutes of music per side. Then you're releasing a double album with two records, which might not be cost-prohibitive to Armored Saint as such, but it might be a downer for our Armored Saint fans. But we've never been one of those bands who say: we wrote THIRTY SONGS for this record and took the BEST TEN! I don't want to compare Armored Saint to any other band, but my feeling is that if you're going through the creative effort to write 30 songs, chances are 20 of them aren't very good, honestly... unless you wrote the songs over a 20-year period. Or maybe you're the Beatles!

To write 14 heavy metal songs is one hell of an achievement, in any case."

Although Bush is more than happy with his lot in Armored Saint, he still takes time to reconnect with his past as lead vocalist of Anthrax - a position he held 1992 through 2005.

"I recently played an Anthrax set at the Milwaukee Metalfest, with all the guys from our other side-project Category 7 as my backup band - which was great! We had a lot of fun. It was a great time. The show and the crowd was awesome! As of now, there's no Anthrax-related stuff planned, and I'd certainly like to do more of that when the situations arise. I want the shows to be strategic. I don't want to slog out a string of shows - I want to do the RIGHT shows. But I'd love to do Europe and South America - the places I actually played while I was in Anthrax! I love working with all those Category 7 guys, and we're talking about creating another album, too. It's all a matter of fitting the time in and around my other musical commitments."

John Bush is a true Heavy Metal Renaissance Man with much creative restlessness; besides his other bands, he also indulges in gritty, greasy cowpunk with his other side-project Electric Spaghetti, which delves into the sort of feedback-drenched roots music (think Supersuckers) that scrapes out the weed-choked gutters along the crumbling curb outside your beat-to-shit smalltown tavern with the flickering neon lights advertising Schlitz beer.

"We just finished recording a full album with Electric Spaghetti, and now we're figuring out if we can get a record deal with it! We actually did the record with Michael Dumas, who produced a bunch of albums for people like Lucinda Williams and Dwight Yoakam... a super-talented guy who's very experienced, and he did an awesome job on the mixing. It's really cool! It's really different. There's shades of country, there's shades of blues, a bit of soul in there too, and taking this kind of musical left-turn allows me to bring out another style in my songwriting and my singing voice - which is always beneficial in the Musical Big Picture. It was a fun challenge for me, and the band just rips. It's so fun to play with all these other talented musicians, and we play some great shows. I want to get that album released one fine day, and it's definitely not metal... when Armored Saint fans hear it, they'll all probably go: WHAT???"

Getting back to Armored Saint: the band is revving up for one of their busiest summers of the 2020s.

"We're heading to Europe this summer for the festival circuit," says Bush. "Alcatraz, Brutal Assault, the Stone Deaf Festival in England. We're doing dates with Metal Church and some with Testament, a couple of dates with Savatage - which is going to be really cool! - and then after that we'll be touring the US with Metal Church and hitting up Vancouver, which will be a lot of fun. Metal Church is such a good band, and they've also been around for eons... kind of like us! They're also releasing a new record which is gaining lots of critical acclaim, and they're representing the Old Guard from the early 1980s - an awesome 'sibling band,' if you will."

Bush shares his yearnings for a more Canadian presence to Armored Saint's live-performance schedule.

"We tried rounding up shows in Edmonton and Calgary to widen the Canadian part of the North American tour, but unfortunately that fell through, and we were all very bummed about that, truly. At some point I would be very happy for us to do a dedicated Canadian tour, where we

partner up with another band who also wants to tour Canada, or on our own if that's how it develops. I'd love for us to tour Canada coast to coast, from Vancouver all the way over to Halifax, and even up to Newfoundland. That would be awesome for me, and awesome for all of us - it's such a beautiful country. We've only ever played Calgary once. We've never played in Edmonton or Saskatoon or Winnipeg. It seems the only places in Canada we ever play are Vancouver and Toronto and Montreal, which of course is very cool, but we're certain Armored Saint could pull off a proper Canadian tour and everything would work out well for everyone involved. I mean, our album debuted at #14 on the Canadian Album Charts, so thank you to all the Canadian fans who've shown us all this love! I see other American and European metal bands touring Canada all the time, so for us it's only a matter of 'when.'"

Bush ends off with some sage advice.

"I say to young musicians: listen to a lot of different music. Play a lot of different music. One

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hand washes the other. When my friends and I were 18 years old, all we wanted to hear was Iron Maiden and Motorhead and Saxon and what have you, but we were also listening to Jean-Luc Ponty and Al DiMeola and Marvin Gaye and



the Gap Band. The more broad-minded you are musically, the better you'll be all around when it comes to songwriting and arranging and just being creative. If you only listen to one style of music, you'll just be one-dimensional, and it's really limiting. The key is to always listen to lots of music. It'll only enhance your abilities. It's the simple logic of it."

Photo Credit Stephanie Cabral

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JOE KEITHLEY: FROM D.O.A. TO CITY HALL

By Marisa Flora

After nearly five decades with D.O.A., Joe Keithley reflects on his new documentary *Something Better Change*, grassroots activism, and how punk values helped shape his path into public service.

AU: For readers discovering this chapter of your life for the first time, how would you describe the path that brought you here?

Joe Keithley: I think the one thing that really helped was having travelled around the world with D.O.A.—playing 4,500 shows in 50 countries across five continents. Dealing with different people and cultures gave me the training ground that prepared me when the opportunity to run for office came up.

Burnaby is now the most diverse city in all of Canada, with over 130 languages spoken here. It's completely different from when I was a kid, but it's pretty amazing.

A lot of my training also came from dealing with promoters who didn't want to pay, border guards, police, and all the things bands run into on the road. I was the guy who had to talk our way through those situations. I'd say, "Sir, no, you're misunderstanding the situation." D.O.A. never got arrested once, so that's a pretty good track record. Managing the band and dealing with all those situations was the kind of experience that helped prepare me. People were surprised when I got elected, but now I'm going for my third term in October.

AU: Burnaby seems to want you there.

JK: Thank you. Yeah, they seem to. I ran five times unsuccessfully and finally won on the sixth try, but only by 130 votes. I thought there was going to be a recount, but they didn't bother.

AU: The documentary arrives at a time when many people feel disconnected from politics. Was it important to show that ordinary people can still get involved and create change?

JK: Yeah, I think what we need in politics is people with different backgrounds. We need the person who runs the daycare, the plumber, the teacher — not just more lawyers, real estate agents, or people with a lot of money. Not every party gets those kinds of candidates, but there are a lot of people sitting in Victoria, Ottawa and Washington, D.C. whose backgrounds are very similar. We need regular people.

I talked to a guy the other day whose group wants to run in his town in Maryland, and he's an activist. I was glad to call him and give him some advice — this is how I went about winning and getting elected. You want people who are different, not just the same old, same old. It's to the point where people don't trust politicians. I mean, kind of with good reason. Except for me, they trust me.

AU: In the documentary, you receive a call asking you to run for the Green Party — and your first reaction is, "You know you're talking to Joe Shithead? I'm not running for your party." Then you hung up. What changed your mind?

JK: Well, when I was in high school, I thought I was going to play defense for the Boston Bruins in the NHL... that did not quite work out. My next goal was, okay, I'm going to become prime minister. That didn't work out either, right? The message was pretty clear at that point.

So when Tom called me up, I was shocked. I thought, "Do you know who the heck you're talking to?" I'm known around the world as the guy from D.O.A. We're the troublemakers. We stick it to the man when people aren't being treated fairly — that's always been our mantra. Then I saw some coverage about the next election and everything that was going on, and the funny thing is, I called them back and said, "Yeah, I'll be your guy." He said, "Okay, good."

The BC Green Party was underfunded and not organized at the time, so they gave me three cloth signs. That was the entire level of support — zero dollars, nothing else. So I went around handing out flyers with my kids, who were six and eight at the time. I told them we'd go to 7-Eleven afterwards and they could buy as much candy as they wanted, but first they had to spend two hours walking around with their dad handing out flyers.

AU: Punk has traditionally existed outside the system, while politics means working within it. Did that feel like a contradiction, or simply another way of continuing the same fight?

JK: D.O.A. was always about trying to help people get justice in this world. Getting to City Hall was an education because there were a lot of procedures I didn't know about — how to get motions moving, how to talk people into things.

A couple of the older councillors, who were from a different party, took me under their wing and said, "Joe, we think you're a good guy. We can work together.

This is how we do this, this, and this." And I went, "Oh, okay." So that whole aspect was pretty easy.

Mayor Mike Hurley has been instrumental because he's the type of person who listens to all the councillors. Rather than just pushing his own opinion, he'd say, "This is what I'm hearing from everyone. I'm going to put it together into one thing. Are you okay if we move forward with this motion?" Because he was a negotiator for the firefighters, he knows how to listen to people, and that made things a lot easier.

As for some of my friends, when I travel around doing D.O.A. shows, some weren't backing it. They'd say, "Oh, well, now you're an elected official." And I said, "Look — and I think I said this in the documentary — D.O.A. was always about changing the world. This is an extension of that. So if you don't like it, well, you don't have to come to the show."

AU: The documentary captures the day-to-day reality of municipal politics, where change is often incremental. Did anything surprise you once you were inside it?

JK: No, not really. The mayor and I were elected in the same year, and one of the things we really focused on was more affordable rental housing. People couldn't afford to rent a house, and politicians go around saying, "We're going to make sure everybody can buy a house." Okay, that's not really reality, right? It's something they say to get votes. Like, okay, who's paying for this? What we did — the mayor, myself and the rest of council — was create more lower-cost rental units in Burnaby than anywhere else in B.C. Burnaby's a big city, with about 250,000 people, so we've done pretty well with that.

As far as surprises, no. It was really just a matter of listening and learning how things worked. If I mishandled something at a council meeting, I'd ask the other councillors or the mayor, "What did I do wrong?" They'd say, "You almost had it right, but next time add this in." Everybody was pretty generous with me, especially because they knew I had a track record of being an activist and helping people. That went a long way.

AU: A strong thread in the documentary is participation — showing up, staying engaged, and not leaving change up to larger systems. Why do you think that message still feels difficult for some people to act on today?

JK: Well, it's a time consumer. I mean, it's a full-time job, right? You get reports from staff on everything from housing to a new pool or ice arena. Instead of reading a 100-page report, they boil it down to maybe a 30-page report, but you still have to know what you're talking about when you arrive at council meetings.

A lot of people don't realize how much the city they live in actually does for them. You just have to be conscious of what's going on, know the facts and be ready when the questions come up. When the mayor says, "Okay, how's everybody voting?" you better have your mind made up.

But the things I really enjoy are that, because the city is so diverse, we get to go to all sorts of cultural festivals, which are really fun and meaningful. Recently, we were at an event marking Burnaby's official apology for its historic discrimination against people of Chinese descent. It was great. There were 800 people there, and the mayor got up and spoke. Then, without telling us, he said, "Well, not both speeches — how about a song?" and they started singing "Country Roads" by John Denver. I'm looking at Mike, who I've done all sorts of shows with — he's a musician from Ireland — and I thought, "Okay, I know this one." I sang along because I heard that song a thousand times when I was a kid.

It was a great community feeling. Being able to go back and redress some of these wrongs that happened in the past, that's the stuff I really enjoy.

AU: The film features voices from across punk and rock, including Ian MacKaye, Jello Biafra, Duff McKagan and Dave Grohl. What did it mean to hear those perspectives reflect on your journey and the impact of your work?

JK: Jello is one of my oldest friends. That was our first road trip—we went to San Francisco and played the Mabuhay Gardens, and Jello came out to see us because he'd heard about us. We became fast friends, and we've stayed that way ever since. Apparently, he's back on stage performing a bit now, which is really good news. When I talked to him a couple weeks ago, he said, "I'm working." I said, "Well, you do that, my friend."

And a guy like Duff McKagan—wow. He is the nicest guy in rock and roll. D.O.A. was the first band he ever saw live when he was around 14, when we played Seattle. It was the original three-piece with Randy, Chuck and I, and he was amazed. He was like, "Oh, so that's what you do on stage." We became friends after that, and he's just a great guy.

Then there's Ian MacKaye. The first time he saw us, we were driving to a show in Woodlawn, Virginia, south of Washington, D.C. I asked the manager, "Where is the show?" He said, "It's just around here." We drove up to a high school in the middle of nowhere, and I thought, "Okay, so we're playing a high school in the middle of nowhere. Is this your idea of how to arrange a tour?"

But that show ended up being one of the first punk rock shows Ian and Henry Rollins ever saw. They were like, "Wow, these guys are Canadians, and they travelled all the way down here to play for us." I became friends with both of them after that.

David Grohl is the same way. He was in bands that opened for D.O.A., and obviously went on to incredible things with Nirvana and his own career. It was really nice of all those people to volunteer their time for the documentary.

I wish we had Lemmy in there. Lemmy was the nicest guy and one of the greatest performers. Some friends of mine in Ontario used to work for D.O.A., and they would sneak into Motörhead

shows during soundcheck. They said to Lemmy, "Hey, can we work for you? We're local guys, and we want to help." Lemmy asked, "Who do you work for?" They said, "We work for D.O.A." He said something like, "Yeah, call the crew chief. A hundred bucks." And just like that, they were on the crew. Lemmy was that kind of guy. You think of him as this big, tough guy on stage, but in person he was just a nice bloke. He was one of a kind, and I miss him.

AU: After decades of activism, touring and pushing against the status quo, what still gives you hope that meaningful change is possible?

JK: I think more people are listening to some of the key issues now. Things that weren't really being addressed 20 years ago — environmental degradation, reconciliation with First Nations and respecting diversity. Everybody in our city is learning, and I hope everybody across Canada is learning as well.

Then there are other things we work on, like helping seniors. A lot of seniors have worked their entire lives and paid taxes, but by the end of their lives they're almost living in poverty. A lot of what we have — libraries, pools and roads — wouldn't be there if these people hadn't contributed to our communities for the last 50 years. When they're older, we need to make sure they're supported.

Housing is still the number one issue. When Mike and I got elected, we started working on it as quickly as we could, but it's not easy because it's expensive. People have a right to expect change and expect help, but it's not always that simple.

I think people's understanding of what needs to be done is much higher than it was when I was 20 years old. You have to remember, if you don't have hope, then sometimes you have nothing.

That's what got me through being in a band. How many times did I go looking for the guy who was supposed to pay me and he was gone? I'd say, "Okay, buddy, there's a guarantee here. We drove down here and we paid for everything." Like Jerry Seinfeld said, "Business is business. A deal is a deal." That's my motto.

AU: With the documentary now streaming and another Burnaby City Council election underway, how can readers support your work and stay connected?

JK: The documentary is available on about a dozen streaming platforms through our distributor, Music Video Distributors, who have been great to work with. If you're old school and want a physical copy, you can also order the DVD through sudden-death.com. That's probably the best way people can support what we're doing right now.

Burnaby's next General Local Election will be held on October 17, 2026

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know who that is?" I said, "Yeah, I know who that is." Afterwards they came over and said, "That was great. Thanks so much for putting the show on." The crowd went nuts, and then we had a great time watching Slayer. Those moments showed how much respect had developed between the punk and metal worlds.

AU: Looking back at 1986, what stands out most about that period for D.O.A.?

JK: It was a real learning period. We made *Let's Wreck the Party* with my friend Brian "Too Loud" McLeod producing. He was a wonderful guy and talented producer (RIP), but we tried moving toward a more rock-oriented sound. Many punk fans said, "This doesn't sound like D.O.A., sounds like a rock band."

Not long after that, we signed with Profile Records in New York, but it became frustrating because they weren't really promoting the records and we had trouble getting out of the deal. Eventually we moved over to Alternative Tentacles, and everything changed. The records started selling again, especially in Europe.

Every band goes through ups and downs. The important thing is to keep going.

AU: Alongside your newly released *Something Better Change* documentary, D.O.A. also released the 33-song retrospective LP *Take On The Tyrants*. How did you possibly narrow down nearly five decades of music?

JK: It was tough. Paddy and I went back and forth over the song selection because there are 18 albums and hundreds of songs to choose from. We wanted it to represent the songs that

connected with people and reflected what D.O.A. has always been about.

The funny thing is, my youngest son, who's 28 and an aspiring musician and good guitar player, asked me how many songs I'd written. I said "about 700." He said, "When are you going to get busy? Dolly Parton's written 7,000." I told him, "I'm working on it, son!"

Not every song's a hit. We focused on the political songs that made a difference and that people remember, including The Dils' "Class War," "The Enemy," "Disco Sucks," "The Prisoner," "World War III," "Slumlord" and "Pipeline Fever", which is coming back into relevance.

We're also going to work on a new album

around Christmas time and hopefully have it out by early April. Then we'll do a bunch of shows, and we have festival offers in England for next summer too.

[instagram.com/doapunk](https://www.instagram.com/doapunk)
[suddendeath.com](https://www.suddendeath.com)

Photo credits:

D.O.A. 1981 Live b/w, by Bev Davies

D.O.A. Live colour, by Bob Hanham



D.O.A. — Still Crossing the Lines

By Marisa Flora

D.O.A. frontman Joe Keithley reflects on crossover, punk and metal influences, and nearly five decades of songs that continue to connect with audiences today.

AU: This *Absolute Underground* issue celebrates 1986: The Year of Thrash, when crossover really exploded. D.O.A. were already blurring the lines between punk and metal before it became a movement. Did you realize at the time those scenes were beginning to influence each other?

Joe Keithley: Yeah, definitely. Bands like Metallica probably heard punk rock and Motörhead and thought, "Okay, we can put these things together." You could really see those worlds coming together over the years.

We played a huge festival in Poland a few years ago, opening for Slayer. During our set, the Slayer guys came out and watched the entire D.O.A. performance from the side of the stage. My drummer Paddy Duddy nudged me and said, "You




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IRON MAIDEN – *Somewhere In Time*

By Steve Earles

Somewhere In Time is the most criminally underrated of the mighty Iron Maiden's 1980s albums, coming as it did after the epic *Powerslave* album and monumental *Live After Death* double album.

But, simply play *Somewhere In Time*, on vinyl so you can stare at what has to be the most detailed Iron Maiden sleeve by the sublime Derek Riggs ever, and you'll be blown away by a truly great and adventurous Iron Maiden album. I love it, it's superb!

Following the epic World Slavery Tour in support of *Powerslave*, Iron Maiden were exhausted. Which isn't surprising when you realize the tour lasted 331 days and Iron Maiden played 187 gigs.

When the time came to record the follow-up album, Bruce Dickinson brought his material to Iron Maiden's bassist and songwriter, and indeed,

beating heart, Steve Harris.

Bruce had written several acoustic based songs, stating that he 'felt we had to come up with our *Physical Graffiti* or *Led Zeppelin IV*... We had to get onto another level or we'd stagnate and drift away.'

My opinion here is that Bruce was basically right, Metallica had successfully incorporated huge melodic and acoustic elements to their music, and in no way could you say Metallica weren't heavy.

Equally, bands like Voivod and Celtic Frost were showing a great deal of courage and innovation in

their music. At the very least, the band could have tried his songs and ideas.

But, Steve was having none of it. He thought, 'Bruce had lost the plot... he was away with the fairies. He was probably more burnt out than anyone at the end of the last tour.'

I feel this was the beginning of the dissatisfaction with Iron Maiden that would eventually lead to Bruce's departure from the band, certain of you listen to the 'Skunkworks' album Bruce would later record, he has no fear of trying something new. Bruce's non-participation in the song writing gave Adrian Smith a real chance to shine, coming up with the singles "Wasted Years" and "Stranger In A Strange Land".

Steve, Adrian and guitarist Dave Murray had been experimenting with bass and guitar synths, and this added great texture to the songs on *Somewhere In Time*.

Martin Birch, to me the greatest hard rock and metal producer of all time, was once again at the helm. If you doubt my claim just listen to any of

the albums Martin either produced or engineered, including Rainbow, Deep Purple, Blue Oyster Cult, Wishbone Ash, Whitesnake and Budgie, I would have to write a separate article on Martin's work just to give him his proper due.

It was the most expensive album Iron Maiden had produced to date. The bass and drums were recorded in Compass Point Studios in Nassau in the Bahamas. The guitars and vocals were recorded in Wisselord Studios, Hilversum, in the Netherlands. Finally, the album was mixed at Electric Lady Studios in New York City.

Listening to the album today it feels like it has space and time as a theme, though it isn't a concept album, and this was unintentional. As Steve explains, 'we certainly never went in there and said, 'let's write a load of songs on the subject of time.'

Lets go through the songs... "Caught *Somewhere in Time*" is the opener, and it's a stormer, classic Maiden with a futuristic edge. I always felt it was inspired by *Doctor Who*.

"Wasted Years" is superb and deserved to be a huge hit, and it's a theme that should resonate with us all, we don't have much time, it's always later than you think, so we should make good use of it!

"Sea of Madness" is superb. "Heaven Can Wait" has an almost poppy vibe, it's that catchy, it's about out of body experiences.

"The Loneliness Of The Long Distance Runner" is poignant, inspired by the equally poignant film of the same name.

"Stranger in a Strange Land" is classic Maiden and in my opinion a precursor for the next Iron Maiden album *Seventh Son of A Seventh Son*. "Deja-Vu" again has time as a theme.

The album ends in epic style with "Alexander The Great". With Maiden there were no stupid heavy metal cliché lyrics, there was and is always a love of history, art and culture, in a way, they're education with riff and air raid siren vocals!

Without *Somewhere In Time* there would be no *Seventh Son of A Seventh Son* because it gave Maiden the courage to do it.

Finally, one of the greatest things is Iron Maiden's superb cover art, especially if the art is by Derek Riggs. I say unto thee, the cover of *Somewhere In Time* is the best cover art of any Iron Maiden album, not least because of all the hidden references and in jokes, a kind 'where's Eddie?' for Iron Maiden fans.

The cover is inspired by *Blade Runner* and *The Terminator*, Eddie is now a cyborg!

Here are just a few of the hidden references, how many more can you spot?

On the front cover, we have a partially obscured street sign that reads 'Acacia', a reference to the song "22 Acacia Avenue" wherein dwells 'Charlotte The Harlot'!

There are posters of Iron Maiden's "Sanctuary" and "Women In Uniform" singles.

There is an Eye of Horus neon sign, a reference to *Powerslave*.

And best of all, the lovely haloed black cat from the masterful *Live After Death* sleeve!

On the back cover, a clock reads 23.58, and that's "Two Minutes To Midnight", top chums!

We have the 'Ace's High' bar. We have pyramids, a reference to *Powerslave*. Not to mention the 'Ancient Mariner' seafood restaurant. We see a TARDIS from cult series *Doctor Who* (also seen on the "Wasted Years" cover).

Finally we have an announcement outside a venue 'Tonight: Gypsy's Kiss'. That's the name of Steve's first band. A few years ago when Steve played Limerick with his British Lion band, I bought a t-shirt off a 'geezer' who was an old school pal of Steve and he knew him from back in the days of Gypsy's Kiss!

So, to sum up, *Somewhere In Time* is a superb album very worthy of rediscovery.

In an age of instant information, you cannot image the anticipation Iron Maiden's fans had when their heroes were releasing a new album in the 1980s, such a special thing, and I still feel that to this very day.





SLAYER – *Reign In Blood*

By Steve Earles

Slayer, it has to be said, were in the right place at the right time, with *Reign In Blood*, but it took a lot of grit and determination for them to get there. From the get go, Tom Araya (vocals, bass), Dave Lombardo (drums), Kerry King (guitars) and Jeff Hanneman (guitars) were forging a new type of metal, something wicked and unholy this way comes!

Releasing their debut album *Show No Mercy* in 1983 on the fledgling Metal Blade label, recorded in a mere three weeks and funded by the band themselves. It still has a rough hewn raw charm, and songs like “Die By The Sword”, “Black Magic” and “The Antichrist” hint at the Satanic Majesty to come, but the ‘production’ buries a lot of the promise. Nevertheless, Slayer were embraced by the underground. The very name captured the imagination of fans hungry for the next stage in metal’s evolution. Slayer were something special, you could feel it in your soul!

In June 1984, Slayer released a three-track EP *Haunting The Chapel*, a quantum leap forward; it was darker, thrashier and faster. It features perpetual live favourite “Chemical Warfare”. This was the first time that Dave Lombardo played the double bass drums that would become such a huge part of Slayer’s sound. “Captor of Sin” was

later memorably covered by At The Gates. Shortly after, Slayer released the *Live Undead* album and toured with one of their major inspirations Venom (it’s both ironic and sad that Venom would soon be overtaken by two bands, the other being Metallica, they’d both inspired and, fair dues, helped by taking them on tour. In some alternative universe, Venom are huge, but that’s a tale for another day).

The next full length studio album Slayer released was another quantum leap forward, longer, more progressive songs such as “At Dawn They Sleep”, an improved production but utterly swamped by the reverb present in so many metal albums of the time (such as Slayer influence Venom). Araya later commented, “Nowadays, production wise, it’s so under par. But for what it was at the time, those are amazing records to me.”

But, it’s with *Reign In Blood*, released on October 20, 1986 by Def Jam Recordings that Slayer laid their claim to metal immortality, carving their names in stone. Produced by Rick Rubin whose influence on Slayer’s sound cannot be underestimated, and indeed, Rubin’s influence on future music production is vast.

Reign In Blood peaked at 94 in the Billboard 200 and was certified Gold in 1992, an incredible achievement when you consider the musical world it was unleashed unto, Bon Jovi Slayer were not!

Larry Carroll’s cover art perfectly matched the music, genuinely a work of art, genuinely disturbing, it has a visual aggression still startling to this day.

With Andy Wallace engineering, Rick Rubin brought fresh ears to the band’s sounds, the songs were tighter, shorter, faster, and most importantly, the sound was cleaned up.

The Reverb was banished to the deepest level of the Inferno never to be heard again!

Kerry King loved how *Reign In Blood* sounded. It

was like-wow, you can hear everything and those guys aren’t just playing fast. Those notes are on time.

And Kerry was happy to see the omission of the reverberation, noting that the band now sounded “way more threatening.” Further noting that prior to *Reign In Blood* Slayer “played in Reverb Land, for lack of a better term... Why didn’t we think of it before?”

Rubin explained. “When I hear very fast music like Metallica and the sounds are big sounds... the whole thing gets blurry, and you really can’t hear it... If the music you’re playing is fast and the sounds are big, there’s not enough space for those big sounds to happen next to each other. There’s no punctuation, it becomes a blur of bass. I wanted it to be a pulse.”

Rick brought an outside perspective. “I didn’t have the baggage of the old way of doing it. And in this case, these forms of music were so new that the old way would have lessened their impact.”

Reign In Blood opens with “Angel of Death”, there’s those opening drum rolls, that scream from Tom and then we’re into the most intense metal song ever recorded. It’s perfect. No band will ever top this, including Slayer. If you were asked what is best in metal? Just playing this one song is the answer! It’s perfect. “Piece By Piece” follows, a punky gallop, over before it begins. Next we have “Necrophobic”,

total Slayer overkill. “Altar of Sacrifice” is super thrashy, yet, for the first time on this album, we can hear just how good musicians Slayer actually are! “Jesus Saves” is very catchy, I just love Tom’s delivery. “Criminally Insane” goes into the serial killer territory Slayer will explore again in the future. “Criminally Insane”, even today, sounds so fast! It’s the sincerity of delivery that makes it work for me. “Reborn” just pulverizes. “Epidemic” is classic Slayer and “Postmortem” is so heavy.

The album ends with “Raining Blood”, it reeks of atmosphere, and I love the Black Sabbath inspired rain sounds, it was used in the South Park episode ‘Did, Hippy, Die’ to drive out an infestation of foul festival loving hippies (‘more tunes’). Kerry King commented gleefully. “It was good to see the song being put to good use. If we can horrify some hippies, we’ve done our job.”

Four decades later, what is the legacy of *Reign In Blood*? All of what we now call extreme metal bands are inspired by Slayer, it’s as simple as that. Even a band that predated Slayer, like Ministry, is inspired by Slayer (“Just One Fix” uses the riff from Slayer’s “South of Heaven”). Death Metal, Thrash Metal, Black Metal, all owe an enormous debt to Slayer in general and *Reign In Blood* in particular.

Even outside the metal genre, Public Enemy sampled “Angel of Death” for “She Watch Channel Zero!” on *It Takes a Nation of Millions to Hold Us Back* (And this track itself was memorably covered by Senser). Utah Saints sampled “War Ensemble” for their mega hit “I Want You”.

But more importantly than all this, *Reign In Blood* is art as much as music, it sounds like no other band except Slayer, it could have come from no other time than 1986 eternal.

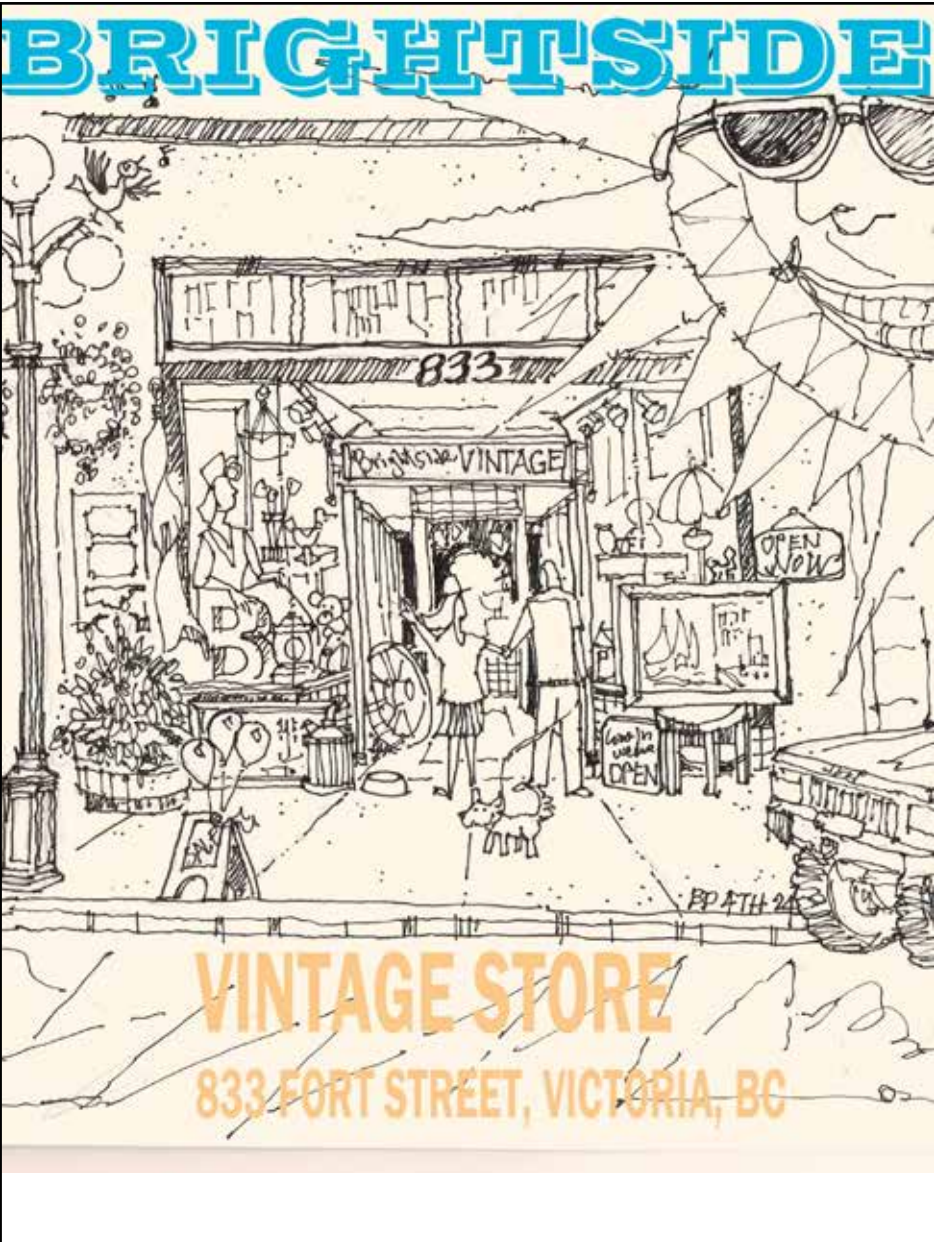
Rick Rubin’s influence cannot be praised enough, and *Reign In Blood* is no fluke. Compare the original Steve Brown recordings of The Cult’s *Electric* with Rubin’s vastly superior version, to me, a career highlight for The Cult, such a lively album. Or compare Rick’s production on the self-titled *Trouble* album on Def American, it’s a wonderful album, so incredible sounding. Or the debut Danzig album, the list goes on...

So, think on how different Slayer’s career would have been without Rick, or his without Slayer!

Finally, I see *Reign In Blood* as the first of an unholy trinity of Slayer albums along with the doomy “South of Heaven” and the superb “Season In The Abyss”!

Without Slayer and Rick, the heavy metal genre and our lives would have been much poorer.

Long may they Reign!



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Metal Meltdown with drummer Dave Lombardo – Part 2

Calgary Horror Con Panel moderated by Trevor Lawrence Reid

AU: When you were asked to join the Misfits, what was that experience like? Do you have any Danzig or Jerry Only stories to share?

Dave Lombardo: Well, I got a personal phone call from Glenn, and that to me was a shock. I mean, if you got a phone call from Glenn Danzig, wouldn't you be shocked? I was like, what? I've known him since the mid 80s. Slayer and Danzig did tours together and then after that producer Rick Rubin was working with Slayer and he was working with Glenn as well. He called me up and asked. He said "I want to put the Misfits back together, it's going to be big. We're going to be playing stadiums and arenas." He said, "I'm not going to do it unless you do it." I said "Okay," and we've been doing this since 2016 and it's been great.

Stories with Jerry Only. So I fly into New Jersey and I get picked up by Jerry and he loves Elvis Presley. His dad has this machine shop and he has Elvis playing constantly. So the first day, he said "We'll go to the shop. We'll go through the songs and see where you're at. So we did and Jerry said, "You'll stay at my place." It was a day of

travel, rehearsed all day, dinner and a little bit of drink so I was exhausted. He said, "Here you can have my room." All right, so I get in there and I didn't really pay attention but the room was unique. So I fell asleep no problems. It was probably 5:45 or 6 in the morning and I usually get up late, like 10:30 to 11 o'clock. So it was around six o'clock in the morning and I hear "La La La, La, La." He's doing his scales, Jerry's singing, Oh God. Then I noticed there's no blinds on the windows. So the sun's just coming in and I get up and I'm like there is no fucking blinds. This is Jerry Only, the Misfits man. It's supposed to be dark, cavernous and cold. That was a very interesting realization for me. That the perception you have of the artists is not, really what or who they are. Some people say to me "Oh dude, you're actually nice but you are in Slayer." Well, what am I supposed to do, have dark glasses and never smile?

AU: What would you tell a 13 year old aspiring musician to get them going?

DL: You can't pursue this career to want to be famous. You have to do it for the passion of being creative and love of the instrument that you play. That's what you have to do. I loved playing before I realized what it felt like on stage. I loved playing in my bedroom watching my mom and my dad come in and say, "That's pretty good." It was funny because when I was 13 or 14 I would play with my tongue sticking out. My dad would tease me, "You're going to go on stage, you're going to play in front of all these girls and you're going to have your tongue sticking out like that?" You can't be disappointed if it doesn't work out. Don't set your goals as I want to be a rock star. It has to be more, I want to play with my friends. That's what drove me. The legacy, the rock star shit, all that came later. Everything was just love and passion for the music. Then what happens is Slayer goes. I leave the band and boom the vibe goes down. I'm not playing in front of that many people but I still love playing drums. I still love jamming, writing music and releasing records. Then Grip Inc. in the 90s started going up and playing bigger festivals. Then Mike Patton calls and says he want to put

this band together, Fantômas. Then Slayer called me and things were okay then things shot up again. Then I left. The one constant and consistent passion wasn't the amount of people that were in the room, it was that I had my drums and that's my first love. Then came everything else.

AU: Was there a moment that sparked the drumming in you and you knew from that moment on that that's what you wanted to do?

DL: It started so early in my life. My earliest memory is watching my brother play in a band. Another time we were at a Cuban get together and I would watch the conga players play. I was enthralled. Then later on, I saw Buddy Rich play on the Johnny Carson Show. After that, I went to the Policeman's ball. I remember there was a drummer there doing a solo and I was fixated on him. When you're a kid and you're exposed to music, you absorb it. I think those were pretty important moments for me.

AU: Was there a show where when you played the last note you felt like this is it. I finally made it, all my hard work has got me here?

DL: It's still doing it to me every time. There's this continuous passion and drive that has not fizzled away. My current wife, who is Canadian, says I've never met anybody like you. I'll wrap up a project and immediately I don't even think or worry about it. Oh, what are the people going to think? Who cares? I don't care. Release it, put it out into the world and onto the next and that's it. Not sit there and, oh, is it going to be big? No, you're fucking it up. I don't think I'll ever feel that way, where it's like I made it. Because it's so personal what I experience with my drums that nothing else matters except what goes on between me and that moment and the musicians on stage. The most amazing experiences on stage is when you do something and the guitar player turns around and you make them laugh. I know you guys probably love Slayer. So this was probably in 2008, I left in 2013, but in '07, '08, '09 things were really popping. Slayer was on top of their live game. You see the footage, all those drum videos and being the big four, where it was a machine. It's like flawless. It's a well oiled machine. So to entertain myself, to mix things up because I've

been playing that music for so long I would get bored playing the same South of Heaven. I mean, how many times are you going to do that? Mick Jagger said that he would have written Satisfaction a lot better if he knew he was going to play that song for 70 years. So I'd be in the back of the bus hanging out in my own world. Hanneman would be in the front of the bus. Tom and Kerry would go in the dressing room inside the venue. Jeff and I would be the ones that would hang out and talk. He'd always come in maybe two hours before the show and say "Hey, play some music." I would have an iPod just full of different styles of music. Stuff that he'd never heard of. So one night I played a band called Taraf de Haïdouks. It's Bulgarian Gypsy music and it's very fast. Think speed metal but they're all acoustic instruments, bass, flute, violin. So I crank that up and when I listen to different styles of music, I'll pick little things from it and I will implement that in a Slayer show. So I'll be listening to Prodigy and I'll kind of translate what I heard and play it in Slayer. You guys won't notice but the band and I will notice the pulse and how I push the song. Within that beat, there's the techno beat. So the Slayer song will start sounding techno. Then with the reverberation of the room I'll really hear that sub going and it'll feel good. Because the best mix in the house is where I'm at. I am in the nucleus of the band. So to wrap that up. I was listening with Jeff to Taraf de Haïdouks and I threw in some crazy rolls in one of the drum parts and he turned around and just started laughing because he had heard what I was listening to on the bus earlier.

AU: With all the bands you have been in, what is your favourite country you have played in?

DL: Canada! That's the right answer.

To Be Continued Next Issue...

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MEGADETH – *Peace Sells...* *but Who's Buying?*

Capitol Records

Reviewed by Steve Earles

Ten out of Ten

"Megadeth's debut album *Killing Is My Business...*

and Business Is Good! was a rickety jagged thrash beast that lacked any refined edges. Yet its purity and unique style built a strong foundation for what was to follow. Like Metallica managed to do after *Kill 'Em All* (release a second album of exquisitely performed thrash), Megadeth likewise found their place in the genre with the mighty *Peace Sells...* Megadeth are a band very similar

to Metallica where the music does not rely on all-out speed. The style of almost rock-infused songs reached out to already primed metal-heads that were weaned on Iron Maiden, and metal leviathans Black Sabbath and Rainbow. Sometimes criminally underrated, existing in the shadow of mainman Dave Mustaine's previous band Metallica, Megadeth have never reached the dazzling heights that they truly should have soared towards."

METATRON – The Meads of Asphodel

Whatever one thinks of Dave Mustaine, he made a pivotal contribution to Metallica, his songs and

the style of music he helped create featuring extensively on Metallica's *Kill 'Em All* and *Ride The Lightning* albums.

Mustaine formed Megadeth and released the not-unlike Metallica album *Killing Is My Business...* featuring David Ellefson on bass guitar, Chris Poland on guitar and Gar Samuelson on drums. While it only hints at things to come, it is a fine album, and shows the extent of Mustaine's influence on Metallica.

But the follow-up was a quantum leap forward, on this album Mustaine would make his mark on the metal scene in his own right.

Released in September of 1986, and along with Slayer's *Reign In Blood* and Metallica's *Master of Puppets*, one of three truly influential thrash metal albums.

Peace Sells... began life as a low-budget Combat Records project, but this changed when Capitol bought out Megadeth's contract.

It's unlikely that Capitol actually understood Megadeth's music, or even liked it, but they knew there was a real buzz about Metallica, and they wanted their own Metallica, and with Megadeth featuring a former member of Metallica, it was as near as they could come.

It's worth giving some historical perspective here, because Mustaine's actual contribution to Metallica is often overlooked.

Mustaine was sacked by Metallica just prior to their recording their debut *Kill 'Em All*. The reasons given are many, and I won't go into them here. I personally doubt there was a long term future for a band with three alpha males, so Mustaine's departure was for the best all round.

But, in the brief period he as in the band, Mustaine, along with the late lamented Cliff Burton helped forge them into a lethal live unit, and added a great deal of depth to their song-writing, the proof lies with the songs he wrote, "Mechanix" AKA "The Four Horsemen", "Ride The Lightning", "Jump In the Fire", "Phantom Lord" and "The Call of Ktulu". That is some legacy.



Tragically, Mustaine never got over being sacked by Metallica and it has cast a cloud over his life for over forty years, which is sad, because Megadeth are a great band.

The original album had been co-produced and mixed by Randy Burns but Capitol weren't happy with his work.

Mustaine was pleased (or at least less sour than usual!) to be off Combat Records. "We toured *Killing Is My Business...* for 72 weeks... We started writing the next album while we were still on the road. My experience with *Killing...* was dreadful. We went into the studio and Combat Records was this cheap, pathetic label that gave us \$8,000 to make the record."

It would be the title track that enabled Megadeth to make a mark on the wider metal scene and take Megadeth out of the underground, as Mustaine recalls. "I knew I was onto something when I wrote *Peace Sells...* I'd written the lyrics on the wall of the rehearsal place where I was living. I was homeless at the time. No one knew we were borderline bums during the making of that record. I saw some famous writer, maybe Patti Smith, had said something, and the gist was that peace is a novel idea but that no one will ever go for it whole heartedly, so I wrote: 'Peace sells, but who's buying?' and I thought, 'Oh my God, what did I just say? It was an important song and an important moment.'"

Capitol brought in a certain Paul Lani to mix the original Randy Burns version of *Peace Sells...* "Capitol had Paul Lani mix the album. It wasn't working out with Randy. Paul had worked with Rod Stewart and people like that, and if I'd known that beforehand I probably would have said no because of my metal loyalty. No offence to Rod, but they're very different musical styles, but he did a good job."

I wouldn't agree 100% with that statement, I've heard some of the original Randy Burns mixes, and they are superior to Paul Lani's.

Ironically, considering Mustaine's constantly professed Christianity (despite not behaving in a very Christian fashion and believing crazy conspiracy theories), some of the songs on *Peace Sells...* are inspired by the occult as Mustaine

explains today.

"I'm still interested in the occult. Just because I believe in God, it doesn't mean Satan and the dark side isn't real.

"The Conjuring" was taken from actual lines that make up a hex but I jumbled everything and left a couple of things out... If you get involved in the occult or witchcraft, there are consequences. If you can afford the risk, then, by all means, follow your heart. If you want that power, that is a choice, but there's a price to be paid. I had to pay a horrible price, with years of work, with Filipino priests laying hands on me and exorcisms with Indian gurus and shamans and everybody trying to get rid of the satanic impression I picked up from practising witchcraft. It finally broke but was gnarly. If you deal with the devil, you don't stop till the songs are over and the song wasn't over for a long time."

The reader may choose to take Mustaine's words with a pinch of salt here.

More true to life is probably "Wake Up Dead", a great track with lyrics about a cheating man knowing his fate if he gets caught.

There is also a great version of "I Ain't Superstitious", originally written by Willies Dixon and recorded by Howlin' Wolf (now recorded by Howlin' Mad Mustaine!).

The cover art by Ed Repka is superb, it's a shame that he and Mustaine have since fallen out.

The band played together well, surprising, given that in a 'kettle calling the pot black' situation, Mustaine complained about his bandmates' drug-addled behaviour. "*Peace Sells...* was a feather in my cap. I think the homelessness during that whole thing and the disdain I had for my bandmates was what ruined it. The success of the record and the fact that I'd pushed the extreme limits of my guitar playing at that time was very gratifying. And it's great to hear the next generation including me in their influences."

Whatever the circumstances of its troubled genesis, *Peace Sells...* is one of the all-time great metal albums.

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Metallica - Master of Puppets

By Jack Ó Riordan

It may seem a stretch to call Metallica's *Master of Puppets* underrated.

Few albums, of any genre, have ever reached such levels of ubiquity in the history of music. Were we to commune with aliens tomorrow, in order to explain to them what music was, you couldn't go wrong with using it as an example. In fact, it was the first-ever heavy metal recording chosen by the Library of Congress for preservation in the National Recording Registry, and the first metal album to go platinum in the U.S. How can an album as ubiquitous as this possibly be underrated? Precisely because of its ubiquity. In all this blur of records and numbers, it can be hard to see the humanity in this record. The element which made it connect with so many people in March of '86, and still connect with new

listeners today. In such a way, *Master of Puppets* is underrated in that it can be overshadowed by its own success, a kind of irony only befitting a truly great album.

And it's not hard to see why.

The first track "Battery" begins with acoustic guitars, not the only time this happens on the album. This wasn't a first for the band, a notable example being "Fade to Black" from their sophomore record, but this opening nonetheless feels like a statement of intent; that while the album is still inexorably thrash, it is going to make you feel a variety of emotions.



Anger is present of course, articulated by the lineup arguably at their peak as musicians. Hetfield's vocal performances are very strong, as is his signature all-downpicking style on rhythm guitar. Hammett's solos are

expressive and also melodic in a way that wasn't necessarily seen before Puppets, and Ulrich keeps his breakneck pace drumming throughout the record. Like the Beatles' Ringo, he was undeniably

not the most technically gifted, but he suited the album's sound perfectly, allowing the other members to shine.

The soul of this album belongs to Burton, however. Many of Puppets' more complex emotions, be it paranoia on the title track or grief on Orion are indebted to his influence on the band. Burton brings a level of musicality and knowledge of his craft which makes this album continue to feel fresh, even forty years later. Incorporating classical and jazz influences, such as the virtuosic and notably unmetal Jaco Pastorius, Burton

pushes the band into more experimental ground, utilising bassline countermelodies and unconventional time signatures. He even taught advanced music theory concepts to his bandmates, and the more melodic focus can be heard on tracks like Orion. If this album belongs to any one person, it's Cliff Burton.

Tragically, it would also be the last Metallica album to feature Cliff Burton. September of the same year as the album's release, Cliff Burton would pass away after an accident involving the band's tour bus. As much as the album is a classic in its own right, it is undeniable that it has come to eulogise Burton and epitomise his genius in the years since his death.

The thread between Puppets and Burton's passing runs deeper than just timing. Many of the album's lyrics delve into themes of loss of control, be it through addiction on the title track, war on "Disposable Heroes", or organised religion on "Leper Messiah". Throughout, this record is a meditation on all the ways that a human life can lose its own autonomy and can be made to be a puppet. This thematic depth ties into the poignant irony of Burton's own life being cut short. It is due to this fact, that the album, especially Orion, is seen to be elegiac for Burton's life.

Although Metallica would continue to release successful albums, Puppets bookends their run of albums with the classic lineup. Their next album, *And Justice for All* would be released in 1988, still hugely successful, but not as beloved as Puppets. Although Jason Newsted was a talented musician in his own right, the shadow of Burton's genius unfortunately seemed a gap too large to fill, not helped by the album's production. The fact of the matter is that Puppets seems to be Metallica at the peak of their powers as musicians,



not because they didn't want to make another record as good, but because they simply couldn't without Burton. And so, in addition to the more obvious sadness which the album carries, there is also the subtle mourning for what could have been, had tragedy not struck.

And so we arrive back to the beginning. How can an album which is seen as arguably the biggest metal band ever at the peak of their powers possibly be underrated? Well it isn't, at least not in terms of influence. Everything about this record, right down to Don Brautigam's cover, is timeless. The album retains a level of cultural significance even today, with the title track returning to the charts in July of 2022.

No, where I think this album can never be fully rated is in its relationship with the listener. The episodes in one's life which it guides you through, the catharsis of its soaring guitars, an anchor which you can rely on. Even if everything else is in the balance, you've still got Puppets. And this completely overshadows the records, the charts, the influence. Because truthfully, I don't feel anything when I see those facts and figures. What makes me feel is when I hear the strumming of those Spanish guitars as the record crackles under the stylus once again.

Photo by Ross Halfin



CLIFF BURTON – An Appreciation

By Steve Earles

"When a man lies he murders some part of the world
These are the pale deaths which men miscall their lives
All this I cannot bear to witness any longer
Cannot the Kingdom of Salvation take me home."

"To Live Is To Die" – Cliff Burton

If any one man can embody the spirit of 1986 eternal it's Cliff Burton.

It's ironic that 1986, the year Cliff departed this world, is also the year he became immortal, as alive in the hearts of those who love and inspired by him as he ever was in life.

Clifford Lee Burton (February 10, 1962-September 27, 1986) will be forever remembered as the ground-breaking bassist on Metallica's first three classic albums, but Cliff's lasting legacy goes beyond those three astonishing albums.

Cliff was born in Castro Valley, California. His mother was Janette 'Jan' Burton (1925-1993), and his father was Raymond 'Ray' Burton (1925-2020). By all accounts Cliff could have wished for two more supportive parents. Ray was at The Rock 'N' Roll Hall of Fame to represent his beloved son when Metallica were inducted. Cliff means just as much to Metallica and their fans now as he always did. I don't see that ever changing.

Cliff has a sister Connie and had an older brother Scott (1958-1975). Without a doubt, his brother's death from a brain aneurysm had a profound effect on Cliff.

Cliff's interest in music began early when Ray introduced him to classical music and he began taking piano lessons. Cliff would bring this knowledge of music theory and harmonies with him to Metallica, one of the many positive things he brought to the trailblazing band.

Cliff began playing the bass guitar at 13 following the death of his brother. His parents quoted him saying, "I'm going to be the best bassist for my brother." Cliff practiced for up to six hours a day, a practice he continued with Metallica, one that forced the other members to up their own game.

From the beginning, Cliff's influences were diverse, southern rock, hard rock, the blues and classical music. Bassists that influenced Cliff included Phil Lynott, Geddy Lee, Lemmy Kilmister and Geezer Butler, all great influences, and it's no coincidence that while all four are great players, they're also great songwriters.

As a student at Castro Valley High School, Cliff formed EZ-Street with future Faith No More members, Jim Martin and Mike Bordin.

Big Jim and Cliff were kindred spirits and they became fast friends. Jim Martin is the Jim referred to in the clip of Cliff and his pals smoking weed in *Kill 'Em All*. I'm certain had Cliff lived, he and Jim would have collaborated together. Jim is a great

guitarist, when he was pushed out of Faith No More, the spirit went out of the band with him.

Jim and Cliff continued to play together once they became students at Chabot College, in Hayward, California. Their band Agents of Misfortune (Obviously a name inspired by the legendary occult rock band Blue Oyster Cult from their classic *Agents of Fortune* album), entered the Hayward Area Recreation Department's Battle of the Bands contest in 1981.

Video recording of their performances exists and it shows Cliff playing parts of what would become Metallica songs, his bass solo "(Anesthesia)—Pulling Teeth" and the intro to "For Whom The Bells Tolls".

Cliff joined his first professional band Trauma in 1983. Trauma's track "Such A Shame" appears on the second *Metal Massacre* compilation album.

How cool would have been if Trauma appeared on the first *Metal Massacre* with Metallica! Still, *Metal Massacre 2* featured Armoured Saint and Aloha, who featured Marty Friedman, so Cliff aside, Trauma were punching above their weight anyway.

In 1982, Trauma performed at the Whiskey a Go Go in Los Angeles. Watching were James Hetfield and Lars Ulrich.

In point of fact, Lars and James actually heard Cliff before they saw him. James explained. "We heard this wild solo going on and thought, 'I don't see any guitar player up there.' We were both counting the strings and I finally turned to Lars and said, 'Dude, that's a bass!' Cliff was up there on stage with his band Trauma with a Wah-wah pedal and his huge mop of red hair. He was looking down at his bass, playing."

Suitably impressed, Lars and James wanted Cliff to replace Ron McGovney. Cliff didn't want to leave San Francisco for Los Angeles where Metallica were based, so Metallica moved El Cerrito, a town across from the Bay in San Francisco. That should give you an idea how special Cliff was.

Metallica secured a recording contract with Megaforce Records and relocated to Old Bride, New

Jersey to record their debut album, which came to be known as *Kill 'Em All*! It would feature Cliff's showcase "(Anesthesia)—Pulling Teeth". Cliff used a Wah-wah pedal and an Electro Harmonix Big Muff, uncommon equipment for a bassist, but then Cliff was an uncommon bassist!

Kill 'Em All is one of the most influential metal albums of all time, inspired by Venom, Diamond Head and Motorhead, no metal album since then can fail to have been influenced by it. And it holds up well, "Seek And Destroy", "Whiplash", "Jump In The Fire", feck, all the tracks are classics!

Incidentally, *Kill 'Em All* was originally going to be called 'Metal Up Your Ass', and indeed artwork of a machete emerging from a toilet bowl was created! But the record companies did not like that title. SO, Cliff said. "Those record company fuckers... Kill 'Em All!" And thus did the Metallica debut get its now iconic name courtesy of Cliff!

Metallica toured hard to promote *Kill 'Em All*, playing with two bands they really admired and had drawn inspiration from Raven and Venom, both of whom were on Neat Records, a small label that punched well above its weight with other acts including the Tygers of Pan Tang!

Metallica hit it off with Raven, their guitarist John Gallagher described Cliff as "a one-off! A real hippy! I swear, he had this pair of bellbottoms, and one leg had a Black Sabbath patch, and the other had a Rush patch. A really funny guy and a great player!"

Corinne, Cliff's girlfriend, gives a great insight

into Cliff's character. He was "so unique, and so intelligent, and yet so funny... We had loads of things in common-literature, movies, philosophy, art. He loved art and I loved art history, so I introduced him to Hieronymus Bosch and other medieval art that I loved. We'd go to really great used-book stores together. I bought him *Diary of a Drug Fiend* by Aleister Crowley."

The follow up album, *Ride The Lightning* took things to another level. Recorded at Sweet Silence Studios in Denmark, because Lars admired studio owner and producer Flemming Rasmussen's work on Rainbow's excellent *Difficult To Cure*, plus he could always call his Gran for a cuppa in his home country!

His production is awesome, *Ride The Lightning* sounds awesome! Lars is actually playing the drums properly courtesy of lessons from Artillery drummer Flemming Larsen. James's vocals have improved greatly, his rhythm guitar playing is second to none and Kirk was a truly inspired choice to replace Mustaine, as he's not only talented, but a team player.

As to Cliff, he's credited on six songs, I will draw special attention to the chromatic intro he plays on "For Whom The Bell Tolls" and his astonishing lead bass on the epic "The Call of Ktulu". Incidentally, the Lovecraft influence came from Cliff. Cliff introduced music theory and harmonies to Metallica and they were much better for it.

As before, Metallica toured hard. Then it was time for album number three, *Master of Puppets*, the greatest metal album of all



time! Cliff excels himself on the lead bass to the epic "Orion", but every song is a timeless stone cold classic. Here is a truly great band on creative fire! There was some talk of Geddy Lee producing, Cliff would have loved that!

I love Cliff's description of the Lovecraftian subject matter of "The Thing That Should Not Be". "It's about

huge guys marching around... Huge fuckers so big they compete with buildings in size."

Metallica did a massive tour with Ozzy.

Then on their 1986 European tour, after a performance on September 26 in Stockholm, the band's bus skidded off the road after the gig, and Cliff was killed.

The last song he played live with his brother in Metallica was "Fight Fire With Fire".

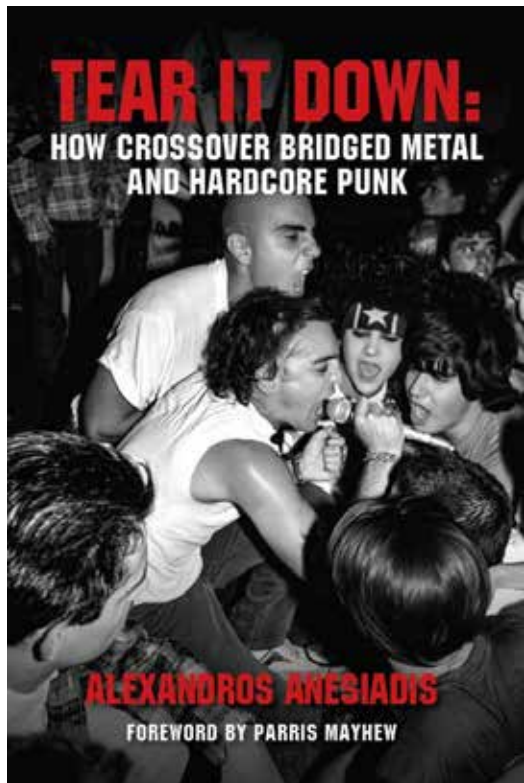
Metallica soldiered on, recruiting Jason Newsted on bass, but things were never the same again. Cliff took a lot of Metallica's creativity and innocence with him.

Yet, in death, Cliff's influence is stronger than ever, he remains emblematic of integrity, grit and sheer originality. He remains a constant inspiration to me, and to many others. He had what we all should aim for, the courage to be our true selves, not the personas we usually hide behind.

Long may he reign eternal!

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TEAR IT DOWN: HOW CROSSOVER BRIDGED METAL AND HARDCORE PUNK

Interview with Alexandros Anesiadis
By FLORA

As *Absolute Underground* celebrates 1986: Year of Thrash and 40 Years of Crossover, few people are better suited to revisit that era than author and researcher Alexandros Anesiadis. His book, *Tear It Down: How Crossover Bridged Metal and Hardcore Punk*, traces the movement's formative

years through more than 180 interviews, exploring not only the bands that defined crossover but the worldwide culture that grew around it. AU caught up with Anesiadis to discuss the making of the book, the legacy of crossover, and why its influence continues to resonate four decades later.

AU: For readers discovering *Tear It Down* for the first time, what first pulled you into crossover, and at what point did you realize its story deserved a book of this scale?

Alexandros Anesiadis: Well, it was D.R.I.'s *4 Of A Kind* LP! I got it when I was 14 years old, and I was instantly hooked, but confused. It was neither pure hardcore, nor metal, but something in-between. In my teenage mind this was a revelation, so I started searching for same-styled bands, even though my knowledge was extremely limited.

I realised that the story of crossover deserved a book about 8 years ago. I was always buying books about punk, hardcore, garage, Oi! and metal, but there seemed to be a gap, so I said, 'well, let's do it'. This resulted in my first book, *Crossover The Edge* and now in *Tear It Down*.

AU: This issue of *Absolute Underground* celebrates 1986: Year of Thrash and 40 years of crossover. Looking back, do you see 1986 as the movement's defining year, or is that milestone more symbolic than historical?

AA: It's both symbolic and historical! 1986 is definitely the most significant year for thrash metal, just check out the awesome stuff released

that year: Slayer's *Reign in Blood*, Kreator's *Pleasure to Kill*, Nuclear Assault's *Game Over*, Dark Angel's *Darkness Descends*, all under the same denominator of bearing massive hardcore influences.

On the other hand, some of the most seminal crossover records were also released in 1986: Cryptic Slaughter's *Convicted*, Agnostic Front's *Cause for Alarm*, The Accüsed's *The Return of... Martha Splatterhead*, Crumbsuckers' *Life of Dreams*, Ludichrist's *Immaculate Deception*, Attitude Adjustment's *American Paranoia*, Cro-Mags' *Age of Quarrel* and innumerable more.

I'm just jealous of people that lived in that era, in the right place. Can't imagine how crazy it would have been to be e.g. a New Yorker and have all

those records coming out every month, and attending all those crazy shows!

AU: One of the strengths of *Tear It Down* is that it avoids presenting crossover as one scene or one sound. After more than 180 interviews, what surprised you most about how differently musicians from around the world remembered that era?

AA: What actually surprised me was the fact that crossover even though it was huge in the USA, many shows ended in a bloodbath between punks, hardcore kids, skinheads and metalheads. This is something that wasn't happening in Europe (well, in

England maybe was that case). It kind of shows how strong those subcultures were holding on to their unique identity, something that is nearly lost nowadays...

AU: The book shines a light on countless overlooked bands alongside the names everyone knows. Was there one interview or discovery that completely changed your own understanding of crossover history?

AA: The interview that changed many things regarding crossover history was the one Al Batross, drummer of Ludichrist, offered me. It was one of the most detailed and amazing interviews I ever conducted, with Al mentioning in detail everything about that era, plus mentioning that early Ludichrist were influenced by the UK anarcho's Rudimentary Peni, a name that I didn't expect to hear!

AU: You also include record labels, artists, fanzine creators and other contributors instead of focusing solely on musicians. Why was it important to document crossover as a culture rather than simply another musical genre?

AA: I think that this was the best way for crossover to be treated, rather a phenomenon/worldwide movement. It had an effect on everyone affiliated with it, like record labels or artists. It had a specific style, not just in music terms, but also in visual, lyrics and imagery.

AU: Growing up in Greece, you experienced an underground scene that many North American fans know very little about. Did that perspective influence how you approached

documenting a movement that stretched far beyond Canada and the US?

AA: It was always like being an



outsider to an outsider culture! Crossover was never huge in Greece, but it was defining for me. I may romanticize stuff a little bit more than somebody who actually lived it, however I believe that being an 'outsider' in terms of country, offered me a more level-headed approach too.

AU: You mention more than 1,300 bands throughout the book. Were there any difficult decisions about what to leave out, or was your philosophy simply to preserve as much of crossover's history as possible?

AA: I wanted to preserve and include as many as I could, but David Gamage (Earth Island Publications) would kill me, haha! I believe that I included the 99.9% bands that I identified as crossover, 1980 to 1990, plus some newer ones. I only omitted moronic Nazi POS bands, let them fade away.

AU: Forty years later, crossover continues to influence everything from hardcore and thrash to metalcore and crossover revival bands. Do you think today's listeners fully appreciate how influential that original movement really was?

AA: I think not, because right now the volume of information attacking the young generation of listeners leaves little room to check out older or split-up bands that were the progenitors of the new hardcore and metal styles. But I'm so happy that newer bands like Ekulu, Mindforce or Combust have been influenced by Leeway, Cro-Mags and Killing Time. And I hope that bands that have gained major publicity like Turnstile,

drop some hints about their influences, for the newer generation to check out.

AU: Looking back at all the conversations you had while writing *Tear It Down*, was there one idea or misconception about crossover that you hope readers walk away questioning?

AA: No, not at all.

AU: Where can readers pick up a copy of *Tear It Down*, and where can they follow your ongoing research and future projects?

AA: They can pick up a copy directly through earthislandbooks.com

or via all the major resellers (Barnes & Noble, Amazon etc etc), and they can add me/follow me either on Facebook or Instagram:

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Like the book?
Go pick up these five less-known records for a start!
Beyond Possession - *Is Beyond Possession*
The Boneless Ones - *Skate for the Devil*
Impulse
Manslaughter - *He Who Laughs Last...*

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Deadspot - *Adios Dude*

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THOR REISSUES 1986's RECRUITS WILD IN THE STREETS

Thor is revisiting his 1986 album *Recruits Wild In The Streets* with a reissue through Cleopatra Records, accompanied by a new release of the album's title track, "Recruits (Ride Hard, Live Free)." Originally released 40 years ago, the song was intended as an anthem about freedom, hope and the possibilities of youth.

"Recruits (Ride Hard, Live Free)" also appeared in the 1986 comedy *Recruits*, directed by Rafal Zielinski and starring Doug Annear and John Canada Terrell. The film follows a group of

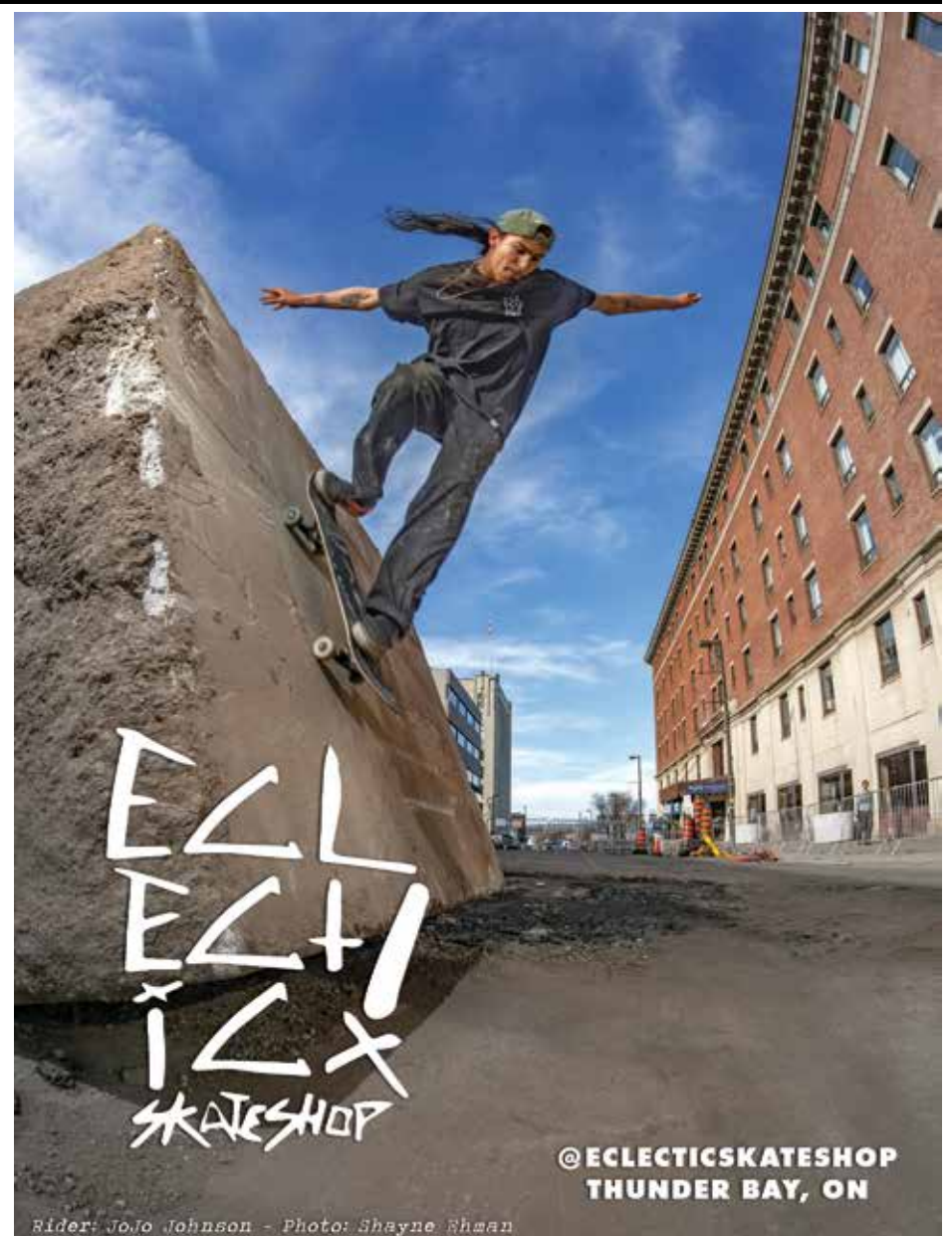


people who fail police academy training but are recruited into the police force anyway. Thor also appears in the film as Thunderhead, a character whose look was inspired by his love of *Easy Rider*.

Recruits Wild In The Streets was Thor's third album, following 1985's Canadian- and UK-platinum-selling *Only The Strong*. The album features several tracks

that have remained part of Thor's catalogue, including "Warhammer," "Ragnarok," "Lady of the Night" and "Long Ride From Hell."

Thor's other film appearances include *Rock 'n' Roll Nightmare*, *Zombie Nightmare* with Adam West, and *Pact of Vengeance*. Further Thor reissues are planned for 2026, along with a career-spanning box set and a new album. *Recruits Wild In The Streets* was released July 17 through Cleopatra Records. cleorecs.com





1986: THE YEAR HEAVY MUSIC WAS REBORN

By Ryan Dyer

I was born on March 22, 1986. Coincidentally, it was also one of the most important years in heavy music history. As a new generation entered the world, heavy music itself was being reborn. Thrash was reaching its creative peak, hardcore punk was colliding with metal, industrial music was becoming darker, and extreme scenes across the globe were laying the groundwork for the future.

January 1986

The year did not begin with the albums that would eventually become household names. Before Metallica, Slayer, and Megadeth defined 1986 as a legendary year, the underground was the first to strike, with Canada's Sacrifice releasing *Torment in Fire* on January 25.

Earlier that month, Seattle's The Accüsed released *The Return of... Martha Splatterhead*, a chaotic blend of hardcore punk and metal that helped define the emerging crossover thrash movement.

Ozzy Osbourne released *The Ultimate Sin*. Carrying the legacy of Black Sabbath into the MTV era with an arena-ready sound, the album showed that heavy metal's established stars were evolving alongside a new generation. Later that year, Ozzy would take Metallica on tour, creating one of the defining images of the changing metal landscape: the pioneers sharing a stage with the bands who were reshaping the genre.

February 1986

February continued to show that heavy music was coming in from multiple directions as Italy's Bulldozer released *The Final Separation*, representing the darker European side of thrash. As American bands refined the style, European acts were pushing it toward something more extreme.

March 1986

The biggest release of March 1986 was the one from my mother: my birth on March 22. Of course, Metallica also put out a little album called *Master of Puppets* earlier that month, an album that would cement them as one of the neo-classic artists of heavy metal. At the time, few people probably realized they were witnessing a future landmark.

Meanwhile, Ministry released *Twitch*, a major turning point for the band. After the synth-pop direction of their debut *With Sympathy*, Al Jourgensen began moving Ministry toward a darker, more experimental sound that would eventually help define industrial metal.

Canada's Voivod also released *Rrröööaaarr*, pushing thrash into stranger territory with its mix of punk energy, aggressive riffing, and futuristic atmosphere. While still rooted in the speed and aggression of the early thrash movement, Voivod was already moving toward the experimental, progressive direction that would make them one of metal's most unique bands.

April 1986

By April, bands were adapting to a new era where MTV, synthesizers, hairspray and larger productions were becoming part of the genre. Judas Priest released *Turbo* on April 14, 1986, a controversial but important album in their career. After helping define traditional heavy metal throughout the 1970s and early '80s, Priest embraced an '80s sound, incorporating synthesizers and a more accessible production style.

At the same time, Canada's thrash underground continued its assault with Razor's *Malicious Intent*. Following Sacrifice's *Torment in Fire* earlier in the year, Razor represented another side of Canadian aggression: faster, sharper, and more stripped-down.

May 1986

By May, the European extreme metal scene continued to gain momentum. Sodom pushed boundaries with *Obsessed by Cruelty*, another landmark from Germany's thrash scene. Darker and more primitive than many of their American

1986 THRASH ALBUMS

How many of these did you wear out?

Agnostic Front — *Cause for Alarm*

Candlemass — *Epicus Doomicus Metallicus*

Cryptic Slaughter — *Convicted*

Iron Maiden — *Somewhere in Time*

Judas Priest — *Turbo*

King Diamond — *Fatal Portrait*

Kreator — *Pleasure to Kill*

Megadeth — *Peace Sells... But Who's Buying?*

Metallica — *Master of Puppets*

Ozzy Osbourne — *The Ultimate Sin*

Slayer — *Reign in Blood*

Motörhead — *Orgasmatron*

counterparts, Sodom brought a dirty, blackened atmosphere to thrash that helped shape the sound of extreme metal.

Meanwhile, New York's Agnostic Front released *Cause for Alarm*, an important moment in the crossover movement. Blending the speed and aggression of hardcore punk with heavier metal influences, the album showed that the connection between punk and metal was becoming one of the defining underground movements of the era.

June 1986

When 1986's midpoint arrived, it was clear that this year was not just an American thrash explosion. Heavy music was branching into multiple directions. Sweden's Candlemass released *Epicus Doomicus Metallicus*, proving that heaviness was not only about speed as doom metal found one of its defining statements.

Canada's Exciter continued the country's strong year with *Unveiling the Wicked*, further cementing their role in the development of speed metal and thrash. Meanwhile, Queensrÿche released *Rage for Order*, showing another path forward through progressive songwriting, complex arrangements, and a futuristic sound that would help shape progressive metal.

July 1986

By July, heavy music had become a worldwide movement. Japan's Loudness released *Lightning Strikes*, bringing technical precision and Japanese metal to a wider international audience.

Flotsam and Jetsam released *Doomsday for the Deceiver*, a highly technical thrash album that would gain additional attention when bassist Jason Newsted later joined Metallica.

Germany's Destruction released *Eternal Devastation*, continuing the Teutonic thrash assault alongside Sodom. Meanwhile, Cryptic Slaughter's *Convicted* showed the continuing collision between hardcore punk and metal, representing the crossover movement that was blurring genre boundaries.

August 1986

August highlighted the diversity of the thrash underground. While some bands were pushing the genre into stranger and more experimental territory, others were refining its speed and aggression.

California's Hirax released *Hate, Fear and Power*, continuing the band's aggressive blend of

speed metal and crossover thrash. The album represented the increasingly blurred line between traditional metal and hardcore punk.

September 1986

September was another defining month for the year. Megadeth released *Peace Sells... but Who's Buying?*, an album that cemented them as one of thrash's major forces. With its technical precision, political edge, and memorable songwriting, it defined Megadeth as serious peers to the other Bay Area bands, proving Mustaine hadn't wasted all of his songwriting ability in Metallica. Iron Maiden also released *Somewhere in Time*, showing that even the traditional heavy metal giants were not standing still. Incorporating guitar synthesizers and a more futuristic atmosphere, Maiden embraced new technology while maintaining their signature sound.

New York's Cro-Mags also released *The Age of Quarrel*, one of the most influential albums in the crossover hardcore movement. The album helped define the sound of a scene where the boundaries between hardcore and metal were disappearing.

Canada's Skinny Puppy also released *Mind: The Perpetual Intercourse*, pushing industrial music further into darker and more experimental

territory. While not a metal album, it represented another branch of the same underground movement - one that would eventually collide with heavy music.

October 1986

October delivered one of the defining moments of the entire year. Slayer released *Reign in Blood*, an album that took the speed and aggression of thrash to a terrifying new level. Short, relentless, and uncompromising, it became one of the most influential extreme metal albums ever recorded.

The crossover movement also received one of its major statements with Nuclear Assault's *Game Over*. Featuring former Anthrax members and combining the speed of thrash with the attitude of hardcore punk, the album represented the growing connection between metal and punk scenes.

By October, 1986 had revealed its true identity: thrash was no longer just a rebellious underground style. It had become the foundation for multiple new forms of extreme music.

November 1986

November represented the point where thrash, crossover, and extreme metal were all expanding in different directions. Germany's Kreator released *Pleasure to Kill*, an album that remains one of the most important statements in extreme thrash history. Faster, darker, and more aggressive than much of what came before it, Kreator pushed thrash toward the intensity that would influence the development of death metal and other



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extreme genres.

Dark Angel also released *Darkness Descends*, another landmark from the American thrash underground. Faster and more intense than much of what came before it, the album helped bridge the gap between thrash and the emerging death metal movement.

The crossover movement was also reaching a defining moment. Bad Brains released *I Against I*, showing the band's increasingly heavy and ambitious approach to hardcore punk.

Brazil's Sepultura released *Morbid Visions*, bringing a chaotic form of extreme metal from South America that felt more influenced by the German side of thrash. While the production was primitive compared to the major releases of the year, the album showed that the underground was no longer limited to North America and Europe.

December 1986

At the end of the year, the impact of 1986 was becoming clear. Heavy music had splintered into countless directions, with bands around the world taking the aggression of metal and punk and transforming it into something new.

Tesla released *Mechanical Resonance*, introducing a more blues-based and melodic approach to hard rock while still carrying the weight and attitude of heavy music. The album represented another side

of the 1986 explosion, as bands explored different ways to build on the foundation created by metal's previous decade.

Conclusion

Looking back forty years later, it is easy to see 1986 as a turning point. At the time, nobody knew exactly which albums would become classics or which underground movements would grow into entire genres. Musicians were simply pushing boundaries, competing with each other, and creating something more ambitious than what came before.

Thrash reached an artistic peak while at the same time, crossover brought punk and metal together, industrial music began moving toward darker territory, doom found a new identity, and extreme metal scenes were emerging all over the world. In particular, Canada had a remarkable year, showing that the country's underground was contributing to multiple corners of heavy music, from Voivod's experimental thrash to Skinny Puppy's industrial darkness and Dayglo Abortions' politically charged hardcore punk.

I was born in 1986, but so was a new era of heavy music. Forty years later, the albums from that year still sound powerful because they captured a moment when anything seemed possible.



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Dark Angel - 'Darkness Descends'

By Steve Earles

This is the second album from Dark Angel, released on November 17th 1986 (My birthday!).

It's a huge improvement on Dark Angel's debut album 'We Have Arrived'. A lot of this is down to Gene Hoglan joining the band and lighting a fire under them, forcing the band to greater heights.

Gene, as all know, is not just a drummer, he's a writer, arranger, and an all-round force of nature!

'Darkness Descends' is a seminal thrash metal album! Hugely influential, it features a great production from Randy Burns.

It's the last Dark Angel album to feature Don Doty

on vocals. This is as it should be. He's only adequate on the Dark Angel debut, with Gene onboard, he's not up to scratch. His replacement

Ron Rinehart was the perfect singer for Dark Angel!

The title track 'Darkness Descends' is inspired by the four Dark Judges from the Judge Dredd stories, Judge Fire, Judge Fear, Judge Mortis, and Judge Death, and features their mantra: "The City is guilty. The Crime is Life. The Sentence is Death!" Elsewhere we have an improved re-recording of 'Merciless Death' from their debut, and "The Burning Of Sodom", excellent songs all.

Dark Angel's next album, 'Leave Scars' is a quantum leap forward, but without 'Darkness Descends' providing the foundation upon which to create it, it would never have happened.

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Flotsam and Jetsam - 'Doomsday For The Deceiver'

By Steve Earles

Flotsam and Jetsam will forever be remembered for being Jason's Newsted's band before he replaced the late Cliff Burton in Metallica.

Which is a pity, because Flotsam and Jetsam were a decent band in their own right, and 'Doomsday For The Deceiver' is a very good album!

I have to say, though, that the cover of 'Doomsday For The Deceiver' is total shite! Satan and Hell drawn by madman on acid and whiskey, and not in a good way. Not 'so bad it's good', just plain bad! Derek Riggs it ain't!

But the music contained within the sleeve of shite is truly great! 'Hammerhead', 'She Took An Axe', and 'Iron Tears' are great songs. There's a

couple of really dumb ones too, but most of it is grand. 1986 Eternal!

Mention must be made of the Metallica-connected elephant in the room, Jason Newsted. He was a

very big part of Flotsam and Jetsam, co-writing all the songs and the majority of the lyrics. So, it must have been a jolt to join a band that placed no value on your creative talents, which would be the ultimate cause of Jason leaving Metallica. That and the bullying!

Flotsam and Jetsam benefitted from the Metallica connection, signing to Elektra and releasing 'No Place For Disgrace' (Which had a vastly superior

cover!), another great album, it features three Jason Newsted co-writes, the title track, 'N.E. Terror' and 'I Live You Die'.

Flotsam and Jetsam are still going today, fair dues to them, but it all began with 'Doomsday For The Deceiver'.



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Metal Church - 'The Dark'

By Steve Earles

Metal Church's astonishing self-titled 1984 debut is one of the greatest metal albums of all time. When suitably refreshed I love to sing 'Beyond The Black'. Hugely influential, no less another fellow Metal Guru than Fenriz of Darkthrone has stated emphatically that he would play the opening track of this album 'Beyond The Black' to anyone who wanted to know what heavy metal is and indeed should be. A splendid fellow: such is the way of the Metal Guru!

Every track on 'Metal Church' is a stone-cold classic, they even make Deep Purple's 'Highway Star' their own. Truer than true. Heavier than a very heavy thing. And hugely influential on the thrash metal genre.



Metal Church signed to Elektra, Metallica's label for 1986's 'The Dark'. Now at the time, it suffered somewhat in comparison to bands Metal Church had influenced ironically, who had pushed the speed factor up. But time has been kind to 'The Dark', opener 'Ton Of Bricks' is equal to anything on the

debut. 'Start The Fire' shows the kind of groove Pantera would make famous, and 'Watch The Children Pray' is a superb ballad.

Sadly, this would be the final album from the classic Metal Church line-up, and David Wayne is no longer with us, but what a fabulous legacy.

I can highly recommend Cherry Red's great value and great sounding Metal Church - 'The Elektra Years', which features Metal Church's self-titled debut, 'The Dark', and follow up 'Blessing In Disguise',

that's a release created and packaged with a lot of well-deserved love and respect for Metal Church!



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THE VERY BEST OF PUNK ROCK'S MOST ENDURING BAND

PUNK ROCK SINCE 1978

Onslaught - 'The Force'

By Steve Earles

While the thrash metal scene in other countries, Canada (home of the mighty Voivod - All Hail!), Germany, America, got a lot of attention, England was unfairly overlooked. Which is a pity as it produced some decent thrash metal bands. Three of them were particularly good, Sacrilege (their 'Within The Prophecy' album, also on Music For Nations/Under One Flag, is awesome), Sabbath and Onslaught.

Like many British thrash metal bands, Onslaught had their roots in the UK's punk scene, and they were inspired by The Exploited, Discharge and GBH, and Motörhead of course!

Influences from Slayer and Metallica and Voivod crept in, and can be heard on Onslaught's 'Power From Hell' debut, which if memory serves correct was released on Children of the Revolution Records.

Its production is somewhat shite, but the songs were good and there is a certain raw rough hewn charm to this album.

It at least created a buzz for Onslaught and they signed to Music For Nation's thrash subsidiary Under One Flag.

This was the perfect label for Onslaught. In the 80s Music For Nations/Under One Flag had a superb roster - Metallica, Anthrax, Frank Zappa, Acid Reign, Re-Animator, Sacrilege (truly awesome band, love them), The Beyond, Blind Illusion and many more. Metal heaven!

The follow up to 'Power From Hell', 'The Force' was a quantum leap forward. A major part of this was the recruitment of singer Sy Keeler, to my mind the only singer for Onslaught.

The songs are awesome, 'Let There Be Death', 'Metal Forces' (Inspired by Bernard Doe's great metal magazine that had given such great support to Onslaught and the underground scene in general, much like Ira Hunter and Absolute Underground. All Hail!), 'Fight With The Beast', 'Demonic', 'Flame Of The Antichrist', 'Contract In Blood' and 'Thrash 'Till The Death'.

Make no mistake, 'The Force' was and is a major league thrash metal album and should have been the stepping stone for the next level for Onslaught. So, what went wrong?

First, they signed to major label London Records, who knew nothing about thrash metal and cared less. Onslaught should have stayed with Music For Nations/Under One Flag, they actually understood about thrash

metal, and they cared.

So, Onslaught recorded album number three for London, 'In Search Of Sanity'. London don't like Sy's vocals and tell the band to fire him.

Unbelievably, they do! Imagine doing that to your bandmate and supposed friend at the behest of an uncaring record label.

They then hire (that's hire as in paying someone to be there rather than being there because you are friends and love the music, that will always end in tears.) Steve Grimmett of Grim Reaper. Steve was a great singer and Grim Reaper were a great traditional heavy metal band, but he wasn't the right singer for the band, and some of the fans did not like the unfairness of this.

Steve then rerecorded the vocals for 'In Search of Sanity'. It's a really great album in some respects, but not an Onslaught album.

The success that London hoped for did not arrive and the band broke up.

Happily, Sy is back in a reformed Onslaught proving there is a little justice in this harsh world!



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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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the Ghost

Mixed By:
Rob Shallcross
w/ Lucas Truman

Guitar, Bass, Keyboards
and Vocals:
the Ghost

Mastered By:
Rob Shallcross

Drums:
Rob Shallcross

Cover Art By:
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Produced By:
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VENOM: INTO OBLIVION

Perennial British Legends release
Triumphant 16th Album

By Ferdy Belland

"At long last!" says Venom drummer Danny "Dante" Needham of the release of the metal legends' latest album *Into Oblivion*. "After all the press leading up to it, now it's real!"

Real indeed: even with the album only released since May 1st, the reviews for *Into Oblivion* are almost universally positive, hailing the record as a raw, energetic chunk of "black-and-roll" with all the trademark stylistic elements Venomites everywhere love to hear - galloping grooves, urgent riffery, and spirited performances that rank this as good as anything they've ever produced.

"It's taken a long time for the album to come to light," says Dante. "We had a few setbacks, the first one being the pandemic. We had gone into the start of 2020 writing the new material, and then all the doors clanged shut! With the lockdowns in place, we couldn't write and rehearse as we usually would, all in a room together going through ideas. So Cronos and Rage updated their home studios so we could work remotely. After the lockdowns were finally lifted, we got back together in a studio. That really helped - WAY easier! And now that it's finally out, there's quite

a few summer festivals we're looking into, mainly in Europe - the contracts are being signed! As for us coming over to play in North America... I'm not too sure as of yet. Obviously, we'd love to come back to tour America and Canada!"

Formed in Newcastle UK in 1978, Venom (under the tireless leadership of bassist-vocalist Conrad "Cronos" Lant) bludgeoned their way to the forefront of the original New Wave of British Heavy Metal (NWOBHM) movement by offering a darker, louder, faster, more sinister shock-rock approach than what was presented by Iron Maiden or Saxon or Def Leppard. Leaning heavily on Satanic / Occult imagery and Cronos' cleverly outrageous stage banter, clad in arresting black bondage gear and their stages festooned with myriad pentagrams and inverted crucifixes, the band earned the love of the international metal underground - and the aghast hatred of uptight bible-thumping squares the world around. Venom's first three albums (1981's *Welcome to Hell*, 1982's *Black Metal*, and 1984's *At War With Satan*) hammered themselves forever into metal history and laid so much of the inspirational groundwork for the fledgling musical branches of Thrash Metal, Black Metal, and Extreme Metal. Aloof to fickle changes in musical trends, Venom have plowed their way through almost half a century of earsplitting brutality, and *Into Oblivion* proudly illustrates just how powerful the band

remains to this day.

Touring to support said album, however, comes with much contemporary frustrations - both political and economic in nature.

"It's too expensive to play the States at the moment," says lead guitarist Stuart "Rage" Dixon. "Normally we have to get work visas to come over, and with the current government rates it's anywhere from \$7000-9000 USD... just for the band! And there's the road crew on top of that! It's completely cost-prohibitive, and even if you do shell out to buy the required work permits, there's no guarantee that Homeland Security's going to allow you into the country when you fly in! It's a total crapshoot, even for big British bands like Cradle Of Filth and such. And it doesn't work the same way when American bands come over to the UK and play for next to nothing! But some of the bigger-league American acts are struggling too... Anthrax had to cancel their world tour! Things are acting up, thanks to, er, 'Orange People' causing instant overnight wars that jack up fuel prices... and everything-else prices! So it suddenly becomes really, really difficult."

"We love coming over to Canada, though," says Dante. "We played Calgary at the Noctus Festival back in 2012, which was absolutely brilliant. A heavy metal conference and convention, with interview panels, lectures, AND loud concerts! It'd been 27 years since we'd last played in Canada, and we certainly don't want to wait another 27 years to return! We get invited to play the Rickshaw Theatre in Vancouver all the time... once you wade through all the smackheads loitering outside on Hastings Street, it's actually a great gig! But we're like vampires: we need to be invited, we can't just turn up and cross the threshold! There's

so much kinship between the British and the Canadians. And Venom's connection goes all the way back to the Canadian Assault live album! Old school all the way!"

Even with the promotional campaign for *Into Oblivion* underway, the boys in Venom still have many creative itches to scratch.

"I've already started laying down new riffs and new ideas for new songs," says Rage. "We have song fragments left over from previous writing binges, but we never really go backwards. But this is one of the best times I've had writing with

Cronos... sometimes he can get a bit depressed, if he's struggling with Writer's Block and the music's not working out right away, but this new stuff is coming easy! We're wanting to really push out this new material. Some of the songs are really progressive and different, and we want to keep that creative momentum going."

"With this album," says Dante, "all three of us have pushed ourselves, playing-wise and songwriting-wise, into this broader style of what Venom

can be. The album's not just 12 or 13 ferocious breakneck tunes - there's dynamic rise and fall at work. All of a sudden an almost bluesy passage appears, or there's a poetic spoken-word section. It all still works under the general umbrella of Venom, and the vibe of the band remains, but this is the most musically colourful album we've done... 'colourful' meaning various shades of black! We're painting Venom with a new palette!"

For more information on all things Venom, visit: venomslegions.com

Photo Credit: Christoph Voy



Venom - 'Eine kleine Nachtmusik'

By Steve Earles

Okay, full confession, I LOVE the classic Venom line-up of Cronos (Bass/Vocals), Mantas (Guitar), and Abaddon (Drums). I love my Venom t-shirt and I love Venom's music (Cronos very kindly signed all my Venom CDs, including this one, top Geordie lad!), so I had to include Venom in our awesome epic 1986 issue, else Satan will give me a spanking!

Released in 1986, this is a fitting tribute to the classic Venom line-up, it's title comes from Mozart's 'A Little Night Music', and is a fine example of Venom's Northern humour, who can't love a band that spoofed the 'Home Taping Is Killing Music' plea from the major labels, by adding 'So is Venom'!

Disc One was recorded at the legendary Hammersmith Odeon (Immortalized in Motörhead's classic 'No Sleep Till Hammersmith')

After a brief intro from Vivaldi (this was a metal thing at the time, having a classical/orchestral intro, see also Ozzy, Metallica and more!)

Then we're into 'Too Loud (For The Crowd)'! Highlights include 'Nightmare' (surprisingly melodic!), the classic 'Countess Bathory' and 'Die Hard'.

Disc Two was recorded at The Ritz in New York, and features classics like 'Black Metal', 'Bloodlust', 'Warhead', 'Welcome To Hell' and the splendidly-titled 'Satanachist'!



Of special note is a live version of 'The Chanting of the Priests', very melodic and catchy, it was to have been featured on the fifth Venom album from this line-up, but sadly Mantas left (the remaining members quipped 'It was musical differences. He was musical, we were different!'). Eventually the track appeared on the criminally underrated 'Calm Before The Storm' album.

'Eine kleine Nachtmusik' is a truly great live album, albeit one tinged with regret for the huge band Venom had the potential to become, that's a story for another day, but suffice to say, they needed a bigger label, powerful management, a few good support slots on major tours, a good producer (imagine Martin Birch or Rick Rubin producing Venom in some alternative universe), and finally the band needed to cop themselves on, realize that they were on the cusp of greatness, and pull together. Venom, make no mistake, fell apart from the inside out, and they could have been huge, the bands they inspired and took on tour, Slayer and Metallica proved this, by far surpassing them in sales, tours and success.

However, in terms of influence, the first two Venom album, 'Welcome To Hell' and 'Black Metal' are colossally influential to this day, Death Metal, Black Metal and Thrash Metal all owe a huge debt to Venom!

All hail the mighty Geordies!



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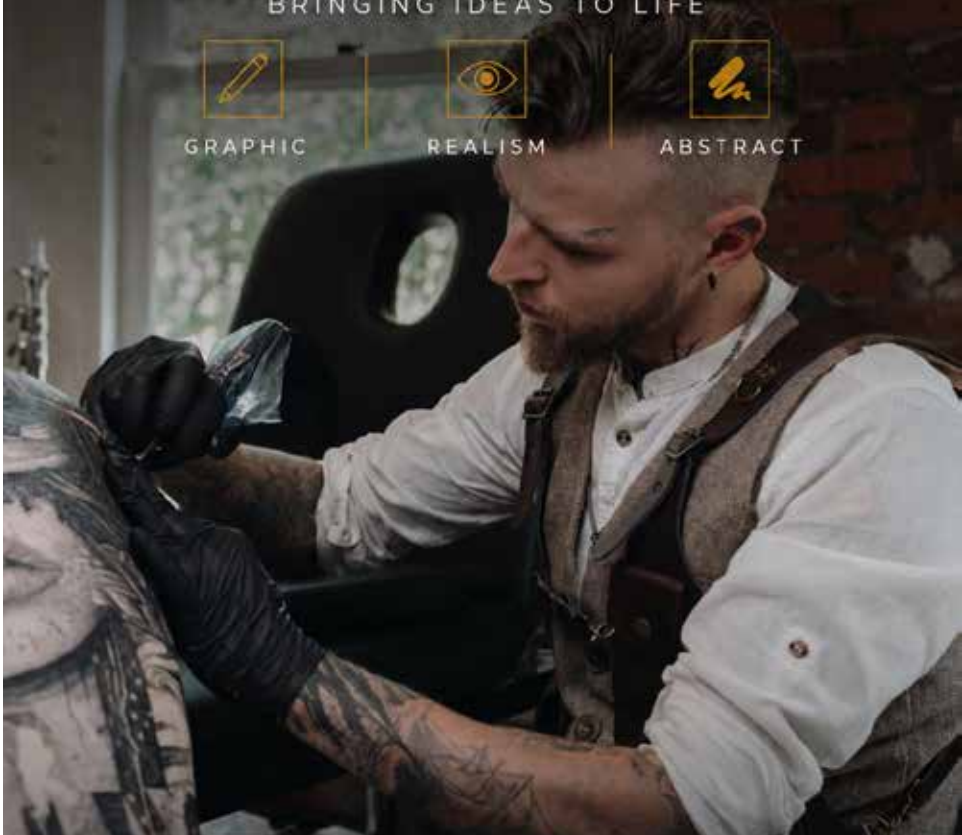
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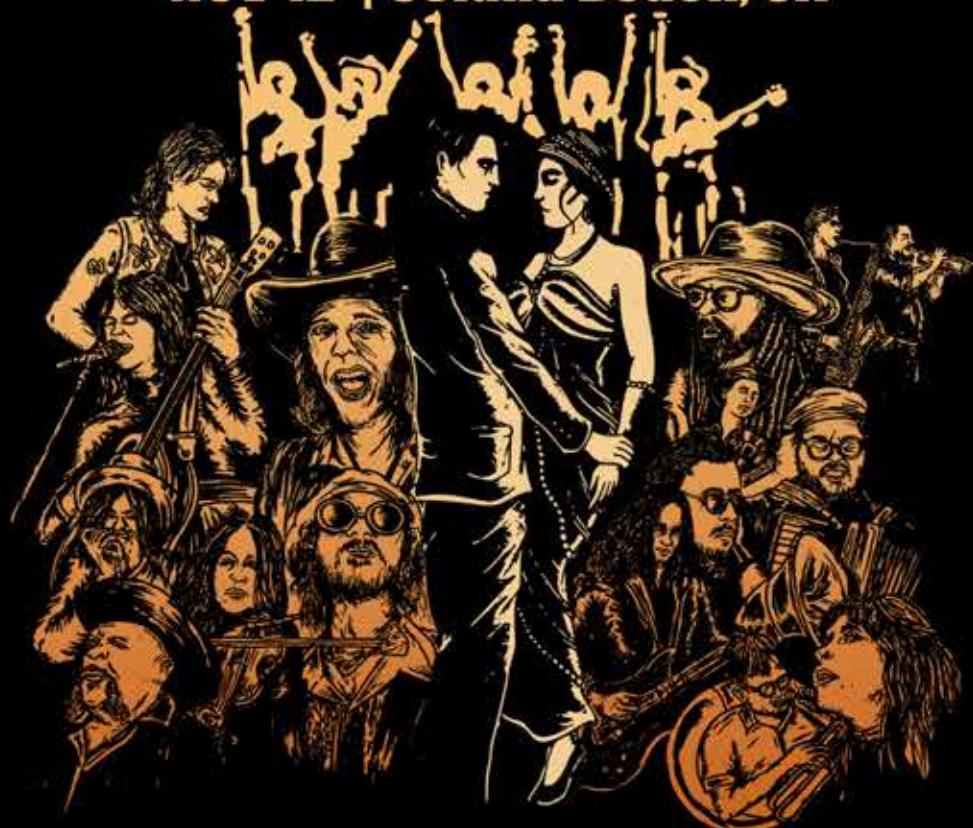
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Ozzy Osbourne - 'The Ultimate Sin'

By Steve Earles

In 1986, Ozzy was a huge star in America, so great was the Ozzman's success, that 'The Ultimate Sin' was awarded Platinum Status the year it came out, our beloved 1986 eternal!

The back story! When it came time to record his fourth studio album, Ozzy was fresh from a stint at The Betty Ford Centre. Judging by Ozzy's appearance in 'The Decline of Western Civilization-Part 2-The Metal Years', it didn't work!

In fact, it could be said that the shenanigans behind the scenes were just as entertaining as 'The Ultimate Sin' itself!

Firstly, Ozzy had to deal with a complaint from his guitarist Jake E. Lee that he had been cheated out of his writing and publishing from the 'Bark At The Moon' album. Lee came to the table with a lot of material but refused to contribute anything until he had a contract guaranteeing his writing and publishing rights.

On 'Bark At The Moon' Ozzy takes sole credit for the song-writing, something disputed by both Jake E. Lee and Bob Daisley. Applying the law of logic called 'Ockham's Razor', it is highly unlikely that Ozzy wrote all the songs on 'Bark At The Moon' on his own. Lee further claims that during the recording of 'Bark At The Moon' that Sharon Osbourne threatened to fire him and replace him with another guitarist if he didn't play along with her wishes.

Most of the lyrics on 'The Ultimate Sin' were written by Bob Daisley, a big part of the Ozzy story in the 80s, though he had a very fraught relationship with the Osbournes for many years. What is certain is that Bob, and many others, made a significant contribution to Ozzy's success. A quick look at Bob's resume speaks volumes for the man's talents.

The final line-up for 'The Ultimate Sin' (Originally to be titled 'Killer of Giants', 'The Ultimate Sin' is a much better title, 'Killer of Giants' is too fairy tale and twee for an Ozzy album title), it was Ozzy, Jake on Guitars, Phil Soussan on bass and Randy Castillo on drums. The band look very L.A Glam Metal in their photos and videos! Ozzy sports

bleach blond hair and a kind of Liberace-style frock. They could not look more '80s. Contrast them then with their support band Metallica. They wore Samhain, Misfits and Faith No More t-shirts, ripped jeans, definitely no make-up and glam hair. And that's before we even get to Cliff Burton's bell bottoms!

Metallica looked like their fans! But the tour was great support and the band remained friends with Ozzy until the end (Ozzy's bassist would even replace Jason Newsted, who joined Ozzy's band. Did they do a swop?).

Contrast the success of Ozzy in 1986 with the fortunes of his former Black Sabbath bandmate Tony Iommi.

Ozzy, Tony, Geezer Butler and Bill Ward had briefly reunited for Live Aid. A good cause but Sabbath were awful. Unrehearsed, in some cases, fucked up! A disaster. And Ozzy did not need Sabbath, whereas, Sabbath needed him.

One good thing that came out of the Live Aid debacle was that it rekindled Ozzy's friendship with Geezer who would join Ozzy's band for the next Ozzy album 'No Rest For The Wicked', the first to feature the now iconic Zakk Wyld!

Geezer is a top man, a real geezer, and loves animals!

Tony Iommi, post Live Aid, found himself without bandmates and decided to record a solo album with the great Glenn Hughes singing. But when the album was released it came out under the clunky title of 'Black Sabbath Featuring Tony

Iommi'! 'Now, as a Sabbath album 'Seventh Star' is a disaster, it would have been fine as a solo album. Oh, then the Sabbath shenanigans kicked in, changing singers mid-tour, cancelled gigs (interest in Sabbath was as Spinal Tap say 'selective' at this point), and more! How did it come to this, from the heights of 'Heaven and Hell' and 'Sabbath Bloody Sabbath' to a heavy metal soap opera?

While there were plenty of high jinx and drinks in Ozzy-Land, at least Ozzy was having fun and selling records!



He was having the last laugh at the bandmates who'd sacked him only a few years before!

Finally, the music on 'The Ultimate Sin' is great (though Ozzy didn't rate the production, but it was typical of its time), I love 'Shot In The Dark', 'Lightning Strikes' and 'Thank God For The Bomb'. It's no 'Diary of a Madman' or 'Blizzard of Ozz', but I still love it!



1986 Mixtape LP's

By Dustin "The Ripper" Jak

1) Slayer - Reign In Blood: Highly anticipated 3rd release and breakout LP after rap producer Rick Rubin takes the lead and the result is a 22 minute brutal assault of the eardrums still unmatched to this day.

2) Cro-Mags - The Age of Quarrel: Another highly anticipated release from NYC. Two years after all the old farts claimed Hardcore was done... This was brutal street metal punk unlike anyone had heard before. This line-up lasted weeks at most too.

3) Descendents - Enjoy! A serious pounder of an album after the mellow *I Don't Want To Grow Up*. Songs like "Hürtin' Crüe", "Days are Blood", "Kids" (On Coffee), "80s Girl" and the great Beach Boys cover outweigh the silly stuff!!

4) Bad Brains - I Against I: After hearing the ROIR Cassette and the Ric Ocasek produced LP... this was a huge change with more of a Van Halen type sound. Thick crisp solos, killer snare sound and amazing vocals on this made it a favourite everywhere, every song was a hit.

5) Dag Nasty - Can I Say: Killer DC Hardcore LP here with Dave Smalley from DYS moving down from Boston... super metal guitars from Brian Baker which are not unlike his riffs in The Meatmen, who he also was still with, but mixed with great harmonies and more emotional lyrics. Still a favourite among my peers.

6) Agnostic Front - Cause For Alarm: NYHC legends drop 2nd full length and throw in some serious metal chops to bring one of the first true "Crossover" LP's... A lot of these songs are still in their set-list today.

7) Crumbsuckers - Life Of Dreams: Another early "Crossover" masterpiece coming out of NYC.

Super tight musicians with political lyrics made this a highly sought after album... "Sit There" and the title track are stand-outs!

8) Beyond Possession - Is Beyond Possession: Song after song of absolutely raging Canadian Metal Punk Crossover at it's absolute best. Absolute monstrosity of a live show... The first EP is amazing as well. Killer artwork by Mofo from Thrasher Mag/Drunk Injuns.



9) Samhain III - November-Coming-Fire: This was my first Danzig album at 16 and I fucking adored it... and still do. It's a lot different than the Misfits with more of a Death Rock sound but these tracks grew on you. "Mother of Mercy", "Kiss of Steel" and "In My Grip" are all classics on here. Would morph into Danzig eventually.

10) Dayglo Abortions - Feed US A Fetus: This album completely blew me and all my silly friends away!! We had already heard the early stuff but needed it again and the new side was a pulverizing punk rock/heavy metal assault with disgusting lyrics about sodomizing Inuit people, dogs farting, washing your hair, and the Prime Minister's wife getting defecated on by Mick Jagger... No one was safe. My dad is still mad about the day I brought this LP home and he is long deceased.



11) The Accused - More Fun Than An Open Casket Funeral: This was a ripping slaughter fest of Discharge style Hardcore mixed with searing Metal chops. New bass player

"Maggot Brain" increases the speed just enough to make people flip-out!! These shows were amazing as well.

12) Verbal Abuse - Rocks Your Liver: This was the shit, man. Complete with a Jak's Rat drawn on the cover as well as "Metal Melissa The Pissa" passed out on the couch at Guerrero Street. A lot different than the Nicki Sicki line-up this true Crossover as well mixing raging solos and double bass breaks all over. Still holds up good at any

party. Title track is a Queen cover.

13) Cryptic Slaughter - Convicted: Another relentless beat-down laid to tape... "Lowlife" is pioneering Crossover with some of the fastest scissor beats we had heard besides Napalm Death in the UK. Cryptic Slaughter's next LP was great too. One of my fave West Coast releases to this day.

14) Destruction - Eternal Devastation: Second full length from German Thrash Kings... this was

perfect in every way. "Curse the Gods", "Life Without Sense" were monolithic tracks on this. One of the German Big Four



15) GBH - Midnight Madness and Beyond: This is a bit more metal than the 2 Baby LPs... closer to *City Baby's Revenge*... but great nonetheless. They would tour the West Coast with Verbal Abuse and Accused the following year.





Whiplash - 'Power and Pain'

By Steve Earles

Whiplash are probably best known for their drummer Tony Scaglione being a temporary stand-in for the legendary Dave Lombardo on Slayer's 'Reign In Blood' tour.

Which is a shame, as Whiplash are an excellent thrash metal band in their own right. Also, I feel the power trio format served them well, and gave them their own unique identity.

The original line-up of Tony Portaro, Tony Scaglione and Tony Bono recorded Whiplash's debut 'Power and Pain' in 1986.



Incidentally, Three Tonys, that must have made band practice a little confusing! 1986 was, in retrospect, the peak year for thrash metal. It's the year of Metallica releasing 'Master of Puppets' with the great Cliff Burton (R.I.P.). 'Nuff said.

While 'Power and Pain' isn't in that league, it's still a great album, with its own unique identity, like Motörhead on speedier speed!

Mention must be made of the cover of 'Power and Pain'. Unlike the cover of Flotsam and Jetsam's 'Doomsday For The Deceiver', which is just plain bad, the cover of 'Power and Pain' is so bad it's good! There is a distinction.

Follow-up album, 'Ticket To Mayhem' featured Joe Cangelosi on drums following Tony Scaglione's defection to the mighty Slayer. It's a great thrash album!

In 1989, a certain Glenn Hansen joined as singer for 'Insult To Injury' (love the cover!). This completes a trio of excellent albums for Roadrunner Records.

All three, including the seminal 'Power and Pain' are available in a great value for money set entitled 'The Roadrunner Years' from Cherry Red/Dissonance Records. Buy or die, as they used to say back then! Line-ups changed, but Whiplash survive to this day. Fair dues to them. True survivors of '80s thrash!



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In the start of the 1980's, you had heavy metal, and you had punk.

Early heavy metal bringing songs of wonder, imagination and far off realms: wizards, magic, dragons, knights, demons, and oh yes – buxom maidens.

Punk brought ground-level stories from the streets: class war, poverty, social unrest, police brutality, capitalism, and fascism – and a community forged in action, in resistance of.

Both styles are loud, fierce, and filled with energy. Both seeking to be heard. Both prepared for combat; whether in skin tight leather pants or worn-out workman's trousers.

Crossover and mixing is inevitable in music. That's how this all started... Church gospel, blues, rock n' roll, country, jazz, psyche, folk. And now rap, industrial, techno, grind, and more. It all mixes, and reinvents. With each new song and note,

ABSOLUTE METAL

no matter what. The animal grows and evolves!

Thrash emerged where technique and fantasy, met passion and grim reality. It sharpened and simplified

metal's fast tempos, and demanded a more elaborate narrative and creativity of punk. Curing/warning of the dystopian future, and living in its current horrors – while smiling – became the mission.

Thrash remains today, and has reinvented for a changed world.

New bands fly the banner... the negative politics, world issues, social challenges remain. "Are there new issues worth exploring" you say? Climate change, indigenous rights, the rise of technocracy.

Drug epidemic. Nuclear war. Global pandemics. To name a few.

Find solace in your local mosh-pit and keep the community strong. Remember to pick each other up when you fall. Both at the gig and in real life. And last of all, remember the songs of yesterday, of 1986 – are still applicable. The rituals of the music still remain.

Long may thrash reign in blood.

- ERIK LINDHOLM

Photo Credit: Harald Oimoen

Photo Credit: Bill O'Leary



STAN BUSH Still Has The Touch

Interview by Ira Hunter, Lawrence Denvir, and Joel Shelton

The Transformers: The Movie - 40th Anniversary - The Apology Tour – San Diego Comic-Con - Concert and Autograph Signing.

Reigning Phoenix Music and Hasbro announce *The Transformers: The Movie: The Soundtrack: The Reformatted Edition*, a full reimagining of the iconic 1986 animated film's soundtrack featuring Sebastian Bach, Stan Bush, Vince DiCola, Brittney Slayes, Mark Osegueda, Francesco Cavaleri, and more.

The album ties into Hasbro's *Apology Tour*, a year-long campaign celebrating the 40th anniversary of the 1986 animated film.

AU: What are you most famous for?

Stan Bush: This is Stan Bush and I think I'm most famous for singing and writing "The Touch", which is from the original Transformers movie.

AU: "The Touch" is such an iconic song. There is also the inspirational fast-paced song you did called "Dare" on the Transformers soundtrack. How do you go about writing such empowering songs that make you feel like you can go out and take on the world?

SB: My writing partner Lenny Macaluso and I, wrote "The Touch" and it sort of started something. Every album after that, I've had two or three songs of that genre like, Believe in yourself, Go for it and Reach for the stars, you know? I really believe that people make their own reality and you can do a whole lot just by having confidence.

AU: What led up to you getting "The Touch" on *The Transformers: The Movie* soundtrack? Was that song created before or just for the movie?

SB: Well, originally when Lenny and I wrote the song we had the Stallone movie *Cobra* in mind. We were going to pitch it for that movie. The record company ended up getting it in the Transformers movie. They told me, "It's an animated movie about robots." and I'm like, "Okay?" It turned out to be an amazing thing, this huge worldwide phenomenon. The rest is history. But I don't think anybody realized how big it would become. What a life the song, the movie and the brand would have. It's been awesome.

AU: There is a whole other generation of fans that know "The Touch" from the scene in the movie *Boogie Nights* where Mark Wahlberg sings it. What were your thoughts when that happened? Did they talk to you first?

SB: That was totally out of left field. I found out about it afterwards. Vince DiCola gave me the heads-up that "The Touch" was in this other movie. I'm like, Wow! It was, I think, meant to be sort of tongue-in-cheek and kind of a spoof on the '80s and all that. But I actually met Mark at one of these Transformers events backstage and I said "You got The Touch." He turned around and asked, "How did I do?" I said, "It was great." He comes over with his phone and we sing "The Touch" together like a couple of drunk guys. It was really funny. He posted it. It was a pretty cool moment.

AU: So, you're on *The Transformers: The Movie*



soundtrack that came out in the '80s and now Reigning Phoenix Music (RPM) and Hasbro have gotten together and they've released this new vinyl which is, *The Transformers: The Movie Soundtrack: The Reformatted Edition*. What can you tell us about this new one?

SB: Yeah, Gerardo (Martinez) from RPM reached out to me several months ago and I agreed to get involved. It worked out really well. First of all, the Knights of Unicron band is incredible and the other songs all came out great. The whole album sounds really good. I was thrilled to be a part of it.

AU: Is it an updated version of the whole original soundtrack album?

SB: Yeah it's a lot of the original songs from the soundtrack recut from the ground up. So there was music of myself and Vince DiCola in there as well. Vince wrote the score, he also did *Rocky IV*. Vince is great. It was cool to be on stage with him at the concert. I've known him since way back because he played on some of my stuff back in the day on that same album.

AU: What album of yours is "The Touch" on?

SB: It's called *Stan Bush & Barrage* and it was my second album. It was on Scotti Brothers/Epic Records. So that's where it all started for me.

AU: On the Reformatted Edition, did you go in the studio and re-sing "Dare" and "The Touch", or did they use the old tracks?

SB: I re-sung those two tracks, we pretty much cut everything new. It came out great. It's cool that I can still hit those notes!

AU: Any other career highlights to share?

SB: Well, I won an Emmy for Best Original Song for Television. That same year, '96, I had a song in the Olympics that was featured on NBC with the US Swim Team. In 1990, I had a song on the first Jean-Claude Van Damme movie. Actually I had three songs on his first two movies, *Bloodsport* and *Kickboxer*.

AU: For people that missed *The Transformers: The Movie: The Apology Tour* special concert at Comic-Con down in San Diego. Could you take them through the experience and how it was put together with the different special guests?



SB: It was the Thursday night of Comic-Con at House of Blues. They had The Knights of Unicron band and all the various singers on the tracks. A couple of them were women. There was also this guy from Italy, Francesco Cavaleri, and the singer from Skid Row, Sebastian Bach, he was there.



AU: It was neat because the first singer that came out was Brittney Slayes, she did the Transformers Theme Song and "Hunger". She's from a band which is local to where I live in Victoria, BC, called Unleash the Archers.

SB: She's a great singer, by the way.

AU: You were definitely a highlight when you came out. You made a lot of people's day.

SB: I think a lot of people were of the age where they were kids when the movie was out and it was a huge thing for them to hear those songs. I don't think there was a dry eye in the house for "The Touch". People love that song.

AU: I think "Dare" is pretty darn good too.

SB: I love "Dare". I have people say it's either "Dare" or "The Touch". I think both of the songs are great.

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AU: During the '80s, there were a lot of animated movies based on toy properties. G.I. Joe, Inhumanoids, M.A.S.K., Care Bears, Centurions and more. Did you work on any others besides The Transformers?

SB: Actually I did sing on one anime. I sang on a Sailor Moon track. It was a theme song. I used to get called for a lot of stuff being a singer in LA at the time. I did a lot of commercials, other records. I sang on Jefferson Starship, Alice Cooper and other stuff. A lot of things would be on this record or that record or in different movies. "The Touch" was used, just a cameo of it, for The Transformers Bumblebee movie.

AU: You were on a split record "The Touch" on the A-side and Weird Al Yankovic's "Dare to Be Stupid" on B-side. How did that happen?

SB: I don't know! The record company probably put it out as a single and I don't have any idea how or who made the decision to put Weird Al on the B-side. It's just one of those things that the record companies decided. We recorded that album in the Scotti Brothers Studios in Santa Monica and I remember it well. It was a very, very strong album. Richie Wise, he worked with Kiss and some other bands, he was a super good guy and very excitable. He would jump up in the air. They called him the cheerleader of rock and roll. I had a lot of real

strong players that played on the album. Kim Bullard, he's toured with Elton John. The drummer from REO, he played on that record too, on "The Touch" and that whole album.

AU: You are still going strong with your music, nothing is stopping you it seems, eh?

SB: Yeah, the latest album is *Born For Battle*. I have another movie that's coming out called *Lion Fist* and the song is "Heart of a Lion". We did a music video for that as well. I'm always doing stuff.

AU: Besides Mark Wahlberg doing the cover of "The Touch", what other artists would you love to see cover the song?

SB: Well it's one of those things where, whoever! I have a lot of favourite artists. Foreigner, Journey, Don Henley. I love all kinds of music. I think we were very fortunate to grow up in the general time era of the '70s and '80s, the movies were so cool. They'd have all these great songs like in the Top Gun movie and Back to the Future. In

those days, they'd have a theme song, like the Rocky song, "Eye of the Tiger". You'd come out of the movie, you're singing the song and it was great.

AU: Because of Boogie Nights we wanted to ask what your porn name would be? But you already have a good porn name, Stan Bush.

SB: Haha. I guess so. Never thought of it like that, but yeah.

AU: What movie do you wish you worked on?

SB: Probably Top Gun.

AU: Do you have more records or more Transformers action figures?

SB: More records.

AU: There's another Transformers band that dresses up in the costumes called The Cybertronic Spree. But at this show that you

did on The Apology Tour, they had the G.I. Joe band, Cold Slither and they had Jem from Jem and the Holograms open up. So that was really a neat mix of cartoon related bands.

SB: I got to meet Jem. I didn't really realize that Cold Slither was the band for G.I. Joe. That's cool.

AU: Just like Transformers, wrestling was big in the '80s. If you were in a wrestling match, would Vince DiCola be your tag team partner?

SB: Oh yeah! The guy's a total heavyweight. Vince is amazing, he's so talented and can play anything.

AU: So during the concert Vince comes out and does the keyboard song for "Death of Optimus Prime". Then you come out and do "Dare" together with him and then "The Touch"?

SB: Actually, I got them to switch it around, so we did "The Touch" before we did "Dare". Because the tempo to "Dare" is so much faster. If you play "Dare" first and then "The Touch", it sounds super slow. You just get mentally accustomed to hearing a really fast song. So it worked out perfect by switching them around and I got Vince to play on "The Touch".

AU: Did you have any idea that the hero of a generation, Optimus Prime, was going to be slain in this film? That he died. Were there kids crying at the premiere of the movie in the '80s?



SB: No, I don't recall seeing that but I heard that was the case. I mean, it was a very traumatic thing for these kids. It's a little bit like Bambi. You get a character and then the character dies. For a kid to process that. So I thought it was a brilliant idea to do The Apology Tour as a title for the whole event. I thought that was really funny and clever.

AU: What did you think of the newer Transformers movies?

SB: They're great. I saw all of them. I think my favourite one was Bumblebee. I was a little disappointed that they didn't use "The Touch" in that first live-action

one.

AU: So people can get the Transformers; The Movie: Reformatted Edition on Reigning Phoenix Music's website. That live Apology Tour show was a real highlight of Comic-Con this year. Were there exclusive toys as well?

SB: There were toys and cassette tapes, some with "The Touch". Stern Pinball had "The Touch" in the Transformers pinball game that they put out too.

AU: Any words of wisdom for fans out there?

SB: Well, just keep on, keepin' on. Believe in yourself and go for it. Also, always remember that "You've got the Touch!"

stanbush.com
reigningphoenixmusic.com
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Absolute Thanks to Curtis and Sofia at C-Squared Music





TRANSFORMERS: THE MOVIE — 40 YEARS LATER

The 1986 animated classic returns with a “Reformatted Edition” of its iconic soundtrack. Forty years after *Transformers: The Movie* arrived



in theatres, Reigning Phoenix Music and Hasbro have revisited its iconic 1986 soundtrack with *Transformers: The Movie: The Soundtrack/ Reformatted Edition*. The album was released July 24, 2026, across major streaming platforms and physical formats, including limited-edition vinyl.

The Reformatted Edition features 10 re-recorded and reimagined tracks from the original soundtrack, rebuilt by Knights of Unicron with modern production while retaining the spirit of the 1986 recordings. The lineup includes a return from Stan Bush, who recorded new versions of “The Touch” and “Dare,” four decades after his original recordings became closely associated with the film. Knights of Unicron—Matt Harvey, Gus Rios and Ross Sewage—lead the album’s performances, joined by a range of guest musicians. Sebastian Bach appears on “Nothin’s Gonna Stand in Our Way,” while Unleash the Archers vocalist

Brittney Slaves performs the “Transformers Theme”. Other guests include Mark Osegueda of Death Angel and Kerry King, Francesco Cavaliere of Wind Rose, and Torch of Cold Slither. Composer Vince DiCola, whose original music remains central to the film’s soundtrack, also contributes to the project.

Reigning Phoenix Music co-founder Gerardo Martinez said, “It is an absolute honour to be able to pay tribute and work alongside Hasbro on the 40th Anniversary celebration of one of the most iconic movie soundtracks of our generation.”

The album was produced and engineered by Matt LaPlant, with pre-production by Knights of Unicron and LaPlant. Zeuss handled mixing and mastering, with artwork and design by Matt Ferguson.

Originally released in 1986, *Transformers: The Movie* was the franchise’s first feature film. Beyond expanding the world of the animated series, the movie introduced Unicron and the Autobot Matrix of Leadership while delivering one of the most unexpected moments in the franchise: the death of Optimus Prime.

That moment remains a defining part of the film’s legacy, and its 40th anniversary has been marked by Hasbro’s year-long “The Apology Tour” campaign, which acknowledges the impact



Optimus Prime’s death had on a generation of viewers.

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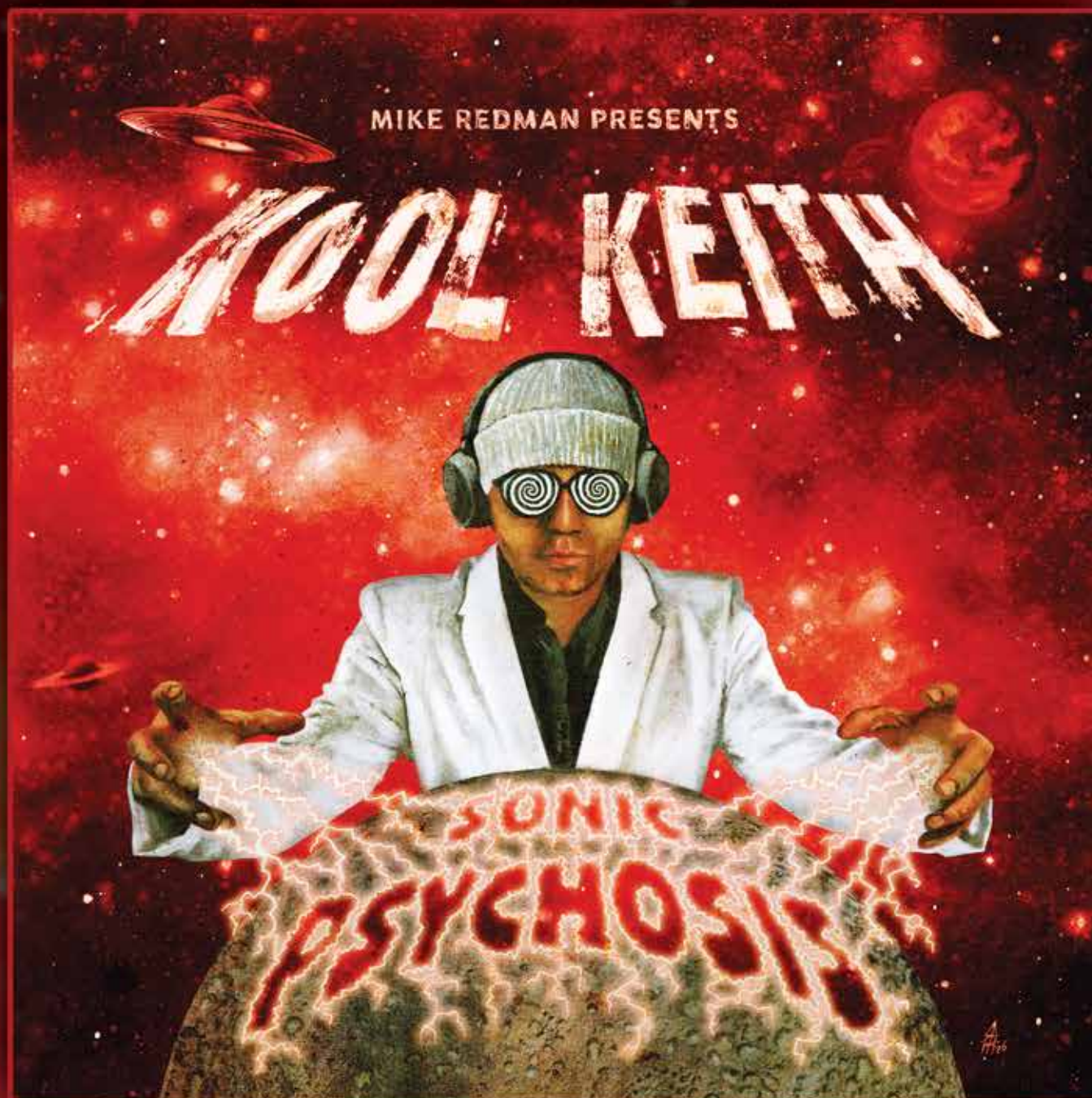
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Motörhead - Orgasmatron

By Steve Earles

It's fair to say that when Motörhead released 'Orgasmatron' in 1986 they had been in the wars for the previous four years.

Losing iconic guitarist "Fast" Eddie Clarke during 1982's 'Iron Fist' tour was a disaster, that was the end of 'The Three Amigos' line-up, and things would never be the same again.

It's not surprising this happened, three alpha males, a lot of booze and drugs, endless touring, pressure is going to build up!

So, Motörhead being Motörhead, instead of recruiting any one of the multitude of talented guitar players who would have actually liked to have been in Motörhead, they hire Brian "Robbo" Robertson, late of Thin Lizzy and Wild Horses!

Now, Robbo was the ideal Thin Lizzy guitarist,

they were never as good without Robbo, period, but Robbo was such a bad choice for Motörhead. Now, the album he recorded with them 'Another Perfect Day' is a fantastic album, a sadly neglected gem, and I love it. But, Robbo hated being in Motörhead, you can see it in band photos of the time, he looks like a man who hates his job and will do anything to get sacked.

Which is what he did, refusing to play the Motörhead classics live, and wearing ballet shoes and satin shorts, which didn't go

down well with Motörhead's fans.

So, Robbo was sacked, and in his stead Wurzel and Phil Campbell were recruited on guitars, making Motörhead a four-piece for the first time. Then, Philthy Phil quit after a memorably appearance on the cult TV series 'The Young Ones', he was replaced by former Saxon drummer Pete Gill.



The band recorded some excellent original tracks for Bronze's 'No Remorse' compilation, then a dispute arose with Bronze and for some time Motörhead survived by touring alone, something all bands sadly have to do now, but there was a record industry then and punters actually paid for their music, so it was hard for the band.

Motörhead had a lot to prove with 'Orgasmatron', their 7th album, which was released on GWR Records, which was the brainchild of Motörhead

manager Douglas Smith, I really admire that, the majority of us wait for other's to initiate things

for us, Doug and Motörhead did things for themselves.

It's worth noting some of the fantastic bands GWR released albums from in their brief existence, Hawkwind ('Live Chronicles', 'The Xeonon Codex', 'Space Bandits', 'Palace Springs'), Sword ('Metalized', 'Sweet Dreams'), Cro-Mags ('The Age of Quarrel'), Mekong Delta ('Mekong Delta', 'The Music of Erich Zann'), Tank ('Tank'), Wendy O. Williams ('Maggots-The Record'), Fastway, Anti-Nowhere league, Girlschool ('Nightmare At Maple Cross', 'Take a Bite'), Motörhead ('No Sleep At All', 'Rock 'n' Roll'), and Deathwish ('Demon Preacher').

It's appalling to think Motörhead were without a record label for so long, despite their huge influence on the then flourishing thrash metal scene. All the bands Motörhead inspired, Metallica, Slayer, Anthrax and more, were all getting major label deals and great producers and decent budgets to work with, Motörhead were being kept alive by playing live and the support of their rabid fans!

Lemmy commented on these wilderness years. "Elektra passed, MCA passed, Epic passed, Chrysalis passed. Everyone passed. Hell, I wish we sold as many albums as we do t-shirts. In England, it's pretty much over for us as far as selling a lot of albums is concerned."

Once their lawsuit with Bronze was settled in their favour, it was time for Motörhead to prove themselves in the studio. 'Orgasmatron' was produced by Bill Laswell, who had previously worked with John Lydon's Public Image Ltd. It was recorded in 11 days and made it to number 21 in the UK album charts.

In his autobiography 'White Line Fever', Lemmy says of Orgasmatron's producer. "As it turned out, Bill was good at getting sounds but he fucked

everything up in the mix. It was a much better album when he took it to New York than when he brought it back... It was dreadful, 'Orgasmatron' was mud."

Phil Campbell shared Lemmy's feelings. "I think the production let us down on 'Orgasmatron'. The songs were really good. We put a lot of effort into the songs."

I don't agree, I think 'Orgasmatron' sounds great, very bottom heavy, way more contemporary.

And again, to be fair, bands need to sit in on the mixing if they want it to sound right, and that's something Motörhead didn't always do.

The album was originally to be titled 'Riding With The Driver' and the excellent Joe Petagno cover art reflects this. Joe says. "Lemmy was living in a houseboat then, and collecting train models. He said, 'You know, Joseph, I want a fucking train!' It

seemed weird to me, but, yet again, it worked." Incidentally, Joe's book of heavy metal art is called 'Orgasmatron'. I think it's a far superior title to 'Riding With The Driver.'

So, does 'Orgasmatron' stand the test of time? Yes, it does? "Deaf Forever", "Doctor Rock", "Claw" and 'Built For Speed' are all classic Motörhead.

But it's the title track that really stands the test of time, easily one of the heaviest songs ever recorded, and such great lyrics, I love it!

It's sad to think that three of the players on this outstanding album, Lemmy, Wurzel and Phil, have now left us, but their music will live on forever, like Motörhead itself!

REIGN OF STEEL
1986 40





MOTÖRHEAD - KISS OF DEATH 20TH ANNIVERSARY EDITION

Twenty years after its original release, Motörhead's *Kiss of Death* has been revisited with an expanded 20th Anniversary Edition, released July 3 as a newly half-speed mastered double LP and expanded 2CD set.

Originally released in 2006, *Kiss of Death* was Motörhead's 18th studio album and followed 2004's *Inferno*. The album featured Lemmy Kilmister, guitarist Phil Campbell and drummer Mikkey Dee, with guest appearances from Mike Inez of Alice in Chains and C.C. DeVille of



Poison. Among its tracks are "Sucker," "Trigger" and "God Was Never On Your Side."

The new edition was half-speed mastered from the original tapes and includes fresh liner notes by Classic Rock writer Dave Ling, including a tribute to Phil Campbell following his recent passing.

The expanded release also features previously unreleased live material from Motörhead's 2007 appearance at Lowlands Festival in Biddinghuizen, Netherlands. The performance is available on vinyl for the first time as a bonus live LP, while the 2CD edition includes the complete Lowlands performance alongside three additional bonus tracks.

A new official lyric video for "God Was Never On Your Side," created by longtime visual collaborator Andy Pilkington, was also released alongside the anniversary edition.

Kiss of Death — 20th Anniversary Edition is available now in expanded double-LP and 2CD formats, as well as digitally.

motorhead.lnk.to/KissofDeath20thPR

Photo credit: Robert John

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They're tips, not rules. Everyone has their own way of touring, but some of these may help younger bands on their way.

PART TWENTY-ONE

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So take their picture.

TOUR TIP NUMBER 122



NEGOTIATE YOUR FREE-TIME ACTIVITIES

There's one vehicle, so you're doing stuff together. And if someone goes out on their own, they better get back for a designated time.

TOUR TIP NUMBER 123



RIDING SHOTGUN MAKES YOU THE NAVIGATOR

You're in charge of directions and keeping the driver entertained.

TOUR TIP NUMBER 124



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TOUR TIP NUMBER 125



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Keys in a specific pocket, change jar in its own place, any guides or directions in a certain spot... EVERYTHING in its place or you'll spend an hour every day looking for things.

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BLAST FROM THE PAST



Vancouver hosts the world's fair at EXPO 86 'The cultural epicenter of planet Earth'

By Clark 'Super' Mantei

Welcome back past blasters to celebrate 40 years since I worked at EXPO 86. The theme for Expo was "Transportation and Communication: World in Motion - World in Touch." The slogan was "Invite the World" and the promo theme was "Something's Happening here!" The event ran from May 2nd to October 13th 1986. Over 90 pavilions at Expo existed from 54 countries. The SkyTrain was new and I'd travel to and from my awesome job via Commercial station to Main St. Expo 86 station. I lived by Clark Park too. I still have my employee pass.

I loved the life I lived at Expo daily as I worked at 'Phat Phil's' restaurant. Originally from Montreal, Phat Phil's went on the map at Expo 67 selling ol' fashioned smoked meat, corned beef and pastrami sandwiches. Here I was 19 years later and 19 years young. Phil's was located right between the tracks of the Scream Machine roller coaster and the gates of the 4,500 capacity Expo Theatre. Who needs music college after grad? I felt that the theatre would invite me to dozens of concerts of the world's greatest artists. The heavy steam from our deli with the smell of coaster grease added with the ultimate best music nightly as the open air theatre allowed all to hear every nightly concert even if you didn't get a ticket to enter. I did attend a lot of shows, both inside and out. I was paid to make food that fueled me for 5 plus months of magical musical memories.

Expo Theatre shows included many styles: *Rock* music flowed as Loverboy, Bryan Adams, Honeymoon Suite, The Beach Boys, Joe Jackson, Van Morrison, and Julian Lennon, among many others, performed. Julian's show was my sister's first concert

as Mom and I went too. A juggler opened for Julian. He'd juggled to Beatles music. At the end the crew threw a hundred balls up to make us all laugh. *New Wave*: Artists like Depeche Mode and The Eurythmics too. I remember Annie

titled "Staggering! That was Stevie Ray," and defined him as a "A blues shredding



powerhouse with a staggering, blistering torrent of pure electric emotion." The article included a b/w photo of Stevie just as he was. I found that photo from the photographer in color recently. It was taken by Steve Bosch. I highly recommend y'all goggle that Stevie show from Expo and you can hear it. Pure bliss!

Ripeace Stevie Ray Vaughan.

B.C. Place was right behind our location at Expo. On August 1st I went to see Bob Dylan and Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers on their legendary True Confessions Tour. For \$22.50 I was absolutely in awe. It was sooooo good. Tom's band was now Bob's band.

I roamed around from side to side as festival seating was awesome then. Looking down from stage left Bob explained he wrote "All Along The Watchtower" and dedicated it to Jimi Hendrix. Then Tom and his band left Bob alone to play his early hits to us. Being festival seating I roamed a lot but for Bob I went right up front. The Heartbreakers and Tom then played mega hits and my forever glowing moment I was by the soundboard as Tom went into "The Waiting" and extended the intro and spoke to us. Shivers still raise when I recall that moment.



After I met mom and my sister at Phil's to pay my buddy back for the tour book and Mom paid him from her purse and smiled. Thanks Mom.

Another favorite memory was that John Lennon's custom painted 1965 Rolls-Royce Phantom V touring limousine was parked outside near Phil's. I'd pass it everyday. It was painted in 1967 by Steve Weaver, inspired by Romani Gypsy caravan art just before the Beatles Sgt. Peppers was released. I was released in May 67 too! The car was bought by Jim Pattison (Chairman of Expo 86) for \$2.3 million. The songs "Somebody to Love" and "Sounds of Silence" played on loop as you'd near the car. That Limo now resides at the Victoria B.C. Museum. I recently took a photo of

Mom standing next to it as she's volunteered at the museum for over 20 years.

It's hard to believe it's been 40 years now. I started as a prep cook at Expo. Dated my helper for 4 happy years. Hi Erica. And cherish every moment in my heart and soul.

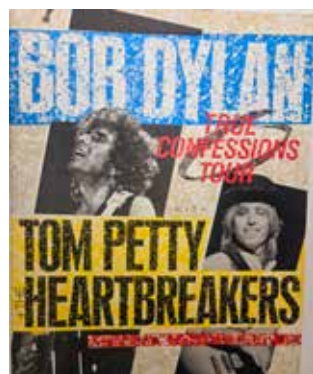
This article is actually part 4 of a 5 part story. Next issue will bring Expo 86 to its finale on October 13th.

Until we blast back again this fall. Take care everyone.



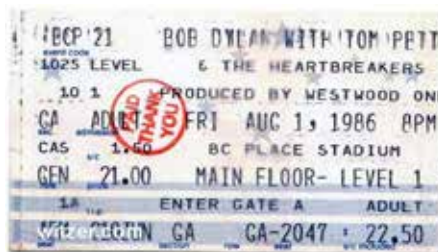
Lennox warming up her voice throughout the afternoon.

Country, Folk, & R&B/Soul: Johnny Cash, Harry Belafonte, Joan Baez & Don McLean, K.D. Lang or Smokey Robinson. *Las Vegas, Comedy & Classical*: Liberace, Bill Cosby, Bob Hope, Joan Rivers and George Burns made us all laugh too.



Legends of Rock and Soul: Ray Charles (I went), Roy Orbison (I went), Jerry Lee Lewis and Fats Domino too. *Blues and Jazz*: B.B.King, Miles Davis (who denied Wynton Marsalis from playing with him when he walked on stage... that's Miles), and Stevie Ray Vaughan too.

I must stop at Stevie. August 11th (40 years today!) was a special night. I was dead center too. I had seen in 1985 up close. Bonnie Raitt backed him up. Then Steve showed up in an Elvis style golden tuxedo and he was quite intoxicated. His eyes closed, and cigarettes a plenty, he still blew all of our minds and left us in awe. During the fireworks he told a story of brotherhood in between the massive explosions. It was surreal. The song was "Life Without You" and I still get shivers. The following day the Vancouver Sun's review by John Mackie was



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Remembering the Magic of the Music and Times of 1986.

Hey people, does anyone remember living life in 1986? I certainly do. Music and movies were in full bloom. MTV and MuchMusic played out all the hit videos of that marvelous year.

I moved to Vancouver post graduation to find adventure and as a music player I enjoyed the time like never before. My buddy Steve invited me to stay with him, and what a great time it was. Yet before I moved into his mom's penthouse in West Van, I went to Seattle to see KISS on Valentine's Day with W.A.S.P. Life was cheap as gas. Upon moving to his mom's the first thing he did concert wise was take me to see The Cult at the War Memorial gym. "She Sells Sanctuary" was their hit song. Steve was truly up on all the music of the time, as was his sister Lisa.



She introduced me to Tears For Fears and Feargal Sharkey as his song "A Good Heart" was a worldwide sensation. She was 14 and had a book to write out all the songs she'd record on VHS videos. I watched everything she recorded. 1986 was in full bloom. In the movie theatres the world loved Top

Gun with Tom Cruise blasting Kenny Loggins "Danger Zone" and Crocodile Dundee with Paul Hogan, who also dominated almost every commercial break advertising Australia's Fosters Lager. I also saw The Psychedelic Furs at the UBC Gym with their hit "Pretty in Pink" which provided the title for the '86 film featuring Molly Ringwald. It is cited as a definitive moment in 1980's teen cinema. I embraced anything and everything. Lionel Richie was a parental favorite with "Say You, Say Me," yet Robert Palmer with "Addicted to Love" or Falco with "Rock Me Amadeus" were smash videos and radio hits too. Eddie Van Halen later said he was a huge fan of Peter Gabriel that year, as his album *SO* had the mega hit

"Sledgehammer" and "In Your Eyes" as well. Also Van Halen brought in Sammy Hagar after Diamond David Lee Roth departed to go solo. 5150 was a number one album for Van Halen too. "Love Walks In" was a classic rock ballad yet "Dreams" and "Why Can't This Be Love"

were everywhere. I saw them at BC Place on October 23rd. Also Steve Winwood released *Back in the High Life* with hits and videos for "Higher Love" and "Back in the High Life Again" and it was so good. The Eurythmics and New Order were a staple too. The Pet Shop Boys with "West End Girls" was also great. INXS, Level 42, The Bangles with "Walk Like an Egyptian" and "Manic Monday" (written by Prince) and Duran Duran with "Notorious" or Genesis and Simply Red were all on top. Yet one genre of music was in full bloom and that was Heavy Metal. Classic Metal too. Since the US Festival in 1983 with Heavy Metal Day bringing metal to the masses on May 29th to 500,000 people in California. Saxon and Accept released new music too.

Now for Judas Priest. On April 14th '86 came their 10th album *Turbo* with the radio and video



hits "Turbo Lover" and "Parental Guidance." They played Vancouver's PNE Coliseum on July 14th. It was nothing short of incredibly awesome. I went with my brother and we had a blast. Serving as the opening act for Judas Priest in Vancouver marked the historic live debut of Bon Jovi's landmark *Slippery When Wet* tour. Recorded at Little Mountain Sound in Vancouver from April thru May of 86, the hits were "Livin' on a Prayer", "You Give Love a Bad Name" and "Wanted Dead or Alive" which became an anthem. The album hit number 1 on October 25, 1986.

Saving the greatest for last is the legend of the Big Four bands of Thrash Metal: Metallica, Slayer, Megadeth and Anthrax all released albums that year. Yet Metallica's *Master of Puppets*, released March 3rd, 1986, permanently changed the landscape: Commercial success without radio, critical respect and a mainstream shift which forced global record corporations to finally take the underground scene seriously. Opening the floodgates for the rest of the Big Four to land major record deals and headline arenas.

Lastly, Ozzy Osbourne released *The Ultimate Sin* early in January of 1986 and hits like "Shot in the

Dark" shot up the charts on both radio and video. On March 24, 1986, Ozzy went out on tour, yet he made sure he brought the greatest opening act of all time; Metallica. The tour was legendary. I had tickets to that show for June 27th at the PNE Coliseum, yet sadly, the show was cancelled. You can't keep a good rock city down. Just 17 nights later was Judas Priest. All in all, 1986 was a true phenomenon - a cultural shift that permanently redefined rock history. The year ended with me seeing David Lee Roth at the PNE Coliseum on his *Eat 'Em and Smile* tour with Steve Vai. The tour was legendary indeed! All in all 1986 was a phenomenal time to be alive and I lived it. It was the ultimate era. It was the ultimate time in my life up until then.

With that I'll end this story. I want to wish you all the best for the rest of 2026.

Never forget the memories of your past and always remember to Rock Out and Rrrrrrrroll On.

- Clark'Super'Mantei



GARY BRAINGLESS

John Carlow/ Finding Charlotte Photography

In this feature, *Absolute Underground* highlights someone in the local Victoria BC scene.

I came to know Gary well after his days hosting bands at the infamous Rats Nest in Victoria. Probably a whole book's worth of stories from those years alone. I dropped a few questions on him about those days and what he's up to now.

Absolute Underground: Introduce yourself. What are you best known for?

Gary Brainless: My name is Gary Brainless. I'm known for the parties I have now. My friends know me for my Spinach Pie and Stuffed Mussels. In the old days, I was known for putting on punk shows at my place; The Rats Nest and other venues that would have me.

AU: To someone who has never heard of The Rats Nest; how would you describe it?

GB: It was a meeting place for like-minded individuals where people could get together and have fun.

AU: You were a huge part of the local underground scene. That's an incredible legacy. Did you ever imagine your run would be so long?

GB: When I first started The Rats Nest, I never imagined it would turn into what it did. And

having it last as long as it did (28 years) was a real gift for myself and everyone else who participated.

AU: Funniest/ best / memorable stories?

GB: One night an old friend passed out on my couch after playing in the band Red Tide. While I was cleaning up in the morning, I heard this monster fart. It was Ken who woke up startled by his own fart.

There was a skinhead who tried his best to get through my small bathroom window with

help from people on the outside so he didn't have to pay, but he got stuck cause his fat ass wouldn't fit through the window. We had to push him back from the inside and he landed on the people below.

The best moment I remember was from the very first show with The Resistance and NoMeansNo. At the opening chords, that's when I realized that's how amazing it was and I said "FUCK YEAH!"

AU: Some of the best/ memorable bands you hosted?

GB: Of course NoMeansNo, The Dayglos DRI and Euthanasia. The bands were just countless; there were so many of them.

AU: Did you hang at the other band basements in town ?

GB: Yeah, I hung out and played Bonehead's and Dan's and Doug's. I can't remember the name of the house, but The Ex from Holland was there. There were numerous other houses that had parties as well. I don't remember any of the names of those other houses, but I have a great memory. It's just really short LOL

AU: Keep a record of all the bands you have hosted over the years?

GB: No, but I'm presently making up some Rat's Nest shirts which will have a list of all band names that played on the back. So I'll be asking everyone to send me names of bands they remember and

hopefully I'll be able to get them all back there.

AU: Collection of keepsakes from all the bands that played there?

GB: Pretty much all I have from that time are the posters and the memories.

For memories , I remember Problem Children from London Ontario (I think) bringing me breakfast in bed one time. It consisted of 3 monster pancakes and about 3 cups of Aunt Jemima syrup and a large container of Coca-Cola. Fuck did I wake up!

AU: Do you have a large music collection? Standouts?

GB: I used to have thousands of records, but I got rid of them when I had to move. Now I have hundreds of thousands of songs on hard drives, which are much easier to move. As far as favourites go, I love New Model Army, Mindless Self Indulgence, Ramones, NoMeansNo, and a million more...

AU: Any bands you wish you'd seen?

GB: Frank Zappa would have been cool to see and New Model Army. Other than that I've pretty much seen everyone I want to see.

AU: Like all genres of music?

GB: I love all genres of music, but new Country can suck my balls, so I guess I don't like all kinds of music. I love rock. I love roll. I like RnB, jazz, old country and of course punk and metal.

AU: Thoughts on social media?

GB: It keeps people together, but it also drives them apart because they don't do anything in person. They are all just looking at phones. But I suppose it's a great time to be a robber, cause no one will see you coming. All too busy looking down.

AU: As a reader.... Best books? What's currently being read?

GB: I used to read a lot of fiction when I was a kid, but then I kind of grew up. I say "kind of" cause I'm still a child at heart. Nowadays I read nonfiction so I can learn how to do more things. Right now, I'm reading "The Ultimate Bread

ver·nac·u·lar

Machine Cookbook for Beginners", "Rubs" which is making rubs for food cause I love to cook, and "Make Your Own Essential Oils and Skin Care Products" cause I like to hide my wrinkles. I'm starting my own spice company called "Earth Spice" where I'm making spice blends of various types.

AU: The last few years, I've always seen you with a vid camera. Did you take photos, take videos of the Nest days?

GB: I take videos of bands coming through town quite a lot and will eventually make a YouTube channel of that stuff. From the days of the Rats Nest I wasn't rich enough to own a camera. I did get a bunch of cassette recordings of NoMeansNo, Dayglos, and other bands that came through which I will release one day.

AU: The road ahead?

GB: I'm currently playing with Brewtality and Smoked out Brainless (which I haven't played or practiced in a while) and a blues rock band that I like to call The Dirty Hippies.

AU: Would you do it all again?

GB: I would do it again. Probably wouldn't change a thing cuz I learned so much from it.

AU: Shout outs?

GB: Shout out to NoMeansNo and Dayglos for always being there on a weekend when a band couldn't get over the border from the States. They would always come and play.

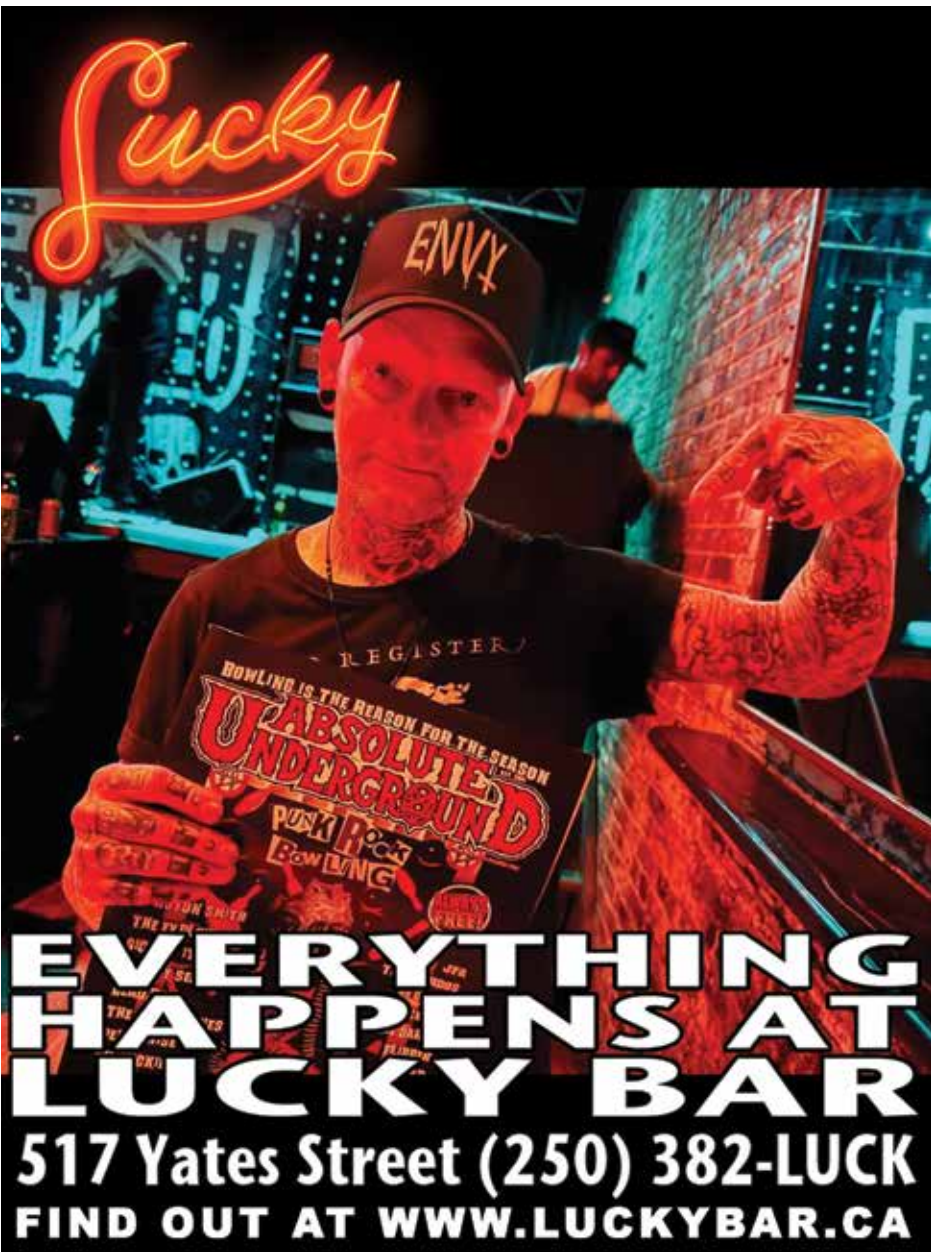
AU: Anything you'd like to add?

GB: I really appreciate the scene in Victoria and Vancouver; it helped shape my life. Thanks everyone!

AU: You've been interviewed a few times.

What's the one question you wish you'd been asked?

GB: In all these interviews I've done, not once have I ever been asked if I was gay. And with that, I will say goodbye and thank you.





MISCREANCE: Lost In Time

By FLORA

Inspired by the pioneering technical thrash and death metal bands of the late 80s and early 90s, Northern Italy's Miscreance have carved out their own identity since forming in 2018. Their second album, *Reminiscence*, arrives August 28 through Season of Mist, combining old-school technical aggression with an ambitious concept centred on a fictional lost civilization. In this interview, guitarist Andrea Granauro discusses *Reminiscence*, the band's influences, and why technical thrash continues to inspire a new generation.

AU: For readers discovering Miscreance for the first time, who are we talking to today, and how would you describe the band's sound and identity?

MIS: Hey everyone! I'm Andrea G. (Guitars). Miscreance are an Italian technical thrash/death band born in 2018 from the ashes of another band called Atomic Massacre, the project was born due to our urge and desire to give a second life to the late 80s/early 90s technical death metal sound. At that time, we were all discovering the pioneering bands of the genre such as Nocturnus, Atheist, Invocator etc... We were so amazed by their unique and overlooked sound that we actually wanted to do our own 2.0 version.

We were and still are growing around our music. I already said where we took our inspiration from, and that's pretty evident if you listen to even a couple of seconds of one of our songs, but everyday since then, for it's been a continuous "battle" trying to find the most unique (sometimes bizarre) arrangements to avoid ever replicating ourselves or another band's work from 30 years ago.

AU: Your second album *Reminiscence* arrives on August 28 through Season of Mist. At what point did you know this album was taking shape as something bigger than simply writing another collection of songs?

MIS: The structure beyond *Reminiscence* was mainly written during the Covid-19 period, our first album *Convergence* was already finished and recorded but still to be released, so we immediately started writing new riffs, as we usually do. Staying home and listening to music all day also contributed to giving us a lot of inspiration for new songs. At first, we thought about an EP, but seeing that the music was taking

shape pretty well and very quickly, we decided it would become a full album, developing a concept behind it.

AU: *Reminiscence* is built around the idea of a "lost" civilization and a shared hallucination that weaves together ancient history, science fiction and mythology. Where did that concept come from, and how did it evolve during the writing process?

MIS: We are all fascinated by the ancient world and anything related to it. The actual concept was our original idea and was developed reading a book called *From Atlantis to the Sphinx*, which analyzes many different aspects of the ancient world, integrating myths, facts and sometimes speculations on old books, maps and all of that. The idea unraveled itself step by step, the main concept was: if all these ancient and lost civilizations have all of these untold truths and myths, why can't there also be a "lost album" and have it reinterpreted by us? The whole album revolves around this concept, including an actual link running through the songs, starting from a *Trait d'Union* between a non-existent time and the



present day, then going through their use of psychic powers to cure diseases, through their rituals to reproduce and haunt, sometimes even using a language that has yet to be discovered...

AU: Songs like "Scalp Ceremony" introduce tribal

percussion and other unexpected textures alongside technical thrash and death metal. How did you approach incorporating those elements while keeping the songs feeling like Miscreance?

MIS: The percussion was a consequence of what we wanted to communicate with these songs about ancient times and lost music. The idea is that if a lost tribe had a musical heritage, even if reinterpreted in our style, it still has to include primitive and indigenous instruments, such as percussions, didgeridoos, berimbau, pan flutes... all the instruments were played by Leo Di Angilla who is a professional percussionist and understood every guideline we gave him about the concept, doing a perfect job on his parts and giving the songs the right vibe!

AU: Your music clearly draws inspiration from bands like Death, Atheist, Coroner, Sadus and Voivod, but it never feels like simple nostalgia. How do you balance paying respect to those influences while continuing to develop your

own identity?

MIS: We all love those bands and we listen to them every day. We also shaped our personal and individual sound based on those bands and records, so their influence can't go unheard in our music. In our first album *Convergence* we sometimes deliberately took inspiration from them, trying to make something "à-la" Death/Atheist etc... On *Reminiscence* we took everything we had done while being inspired by those bands, and worked on it to shape what we had already created into a more personal and unique style, without thinking too much about bands from the past we obviously still love.

AU: This *Absolute Underground* issue celebrates 1986 – The Year of Thrash, marking 40 years of crossover. That era saw thrash, hardcore and the earliest forms of death metal feeding off one another in exciting ways. Looking back, how important was that period in shaping the music you make today?

MIS: I think that exact period (and year) is 100% the reason we are here now. In the early days, before going crazy with all the technical stuff, we, as Atomic Massacre, played like there was

no music after 1988, and 1986 was of course the definitive year, with all the incredible albums that were released that year! To prove this

point: when we have the chance to, we still play "Merciless Death" by Dark Angel as a cover, to remind everyone how proper thrash metal should sound!

AU: Technical thrash and old-school death metal have seen a resurgence in recent years. Why do you think these styles continue to connect with a new generation of musicians and fans?

MIS: I think it mostly depends on what bands are popular at the moment, and everything follows from that. For this specific period of technical

death metal and similar styles, we should probably thank bands like Vektor or Blood Incantation, which helped the resurgence of this genre over the past years. If that can help to build a scene and interest towards a style which was overlooked even when it first came out, we're happy to contribute!



AU: With *Reminiscence* about to be released, what are you most looking forward to once people finally hear the album?

MIS: We really hope to spread our music as much as possible and that all people who will listen to the album will immerse themselves into the concept with their mind and hearts. We really put all of our efforts into composing this album in all its shades. Then, we are looking forward to playing as much as possible. We're gonna do some special release shows with the album performed in its entirety, from start to finish, so promoters, if you're reading: BOOK US!

AU: Where can readers connect with the band online, pick up the new album once released and keep up with everything that is coming next?

MIS: You can follow us on our social media pages:

facebook.com/Miscreance

instagram.com/miscreance_official

You can **get our merch** through Bandcamp: miscreance.bandcamp.com

We have many exclusive merch items, including a special *LP Artist Edition*: a white vinyl with gold splatters, which you'll only find from us!

For bookings, reach out to our booking agency **Death Over Rome Bookings**: tito.dta@gmail.com

Thank you again for this interview and thanks to all our incredible fans who support us every day!

Photo credits: Low angle band photo, by Jacopo Abbruscato

Band among columns, by Alice Siega

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AARON BEHRENS OF GHOSTLAND OBSERVATORY

Interview by Peter Illing

Absolute Underground: Ghostland Observatory(GLO) has been together for over two decades. Looking back now, did you ever think the project would be as big as it is?

Aaron Behrens: Yes, we believed in the power of GLO from the beginning. You don't get into this line of work unless you believe in it. You've got to want it and give it everything you've got, and that's what we did. But that's only part of it. The other half of the success of GLO came from creating a sound that naturally resonated with

people and once that connection was made then the power of belief, and power of the people took it to another level. Very thankful for all the success we have had.

AU: Ghostland Observatory's light show is an experience; I can tell y'all did your research and invested lots of time into production. What is going on behind the scenes?

AB: We have been blessed with many happy accidents. Our first big show back in 2006 in Austin was supposed to have a LED wall back when that was a rare thing to have but the LED wall company canceled on us last minute so we pivoted and literally googled Laser Light Show and ended up connecting with the laser company we still use today! Ha! But Thomas really is the visual visionary. He was influenced by the early rave scene and once we got our hands on lasers it definitely leveled up the live show big time!

AU: Trashy Moped Records. From what I can tell this is where you and Thomas Turner started it all. Why did y'all choose to do it

yourself rather than seek major label support?

AB: We chose to do it ourselves because at that moment in time it was the first time where Indie bands could put out their own music and connect with their fan base through social media which at that time was MySpace. The first band that we saw have success was actually Clap Your Hands Say Yeah and that gave us the inspiration to pursue being fiercely independent and holding onto the rights of all the music we created. We saw the value in that early on thank goodness and it's stayed that way all these years.

AU: Were you approached by any major labels?

AB: Yes, we were approached by many major record labels when we started playing all the

major festivals, but by then they were just wanting to repackage what we already had done. They couldn't really offer us anything that we couldn't do ourselves other than manpower, I guess, but it just wasn't worth the risk for us to give up everything to them for fame.

AU: Some of our readers may not have heard of Ghostland Observatory before, what is your go to GLO song recommendation and why?

AB: I think "Sad Sad City" is the one I always point people to. It's accessible enough and gives you enough of an idea of what GLO is and hopefully it will inspire the listener to dig deeper in the catalog to hear the real funky stuff.

AU: I have to ask about the KEXP performance of Prince's "Darling Niki" - it is essentially lost media. What happened?

AB: Ha!! Right! That was an awesome moment captured that I guarantee KEXP has on a hard drive somewhere! I think Prince or his estate wouldn't allow that cover to be released or played anywhere. I personally think if Prince would have seen or heard our cover he would be so down.

AU: When you're writing, how do you know whether a song belongs on a Ghostland Observatory record or an Aaron Behrens record?

AB: When it comes down to writing for Ghostland, it has to be Thomas and me in a room for the magic to happen. We are the only 2 chemicals that create that kind of reaction. It's crazy but it can't be achieved outside of that room, we have to come together to get the GLO.

AU: You've mentioned a new Solo record in the works. What should fans expect with the new project?

AB: My solo material is created in the simplest way: just me and my acoustic guitar. I wake up and write nothing most days, and then some days

¿Que Paso, Canada?

Deep In THE Sound of Texas

the heavens open up and bless me with a song. Those are the songs that eventually make their way out into the world. Singer Songwriter Music was actually my first love that I was doing before GLO took off. I was playing coffee shops around Austin singing my heart out. Just an emotional kid who needed a place to get it all out - that's what my solo material will always be: my emotions put to song, then decorated with the sounds of the friends I bring in to play on my records. The sound is definitely my small town country Americana rock roots being blended with life experiences and inspirations.

AU: Are there any new GLO projects in the works?

AB: There are sounds and new stuff stored in the vault. Not sure when it will be released but it does exist.

AU: Texas. It's your home, it's my home. I have my Texas heroes who continue to shape me today. Who are some of your Texas heroes that influenced you?

AB: I've got many but to name a few Buddy Holly, Roy Orbison, Townes Van Zandt, Freddy Fender, ZZ Top, Willie Nelson, George Strait

AU: What keeps you writing and creating art?

AB: Music was the path I discovered that allowed me to convey my true internal feelings. It touched me deeply and made me feel like it was okay to speak and express everything. As long as I'm living, I will be writing music and creating art. Art is life translated.

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CANNABIS CORNER



EARTHWOLF FARMS

Absolute Underground: Who are we talking to today and what do you do?

My name is Brishna and I am one of the owner-operators of Whistler Therapeutics dba EarthWolf Farms. I operate an organic certified farm in Lillooet, BC, one of the driest areas in BC ideal for agricultural crops like grapes and cannabis. I have an undergraduate degree in life sciences followed by a master's in neuroscience specializing in aging, and now I have over 12 years of experience working in the legal cannabis industry.



EarthWolf Farms

AU: When did you first start growing Cannabis?

I first started working with cannabis after completing my secondary education at McGill University in 2013. I then worked as a junior researcher/ lab manager before moving out west to Whistler, BC. My partner at that time was employed by Whistler Medical Marijuana Corp., which held one of the first 7 licenses in Canada. H I met his manager and was then recruited as a part-time scientist and technician. Initially, I worked as a researcher to improve processes and procedures for organic growth, then assisted with quality maintenance before completely transitioning to the extraction department. In the first 2 years of working there, I was involved in producing concentrates—specifically edible cannabis oils.

In 2019, when Whistler Medical Marijuana sold, we decided to find a location for outdoor growing as we saw it as the most sustainable form of growth in the industry with little waste.

AU: What drew you to the Cannabis industry?

It was the novelty of a new industry and the need for standardization and research.

The lack of standardization was followed by the intrigue that such a plant existed with so little research done on it that was affecting the nervous system and multiple other systems in many organisms including us, humans. They say curiosity kills the cat and I am sometimes afraid it will do the same to me, ah!

AU: What is it like being a Licensed Producer in BC?

Like pulling your hair! And getting letters from patients who buy our products with unbelievable stories of how it's helped them or their loved ones.

What I enjoy is again the curiosity driven development in this industry. I enjoy applying rigor and the scientific method to developing new and existing products, while ensuring quality is always maintained or improved with each new lot produced.

AU: What's the best part of your job?

The development of new procedures, research and new products.

AU: What do you currently produce and what makes them unique?

We produce organic

concentrates or extracts. We call them concentrates as we do not use chemicals of any kind to produce our products. We use only ice and water to carry out mechanical separation when we take our organic flowers and make bubble hash, which then gets graded into a variety of grades, with each grade going to different product lines. I like to remind people that all extracts are concentrates but not all concentrates are extracts as extracts are concentrates produced via help with hydrocarbons or c02 extraction. Essentially, a concentrate is a collection of all the active ingredients of a plant, in this case, its a collection of the trichomes themselves. Another distinguishing feature of our products is that they are all produced by hand in small batches, small growing lots followed by small lots of hashes or rosins or oils.

AU: Do you prefer Sativas or Indicas?

I don't really see cannabis as one or the other. The classification of indicas and sativas is quite outdated and based solely on morphology—how the plant physically looks or its phenotype. I personally have tried sativas that have a diverse range of terpenes and other compounds, with effects similar to what an indica might induce and vice versa. Currently, we have 1 cultivar on the market in the live rosin format: Northern Apple Jaxx Live Rosin. We grew this cultivar in two different environments: one fully outdoor and organically sun-grown, and the other organically grown in a hoop house-style greenhouse where we used light deprivation to observe the effects of genetics and environment on the product.

AU: What is your favourite all-time strain to smoke?

Skywalker OG Kush - from a long time ago! I started smoking only after working in the industry and being exposed to it. My cannabis use was nearly nil until age 24, and I'm glad. As a neuroscientist, I believe in brain plasticity, and brain development varies from person to person; major growth stops for some of us at age 27.

AU: Why is outdoor growing so important?

It is sustainable first and foremost. It is organic and natural, with little carbon footprint. While working at Whistler Medical Marijuana Company, I saw firsthand the waste associated with indoor growing, which resulted in high product costs and made end products quite expensive for patients.

AU: What makes an expert grower in your opinion?

I don't really believe in expert growers right now. Everyone I meet who calls themselves a grower also thinks they are an expert.

AU: What are some growing secrets or tips you can share with our readers?

Start small with a few plants. Keep good documentation, review your notes and improve your systems based on your observations. Be systematic and don't get lazy.

AU: Tell us about your hash.

All our organic cannabis flowers that we grow outdoors first become hash in the form of what is called bubble hash, and is graded based on the size of the trichomes. Different qualities of trichomes become different products. After classifying the bubble hash into different qualities or grades, some goes to products like our live rosins, and then some to our oils or our Afghan hash. Our Afghan hash was a product I had to push myself to develop as I saw a need for it in the market seeing what others were producing from kief. We use organic bubble hash, and it undergoes heating and lots of hand manipulation as it would in Afghanistan. The one significant difference is that we do this all in a clean and sanitary manner that allows us to pass all the microbial and chemical contaminant testing required by Health Canada. The first few lots of our Afghan hash I had to produce myself along with my business partner. If I were to show you our research log for the Afghan hash development, you might laugh at my silly notes changing variables such as temperature, oven time, handling time, composition, smoking point etc. We may be the only company in Canada where Afghan hash is made by a first-generation Afghan Canadian immigrant.

AU: Is it true your oils are such high quality that you can cook with them?

Yes. We use full-spec, cold-pressed virgin organic coconut oil, which is much more stable to create our concentrate cannabis oils that are 10%+ THC in concentration. After testing our concentrate oils with a third-party lab, we dilute them to the concentration level allowed by Health Canada (3% max allowed, ie 1000 mg per bottle). We performed stability studies with a third party lab on our formulation and it remains stable for over four years, both in open and closed bottles. Our final oils are approximately 80% olive oil, diluted with it, and approximately 20% coconut oil. I love baking brownies with them, each bottle makes over 70 10 mg brownies, or more if you dose lower. I also love making halloumi with it, or using it as a salad dressing along with some balsamic vinegar.

AU: Why is it important to support local growers?

You support your local economy by supporting your local farmers, whether you are buying fruits and vegetables or outdoor-grown cannabis products. We employ locals from our community in Lillooet all the way to Whistler/North Vancouver. Unlike other oil or hash producers in the current market, we are the only Canadian-owned private company in BC producing oils and hash. We own the majority of our company with a small shareholder base consisting mainly of family and friends. We are not publicly traded nor are we controlled by our investors.

AU: Where are your products available?

Our products are currently available only in BC for the recreational market. We hope to grow organically with support from our clients and the many patients who use our products.

We also distribute our products at a lower cost to medical channels that serve veterans and medical patients. Our friends at Evergreen in Kitsilano always carry our products, they deliver to anywhere in BC from www.ecsvan.ca

AU: How can people find you online?

We are often shadowbanned because of our content, however we believe in pushing the envelope, as that is the only way we see change happening, given how slow and ineffective our government bodies are. **You can learn more about us, our development and our products on our website Earthwolf farms.ca**

Our **instagram handle is @earthwolforganics**. You can also find us on Twitter and Facebook under the handle EarthWolf Farms.



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CANNABIS CORNER



about the rationale for recent enforcement against the Victoria Cannabis Buyers Club (VCBC), and to reinforce our historical support for VCBC.

The VCBC is one of the oldest compassion clubs in Canada, with over 8000 active members since its inception in 1996. Its clientele is primarily comprised of low-income people with chronic illnesses, diverse individuals each one of whom has sought relief from serious medical conditions from its first storefront location since 2001.

VCBC became a nonprofit society in 2012, with a Board of Directors elected by its members, dispensing medicinal cannabis for its membership at a compassionate price. It requires proof of a medical condition – it is not a

recreational cannabis outlet.

Since 2001, VCBC has survived five legal trials, including four raids on the club between 2002 and 2003. VCBC has had 15 trafficking charges laid against it, none of which have been successful. It has created national standards and precedents, and in 2015 the club's former head baker, Owen Smith, won a unanimous Supreme Court of Canada decision that granted patients the right to use cannabis oils and derivatives.

Last month the club was raided (more than 3 years after the last raid) during which around \$100,000 in products was seized, and a few weeks later a civil forfeiture notice was served to the owner of the building leased by VCBC, through which the Province is seeking approximately \$3.24 million,

tied to years of enforcement actions, raids, and fines connected to the club's unlicensed cannabis operations. According to VCBC, the fines are

currently being challenged in court and are pending a judicial review expected to examine whether members have a constitutional right to access the cannabis products and services provided by the club. Provincial targeting of the landlord has resulted in an eviction notice being served to VCBC, making access to its services almost impossible for its most vulnerable clients.

VCBC has provided life changing medicines for ill patients throughout a generation of regulations and laws prohibiting and limiting cannabis use. Given that survival, and the nonprofit, community serving nature of its existence, it is perplexing in the extreme as to why the Provincial government would now raid and expropriate the VCBC when cannabis use, distribution and sale is legal. Raids on the VCBC store and the subsequent eviction notice from its landlord (under threat of civil forfeiture of their building) make no sense in the current environment of cannabis legality, regulation and popular recreational use.

Civil forfeiture is a tool typically reserved for the proceeds of serious crime, and I cannot help but ponder what resources are being used in this enforcement and action that might be better employed to target intense, drug-related criminal infrastructure that have a far greater, and more concerning, harm on communities, families and neighbourhoods.

All that said, VCBC has made the simplest and most Canadian request – that it be given time to complete the process of a judicial review of the relevant decisions, with a pause on enforcement until that judicial review is complete. VCBC is asking for what every Canadian expects – a fair hearing, before sentence is declared and executed.

Victoria City Council has a history of supporting the VCBC, most recently writing, in 2020, to Health Canada to support a temporary exemption from the Cannabis Act, and again in 2022 to Ministers Mike Farnworth, then Minister of Public Safety and Solicitor General, and Sheila Malcolmson, then Minister of Mental Health and Addictions,

requesting amendments to the provincial cannabis regulatory framework to remove barriers to deployment of harm reduction services through non-recreational cannabis.

The latest efforts by the Province to attack and defeat the Victoria Cannabis Buyers Club threatens the existence of a long-standing community service that has a history of supporting the health care needs of patients who have neither the financial nor systemic capacity to find that care elsewhere. I urge you to halt your persecution of VCBC at least until their judicial review has been resolved.

Your truly,

Marianne Alto
Victoria Mayor

As of 06 August, 2026, no response has been returned.

VCBC Eviction Update July 26, 2026

We won in court, got the injunction against the landlord and have avoided the eviction! We are open and operating, continuing with mail orders and the store is open regular hours.

Thank you for your support!
Victoria Cannabis Buyers Club

VICTORIA MAYOR SENDS LETTER REGARDING VCBC ENFORCEMENT

Following concerns raised by the Victoria Cannabis Buyers Club (VCBC), Victoria Mayor Marianne Alto sent the following letter to Ministers Nina Krieger and Niki Sharma on June 17, 2026.

June 17, 2026

Hon. Nina Krieger
Minister of Public Safety and Solicitor General
Hon. Niki Sharma
Attorney General

Re: Victoria Cannabis Buyers Club

Dear Minister Krieger and Minister Sharma,

I write on behalf of Victoria City Council to inquire



THE GOOD WEED BOARD PART 12

PINE MENTZ vs. FRUITLOOPS & FUEL

By Marty Wig

Welcome to the Good Weed Board part twelve! This is my second article with *Absolute Underground*. In my introductory article with AU we covered some old reviews that had been waiting in the vault. This time around we will explore two newer products available on the BC market: Pine Mentz by Sweetgrass Cannabis, and Fruitloops & Fuel by Forbidden Forest.

PINE MENTZ BY SWEETGRASS CANNABIS

Let's start with the Pine Mentz. Grown in the Kootenay region by Sweetgrass Cannabis, I tasted a 14-gram packaged on April 15. According to the label this product is FVOPA Organic Certified, grown in living soil, hand-trimmed, and slow cured. It was packed into a short, wide bag with decent air volume.

My first impression of the flower was a mildly aromatic dank pine scent. But not to be underestimated, from the inner layers of these dense buds wafted much stronger notes of sweet mint and dough. The profile was familiar. Very similar to most of the other minty flowers I've graded over recent years.

Burn quality was supreme, with a nice grease ring forming halfway through. An impressive combination of Haze and Kush profiles, the effects were more stimulant than narcotic, good smoke to take on an adventure. This one likely would've scored higher if I didn't observe some minor degradation.



The Pine Mentz gets an 81/100 on the Rating Guide.

FRUITLOOPS & FUEL BY FORBIDDEN FOREST

Next up is the Fruitloops & Fuel by Forbidden Forest. Once again I tasted a 14-gram, packaged on July 7 and opened August 1. To contrast packaging, there was probably too much extra air volume for just a half ounce in this size bag. Details on the label are adequate. It confirms the flower is non-irradiated. I like that it lists both lineage and flavour profile. I also appreciate when a label gives credit to the cultivator despite being brought to market by a processor.

The grower of this Wedding Cake x Frosted Fruit Cake cross is Meridian 125 W Cultivation from Powell River. Upon opening the bag a strong skunk aroma drifted outward. I was

impressed by how nicely the buds were cured, displaying a remarkable sponginess. Skunk and musk base notes became even more prevalent on the inside layers, reminiscent of the highly coveted OG Shark.

To my surprise the sweetness of cereal milk and cream with a hint of berries injected gas into the flavour. This unique profile is a pertinent example of the Fuel Spectrum, a theory you can read more about in the Good Weed Board part ten. I think Pink Kush lovers will appreciate this one.

My score for the Fruitloops &

Fuel is 84/100 on the Rating Guide.

That's all for Part Twelve. I might introduce a mailbag platform down the road for readers to send in feedback, cross-comparison notes, and suggestions for products to review. Our next release in *Absolute Underground* #132 is slotted for October/November. See you then!





CanAm Wrestling - Interview with Promoter

OTTO GENILE

By Chad Persley

AU: Tell us about the history of CanAm Wrestling and your history as a wrestling promoter?

Otto Genile: CanAm Wrestling was born in 1996, and our first run went from 1996 to 2003. We would go on the road three to four weeks at a time, traveling all over Canada.

We first started at the Back Alley Nightclub, where we presented Slammin' &

Jammin' events with some of the world's most iconic rock and roll bands, including Loverboy, Cheap Trick, Nazareth, Joan Jett, and many others. We travelled from the Queen Charlotte Islands out west, all the way to Hamilton, Ontario out east. We also travelled to the Northwest Territories and the Yukon, doing shows mostly for First Nation communities. We would go in and present

drug and alcohol workshops, then present the wrestling shows to the communities as a gift for bringing us there. CanAm Wrestling's acronym stands for Constantly Against Narcotic & Alcohol Misuse, Which I am very proud of due to the fact of being 20 years clean and sober.

I have worn every hat there is in the wrestling business, from

TURNBUCKLE SANDWICH

host to referee, commentator, and wrestler, but I have always been a promoter. My alter ego is Vinnie Fever, which I am still known as today.

We are an all-ages, family-friendly entertainment event and we pride ourselves on that. We always try to give back to the community in every event that



This is our first year where we are trying to help charities in Calgary that need our help. We look forward to continuing these events so that we can give back to the people that give to us.

we do in some way.

AU: Do you have any exclusive talent or is there mutual sharing agreement with the many talented wrestlers in this area?

OG: Unfortunately, we do not have exclusive Talent as they are all independent wrestlers, which means they can work for whatever promotion they would like to work for.

Maybe one day we will be so big that we can put them all under contract and then yes we would have exclusive rights to each and every superstar that we have.



AU: What do you have in store for us over this coming winter and next year?

OG: Over the winter we will continue to do shows indoors, currently four to six shows a month all over Alberta which includes Springbrook, Red Deer, Bashaw, Lacombe, Olds, Okotoks and Calgary at our Studio Urban Audio Canada Located at 6439 2nd St SE.

Look for our events coming to a community or town near you soon!!

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(UN)CONTROLLED CHAOS

An interview with wrestler, author, historian, hall of famer and cauliflower alley member Vance Nevada.

By Mike “They can’t all be zingers!” Croy
Absolute Underground: Who are we talking with?

Vance Nevada: Canadian professional wrestler “Mr. Beefy Goodness” Vance Nevada

AU: What are you best known for?

VN: Probably equally known for being a 33-year pro wrestler with travel and headline matches from coast to coast in Canada as well as for my decades of effort as a historian for the sport in this country.

AU: Who trained you to wrestle?

VN: I initially trained with Ernest “Frenchy”

Rheault in Somerset, Manitoba. But at that time, in the early 1990’s, it was a bit like an on-the-job apprenticeship and I would learn from all of the vets in the area at the time. Eventually though, Eddie Watts kinda took me under his wing and became a valuable mentor to me, teaching me not only about how to do my business in the ring, but how to approach my career as a whole.

AU: What’s the funniest or craziest thing you’ve seen happen at a live show?

VN: That’s a tough one. We’ve had a few riots over the years — but perhaps the craziest situation I was involved in was during a northern tour of the Northwest Territories in the winter. Where the van carrying all of the wrestlers actually ended up stuck on a riverbank in the middle of the night because the weight of the front tires on the icy river was too much and we were hung up for a few uncomfortable minutes. The promoter had tested the safety of the situation by first sending one of the midget wrestlers out across the ice to ensure the ice road was safe. But, it wasn’t.

AU: What’s the wildest match you’ve been involved in?

VN: One night in Abbotsford (2002), we had a riot erupt just prior to the main event when some over-served fans took the heel microphone work too seriously and four guys tried to storm the ring. It was a locker room clearing brawl which quickly ended badly for those fans.



I’m also really proud of my long involvement with the Cauliflower Alley Club — a benevolent organization that provides financial aid to wrestlers in need. Many men and women were unable to secure medical

insurance during their careers and now are running into hardships and need assistance. I have been a lifetime member of the club since 2009 and in more recent years have accepted appointments on both the Advisory and Executive Boards. We help a lot of people each year.

AU: What prompted you to write a book about the history of Canadian wrestling?

VN: First, I wanted to ensure that some of the sport’s most prolific wrestlers in Canada got some recognition for their years of service. Often, books celebrate only a select few — but forget the work horses who were consistent in those territories for years. But also, the overall coverage of wrestling in Canada has often been limited to select territories like Stampede Wrestling or Maple Leaf Wrestling and I wanted to show the world just how much depth our wrestling scene has. I approached this by thinking about the kind of book that I looked for when I was a kid and was just getting interested in wrestling.

AU: Who should our readers be on the lookout for, new talent wise?

AU: How do you define success:

VN: Success is measured by how much your efforts and contributions have meant to others. It is achieved by approaching your pursuit unselfishly and recognizing that we each play a role in each other’s story. Nobody achieved success in isolation, we all required someone’s help, and we each have an obligation to pay that forward. Those who are ultimately successful have touched the lives of the most people around them.

AU: If you could invite anyone for dinner, who would you invite and why?

VN: George Gordienko. He was an international “king maker” for years with travels around the globe. Deported from

the US early in his career under suspicion of being a communist, it would cost him his spot in the history books as Lou Thesz then couldn’t drop the title to him in 1956, but he set records and made great money in Europe, India and Japan. After wrestling, he became a celebrated artist. His life and his journey would be fascinating to hear firsthand. Sadly, I missed connecting with him before he passed.

AU: What would you like your legacy in wrestling to be?

VN: While I am proud of what I have accomplished as a wrestler, I think I will probably best be known for my work as a historian to preserve wrestling history. I’ve written three books to date and have ideas for more work in the future along this vein in the future. I’ve documented more than 81,000 pro wrestling shows in Canada, and have compiled career records for more than 300 wrestlers.

VN: There are some great Canadian talents that are really doing great stuff. Wes Barker, Scorpius, Edward Wild III, Braydon Goss, and Sean Gaston among them. But almost everywhere I go I see a wrestler or tag team that grabs my attention. In terms of tag teams - the Handsome Devils and Chocolate City are two of my current favorites

AU: What’s your favorite storyline you’ve been involved in?

VN: It’s difficult to pick just one. I had a series of three matches with NWA World champion Adam Pearce in 2012 which was thrilling. But then there were feuds like vs. Wes Barker that really grabbed the attention of the fans and filled buildings and that one was pretty rewarding too.

AU: In your opinion what makes for a compelling storyline?

VN: You need first to have two characters that your audience is emotionally invested in. Once you have that, you need to always consider what twists and turns you can create that will matter first to even the most casual of fans, because we don’t have television to create the highlight reel to keep people up to speed. Often all you have is a social media promo to compel ticket buys — so if your issue isn’t relatable to the fans, it doesn’t matter what you do between the ropes, it’s not going to make money.

AU: As we wrap things up here Vance, is there

anything else you’d like our readers to know?

VN: Independent wrestling is hotter than ever right now, so if you have a chance to catch local wrestling wherever you are you are going to discover your next favorite wrestler, so just be sure to get out to the matches, because there is nothing like seeing it live.

Thank you Vance Nevada for taking the time to answer some questions about wrestling, your books and talking about wrestling history in Canada!

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ABSOLUTE UNDERGROUND



PROTEST THE HERO

Vocalist-bandleader Rody Walker discusses new album *Within*

By Ferdy Belland

"In the past, we've been widely impersonal, specifically in relation to the lyrics I've written," says Protest the Hero's commander-in-chief Rody Walker. "This is the first time I really feel super, super-connected to the whole record. Especially when compared to our previous record *Palimpsest* - back then, I wasn't inside the lyrics. The storytelling wasn't coming from me. So with *Within*, I thought it was important to truly speak as myself. At some point, it was difficult... it's difficult to be vulnerable. But I believe it's important for men to express vulnerability, to show vulnerability, to show emotions outside of just anger. So as much as I was going 'ah fuck, I'm putting myself on display here,' I do believe it has great artistic value. This was a subconscious thing that happened, and it became apparent to me only after the album was finished and I was able to listen back to it with objective ears."

And the world can now listen with their own objective ears as Canadian prog-metal grandmasters Protest the Hero released their new album *Within* on July 17th - the first album from them in six long years. But all good things come to those who wait, and on all accounts this album can't be described as a return to form as much as it proves that Protest the Hero have lost none of their power or their imagination or their grand musical scope. Listen for yourself and see.

"We write very intentionally," Walker explains. "Even if we should leave a track off the record... we don't. When we start out, we go: it's gonna be ten tracks! And then we end up saying: well, you know what? It's not ten tracks - we got SIX! And those are the ones we're happy with. There aren't any more. The directive is always to write ten songs... I don't know why. Sometimes it's been twelve, sometimes it's been eleven, but this time it's six! If there'd been more songs that came about, we would have released them."

And with the album put to bed, Walker finds the time to actually lean back and listen to music, as opposed to burning up all his time creating it.

"My current listening tastes have been directed by nostalgia," says Walker. "I went back to the skate-

punk I grew up on, and which I still very much love: Gorilla Biscuits and hardcore! Which led me to other hardcore stuff... Drain, Turnstile, End It, Speed, stuff like that. The new solo album by Paramore's Hayley Williams really rips, and I had the opportunity to see her live in Toronto, which was fucking awesome. That's what I care to listen to the most at the moment. The most recent Knocked Loose record was really awesome, too."

In a notable turn of events, *Within* marks the very first time Protest the Hero have released their work completely independently, without assistance from an overshadowing record label or managerial entities.

"We've worked with a lot of different labels over the years, and a lot of different representation," says Walker, "It's not as if any of it's been particularly unpleasant, or we've run into terribly evil people. Not that we HAVEN'T, but there was no dig aimed at anyone with this professional decision of ours, necessarily. A lot of those people have helped us reach this point in our career

where we can release our work independently. We're not acting in defiance against anyone or anything. It's just an act of independence, a sense of freedom that we've afforded ourselves and we can celebrate this. We're proud of this new album, and proud of the fact that we put it all out there ourselves, alone. It's a very significant moment for us.

"It's a good feeling of strength and confidence. And we also recognize and openly acknowledge the contributions given to us by the managers and the booking agents and the record labels that have allowed Protest the Hero to get to this point in our lives. Obviously, it's very difficult to start independently, and my congratulations go to the artists who have managed to achieve sustainability and success while maintaining

independence the entire time... such as Intervals; as far as I know, Aaron Marshall has had no industry representation by labels! We have signed so many different deals, in so many different territories, that we don't know where we own our stuff and where we don't. The truth is: we don't own a lot of it. We own most of the masters, but we don't own the rights to a lot of it in specific territories. So that played a big part in our professional decision as well. It's not that we resent the people who own those rights, but it gets to the point where we try to get our *Volition* album down to Mexico and we're trying to find who has the fucking rights to that! It all became such a mess. We just want to get to a point where we'll have it all. We'll have the rights to everything, and if there's a problem, then it's just our problem."

With the release of *Within* sure to stand the world's prog-metal community on its collective egghead, worldwide excitement for international supporting tours from Protest the Hero is bound

to be boiling, but Walker explains that the band will be taking a more careful, methodical approach to their live appearances. "We'll be playing the Anarchy in the OK festival

out in British Columbia, over the first weekend in September, but that's a one-shot show. We're not touring out west; one and done! As far as I know. But I could be wrong. I've been wrong before! There's not a whole lot of touring in our new future, even with the new album's release, to be honest. We're not the young bucks that we were. We're all in our 40s now, and if I can

be totally candid: I have a chronic illness. I have an inflammatory bowel condition, and I have to take a biological medication once every eight weeks, which makes it very difficult to be away



from home a lot. Which is not to say that we're not going to tour anymore - there's just certain limitations now in place. But more time at home just gives us more time to write and record and release more music, so there's a silver lining there. It's a double-edged blade.

"I could see Protest the Hero morphing into a creative entity which focused only on songwriting and releasing music to the public, as opposed to continuing also as a live-performance outfit, but I can't imagine I'd be super-satisfied with that. Not yet, anyways. I never want to stop making music. As much as playing live now has certain difficulties for me - we'll continue to tour. You need to know that I love being onstage. I love performing for people. I love getting to go out and sing these songs, over and over again. Otherwise you just sing them once into a microphone in a studio, and you never sing them again. And I want to sing these songs, songs that I wrote for myself, songs that I wrote for my friends, and I want to sing them for the people out there who love our band."

protestthehero.bandcamp.com

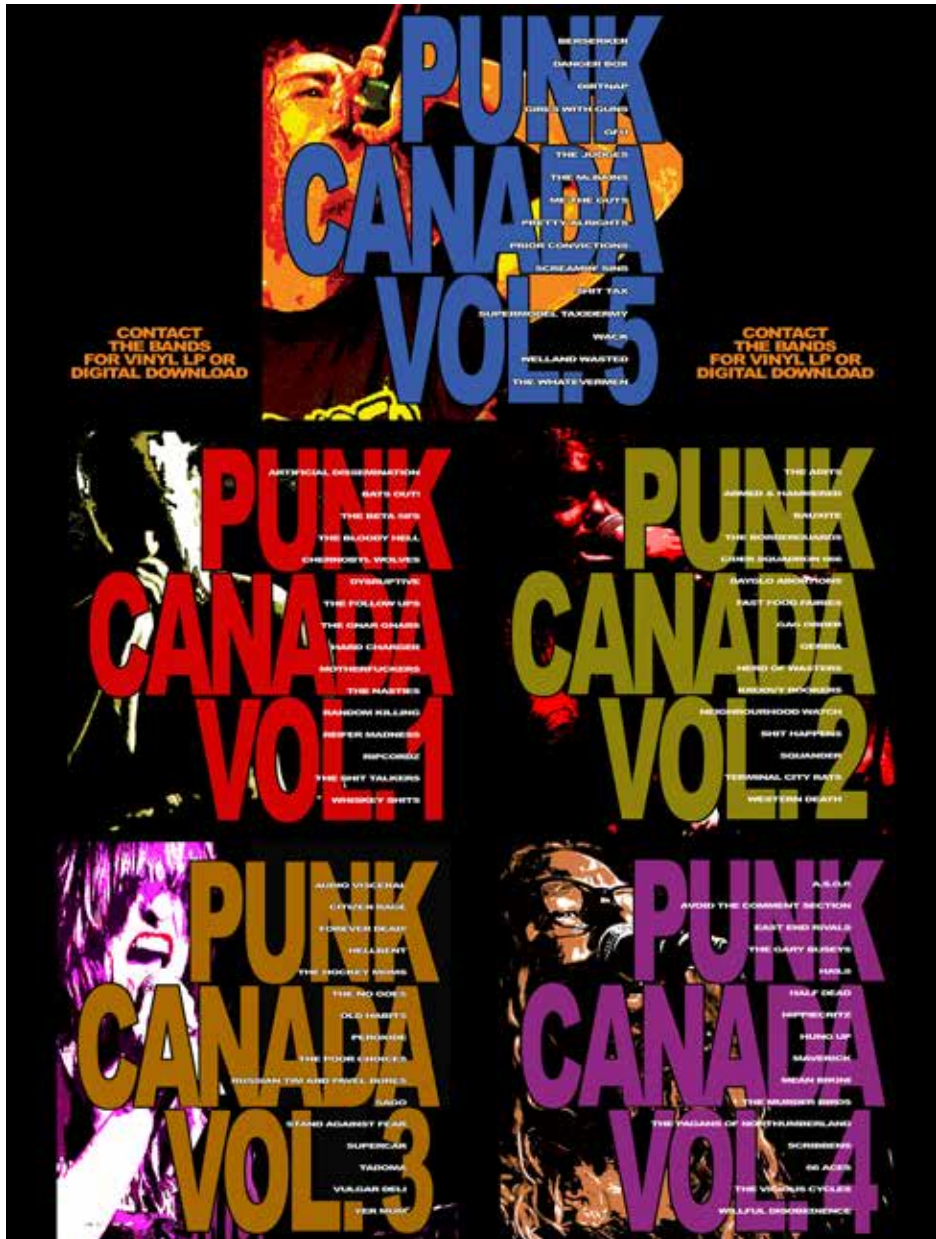


where we can release our work independently. We're not acting in defiance against anyone or anything. It's just an act of independence, a sense of freedom that we've afforded ourselves and we can celebrate this. We're proud of this new album, and proud of the fact that we put it all out there ourselves, alone. It's a very significant moment for us.

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Ghosts and Poltergeists

The travelling expo features hundreds of vendors offering taxidermy, preserved animal specimens, bones, funeral collectibles, antiques, horror and Halloween-inspired artwork, handcrafted oddities and other unusual finds. Attendees can also take part in tarot readings, sideshow performances, photo opportunities and other activities throughout the weekend.



The Vancouver event will also offer several hands-on workshops, including insect pinning, wet specimen preservation and taxidermy classes. Workshop options include Sunset Moth and Scorpion Habitat entomology classes, a Ratalope Coffin Taxidermy Class, an Octopus & Tentacle Globe Wet Specimen Class and Raccoon Taxidermy Classes. Materials and tools are provided, and workshop tickets include admission to the expo.



Founded by Michelle and Tony Cozzaglio in Oklahoma, the Oddities & Curiosities Expo has grown into a touring event featuring alternative artists, collectors and small businesses. Its 2026 North American tour will visit 40 cities across the United States and Canada.

The Vancouver event takes place Saturday, October 10 and Sunday, October 11 from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. at the Vancouver Convention Centre, 1055 Canada Place. Tickets are \$20 CAD in advance or \$25 at the door. Children 12 and under are admitted free.



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A peek into RECORD ROOMS with Patrick McEachnie

John Carlow/ *Finding Charlotte Photography*

I met Patrick through the bands he plays in. He's very knowledgeable about music, and I discovered that he's really into record collecting. He has a successful online show about his experiences as a collector.

Absolute Underground: Introduce yourself.

PM: My name is Patrick McEachnie. I play/played in Chain Whip, Cult Crime, Pack Rat, and a bunch of others. I used to run Hosehead Records. More than all that, I'm a music fan.

AU: When did you start YouTube and Patreon?

PM: I started my channel *Patrick the Pack Rat* in January 2026. I'm only six months into it but already the response has been insane. I'm very fortunate to have the audience that I do, and it feels like every week I'm excited about some new milestone. I set up Patreon in February, which has really helped me improve the production of the videos. I've been able to upgrade my gear like better microphones thanks to my Patreon subscribers. I couldn't do it with them!

AU: Who is your target audience?

PM: Music fans! The show is about helping with music discovery as much as it is about the records themselves. You don't have to be a collector to enjoy the episodes, but it helps. I hear feedback from viewers that they don't even have any records, but they love finding new bands and listening to passionate people talking about what they love.

AU: When did you start to show an interest in music?

PM: Like a lot of people, I got into music when I was a kid. It was a mix of skate videos, Tony Hawk games, and the occasional good song on *Much Music*. I got a drum kit for Christmas when I was 12 and music has been on my mind ever since.

AU: What was the first record you ever bought with your own money?

PM: When I was 16, I bought Jay Reatard - *Blood Visions*, Career Suicide - *Attempted Suicide*, and the Clorox Girls - *Jaime Les Filles* from Rotate This and Hits and Misses in Toronto. I still have all three and still haven't gotten sick of them. I had bought some CDs with birthday money earlier on, but those were my first real record purchases.

AU: Collect to own or do you listen to everything?

PM: I wouldn't buy a record if I didn't want to listen to it. Everything that comes home with me gets listened to at least two times before I alphabetize it on the shelf. Doesn't matter how rare it is, these things were made to be listened to, and that's what I do.

AU: Best collecting opportunities?

PM: Every single time you walk into a record store, there's a chance to find the best score of your life. You're not going to find anything if you're not out there looking. Every garage sale/thrift store/record store is a collecting opportunity. As any touring musician knows, one of the best parts of tour is going to record stores across the world. Sometimes you only have one free hour to spend in whatever city you're playing, so my move is always to hit some record stores. I skipped seeing the Eiffel Tower so I could go record shopping in Paris.

AU: Best way to value a record?

PM: If we're strictly talking about determining monetary value, then it's a mix of Discogs/eBay/popsike/Gripsweat. It's easy for people to read the data wrong and think their classic rock LP is worth \$100 because someone once paid top dollar for a sealed or autographed copy. So if you're going to price things out, try and take in as much of that context as you can.

AU: I always wonder how you (or any collector) can afford a hobby like this?

PM: I can only speak for myself, but I spent years skipping meals and avoiding common vices so I could afford more records. I feel bad for new collectors because of how expensive things have gotten. Even 5 years ago prices were much lower than today. Some people have big budgets, some people hit garage sales before the sun comes up. There's no wrong way to do it.

AU: Overall; Why vinyl?

PM: I asked my parents for a record player when I was 12 or 13. Even then, I thought that owning my favourite music on vinyl was somehow more worthy than CDs or digital. To this day it feels like the best way to appreciate music. I wish there was some deeper psychological reason for it, but it kind of just comes down to me thinking records are cool. With Record Rooms, I get the pleasure of interviewing record collectors about the artifacts that give them the most joy. There's something so contagious about that to me, and I hope people can walk away with that feeling after watching my videos.

AU: Thoughts on cassettes?

PM: Great for demo tapes, bad for real releases. To me, an album isn't real unless there's a vinyl pressing of it. I often buy cassettes from new bands to show my support, but I'm not in the habit of playing them often.

AU: Thoughts on ten inch format?

PM: I think 10"s get a bad rap. There's lots of collectors out there who refuse to buy 7"s or 10"s, which makes no sense to me. If you like the music and you want to own it, buy it. Some people say they're inconvenient because you can only put a few songs per side, but if you're looking for convenience, you should just stick to streaming.

AU: Rarest record you've seen in person but don't necessarily own?

PM: A few years ago I sold a record collection for a friend in a tough situation. He had a lot of very rare hardcore punk records, which I got to play and enjoy while I was selling everything off for him. Some of the rarest of them were a blue copy Youth of Today - *Break Down the Walls* LP, Agnostic Front - *United Blood 7"*, the first Minor Threat 7" with the red sleeve, and a blue/green copy of 7 Seconds - *The Crew*.

AU: You seem to know a LOT about music. Where was the source of that knowledge?

PM: There's something to learn everywhere you look if you're open to it.

I've never been satisfied with just listening to music. I want to know the story behind the album, behind the band, and behind the members. I read a lot of non-fiction music books, I watch a lot of musician interviews, and I talk to a lot of music fans. I don't feel like I know that much because of how many stones are still out there unturned, you know?

Sharing musical knowledge is one of my main goals with my YouTube channel. I get so excited when viewers tell me they learned about a new band or album from my videos. It's the best feedback I can get.

AU: Guilty pleasure record?

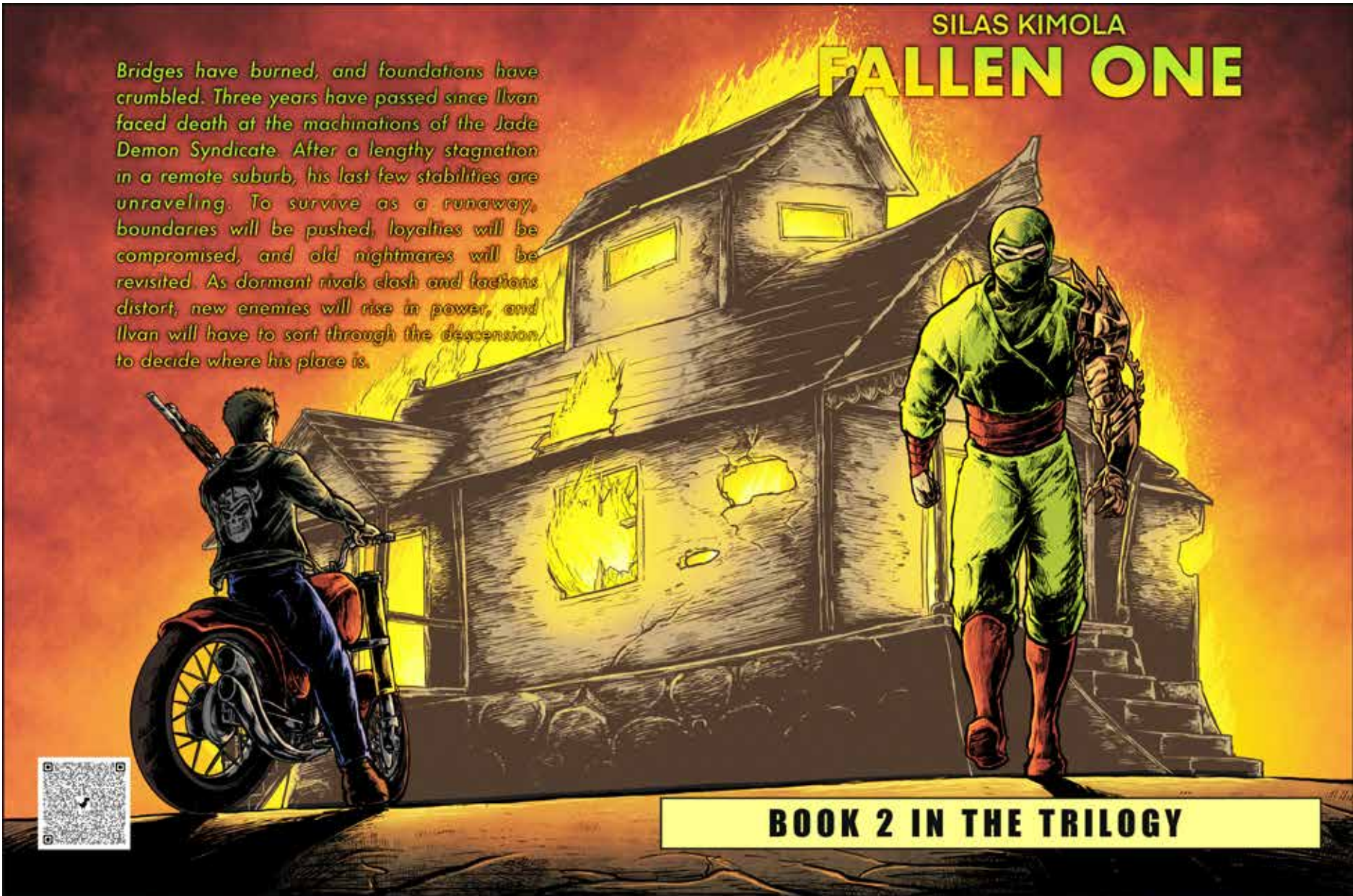
PM: No guilty pleasures in this world. When I was young and judgmental, sure, but at this point I say listen to what makes you feel good. - Some people like to keep stuff secret, and that's okay too. I personally don't feel guilty about what I enjoy. Don't burden yourself with someone else's anchor.

AU: Favourite record?

PM: I have so many favourites, it really depends on the day, but you can never go wrong with the first three Ramones albums.

@patrick_thepackrat on YouTube and Instagram

@recordrooms.reels on Instagram
patreon.com/patrick_thepackrat



INTERVIEW WITH VICTORIA'S OWN BLACK METAL BAND EMPALEMENT

By Mike "Corpse paint allergy" Croy and Angie "Moonlight on the Fjord" Edwards
Absolute Underground: Who are we talking with? and who is in the band?

Empalement:

Man'anghal: vocals

Moros: guitars

Godot: guitars

He Who Was Tasked To Shepherd Souls

Between The Planes: bass & vocals

Zaag: drums

AU: What are you best known for or most infamous for?

E: Bringing black metal back to the local scene.

AU: Describe Empalement's sound

E: Deathened Black Metal.

AU: What is the origin story of Empalement?

E: In the death of winter 2023, Moros and Man'anghal came together with the intent of creating a feral and visceral extreme metal project, based on their shared love of second wave black metal, death metal, grind, and other forms of punishing art. The songs that would end up on our debut EP, *Celestial Perversion*, were written in 2024, and by mid 2025 we had solidified our lineup so that we could begin to perform live.

AU: Do you have any pre-show rituals?

E: There is a lot of preparation required to craft our look and make sure our bodies are ready to handle the stress of an intense live set. We use that time to center ourselves and step into the mindset required to perform Empalement's music. People can sniff out insincerity, hence we must make sure our mood is cold and our energy is dark.

AU: Do you have anything exciting coming up, our readers should be on the look out for?

E: Yes. We have just completed recording 4 new songs, which will be released at different times over the next year. We are making an appearance at the Armstrong Metal Festival this summer, and have some incredible shows lined up for the fall/winter. 2027 is also shaping up to be a monumental year for Empalement.

AU: What is your creative process like?

E: Each Empalement song begins with a riff, a seed from which all darkness grows. That riff, if good enough, is forged into a complete arrangement by the band. Once demoed, Man'anghal interprets that arrangement and crafts the appropriate lyrics and lore. Sometimes this takes months, sometimes this takes an afternoon.

AU: Why did you choose the name Empalement?

E: We spent months searching for the correct name. Empalement is the archaic spelling of Impalement, which evokes the vampiric sensibilities of lust and violence we drench our sound in. It also refers to the idea of turning a ghostly shade of pale, as one is drawn closer to death.

AU: How do your personal views shape the song writing process for the band?

Man'anghal: As far as the lyrics and visuals go, I believe that anything is permissible in art. Nothing is sacred and extreme material deserves to exist. But the exploration of darkness does not equate to personal alignment with it. Empalement is simply a mirror to the horrors that exist in the world, and that should make you uncomfortable. With all that said, each song is imprinted with my values to shape the narrative and message so I can perform with conviction.

Moros: This music has to come from a place

of darkness. When Empalement first started, my mental health was in the gutter. I was at an all time low point in my life. Every rope was a noose, every bridge was a cliff, and all I could take comfort in was the idea that suicide was always a viable escape. Empalement gave me an opportunity to channel all of those feelings into something creative. I believe if you haven't known that darkness, you can't truly resonate with what black metal is supposed to feel like.

AU: What does black metal mean to you?

E: Beyond the traditional sound born from the second wave, beyond the corpse paint and spikes, and beyond the atmosphere of pure evil, Black Metal at its core does not seek the approval or acceptance of anyone. It is easy for someone

to point at Empalement and say that we are not 'true black metal' because we don't adhere closely enough to the dogmatic definition that the modern scene has decided upon. It is easy for a band to look and sound 'black metal' with spooky sounding lyrics and riffs, yet many are creatively hollow and don't contribute anything meaningful to the genre. They may sound more traditional than we do, but are effectively just a cosplay of the real thing. At the end of the day, Black Metal is the ultimate

vessel through which to express your beliefs and convictions. It is the power of the individual over the collectivism of authority, society, and religion.

AU: As we wrap things up here, is there anything else you'd like our readers to know?

E: If you like what you hear on our debut EP, *Celestial Perversion*, be ready for our upcoming releases. They will boast a more barbaric, militant sound that will conjure forth eternal bloodshed and capture all hearts of darkness!!!!!!

Photo credit: Man'gahal





ARC OF DYAD

Blackened heavy metal from Melbourne, Australia

By Ray MacKay

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

Simon Lukic: My name is Simon Lukic and I'm the principal songwriter and driving force behind Arc Of Dyad. I took care of the music and lyrics, as well as the guitars, bass and vocals on *The Work Of Idle Hands*. Arc Of Dyad is ultimately a solo venture first and foremost — a vehicle for me to share my ideas and create the music I want to create. It's no different from most bands who have one or two individuals running the show — I just don't happen to have a "band" around me.

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

SL: The idea to release music has been brewing for a number of years now. The concept itself came together in 2003 after a few years of working out the direction I wanted to pursue. I went through a lot of music — upwards of thirty songs were scrapped until I decided on the approach you hear on *The Work Of Idle Hands*.

With the direction locked in, it was then a matter of completing the songs and settling on a vocal style — which took a bit of time. I then sought out Tom Kocovic to produce the album and arrange the drums. Chris Themelco was then approached to mix and master the recordings.

AU: You have a new album, *The Work Of Idle Hands*, out as of March 7, 2026, on all streaming platforms — tell us all about it!

SL: Our debut album *The Work Of Idle Hands* was released in March and I'm keen for metal fans to give it a listen. It features seven songs that cover a range of topics that listeners from all corners of the world should be able to connect with on some level. The subject matter can be weighty at times, but I want Arc Of Dyad to offer more than songs about dragons, elves, pirates or the netherworld.

With that said, I know that some people don't care about lyrics and, if that's the case, I hope that they

can still enjoy the tunes and appreciate the hooks, riffs and melodies.

AU: If possible, describe Arc Of Dyad's musical sound and style for our readers.

SL: Arc Of Dyad has been called black metal, blackened heavy metal and even progressive blackened heavy metal, which is fine with me — once you release your music into the world, you kind of lose ownership of it in a way and that's OK.

I can appreciate the labels, but in all honesty, it's all heavy metal in the end. I don't mind the blackened heavy metal tag — I quite like it, to be honest — but I do not believe that Arc Of Dyad is black metal simply because the lyrical content is worlds apart.

When all is said and done, Arc Of Dyad is a heavy metal band with a focus on traditional songwriting, hooks and lyrics that avoid the usual clichés that are often found in the genre.

AU: Where are you from, and what is the music scene like there?

SL: I'm from Australia and live in the state of Victoria, which is — and I'm sure that most Australians would agree — the metal capital of the continent. Apologies, Sydney, but you know it's true!

The scene here is phenomenal — always has been, with bands of every subgenre co-existing with one another. There really is something for everyone here and, when you take into account the many bands across the country, it makes for a unique scene.

AU: What does *The Work Of Idle Hands* have in store for metal fans? What's the vibe?

SL: First and foremost, I want to offer something different to metal fans — not different for the sake of it, but music and lyrics that no other band is creating.

There is a clear '80s metal vibe running through the album, as well as a definite melodic death/doom metal feel in the melodies and solos. My goal with the vocals was to mirror the subconscious mind, so I approached it with a haunted whispering style to complement the lyrics, which focus on personal challenges and the world around us.

I worked on making this album an experience that gives listeners something to think about and

bang their heads to.

AU: What were some of the inspirations that went into the album?

SL: I would say Celtic Frost encouraged me to stand out from the crowd and create a distinct sound. Anacrusis for the lyrical nudge and vocals. Death for always going against the grain and pure heavy metal attitude, and finally, Armoured Angel for songwriting smarts and showing me that the song is king.

I would also add Fear Of God (R.I.P. Dawn Crosby), Destruction, Sabbath — the English version, Skyclad, Coroner and Paradise Lost, amongst others, who helped shape the sound that you hear on *The Work Of Idle Hands*.

AU: Is there a song that you are especially excited for listeners to hear?

SL: That's difficult to answer because I was very selective in regards to the songs that made the album. Nine songs were originally going to appear on the album, and that became eight after I asked two close friends to act as a sounding board. They both came back with the same least favourite song and I thought that it was a consistent response, so I removed the track from the album.

Then, during the mixing and mastering stage, I removed another song as it stifled the listening experience. So, for me, the songs that made the album make for a cool journey that are all important in their own way.

With that said, check out "Human, Mistake", "Marching" and "Speaking In Tongues".

AU: Any upcoming tours or future releases?

SL: There will be no shows for the time being. I am focussed on developing a back catalogue much like what Quorthon did with Bathory and Fenriz and Nocturno Culto are doing with Darkthrone.

I have no aversion to one day getting some like-minded individuals together to perform the songs on *The Work Of Idle Hands*, but my attention is on the creative process at the moment.

Future releases? Well, I am directing my energy on promoting *The Work Of Idle Hands* for the remainder of the year, as well as completing a sophomore album in preparation for a 2027 release.

AU: Anything else to promote?

SL: Part of the promotion for *The Work Of Idle Hands* will consist of monthly video releases for each of the seven album tracks. Videos for "Borrowed Time" and "Constellations" are available now on the official Arc Of Dyad YouTube channel, with "Human, Mistake" to follow. This will obviously continue for the remainder of the year.

AU: Final words for our readers?

SL: I would like to simply thank you for giving me the opportunity to talk about Arc Of Dyad and *The Work Of Idle Hands* — I really appreciate it.

There is so much new music out now and more released on a daily basis that it's easy to get lost in the shuffle. For *Absolute Underground* to offer me some space to share the Arc Of Dyad story will not be forgotten.

To anyone reading, I hope this interview will encourage you to check us out and give a listen. If you enjoy it, welcome on board; if not, thanks for at least giving it a shot.

AU: How do people find you online?

SL: If you're keen on diving a little deeper into the world of Arc Of Dyad, here are some options:

arcofdyad.bandcamp.com

youtube.com/@arc-of-dyad

instagram.com/arcofdyad

Do reach out, as I'm looking forward to hearing from you all.

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CROWDSURF COMEDY

JOEY COMMISSO — NACHOSFERATU

Comedy Review by Dylan Rhymer

Joey Commisso just might be an extraterrestrial. The Kelowna-based stand up comic's observations on the absurdities of life could easily come from a pointy eared visitor from another world. Whatever planet he visits from, his new album *Nachosferatu* is the best debut album I've listened to all year and let me just say welcome to Earth.

"Is it ok to start a comedy special with crying?" he nervously asks off the top, hinting that even though he knows how funny his material is he might doubt that he's the man to deliver it. He is. Part crazed confessions, part meticulously constructed diatribes, Commisso might be the most original voice in Canadian stand up comedy since Norm MacDonald. High praise, I know. Like Canada's favourite cheeky hoser, Commisso's regular guy persona masks an intellect that knows well that it's always funnier to blend in than it is to brag. Back to that alien thing, perhaps.

If there is anything working against the album, it's his decision to begin his album with local material. I am curious to see if jokes about the hazards of navigating British Columbia's notorious Coquihalla Pass play with comedy fans who have never visited. Luckily for me, I have made the dreadful drive more times than I can count and appreciate the local flavour. For BC based comedy fans, *Nachosferatu* is a must listen.

He's no slouch. A former builder, Commisso understands that a great house requires a strong

foundation. With *Nachosferatu*, that concrete is relatable subjects such as Doritos, self service checkouts and soda stream technology. However that's only the base, as it's the outrageous flourishes that he adds to these otherwise pedestrian subjects that take it over the edge into an absurdist playground of ideas. The result is an album that not only stands up to repeated listens but rewards you for them.

He does more research into a joke than I've ever seen in a standup comic. An extended routine about the humble Robertson screw displays more of a backstory than a Christopher Nolan screenplay. Very personal stories of his grocer father's absolute contempt for COSTCO could be the source of Commisso's neurotic sense of humour in the first place. His closer, a brutally honest and graphic account of he and his partner's misadventures in an overdue childbirth is so graphic they ought to send him into high schools as a kind of comedy birth control. But then again, seeing as he is an alien, his form of reproduction could have been a lot worse.

I look forward to more albums from this unique comedian, whether or not he is here to blow up the planet. He comes in peace, just as long as he doesn't have to drive the Coquihalla again. Four stars out of five, (whichever star you call home).

Joey Commisso: *Nachosferatu* is available on most streaming platforms through *Comedy Here Often?* and his complete special is on YouTube.

Dylan Rhymer is a Vancouver based stand up comedian and actor.

dylanrhymer.com



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NEW MUSIC SHOWCASE



LAWREN JUPITER

By Dennis Lighthouse

Lawren Jupiter emerges as a musical wanderer, one whose spirit is equal parts spontaneous and soulful. Hailing originally from Toronto

and now making his home in Hamilton, Ontario, Jupiter crafts his songs with an effortless "go with the flow" or "flow with the go" style that finds magic hidden in everyday moments. His piano becomes a storyteller, each note a reminder that the magic of life is often found in its subtle, fleeting details. His creative journey is steeped

in a reverence for the classic sonics of legends. Drawing inspiration from the Beatles, Buddy Holly, and Queen, as well as the imaginative worlds of Jim Henson and the Muppets, Jupiter channels these diverse influences into a singular voice that seeks out the very soul of music. In his art, the ordinary transforms into the extraordinary, encouraging us all to listen closer to the whispered wonders that swirl around us.

When asked about his biggest challenge, he reflects, "It's not the challenges of life we need to look at, but the way we face them." This philosophy guides his creative process as much as it fuels his resolve to embrace transformation, urging his listeners to view life's twists and turns as opportunities for growth and connection.

Having graced intimate venues like Vertagogo and Ooey Gooley's in Hamilton, Jupiter's live performances have already ignited a spark among audiences and fellow musicians alike. Sharing stages with notables such as Jesse James, Jump Coven, and Sara Wilkinson, he has built a reputation for infusing every performance with heartfelt optimism and a message of love and togetherness. Looking ahead, Jupiter dreams audaciously of playing monumental stages like Madison Square Garden or even Broadway, where his music can

resonate on a grander scale and inspire even more hearts.

With each song, Lawren Jupiter invites us to rediscover the magic that envelops our daily lives—a magic too often overlooked in the rush of the mundane. His musical sojourn is more than a collection of melodies and lyrics; it's a call to embrace the wonder of change, to celebrate connection, and to recognize that sometimes, the most transformative adventures begin right where we are.

Photo credit: Ian Compton



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Mountain Collective American Tour 2017: THE STORM OF THE CENTURY PART 9

By Brydo "Pull It Over And" Parker

Recap: We just left Colorado on our Hot Dog... The Movie American Rockies ski tour and are in our trusty 32 ft Rv with three working brakes and rebuilt tire chains. We have been running away from the Storm of the Century and riding right on the edge of it as it birthed in the Hawaiian Pacific across to our BC and Washington State's Coastal mountains then the Oregon Cascades driving us into the California Sierra mountains across the desert and swept us up to the top of the Rockies in New Mexico then blasted us through Colorado and now we are heading into the heart of this beast. Utah. As we crossed the desert at about 7.00am we were



cooking a big batch of big beef ribs and there was nobody on the highway going either way except two cop cars parked in the middle of the two highways having a chat. We casually drove by looking like a Breaking Bad meth lab. I said to Ira, "We are about to get pulled over," he replied, "Happy thoughts, happy thoughts." and I said, "Nope, we got a tail." The cop followed us at the speed limit for a while, nice and slow. I could feel the cop trying to find something wrong so he could pull us over. Pop goes the lights. I pull over and stick both hands and my head out the tiny window and say to the officer, "There is no door on this side, what should I do?" He said "Stay seated and I will knock on your side door then you get up and come open it." "Ok," I replied. Knock Knock. "Who is it?" I say. "You can open the door now!" I know the cop expected to get hit with a weed smell or meth but what he got was snoot full of ribs. "Whoa! Are you boys cooking ribs?" I said, "Yes." He said "You can cook and drive?" "It's legal in New Mexico." I said. "I thought Colorado is a sanctuary rib state."

A chuckle is all I got. "Would you like to know why I pulled you over?" My instinct was to reply 'because you are bored' but I did not. I said "Yes, I am curious." He said, "It is because I could not read your plate." I replied. That was actually true. Cop says, "No, where you are from is obscured by the plate holder." "May I take a look?" He said "Yes." and Beautiful British Columbia was indeed

obscured by an Arbutus RV plate holder. That is when the other cop rolled up. A K-9 unit no less, with a whining and antsy cop dog. Cop one says to cop two. "I got this. They are cooking ribs in

there." He says to me "You can be on your way." and he follows me back and into the RV and says "You boys got any weed?" "No." we both reply. If he had looked in anything he would have found something. But instead he said "You are right on the border with Utah and they hate weed."

We both nod yes sir. "Where are you going?" he asked. We said "Snowbird. We are on the ski tour of the century. "Where have you been?" he queried. Ira read off the impressive list. "You boys are really doing it! Have a great rest of your trip!" We waited until we got to Snowbird to blaze the morning fatty. The reason we chose Snowbird is because it was included on our Mountain Collective pass. Snowbird is a very well developed mega steep resort and it is highly prone to avalanche. The condos here are bomb proof built to withstand a

direct strike from a class 5 avalanche. The parking lot for RVers is directly in the Avalanche run out and would be hit first. This is where we smoked the morning fatty. We opened the door and there were a couple other smokers in the parking lot and I could hear them say 'Do you smell ribs?' Avalanche is a real possibility as a sign said 'park at own risk, severe avalanche risk'. Luckily it had already come down and we parked on the freshly run out snow. This is a great sign for a snowboarder! We hiked into town about 10 minutes, got in a small line for passes and headed up the mountain on the tram in record time! Very professional and well laid out. We made our way to the super steeps. The Peruvian Gulch over 60 inches of fresh snow had blown in here and Ira was in huckers heaven blasting off every cliff and wind lip in sight. The sky was clear blue and minus 10. Perfect! I was pulling up the rear. Gotta get

some wax if I want to keep up to Ira. Then all of a sudden we find the Peruvian Tunnel. An old mine that connects to the back side of the mountain called Mineral Alley. There is a magic carpet that moves through the tunnel that is like a museum, so cool. Dumps you off and bam you are back into steeps and deeps. We ripped down to the lift and up we went. Now this dropped us off at the very top of the backside where there was a big prison-type fence with another sign saying: Attention snowboarders not permitted at Alta Ski Area no way back up.

No lift access. No bus for snowboarders. No taxi for snowboarders. I for the first time felt sport discrimination. This type of thing made me want to go back to the RV and get the tools to remove the sign and bring it home to show people the deep divide between skiers and snowboarders

that is ripping America in two!

Once again I did not do what I knew to be the right thing. We simply rode away from the offensive and divisive sign and carried on with the sickest day yet on our trip! On our side of the fence. A serious fuck you Alta no money for you. Snowbird is not a beginner's mountain, or even intermediate. This is world class super dope ski area without compare. After a long day and short hikes we ate those ribs. We did two days here getting to know the lay of the land, every run better than the last. Snowbird Utah is indeed mighty when it comes to being ridden hard and

put away wet like our stinky snowboard boots. Incredible amounts of terrain and grooming only a small amount of area for the run connectors and easy stuff, the majority left as deep fluffy pow.

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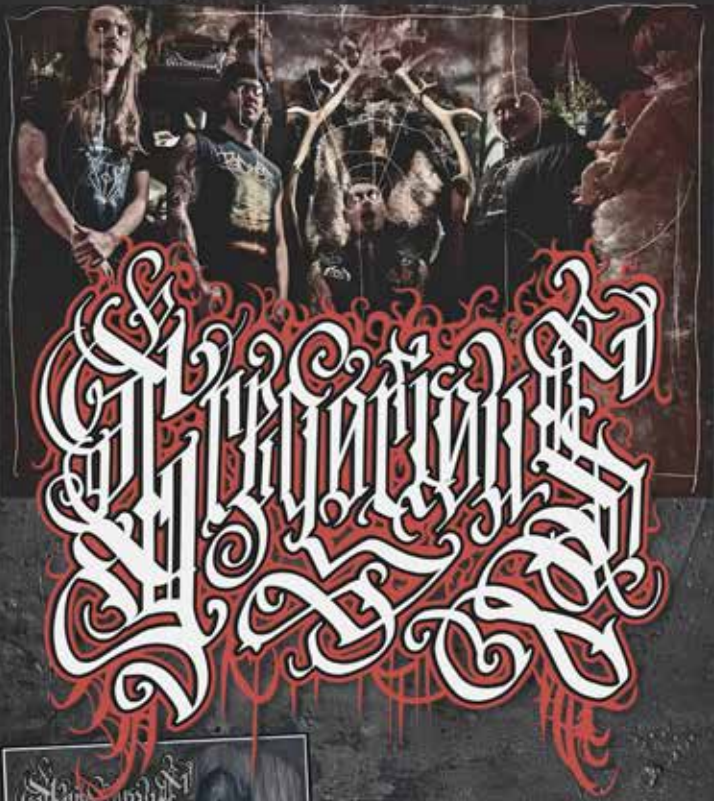
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SHOWCASE SHOWDOWN

Canada's Longest Running Snowboard Competition

By Brydo Parker

The Showcase Showdown is a multi-style snowboarding competition traditionally held on Blackcomb Mountain starting in 1996 but really gaining lots of professional athletes due to the huge prizing in 1998. The first one was my first taste of a truly off-the-hook event. The awards were held at the store in the

Whistler Village stroll and by invitation only and via the back door for the afterparty. Complete with kegs and Go-Go dancers. The biggest names in riding were there. A contingent of Americans, Austrians, Australians, Chileans, Canadians, Japanese and many other nationalities were represented.



Sponsored from then till this day by the big dog on the block Burton Snowboards. Nothing has changed in 2026 except the afterparty has changed to a nightclub. One of the best things about this contest is that the young kids get to be at the starting gate with and mentored by their heroes. Nothing sends a kid out of the pipe higher than after being told "Ya, you can do it!" by someone they want to be like. Watching the progression not in days or months but in between hiking up the pipe to hit it again. The three styles represented in this contest are racing a tight slalom course that is similar to a boardercross and the slopestyle course then drop into the half pipe. Two runs on each course. Just because there are kids in the contest do not think this is easy. It is not. It is fast, dangerous and some of the biggest pipe air all year. My biggest surprise as I have not attended this event since 1998 is the amount of women and girls who outcompete the boys and men. Times have changed and for the better. I like seeing chicks get big pumping air and the cheers from the crowd. Stokes me up!





BEV DAVIES

Vancouver, BC

By John Carlow

In the world of music photography Bev Davies is legendary. Much has been written about this lady. I wanted to hear more about the music she got to see even before shooting bands, the Vancouver punk scene late 70s to mid-eighties and what it was like to be a photographer massing a legacy of music history. I skimmed over the vastness of her career and asked her a few questions.

Absolute Underground: You took art school in TO and Vancouver, but photography wasn't something you specifically studied?

Bev Davies: I took the first year general at Ontario College of Art and moved to Vancouver in 1968. The Doors and Jimi Hendrix were on North American tours that year. I saw them in Toronto and then Vancouver.

I had thought my art interests were costume design and textile printing, but Vancouver School of Art did not have those areas of study. After year one at Vancouver School of Art I specialized in printmaking, etching.

I took a summer course in photography in 1977 at the Art School and learned darkroom on a budget. What to buy to set up a darkroom in a bathroom. I was all set to go save for images; what to take photos of?

It was Mar 24, 1979 that I went to my 1st D.O.A. show. My god that was it for me. I did not take a camera that night, but I saw my future.

AU: How did you afford film and developing materials?

The cost of film was a consideration, but I bought Ilford film in bulk, loaded it into little film rolls and the developing chemicals were not expensive. Black and white was my skill level. My camera was bought by my dad for me.

AU: When did you start making money with photography?

I am still looking forward to that.

AU: Challenges with live music photography?

So much of my work was done with film, flash and only an idea of what was actually on the film, until I developed it. Yes, that was exciting. Seeing the negs, then printing the photos.

Scrolling back over my images after I finish shooting digital is just not the same.

AU: Was it a very male dominated field when you were busiest shooting?

That is how it was. Dee Lippingwell had gone before me so in Vancouver it wasn't unusual (to see a woman shooting shows.). All the daily press photographers were men. Press were rarely at punk shows.

It would be hard to figure out if I was being discriminated against for being a woman or

was it just the general dislike of photographers by an industry that invented '1st 3 songs no flash'.

AU: Who has been your longest lasting friend that you met by shooting them?

That's easy, Joe Shithead from D.O.A. has been a supporter of my work over the years. But it is with sadness that I also say I have lost many. Randy Rampage, Brad Kent, Zippy Pinhead, Miss Mustard (only name I ever knew), and just last week, Lynn Bollenbach. So many images of those lost friends.

AU: Photographers you've liked or inspire you?

I just reached under my coffee table to get my Pennie Smith book *The Clash: Before and After*. Her black and white images are amazing and have inspired me over the years. I sometimes think I may have been the last person to get a colour TV. I thought in black and white. Yet now I shoot in colour.

AU: Is there a favourite story from all the shoots that you've done?

I arranged to do some group shots of D.O.A. They were at the Smilin Buddha to set up and sound check for their show that night. They came out the back door so I could take photos in the daylight. They were talking, smoking and Chuck put down the brown paper bag that he always seemed to carry around. I was taking photos the entire time they were talking,

joking, being D.O.A. Then they said "ok let's do this" and I said "thanks guys I got it".

AU: Ever caught yourself in a fan girl situation?

Oh yes, Billy Idol about 1984. I was having some photos taken with Billy backstage in Kamloops and he put his arm around me and I was shaking, thinking I wish he would stop, I might just fall down if he doesn't stop.

AU: Have you acquired a lot of cameras over the years?

My dad bought me my film cameras, and in 2000 I bought a small point and shoot digital for personal stuff. About 2003 I bought a Canon SLR digital and still shoot Canon 6D Mark 11. I do have an old camera that looks like a vintage train when you open it.

AU: There was a time when you stopped shooting live music. What brought you back?

There was a time that I stopped taking photos, I refer to it as the time I fell asleep on the couch. 10 years or so.

I met Nardwuar at Joe Shithead's garage sale. I had brought a suitcase of my photos to sell. A young man dressed very normal spent about

1/2 hour looking through all the photos and when he was finished, he gave me his card and said, "I would like to interview you". It was Nardwuar. He came to my home, and we would talk and look through photos. He would make a stack of photos, and return with his questions prepared. We did this several times and the interviews

appeared in some publications. I was talking to him about who I had been, what I had done, and telling him my stories.

At about the same time, I met Anton Newcombe of The Brian Jonestown Massacre, and it was then, with Anton on stage, his music surrounding me that I knew I wanted to take photos again. I wanted to be that person again.

AU: Looking back, what would you have done differently?

I have many years of looking back at my photos and I think I would do it all the same again.

AU: What's the one that got away?

I saw many shows in the 60's and wished I had started taking photos earlier, but I didn't. I was very glad to have seen the Doors, The Beatles and Jimi Hendrix even if no photos were taken.

AU: What are some of the publications you shot for over the years?

Georgia Straight, Damage Magazine, Slash Magazine, The Skinny, portable-infinite.blogspot.com

AU: You've been interviewed a bit. What was the question you wish someone would have asked?

I wish someone had offered me a book deal. That is the question I have never heard.

AU: You've done a gallery show and released calendars of your work. Tell me about that.

When I started taking photos in 1979 I would go to a show at the Smilin Buddha on a Friday night, develop the negatives later, print some photos and go back for the Saturday night and give them away. Many people asked for copies of photos. I also was having my photos published in the *Georgia Straight*.

I decided to ask for a show of 1,000 photos at the Unit Pitt Gallery. It took about a year to print those 1,000 photos. I wanted everyone to see the photos they had been asking for. That was my first show.

The calendars ? I was sitting in a restaurant

and there was a rock calendar on the wall with photos by Dee Lippingwell, but there weren't any bands I was interested in looking at. That gave me an idea, so I published my first calendar of Vancouver punk bands in 1980. My mom and dad helped with the cost of the 1980 and 1981 Vancouver punk calendars. When I met Nardwuar, the interviews he did with me formed a 2007 calendar published by Mint Records. I have always thought that calendars are a good way of getting art on peoples walls.

AU: What are the plans for your extensive body of work?

I have one son Keif so we will need to decide, or he will. A book would be nice. A book of just photos with a little note below the photos; who, where, when. That would be my choice.

AU: What are you doing now?

I have been taking photos for an online website

SHOOT TO KILL

out of LA, The Portable Infinite. I have been living out of Vancouver in Delta for the last 10 years. That and my age have made me cut down on the number of shows that I go to.

I used to fly to Austin Texas for the Psychedelic Festival, and to France and Manchester UK to see

The Brian Jonestown Massacre.

I started scanning my negatives in 2005 and still am not finished.

AU: What was the best time to be a photographer?

I think the most exciting time for me was the Buddha nights, but it would have been nice to be at shows in the 60's

at the Cavern club in Liverpool with a camera.

AU: What are your thoughts about fame? Those rock stars and fame?

When I left home, I went to Toronto to go to art school. I lived in Yorkville in the mid-sixties. At some point 3 of us girls ran a coffee house and Neil Young used to come and play late at night. Sometimes he would sit up on the stage and write a song. We would be lucky if there were 6 people

in the club.

The next time I saw him was in Vancouver at the Coliseum and there were 16,000 people there. Fame is something.

AU: Would it be safe then to summarize that you were happiest shooting those familiar to you in the underground scene as opposed to the

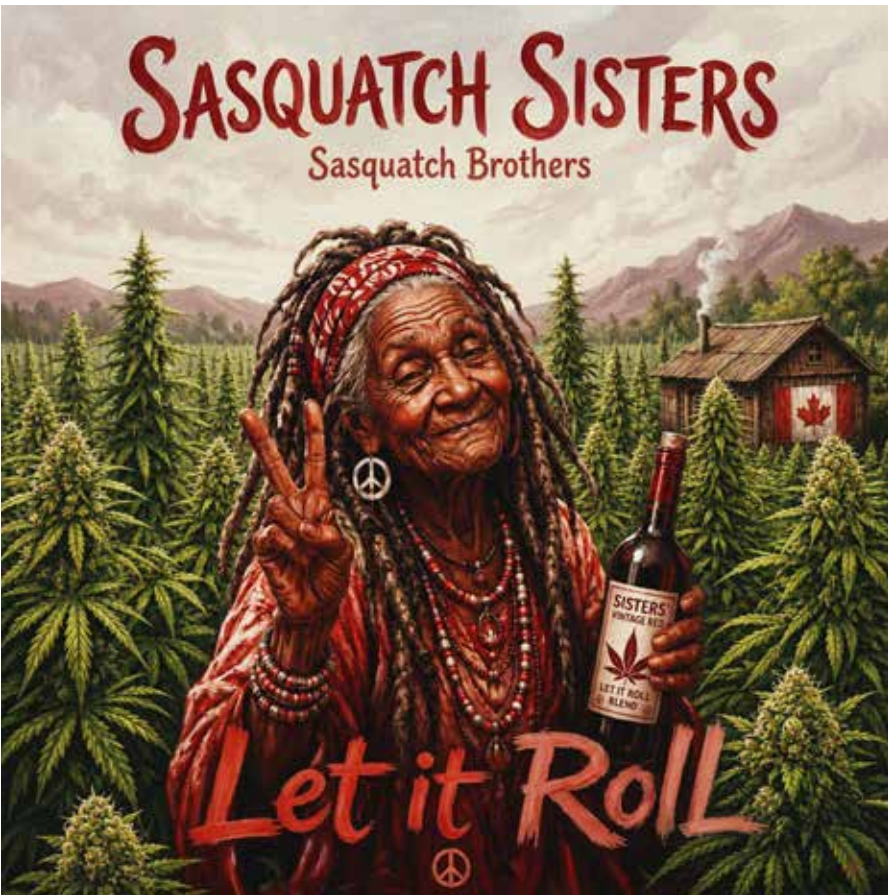
very famous on the other side of the tracks (Madonna, U2, the Pope)?

Yes; safe to say that. It was nice to be able to photograph the very famous but it became obvious to me that I felt more true joy in taking photos of those I knew and they knew me.

AU: What would be useful advice for people entering this kind of work?

Be kind to others, be honest in what you do and don't give up your day job. Ha-ha.

All images © Bev Davies

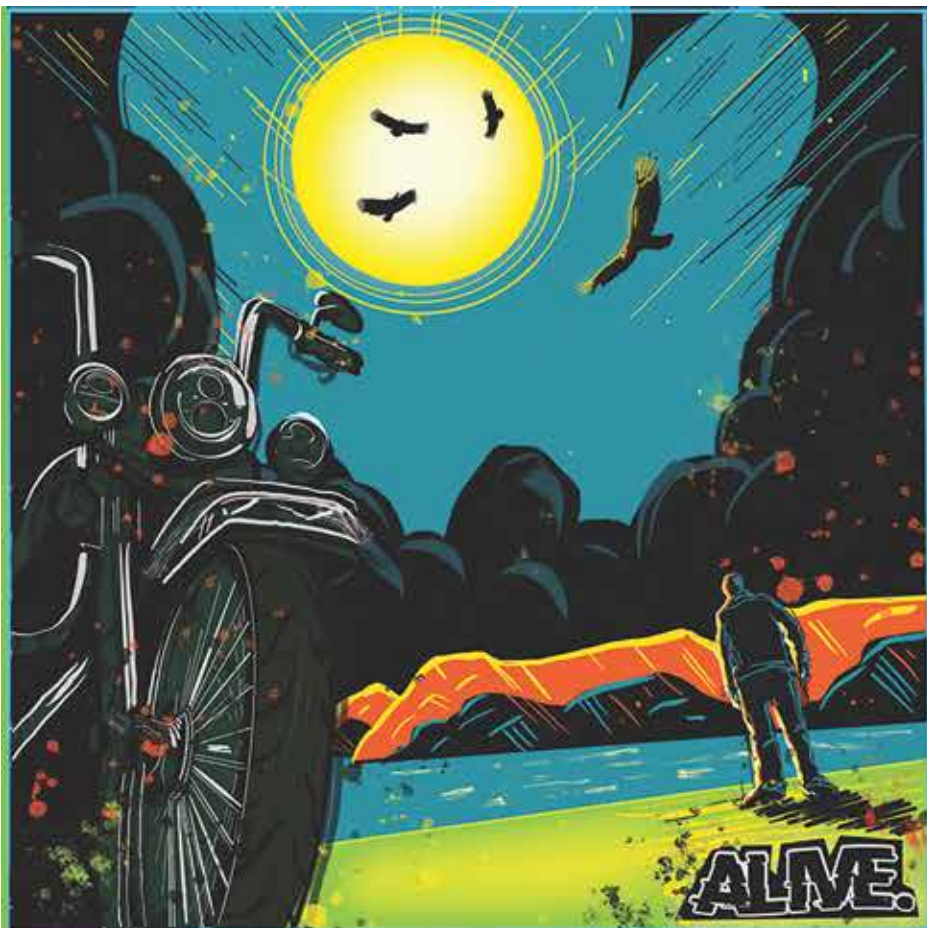


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“Brain Fog’s debut LP, *Alive*, is an absolute treat, with incredible vocal performances, exceptional musicianship, and an unbelievable cohesion that, elsewhere in hardcore, can often come from a lack of ideas, or a lack of risks. Confidently, Brain Fog lacks in neither, seamlessly blending elements of West Coast skate punk, NYHC, post-hardcore, and even the occasional pop-punk chord change to create a sonic base that is dripping with identity while still sewing its influences on its sleeve.

Despite Genghis Khan levels of shared DNA, Brain Fog always sounds like Brain Fog, with their respectful use of influence creating an inroad for people new to heavy Punk, without softening a damn thing. This is an easy cover-to-cover listen, with no skips. *Alive* genuinely feels like a framework that could kick off a new wave.”

-Braze Magazine, Aug 2026

ALIVE. the new 17 song LP drops Sept 3 on Coffin Curse Records. Catch them live:
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KARASU KILLER

Booking and Promoter from Japan

Interview by S.B.

AU: Hail from Canada! Please tell us who we’re speaking with and what you’re all about.

Rafael Yaekashi: Greetings from Japan. This is Rafael Yaekashi from Karasu Killer Records, Booking & Touring. Through K.K, I organize tours, handle logistics, promotion, transportation, and sometimes accommodation and merchandise support. I also continue to run my record label and produce physical releases and merchandise for underground bands from different parts of the world.

Today, my work is mainly focused on helping international bands come to Japan and experience the local underground scene in a real and honest way.

AU: How long have you been booking/promoting, and what can you tell us about the Japanese scene?

RY: I have been active in the Japanese underground scene for over 23 years. I started my label in 2003, played in bands, recorded many releases, and performed all over Japan. In 2014, I began producing official merchandise for bands, including embroidered patches, which later became an important part of Karasu Killer. Up to now, I have officially worked with and released material from more than 140 bands from Japan and around the world.

In January 2017, I organized a short tour for the American band 908, whose members were connected to Aberrant. Because of those friendships, I decided to help organize their tour and continued to support U.S bands coming to Japan.

Many people encouraged me to organize tours because they knew I had experience and strong connections. Since then, the number of tours has grown quickly: around nine bands in 2024, eighteen bands in 2025, and in 2026 the total will reach approximately thirty-two international bands touring Japan with my support.

Up to now, I have officially worked with and released material from more than 140 bands from Japan and around the world.

AU: It sounds like running a promotional/booking/label business in Japan has worked out pretty well for you?

RY: Because of this environment, we in Japan always had many opportunities to share the stage with foreign bands, build friendships, and create strong international connections.

For me, this is not business — it is about passion, trust, and building long-term connections between bands, promoters, and audiences. The Japanese underground scene is small but very dedicated, and I see my role as someone who helps keep this network alive, connected, and active.

AU: You’ve worked with several Canadian bands (Black Pestilence, Hedonist, Scalding, Vaegon) within the last year, which I assume has come from other Canadian bands also working with you. When did you start working with Canadian bands and have you seen increased interest from Canada to come tour Japan?

RY: I was already familiar with many Canadian bands that had toured Japan in the past but my first direct contact with the Canadian scene came through Anju from Grave Infestation. I had followed her work the previous year with The Nausea, and later she contacted me about booking several shows for Grave Infestation, as they were confirmed to perform at Asakusa Death Fest.

Later, I also organized the tour for Scalding, since the members are friends with Grave Infestation and recommended my work. In fact, Jisei is also planning to come to Japan because of a recommendation from the Scalding members.

I organized the full Hedonist tour after meeting Athena through Bootlicker and Chris from Black Pestilence while he was visiting Osaka. Since they are from a different region of Canada, it was interesting to build that connection and work on their Japan tour.

I believe Vaegon contacted me after seeing the Black Pestilence tour and the work we did together. Grand Mal also became interested in touring Japan after seeing the results of that tour and the way everything was organized.— this is how the underground network continues to grow.

Overall, I feel that interest from Canadian bands in touring Japan has been increasing, mainly through word of mouth and recommendations within the underground network. I believe that by continuing to do serious and consistent work, new bands will naturally keep coming.

AU: What are some differences and commonalities between Canadian and Japanese bands/fans?

RY: I have always admired the dedication of Canadian bands because it is very similar to the dedication you see in Japanese bands. When you watch these bands on stage, the level of intensity and commitment is very high. Japanese fans are also extremely dedicated and supportive. They really look for information about the bands, do their research, listen to the material, and make an effort to truly understand the music before attending shows. This level of commitment is something impressive and very special within the underground scene.

There are many bands here that mainly play locally and whose material is not widely promoted or distributed. However, many touring bands that come to Japan are surprised by the number of high-quality bands here. Many Japanese musicians are not concerned about promoting their music on streaming platforms. Some of them don’t even use social media.

AU: If anyone is considering a tour in Japan, what are the top things to keep in mind?

RY: The most important thing to understand is that Japan is not a market where underground bands usually come to make money. The scene here is relatively small, and most shows are organized with a strong DIY spirit. Promoters often take personal financial risks to make tours happen, covering venue costs and promotion.

Bands should come with the mindset of cultural exchange, building long-term relationships, and respecting the local scene. Flexibility is also very important — long drives between cities, small venues, accommodations, and tight schedules are all part of the reality of touring Japan.

Clear communication, realistic expectations, and trust are essential. When bands understand how the scene works and come with the right attitude, the experience can be extremely rewarding and memorable.

AU: Anything else you would like to add?

RY: I believe the underground scene survives because of passion and mutual support. Every tour, every show, and every connection helps keep this network alive. Japan may be far for many bands, but those who come here with respect and dedication often build strong friendships and unforgettable experiences.

For me, organizing tours is not just about logistics — it is about creating moments that stay with people for life. I hope to continue helping bands from different parts of the world connect with the Japanese scene and keep this spirit moving forward.

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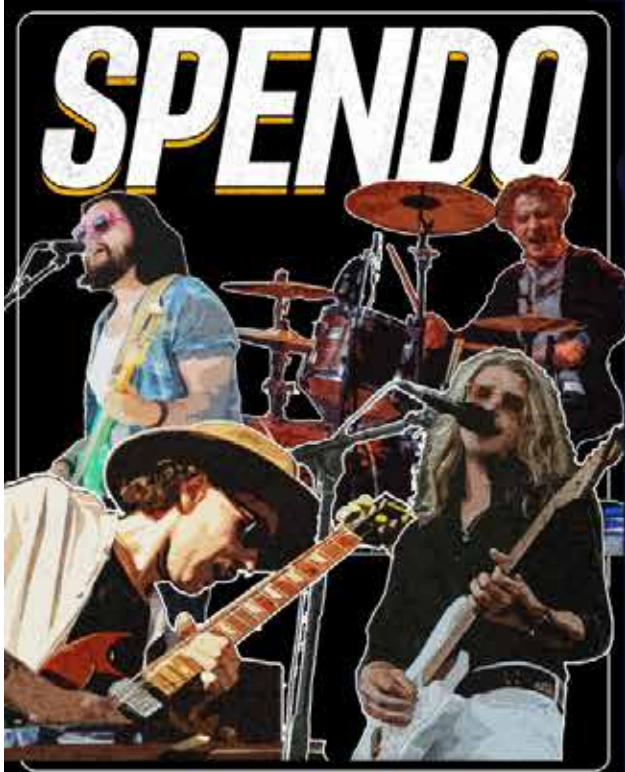
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RIDE THE RAINBOW

The Ultimate Tribute To Ritchie Blackmore's Rainbow

Various Artists

June 19, 2026 – Cleopatra Records

Ritchie Blackmore's Rainbow has remained a defining force in hard rock, with a catalogue that spans multiple eras and lineups. Released June 19, 2026, *Ride The Rainbow* brings together an extensive roster of musicians to celebrate the band's history, featuring performances from former Rainbow members, artists connected to Blackmore's musical legacy, and longtime fans of the group.

Released through Cleopatra Records, *Ride The Rainbow* features six Rainbow alumni: Bob Daisley, Graham Bonnet, Don Airey, Joe Lynn Turner, Doogie White, and Ronnie Romero, alongside Blackmore's Night vocalist Candice Night and former Deep Purple guitarist Steve Morse. The album also includes contributions from a wide range of musicians including Sebastian Bach, Doug Aldrich, Marty Friedman, Vinny Appice, Derek Sherinian, Rick Wakeman, Vinnie Moore, George Lynch, Vivian Campbell, and many others.

The album's first single, "Long Live Rock 'n' Roll," brings together a lineup that connects directly to Rainbow's history. Graham Bonnet, Don Airey,

and Bob Daisley reunite for the track, revisiting a song originally recorded by Rainbow on the 1978 album *Long Live Rock 'n' Roll* with Ronnie James Dio on vocals. Bonnet and Airey would later join Rainbow for the band's next studio album, *Down To Earth*, where the song remained a staple of their live performances.

The recording also features drummer Carmine Appice, whose connection to Rainbow's early influences runs deep through his work with

Vanilla Fudge, a band that helped inspire the development of Deep Purple's sound. Guitarist Ron "Bumblefoot" Thal adds another perspective, recalling his introduction to Rainbow through Rising and the influence the band had on him as a musician.

Across 14 tracks, *Ride The Rainbow* covers the full timeline of Rainbow's career, from early classics such as "Catch The Rainbow," "Temple Of The King," and

"Stargazer" to later-era songs including "Since You Been Gone," "I Surrender," and "Street Of Dreams."

With contributions from musicians spanning generations and eras of rock and metal, *Ride The Rainbow* offers a tribute to one of hard rock's most influential bands while highlighting the lasting impact of Blackmore's songwriting and the many musicians who helped shape Rainbow's sound



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THE HERBAL WITCH'S YEAR OF THRASH

By Lily Fawn

In Grade 8 I shared the left headphone with Colin Minty during science class, listening to Slayer while doing our labs, heads bobbing, potions bubbling. For those of you who spent weekends screaming along to Slayer or Megadeth in your bedroom with the walls covered in thrash posters... I want to share a few herbal tricks for keeping your voice alive.

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When your voice is absolutely thrashed, I love marshmallow root, licorice root, mullein, peppermint and rosemary. Marshmallow and licorice help coat the throat, while mullein, peppermint and rosemary are wonderfully soothing. Add a big spoonful of honey if you've got it.

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Swallow a full tablespoon of olive oil before the show. It coats the throat and can give your vocal cords a little extra protection for about an hour.

If your throat is already feeling raw, my favourite old remedy is a mug of hot water with the juice of half a lemon, a generous spoonful of honey, a tablespoon of butter and just a pinch of cayenne pepper. The butter and honey coat the throat, the cayenne gets the circulation going, and the lemon helps cut through the pain. Sip it slowly while it's hot.

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from tightening up overnight. I also wouldn't underestimate a good stretch and a lot of water before you start thrashing your neck around.

Now go scream your lungs out. Just try to leave yourself enough voice to do it again the next night.

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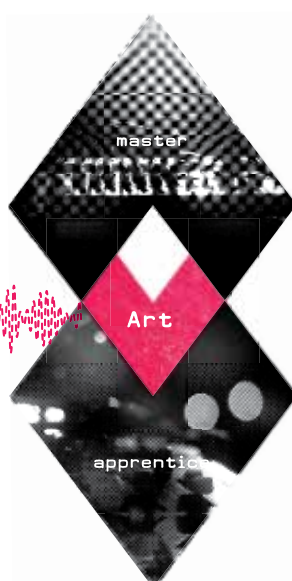
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MR AWESOME

Interview with Roy Robins

By Tim Teece

AU: Super tickled to have Mr Awesome, aka Roy Robins, join *Absolute Underground* today. Roy, can you describe your sound and style in a few words? Who is Mr Awesome?

Roy Robins: I'd like to think that I'm a song and dance man but having trouble with the dancing part. As for who Mr Awesome is, it's just me with the volume turned up a bit too much. All the songs are about beautiful things like ghosts, clowns and eating ghosts and eating clowns. You know, the real topics no one's singing about.

AU: The descriptors "folk", "Canadiana", "folk-punk" spring to mind at times to describe your solo work, including your last album *I Eat Ghosts*. Is there anything you'd

consider similar to you out there in the music landscape? Is another artist out there who you could say inspires your style or that you admire?

RR: I have a huge fondness for BA Johnston! He's a one man party machine and all his work is absolutely amazing! I really don't have to tell anyone that. If I can be as half as rad as that guy, I'd be cool with it. As for similarities, I don't know. There's a million musicians out there doing exactly what I do and probably doing it better! I'm just a dude playing a dude who plays music for other dudes, naw'mean?!

AU: You have a history of playing with fast, driving, punk bass. How does that side of you come out in your solo albums and shows?

RR: Well, I'm a bass player for starters, and never learned to play lead. Once I learned my three or four chords, I figured that's enough to write a song and tell ya a story! To quote Pedro de Pacas: *"Besides, it's just punk rock, man. You know, you don't have to know how to play. All you just got to do is be a punk, man!"*

AU: I'll admit to having shed a tear relating to two songs on *I Eat Ghosts*. Why'd you make me cry?

RR: Cause you deserved it I'm guessing. I don't why you cried but I probably cried writing them, so we got that going for us!

AU: Having seen you perform a number of times, I can assure anyone who is considering attending a show that they will laugh, feel unexpected joy and perhaps be a little shocked. They'll even remember it fondly. What words would you use to describe your live show?

RR: Fun. Just have fun cause I'm having fun when I play. Also, feel free to join in on the fun, Just don't throw anything at me unless it's good or fizzy water

AU: Your ability to connect with audience members of all ages and walks of life is readily apparent on stage. What is your approach or philosophy towards your fellow human being?

RR: Same thing, just have fun. We all came to the show to escape the woes of life and to enjoy what

little time we got here, so let's enjoy ourselves.

I never approach life with a plan. If I knew how the world worked I would've told everyone about it by now! Same goes for music. Just go out and do it. We'll figure it out later.

AU: You've lived in a variety of places in western Canada, is there a different type of energy you can absorb from certain places? Do different environments create different artistic experiences?

RR: They're all roughly the same, Just with their own flair to it all. I'm very appreciative of the places I've been and the places I've seen. I really am lucky to enjoy all this.

AU: One incredible aspect of your art is your merch offerings, shirts and products that are hilarious, deep and dark all at the same time. From what deep well do these creations draw from?

RR: I give all credit to my wonderful friends who I've got to paint, draw and create all these rad pieces of art! Much Love to Adrian Parsons, Bluto Futaba, YYYY's, Huw Evans, Paddy Duddy, BT Gates, and Max Prophet. There's a few more that I'm missing and I'm sorry. But you're loved nevertheless!

AU: Is there a moment in your life when you said "Fuck it, I'm ripping my shirt off and singing my heart out"?

RR: Yeah, almost every show. I must tell you, I lose the shirt cause I sweat too much and wanna cool down! But also it's 'cause I'm sexy and everyone

deserves to see how sexy I am.

AU: You have a new album! What can you tell us about it? Who produced it and when can we hear it?

RR: New album came out on vinyl and streaming sites in July 19, 2026, and it's called *Songs for the Recently Deceased*.

Kevin Corbett has helped me produce, write, photograph and help with the layout of it all and

Paddy Duddy painted the cover. Much love to those cats!

AU: What are your touring plans for 2026?

RR: No idea! I do know I got shows around BC and a couple in Alberta and Saskatchewan. But I'd like to go back out east and hopefully a show or two in the territories this year. If not, there's always next year!

I also have a new band with my Homebuys, The Oo-E Boo-E's and we got five shows

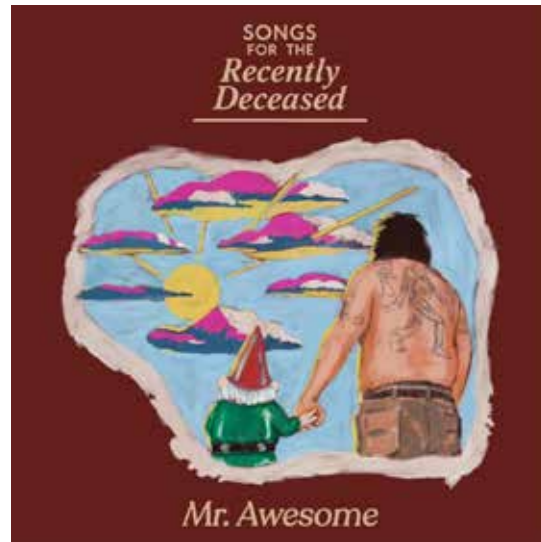
this summer/fall! So we'll see y'all there! (Yes I'm plugging my other band. Shut up. But since I'm here I may as well shoutout the fellas in HippyCritz, the other band I'm in! Much love to Max Prophet, Skidley Bones & Rylan Skum!)

AU: Other than live shows, where can folks find your tunes and merch?

RR: Just call me if you want it that bad. My phone number is 306-26.....

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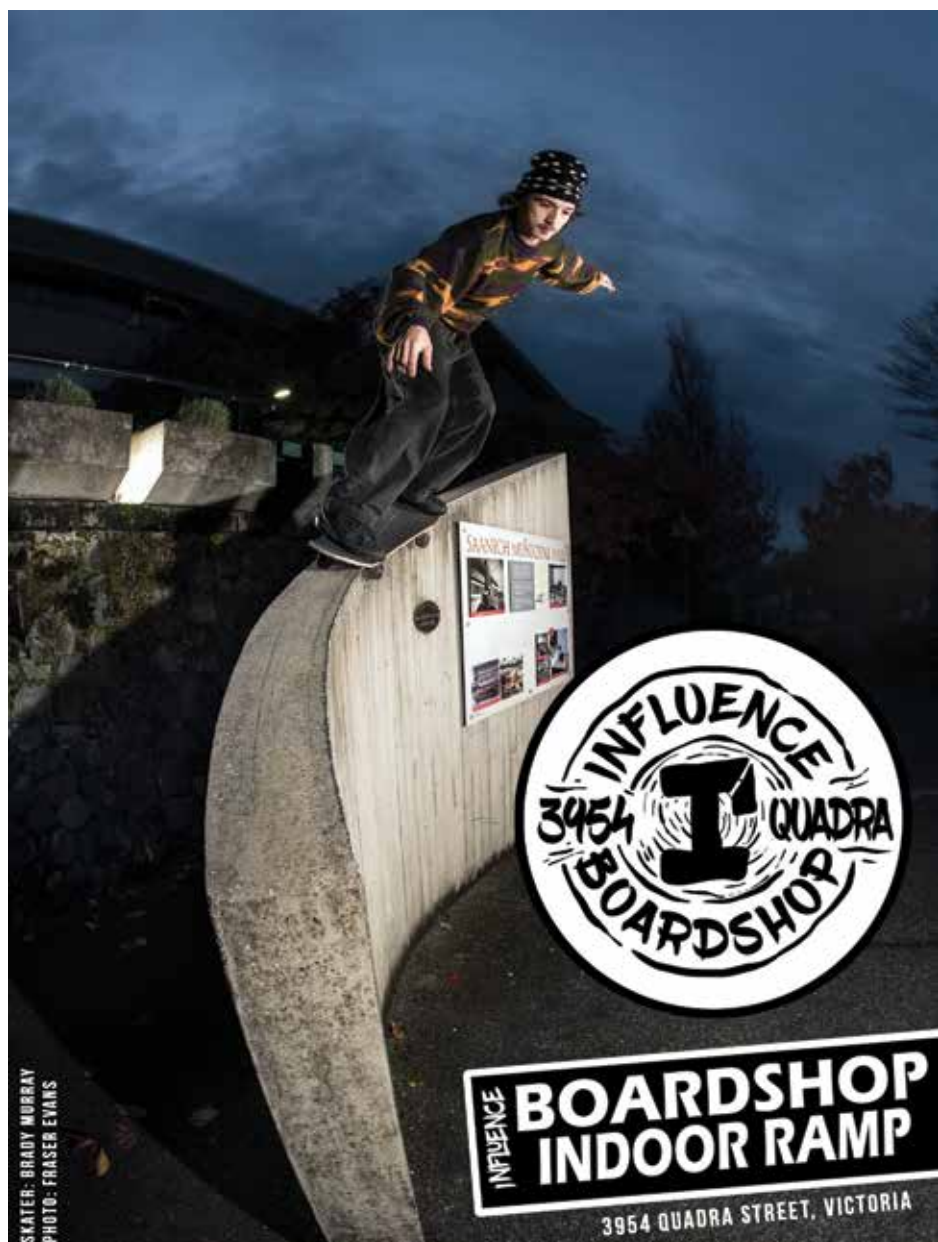
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Fabio Frizzi on working with Fulci and Demonic Choirs

Interview conducted by Alia Synesthesia

AU: This Halloween season, you are set to perform a selection of themes from Fulci films. Can you give us a sneak peek into the most unusual or atypical work on the setlist?

Fabio Frizzi: This time I'm adding some of my original works to my set. In 2013, I started Frizzi 2 Fulci as a personal tribute to Lucio. He was a great director; I did many movies with him, but more than that, he was my maestro. Composing for a film is a very unique experience because you work as a team: the goal is not *yours* but *ours*. Lucio taught me that; he taught me a lot of things. Like it often happens in life, we have lost Lucio. He was dearly loved, and I felt that our connection was so important, that I had to try and give him something from me, hence the title of the tribute, Frizzi 2 Fulci.

When we play music from Fulci's movies, I do something I call "a composer's cut": I rework some of the score, while keeping the original

structure. That's what I did with *Zombie* and *The Beyond*. For us, musicians playing live, this is a particular experience: we play to a click track so that we follow the film. But playing live as a band is a different experience altogether; it's still about telling stories and playing themes from the films, but it's also about making music together. For me, it was important to come back to the live

experience.

Keeping this in mind, there are a couple of pieces that stand out for me. There is a piece from *Zombie*'s composer's cut, the scene with the eye [Paula's eye]. Originally, Lucio hadn't put music in that scene, so my idea was to try to compose something unusual for it. I wrote something funky that eventually goes heavy and hits hard, and when we play it live, people go crazy. This time I might open with that piece.



Another one that really stands out is a piece from a film I did a couple years ago with Scooter McCrae. The movie is called *Black-Eyed Susan*. It's the story of a woman that is an object in a way, very interesting, very modern. The film itself explores the idea of new machines. I am still working on some of the finishing touches for this piece before the tour. It's the first time we will be playing it live, and I think it will be great.

AU: You composed a soundtrack for *The Beyond*, and have this really amazing choral section in the main theme; it's both ominous and dramatic. Can you tell us

about how you collaborated with the choir?

Frizzi: That was the first time I could do that in all my career. Sometimes you work with an orchestra, other times you rely mainly on keyboards. That time I had it all: great rhythm section, fantastic musicians, keyboards, strings, a flute, and, of course, the choir. When you start working on the film, you meet in front of a screen with the director. In Italy, the director is the boss. In America it's more the production. It was like this with Lucio; I wrote the melody and he told me to write *coro demoniaco*, "the demonic choir."

So I went to a studio with my choir director, who was a friend of mine, Giacomo was his name. The base tracks were already complete, we just had to record the choir. We had eight people: four men and four women. Giacomo arrived in the early morning and said, "Fabio, I have an idea." He was an organ player in a church for all his life, so he knew very well the typical things you play in church. He told me about *Dies Irae*, a Latin piece by Thomas of Celano. Instead of having the choir sing vowels, Giacomo suggested a couple of verses from *Dies Irae*, and I said, "Why not?" So he wrote the words on the music lines. The choir arrived and we started, and it sounded magical. I was excited, but I could not imagine that so many people would love this section.

AU: What are some of your favourite pieces to play live that you particularly enjoy sharing with the audience?

Frizzi: It's strange because it's not one of the most famous ones like *City of the Living Dead* or *Zombie*. There is this one piece that makes me excited every time, and it's *Manhattan Baby*. It's set in Egypt and New York, and I love both. I wrote this



beautiful Egyptian theme in the beginning, which evolves into this slow rock tune. For me, that's the moment I take a look at my band and say, "Bellissimo." It's not the most beloved of Lucio's movies, but I love this one.

AU: Do you have a dream project that you've always wanted to work on (but didn't get a chance to work on yet)?

Frizzi: I've been touring with Frizzi 2 Fulci for the past 13 years. Since the first show we played, I wanted to make a movie about the project. The film would be about my musicians, the friendship with Lucio, and other people I've met along the way. So the idea is a full 90-minute movie. I have a lot of material, but I have no time because after one project is over, another one starts right away. But one day, I hope that I will have the chance to put everything together and

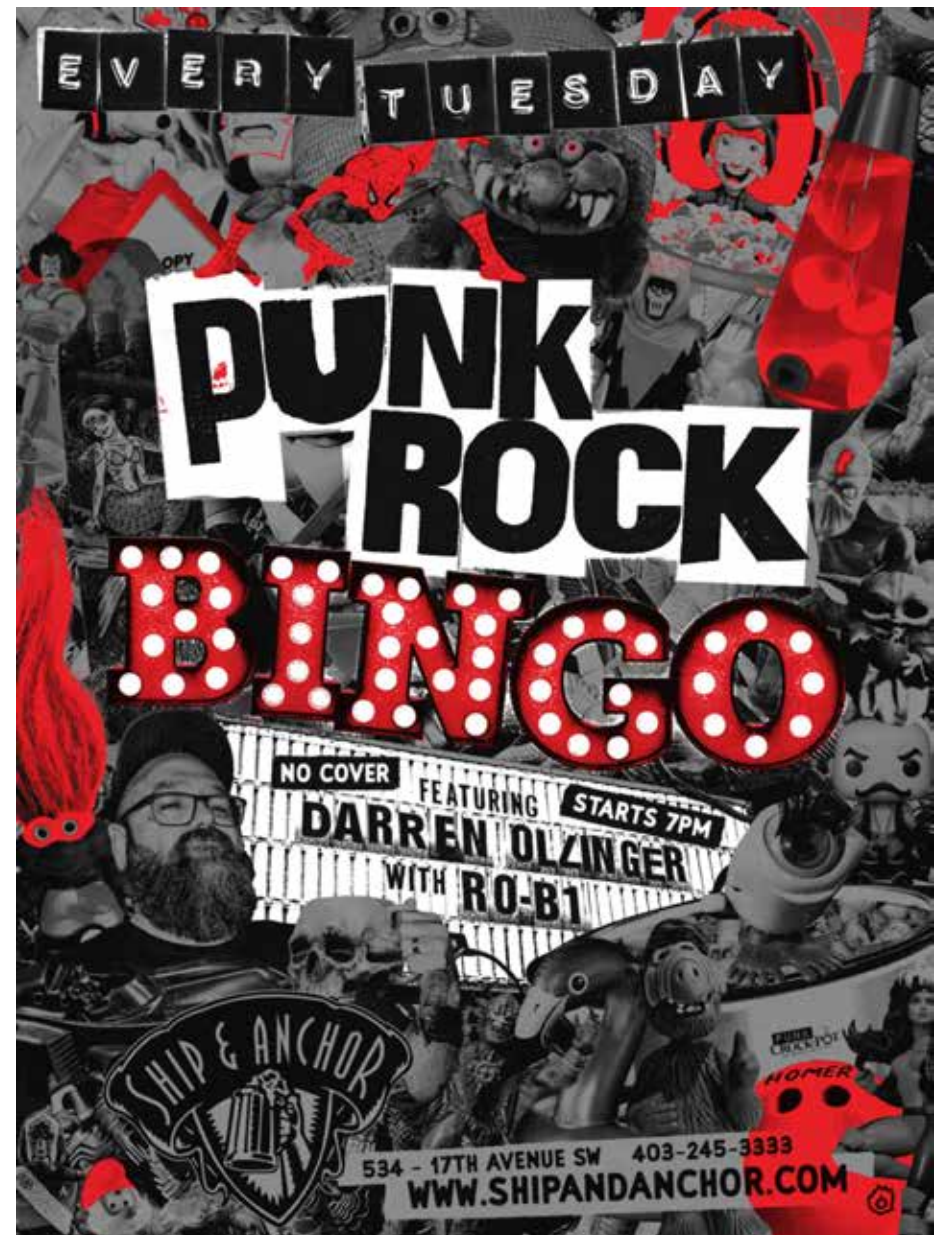
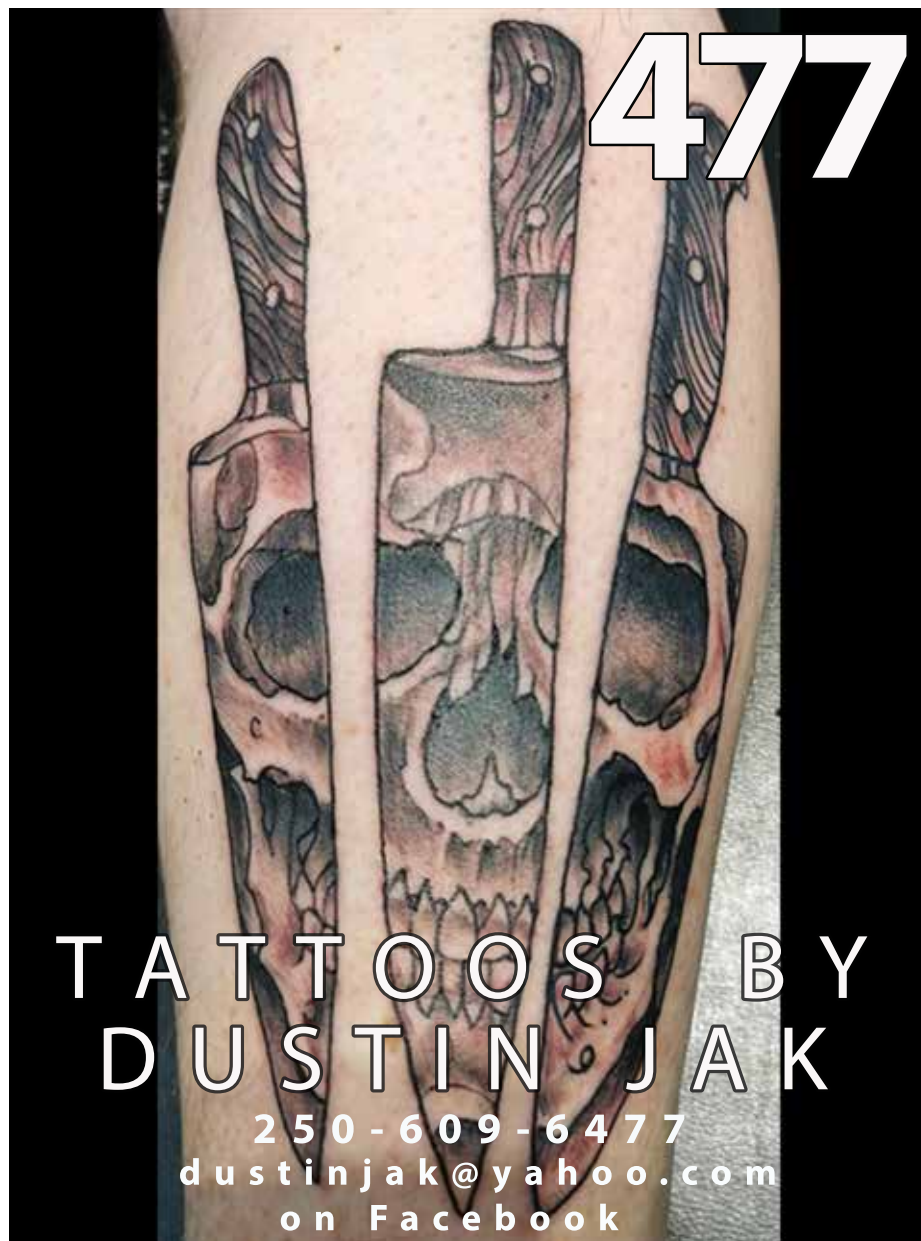
have something like *Frizzi 2 Fulci: The Movie*.

Catch Frizzi 2 Fulci live on Sept 26 in Montreal (Theatre Fairmount), Sept 30 in Toronto (TD Music Hall), and Oct 14 in Vancouver (Rickshaw Theatre).

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CATHEDRALS AND ASYLUMS: INTERVIEW WITH THOMAS YOUNGBLOOD OF KAMELOT

By Alia Synesthesia

Absolute Underground: *Dark Asylum*, your fourteenth studio album, is coming out in exactly one month and this time the album is set in a neo-Victorian era, inside Ravenhill Asylum. Can you talk more about the themes of *Dark Asylum* and what made you interested in exploring this concept and setting?

Thomas Youngblood: For me, the *Dark Asylum* is sort of a metaphor for our own minds. This place we get lost in. It's also a place we've built, good

or bad, we've built these walls around our own existence, and sometimes they're great, a lot of times they're not great. That was the idea for *Dark Asylum* and for *Ravenhill*, but I wanted to have it in a setting that I thought would also expand visually, which is a cathedral that has been abandoned for many years and gone into ruins. To have this insane asylum built into a cathedral, I thought, would be a really cool thing.

AU: Yeah, this "asylum inside the cathedral" element definitely caught my attention. So where do you draw your concepts from?

Youngblood: Everything. Even just on tour days I walk around and visit different places. I'll visit villages and walk through the town, and I'll see an abandoned farmhouse or something, and that'll spark a storyline in my head of what could be happening there or what is possible. I've always liked this Gothic, sort of romantic aesthetic, and I

think this neo-Victorian setting lends itself to this Gothic romanticism that I've always gravitated to. Inspiration comes from all sorts of different places, but in general, it's more about having an imagination that teeters on the dark side. [Laughs.]

AU: You're about to embark on the world tour. Some bands love touring, others - not as much. What's it like touring with Kamelot?

Youngblood: We're super excited. We're going to be playing four to five songs from *Dark Asylum*, so it will be a whole new set list. We'll be bringing back a couple of songs that we haven't played in a long time. We're also bringing two amazing support bands for North America. We're really

excited about all of it. Then we'll take about a month off, and do the second leg of the tour in Europe. So it's going to be busy. [Laughs.]

AU: You are also kicking off the European leg of the tour with your own festival KamFest. How did that come about?

Youngblood: We had planned to play two shows at the 013 venue in Holland, and it's always been a really good venue for us. To do two shows, we thought let's make it two separate shows with different support bands each day. Then the idea of calling it KamFest popped up, and so it's our first official festival for the band. Now we're thinking about expanding it to Brazil and Mexico and some other countries, which will be fun.

AU: Do you have a favourite venue or city you really enjoy playing?

Youngblood: Hard Rock Live in Orlando is one of my favourites. The stage is really big, and it's right there in CityWalk, so there's lots of things to do for people coming in. It's right there by Universal. I also like playing in Japan a lot. But in general, we're fortunate that we were able to visit a lot of cool places and all of them hold a special place in our hearts.

AU: In between playing live and creating music in the studio, what do you prefer, and why?

Youngblood: Definitely playing live. Creating songs at home and in the studio is fun, but having to sit down to perfect the parts is not as fun as

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the creative part of it. We write music to play it live - that's why we do this. We want to deliver our vision on stage and meet the people - that's always my favourite part.

AU: When it comes to a big dream project or a bucket list project, do you have one, and what is it?

Youngblood: I've been working on my own separate project called Veritas, which includes a lot of different guests and stuff, which is probably two or three years from now. Then for Kamelot, we are planning a gigantic orchestral show at a castle. The location is still being discussed, but that's going to be in a couple years. We have a few places in mind. Right now I'm thinking it's going to be in Romania, but we're still finalizing details.



Catch Kamelot live:

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Het Up!

Toronto's Punk Powermongers release split 7" EP with Almighty Trigger Happy on September 10th
By Ferdy Belland

"What's been going on so far?" asks southpaw guitarist Mark of Toronto's punk-rock powerhouse Het Up! "A lot of promoting the upcoming new 7"

single that we're splitting with Almighty Trigger Happy, that's what! Two songs from us, two songs from them!"

It's the latest in a long line of excitable releases from Het Up!, who formed during the dreary days of the recent pandemic from former members of Permanent Bastards and Crookedhook and the split EP will be released to the public on September 10th.

"We also have a tour coming up at the end of the

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summer," Mark informs us. "We're calling it the Summer Is Dead Tour! We'll be doing a run of six shows across Quebec and Ontario. No shows out West, I'm afraid... but we do know that we need to tour further across Canada. We know the folks in Mean Bikini and Outhouse Records, out in Victoria; we shared a show with them in Waterloo last summer and we hit it off, so they've extended the invite for us to hit the Pacific! We're more than willing to branch out of our immediate stomping grounds of Ontario and Quebec... as always, it's a matter of synchronizing everyone's schedules!" But the Boys of Summer in Het Up! - which features Mark, vocalist Dano, drummer Eric, guitarist Simon, and bassist Gideon (surnames are optional in the band, it seems) - don't seem to relax all that much when it comes to songwriting and recording.

"We're busy writing a lot of new material," Mark shares. "We're planning to get a full-length album completed... we've been releasing a lot of EPs, quick releases of two or three songs, but we've been a band for so long now - and we have SO MUCH material to choose from - so we're hoping we can get the full album done through Cursed Blessings Records by the end of the year. We'll self-fund the release if we have to. Every band needs a full album, right? We're at the point now where we've gathered up the catalogue of songs we'd like to include on the album... we write a new song, and so we'll bump an old song off the list...in our opinion, the songwriting just keeps getting better and better, so which songs do we cut? Which songs will we use? It's a good problem to have!"

Het Up! has done a handful of shows this year, but playing live hasn't been the band's main focus.

"The last show we played was at the Way Too Fest out in Welland... the home of Hollerado!" says Mark. "The festival was sponsored and promoted by Toll Free Records, and it was their first year: a one-day event with about 20 different bands participating, spread out across four different venues. Such a fun time! The promoters are

hoping to eventually grow the event into a full weekend festival. Welland is a small town, but it's close to Niagara Falls and the US border, so there's certainly potential to draw people to the town. We'd love to play there again! Aside from that, we played one of our best shows ever at the Opera House in Toronto, opening for the Buzzcocks! An amazing time - that was one of the Top Five shows Het Up's ever played. A packed house, the audience was nuts, and the Buzzcocks themselves were real gents. It was their 50th Anniversary Tour, so to say that was a Special Event is a huge understatement."

The as-yet-untitled full-length album remains the current priority for Het Up!, and the band morale is running high.

"It's always a big balancing act," says Mark. "Het Up's very busy, but we all have our own lives, right? Everyone in the band has a dayjob career and families and stuff. We all make time for the band, but some people have to feed their kids too! But even though we've only been around for a few years, there's a lot of deep history at work here. Me and Dan have known each other since Grade 7, and we've been playing music together since we were 15 years old! Our other guitarist Simon came to our high school as well. We've always played together in one band or another. "But Het Up! came out of nowhere! At the time, we had no intentions of doing anything other than a beer-league band where you get together once a week and play some tunes... so you can get out of the house and get away from the family! But after writing the first batch of songs, we thought: damn, we've got something pretty cool going on here. So things accelerated from there, and here we are. Sometimes we have to wait for certain stars to align before moving forward, but we're all committed."

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BLACK MARKET HEART

Post-Punk noise from Los Angeles

By Chad Cornies

Absolute Underground: Who are we talking to, and what are you most infamous for?

SR: This is Spencer Robinson from Black Market Heart. I was also in The Lords of Altamont for a number of years. If I'm infamous for anything, it's probably the years I spent as a professional gambler, avoiding getting kicked out of casinos all over the country... but that's a story for a different kind of interview.

AU: Give us a brief history of the band, who is in the band, and what are you all about?

SR: I started this band a few years ago as a recording project with just me and a drum machine. I kept getting offered shows and realized that this wasn't going to work as a one-person operation, so I started adding musicians. After a number of

band member changes, and that pesky pandemic slowing things down, we finally have the killer lineup I always wanted. I play guitar and sing, Tina Brugnoletti from Auto Motives and Hot Licks plays bass and sings, and Shawn Medina, who played with me in The Lords of Altamont, is on drums.

AU: What does it say on your bandmates' Tinder profiles and on yours?

SR: Having never used Tinder, and having no frame of reference, I'll just say that we play music, watch TV, and sometimes sleep. We all like animals more than we like people, and love to share videos of metal bands. Is that how Tinder works?

AU: Where is the band from, and what's the music scene like there?

SR: We're from Los Angeles, so the scene here is a little bit of everything. The beauty of being here is that there are a ton of places to play and a wide variety of bands to play with. Wanna play with a Viking metal band? You got it! How about a teen skacore band? Sure.

AU: Describe the band's sound, if possible.

SR: We're a post-punk band. Think of it as falling somewhere between the feedback-laced noise-pop of early Jesus and Mary Chain and the sharp angles of Joy Division.

AU: How would you describe your live show to

the visually impaired?

SR: It's usually a short, high-energy blast with not a lot of chit-chat (who really wants to hear me blabber on anyway). You'll get primal drums, a dirty, driving bass and a lot of feedback from my side of the stage.

AU: Have you released an album recently? Tell us about it! What can we expect to hear?

SR: Our newest album, What Happens in the Dark, was released April 14th. I feel like we've really pushed the sound on this one a bit outside of where we've written before. The music is still loud and fast, but we made a calculated decision to allow other influences in this time. You have a main course of the post-punk and noise-pop we've done before, with some side dishes of dance-punk, gothic rock, and even a little post-hardcore.

AU: Does the album explore any particular themes or topics?

SR: Historically, I've written about a lot of melancholy subject matter, and while some of that is still here, I've tried to go outside of that comfort zone a bit lyrically. There are songs about desperation and feeling like an outcast because that's kinda my thing, but there are also lyrics about music being a bit of an emotional saviour, a story about what it means to live completely unattached from everything, and even a little shout-out to the coyotes I see roaming my streets in the morning.

AU: Any standout tracks you are stoked on?

SR: The title track is the first single, and I think it's a great start for someone who hasn't heard us before. I also think "Coyote" and "Radio Smash" are cool ways to hear some of the ziggling and zagging we did musically on this record.

NO RULES

AU: Sex, drugs, or rock 'n' roll? Or all of the above?

SR: I feel like at some point in my life, all of the above, and now it's probably two of those mostly.

AU: What should we know about you that we don't already? What don't you want your mother to know?

SR: I wouldn't really want to discuss the details of the previous question with my mom! Anyway, as I hinted at earlier, I spent a few years as a professional card-counter... I'm good at math. Oh, and I haven't eaten dinner in 20 years.

AU: Any tour plans?

SR: Right now, we're planning some shows in and around LA that coincides with the album release, and we'll see what happens after that.

AU: Final words of wisdom for our

readers?

SR: I don't have a lot of wisdom in general, but I'd say that everyone is a little crazy, so find the people who are your kind of crazy, and spend your time with them... laughing at everyone else's crazy.

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Instagram: @blackmarketheartmusic — Come say hello and send us memes and weird bands to listen to.

Photo credit: Tina Brugnoletti



INCANDESCENT TRANCE RITUAL

Opening the Second Seal

Interview by Ray MacKay

Blending black metal intensity with electronic dancefloor energy, Incandescent Trance Ritual are pushing genre boundaries with their dark, hypnotic sound. Formed by Marius in Cologne and Luca in Basel after the two met as radio hosts, the project fuses ritualistic black metal atmosphere with industrial beats, rave synths and harsh vocals. Their new EP, *Opening the Second Seal*, continues to evolve their sound, exploring themes of mysticism, addiction, hope and the surreal chaos of modern life. Built from soundscapes rather than traditional song structures, the release is designed as a full listening experience — part ritual, part rave, part sonic descent into darkness. *Absolute Underground* caught up with ITR to talk about their origins, creative process and the new EP.

AU: Greetings from the *Underground*!! For

our unfamiliar readers, please give us a brief history of Incandescent Trance Ritual.

ITR: ITR started when we both ran a radio show together. The thought of trying to combine our musical backgrounds — coming from electronic music and black metal — was very intriguing to us. After a period of trials and conceptual back and forth, ITR was born.

AU: Who is in the band?

ITR: ITR, in its current state, is a two-piece consisting of L on vocals and M on synths, bass, and guitar.

AU: We know words can barely convey the mad mix of rave culture and black metal that is Incandescent Trance Ritual, but if possible, try to explain your sound to our readers.

ITR: ITR combines both the ritualistic, transcendental aspects of black metal and electronic music, without just trying to emulate one or the other. We mix various percussive elements with old-school rave synths and harsh screaming vocals.

AU: Your self-titled EP was released in early 2025 and you're new EP, *Opening The Second Seal*, came out April 24th. Tell us about them!

ITR: Our self-titled EP was very much an experiment, a first manifestation of where we wanted to go with this project. It might be a bit rough around the edges, but it gave us a lot of confidence that what we aimed for might actually work. *Opening The Second Seal* is a consequent evolution, a next step in pursuing our vision. We can happily say that we found our sound and shape with this release. Conceptually, the EP focuses on the state of our current surroundings, on one's struggle with hope, despair and addiction and the inability to cope with all the

surreality and carnage going on.

AU: Can you take us through the creative process behind *Opening The Second Seal*.

ITR: We typically start by creating a soundscape to figure out what a track might sound like. We don't write songs in a traditional way. Within our shared creative vision, things from the world around us provide inspiration. For example, we are fascinated by rough and broken surfaces in the tangible world which we try to translate into our sonic world. Lyrics and vocals are one of the final steps for us once we figure out what we want a track to sound like. We recorded the lyrics in a concert venue rather than a studio which helped us make them more dynamic.

AU: Did the creative process change or differ from the self-titled EP?

ITR: We definitely were able to build on our past experience as well as on our more refined common vision. Process-wise, we felt we were on the right track since the first EP already.

AU: Which of the tracks on *Opening The Second Seal* are you most excited for your fans to hear?

ITR: We share the feeling that "Chasing The Flame" is the most immediate and intimate track on the upcoming release. We strongly encourage you to listen to the record as a whole though.

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

ITR: Since we are very specific and unique in our aesthetics, we're usually doing everything ourselves. We did however work with the photographer/filmer Nicolas Gysin for quite a while now. He's taken the photo for the upcoming release as well. If we would ever consider working with another artist, Jesse Draxler, Pascal Blanché or Jonas Ryyänen would come to mind.



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

ITR: Performing live with ITR is more of a wholesome ritualistic set than individual songs. There's no preference as far as we're concerned.

AU: If someone had never heard of Incandescent Trance Ritual, what single song would you recommend to them as an introduction?

ITR: "Chasing The Flame" or "Driven by Lust" are good representations of what we stand for.

AU: Any final words for our readers?

ITR: Be weird, be creative and don't lose hope in these strange times.

AU: How do people find you online?

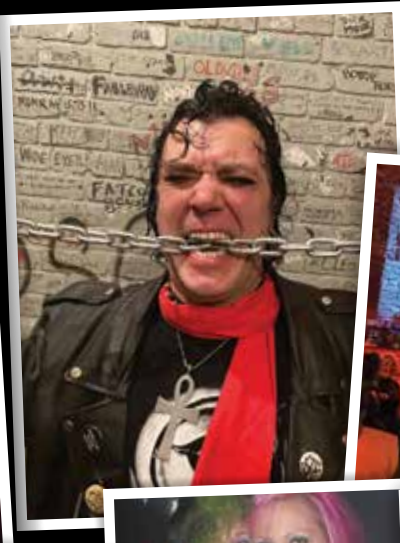
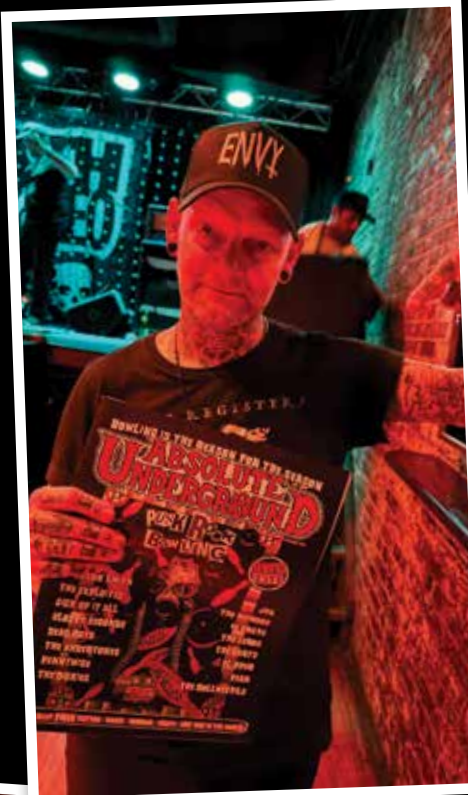
ITR: Our online presence is very limited. Find us on Instagram or the streaming platform of your choice.

[instagram.com/incandescent_trance_ritual](https://www.instagram.com/incandescent_trance_ritual)



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AWARD-WINNING SLEAZE FROM EDMONTON

The Burkosky Bros. On *Heat Score*

Interview by Cody No Teeth Cook

Fresh off a Best Feature win at Shock Stock and a Sexiest Role award for leading man Dean Lonsdale, Edmonton filmmakers Robert and Devin Burkosky discuss their latest exploitation-comedy thriller, *Heat Score*. From male strippers and crack dealers to hometown pride and no-budget filmmaking, the brothers dive into the influences, production challenges and growing audience response behind one of Canada's most unapologetically outrageous indie films.

Absolute Underground: Hey, Robert and Devin! Tell us a little bit about yourselves and how you got into filmmaking?

Robert: We are the Burkosky Bros. and we specialize in making exploitation and comedy films out of Edmonton, Alberta. We've been obsessed with exploitation, trash and sleaze flicks our entire lives, and we just released our latest male stripper flick *Heat Score* back in October. Since then, we've been on a promotional run booking screenings across Canada and hopefully soon the entire planet.

Devin: We grew up making home videos with ridiculous plots that would involve drug busts, prostitutes and potty humor. For the most part, we were always motivated by humor and trying to make each other laugh. So for us, combining our passion for cult movies and comedy has been a natural evolution. We have a philosophy when it comes to filmmaking and the audience: "Give 'em a laugh, Give 'em a scare, Give 'em a hard on, and then send 'em home!"

AU: What films influenced you guys while making *Heat Score*?

Robert: We were influenced by the rise-and-fall story arc of *Scarface* (1983), the plot twists of HBO's *Tales from the Crypt* (1989), mixed with elements of certain X-rated titles that feature male strippers like *Indecent Itch* (1986) and *Buttman's Inferno* (1993) as well as a slew of erotic thrillers.

Devin: Yeah, we definitely referenced *Scarface* a lot in the incubation stage of the script. Say hello to my little friend? How about say hello to my "big" friend? If you know what I mean...

But beyond that, *Body Double* (1984) was an inspiration for some visual and audio cues, and anything Troma and South Park related is a permanent influence on our comedy.

AU: How was the filmmaking process on *Heat Score* in comparison to your other films?

Robert: There was a massive shift in the production workflow for this one. We shot *Heat Score* on digital, whereas all of our previous projects were shot-on-tape which was an incredibly time-consuming, unpredictable, and archaic way to work. Digital gave us way more flexibility on set and a seamless workflow in post-production. The other big change was a major

increase in nudity and sex scenes which was totally invigorating!

Devin: It was relatively similar to our last feature *Private Blue*. An absolute fucking nightmare but you gotta love the process or else it will chew you up and spit you out. You know what they

say, Rock and Roll is a vicious game. Well the same goes for no budget filmmaking.

AU: Did you intentionally set out to make the most Edmonton movie of all time?

Robert: Yes. It's extremely important to us that we provide a raw, honest depiction of the city we actually live in. Instead of shooting in Edmonton and pretending it's somewhere else

like almost every other production does, we really wanted to showcase the city for the cold, beautiful, brutalist hellscape that it is!

Devin: I feel like it's second nature, we are proud Edmontonians. Our city has a lot of charm and

it's about damn time it's documented in an authentic way! Who better to do it than two demented brothers who grew up on the northside. Welcome to hell, this ain't no Hollywood.

AU: You recently had a screening of *Heat Score* at the Metro in Edmonton. How was the crowd reaction for this screening compared to the premiere back in October?

Devin: We had a battalion of maniacs show up for both shows and absolutely brought the house down with their thunderous laughter.

Robert: And I can attest to that because I was there both times. I FUCKING LOVE EDMONTON!!!

AU: Did any of the new changes you've made to the film help with the reception?

Devin: All we did was trim the fat, I'd say the reception was the same. But we feel like we have a tighter product now.

Robert: Yeah, as the two people who have spent thousands of hours watching this movie, we definitely feel the new changes make the movie much snappier and more cohesive, which is only going to make for an easier digestion on future audiences (victims).

AU: And how has the reception of *Heat Score* been so far?

Devin: Very positive, people want to laugh at stinky fart jokes and not be judged. *Heat Score* is a testament to the extreme and the people seem to be along for the ride.

Robert: Yeah, the reception has been overly enthusiastic with the exception of maybe a few "cinema" snobs here and there who probably jerk off to Wes Anderson films while sniffing their own ass holes.

AU: Do you have any plans to show the film in any other cities or at any film festivals?

Devin: We have a couple irons in the fire. Hoping to spread the filth to as many as possible and as soon as possible. Check our socials for announcements regarding future screenings!

Robert: If any programmers or well-connected motherfuckers wanna book *Heat Score* in your city, hit us up!

AU: You won an award at Shock Stock this year! How does that feel knowing your film has found its audience?



Robert: Let me start off by saying that Shock Stock fucking rules!! It was an honor to travel to London, Ontario and showcase our film amongst fellow fans of trash and exploitation flicks. Winning the award for Best Feature totally blew me away, and it is a fantastic feeling receiving validation from people who are real connoisseurs of the genre films that have inspired us our entire lives. Also shoutout to our leading man Dean Lonsdale for winning the award for sexiest role at Shock Stock!

AU: Do you guys have any new projects you're currently working on?

Robert: We are currently wrapping up a new high-octane script for a depraved supernatural slasher flick.

Devin: If you think *Heat Score* is over the top then buckle up because we are putting

the pedal to the metal on our next morbid creation. Are you ready? I doubt it.

AU: For any folks who use the internet and not just print media, where can they find you and your other films?

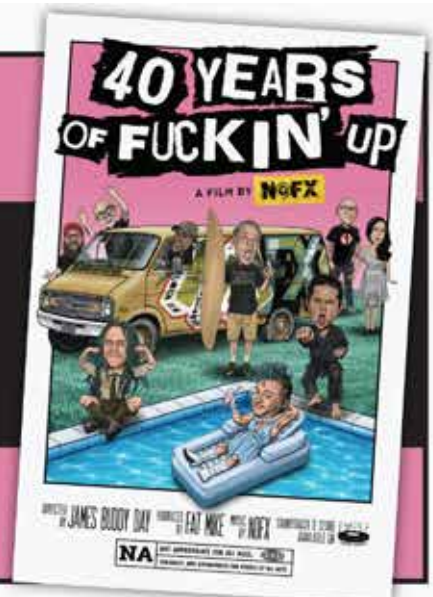
Burkosky Bros: They can follow us on Instagram @beechmountentertainment for all updates regarding *Heat Score* and future Burkosky Bros. films.

You can also stream our previous feature *Private Blue* on platforms like Tubi, Troma Now and Fawesome. Physical copies are also available via SRS Cinema wherever fine DVDs and Blu-rays are sold!



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LOWEN

Interview by Andrew Fryer (2025)

Hailing from the UK, Lowen has spent the last year gaining huge recognition and popularity for their last album *Do Not Go To War With The Demons Of Mazadaran*, an album saturated in middle eastern influences and lore, but with perspective of the present, and hope for the future. Guitarist Shem shares his thoughts.

Absolute Underground: Originally as a spectator and fan, from performance to pure esthetics, how important is visual presentation to you in live music as a spectator? How important is visual presentation to you in live music as a musician?

Shem: This is an interesting question to me because I love a lot of live music where it's just several guys in band shirts with little visual presentation, I love watching a band like Dying Fetus for example where their blistering technical ability is enough for me to have an incredibly good time. On the other hand I think a visual identity is important to stand out and help

separate you from lots of other acts. I have seen some live bands with amazing live presentation whose music I found forgettable also, for me personally, the visual presentation is not a necessity, but it is something that can heighten the experience for those watching, in Lowen we did not always have a combined visual aspect, initially Nina began to dress more ornately and the rest of the band wore generally muted dress, I wore band shirts sometimes to highlight the combination of western and eastern music, but I reached a point where Lowen became more than just a band and I started to see the impact it had on people, people who were diasporically dispossessed in the same way as Nina connected with the exile of our music and it meant something to them. To women and non binary bystanders Nina is also a powerful figure. As we became more popular, and specifically on the tour with Zakk Wylde I realised it was past time that we all visually reflected Nina so that our



message could be unified and become more than it had been in the early days of the band. As our message grew, so did the need to respect that in a visual format whenever we play live.

AU: As a performer, what connects you to a crowd?

As our music has become more upbeat and more technical with time, we enjoy when we see movement in the crowd, we've had circle pits to some of our songs and headbanging always makes me feel connected to the audience, when we are in unison and feeling the groove and rhythm of the songs as one it makes me feel connected with everyone in the audience. We often though have people tend to watch us in still awe, and I am okay with this too, it is not an audience's job to make the artist feel comfortable and they should do whatever they wish, I perform exactly the same onstage whether there is circle pits or if everyone stands in silence, the music is a means of connection itself, and the same way other artist's music has made me feel resonance and less alone in the universe, I am happy to connect with others through the music itself, though I'm always happy to see people moved by what they hear, as long as no one is getting hurt.

AU: Regarding pure visuals, what do you feel album cover art and merch does for your musical ethos or overarching musical outlook?

We have some strong visuals around the band from the beginning, working with Herve Scott Flament is a dream, and it was wonderful to finally meet him in Paris when we played this year.

His art perfectly encapsulates the alien loss of mourning for connection that has never been, of hoping for a utopian existence which itself seems at odds entirely with the world we live in. The underpinning emotion of his art is longing



and desire (at least to me whenever I observe it) and that goes hand in hand with the strong themes of exile woven throughout our music. Nina has also done a wonderful job working with a number of artists to ensure that our merchandise shares similar themes and feelings, reinforcing what Lowen means to people who engage with our music and its themes.

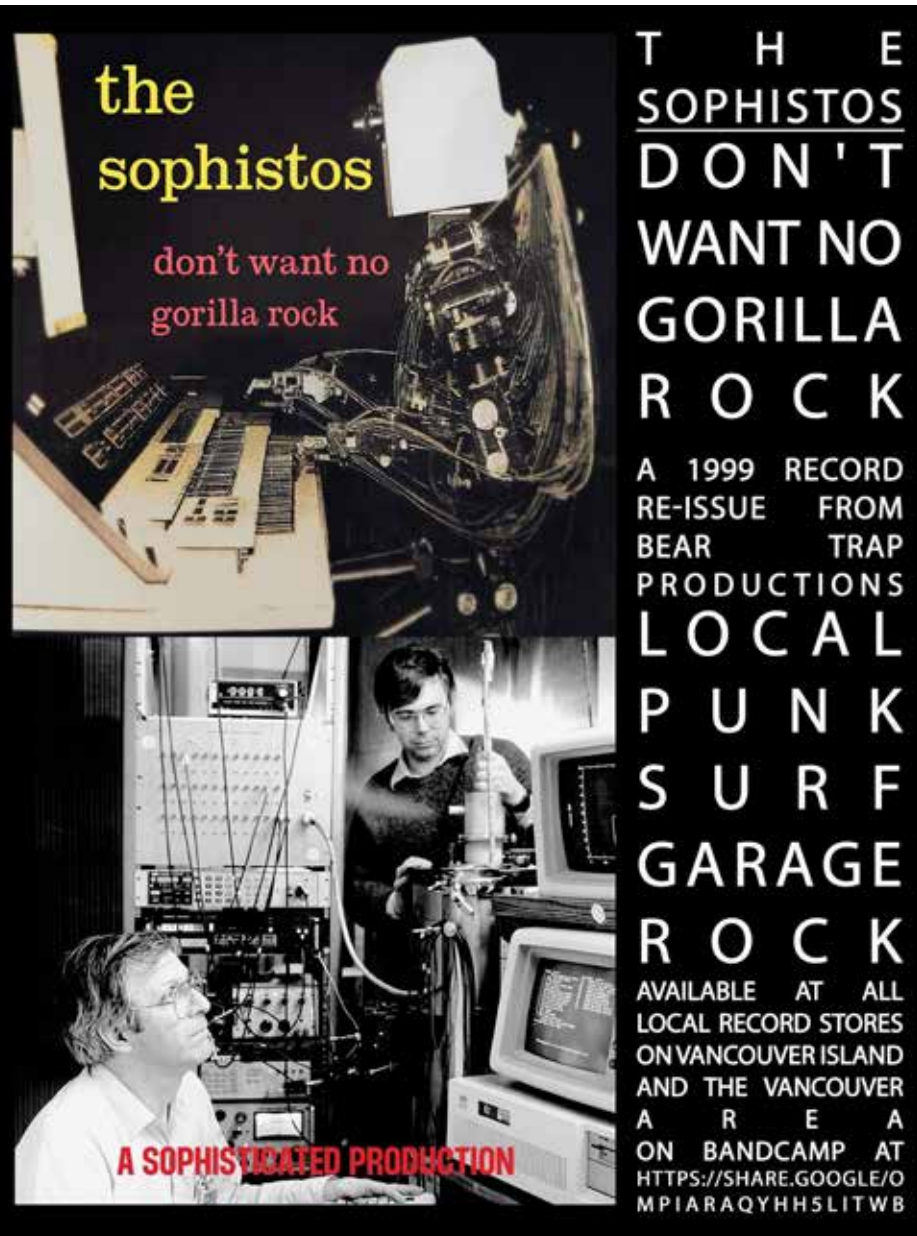
AU: If any, what kinds of change have you experienced through listening to music?

When I was younger music made me more politically aware, like many people I listened to bands like Rage Against the Machine and System of a Down and wanted to understand what they were singing about so I looked some of the subjects of their songs up and this made me more aware of injustices carried out across the world and enlightened me to suffering caused by western imperialism. When I was younger I used to listen to a lot of Black Metal, but as I grew older and looked into some of the bands I listened to I became increasingly disappointed and disinterested In a lot of the genre due to repeated themes of nationalism and bigotry.

AU: Are there things you would specifically like a listener to experience with your music?

For my part in the creation process of our music, I hope people resonate with the sadness, longing and hope of what we write about, of Nina's experience and our desire for a better world. We hope people experience a common ground with some aspect of what we write about, for all the war, horror and death we write about, the unifying theme is desire for people to recognise and grasp life whilst they still have it, and to treat others with kindness so we can all be bastions for each other in a seemingly cold universe.

lowen.bandcamp.com

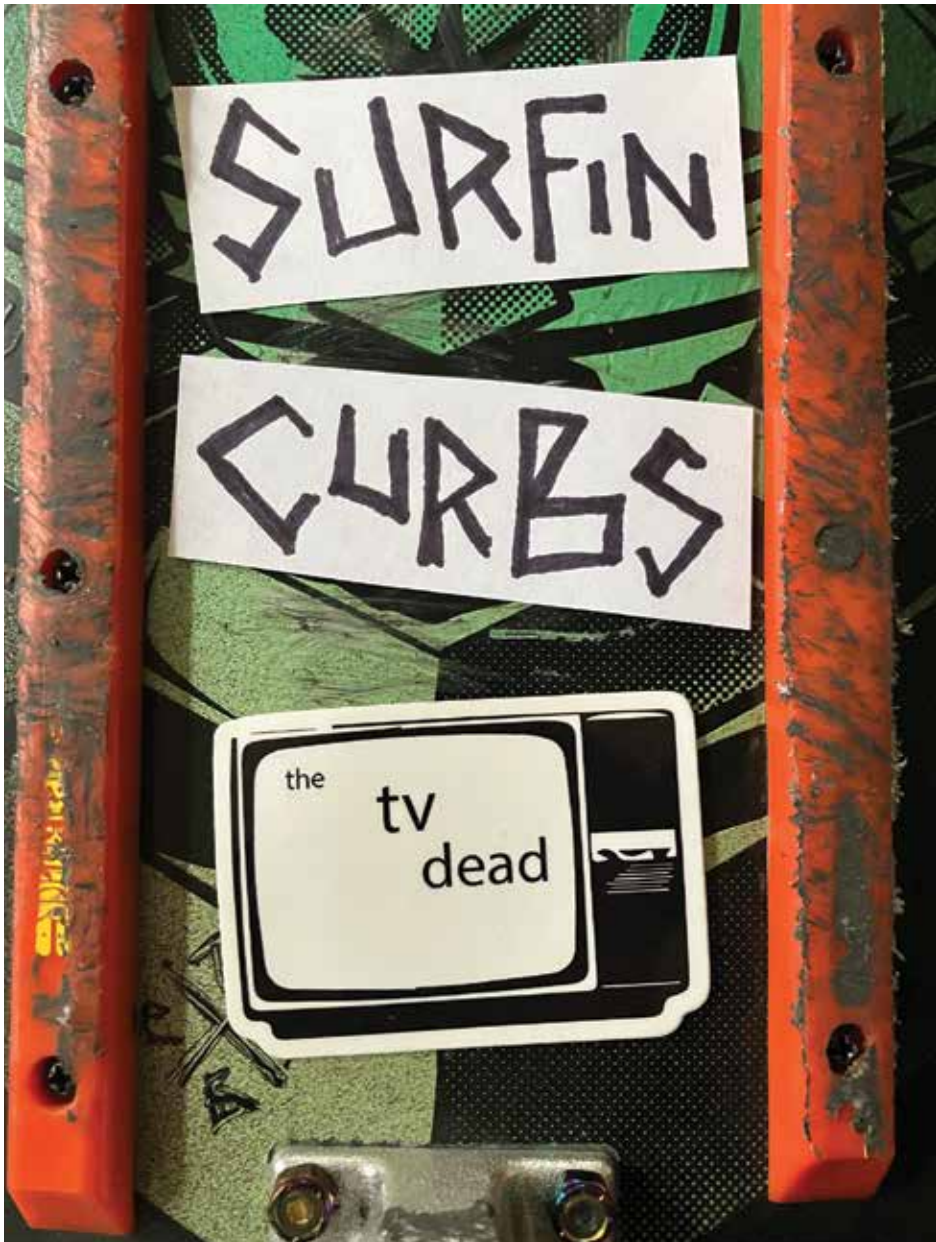


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LET'S KNIFE AGAIN RECUT AND SHARPER THAN EVER WITH SHONEN KNIFE

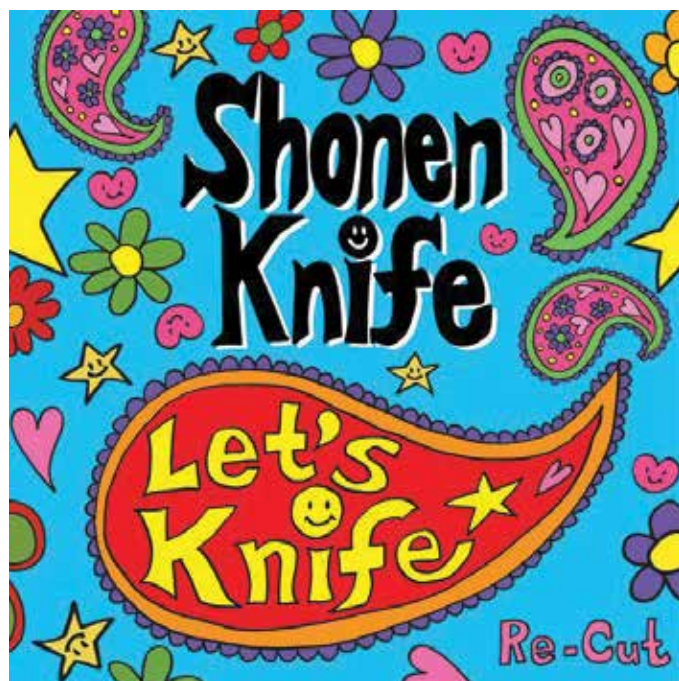
By Billy Hopeless

Well, after taking a long hiatus and many emails from the editor asking me to come back and how much the magazine missed me, he finally won me back by asking me if I wanted to interview Naoko, the original Bladesmith of the legendary Shonen Knife. Anyone who knows me knows of my lifelong family ties and love for all things Japanese and when you pair that up with incredibly catchy well crafted and performed pop punk n roll well I was in love from the first cut I heard and I bowed instantly to the opportunity of an interview. So here we go, let's take a stab at Shonen Knife who have just released a new re-cut of their classic *Let's Knife* album!

Absolute Underground: Konnichiwa! I remember when I first got sliced by Shonen Knife, when I saw your video for "Riding on the Rocket" back in 1992. Now here we are in 2026 and you've re-recorded the classic album *Let's Knife*. Why did you decide to re-record the masterpiece instead of re-releasing the original?

Naoko: We don't have any right to control the original *Let's Knife*. It is the reason why *Let's Knife* hasn't been re-released. Most of all songs including in *Let's Knife* are our signature song. We are still playing them at our shows. And I thought re-record with present members might be wonderful.

AU: Now as I was saying I first heard "Riding on the Rocket" 34 years ago and I can still hear the chorus of "Ukabu Ukabu everybody Ukabu" clearly in my head. Many songs on the *Let's Knife* album were older tracks that you re-recorded with some of the originally Japanese lyrics being translated into English. Why did



you translate some of the words yet keep others in Japanese? Like "float float everybody float"?"

Naoko: I thought the resonance of sound "Ukabu" is fun and it should remain in the lyrics. Because it looks like Peek-a-boo. In the same way, "Iko" is a Japanese word which means "Let's go" but it is coincidentally the same spelling with New Orleans classical song which has "Iko-Iko". I didn't know when I wrote this song but our producer at that time mentioned that...

AU: Yes and the Creole use of Iko-Iko historically translates as "don't mess with us" or "kiss our asses" so it's kind of like saying let's go but in a different way. I'll stick with the Japanese definition and say Iko and Ukabu to the next question. I see you're touring supporting these fresh cuts but there's no Canadian dates, in fact the last time you played Vancouver** was in 2009! Why hath thou forsaken the great white north?

Naoko: Wow! Time flies! I always love Canada and the beautiful port town Vancouver. I would like to



play there. I will ask our booking agent to book a show in Vancouver next time.

AU: When I look at your current promo shots and gig posters, you're all wearing very cool mod fashion dresses that look like you leaned against the Partridge Family school bus. As a kid I was very influenced by bands like the Monkees, the Beatles, the Mosquitos and the Partridges. Who were some of your earliest teachers and influences?

Naoko: I'm inspired by the Beatles for the first time. Wearing the matching costumes and playing great melody line songs is one of my earliest teachers. Other than that, I used to watch the Monkees show, cartoons of Josie and the pussy cat, the Beatles, The Archie show like that when I was a child. When I started the band, I was inspired by late 70's punk-pop like Ramones of Buzzcocks. I liked to watch the Partridge Family, Bewitched or I dream of Jeannie on TV.

AU: Speaking of having a dream and traveling together, what are your favourite road snacks and what's on your backstage rider?*

Naoko: We used to order chocolate cookies for tour rider but recently we only ordered bottled water and two bottles of beer for Atsuko and I. That's all. Because if I get candies every day, I can't eat all. I don't like to trash food. But anyway, I love sweets. I sometimes buy Japanese style rice snacks at the supermarket during tours.

AU: I'm sure you get a happy feeling when you're singing a song but you've had many artists like Kurt Cobain and Joey Ramone and most recently The Goo Goo Dolls bassist Robby Takac who produced your album sing your praises. Tell us about how the Goo Goo went Ga Ga for you ladies?*

Naoko: I have to ask to Robby. I think he loves bands like Ramones or Kiss like me. He understands our music a lot because of the roots of music is similar with me. He managed his own record label, music studios and organizes Music is Art Festival in Buffalo NY every year. That's why I think he understands Shonen Knife's DIY attitude.

AU: Ya got to love old Kiss and the Ramones

HOPELESSLY DEVOTED TO YOU

speaking of which while your song is "Riding on the Rocket" and the Ramones had "Rocket to Russia" Kiss had a song called "Rocket Ride" which used the term rocket as a metaphor for... oh never mind we won't go there now. Rocketing right along before you come to the States to open for Men At Work, you'll be doing a headline Japan tour that celebrates your landmark 1991 album 712, tell us how can we here in Canada celebrate its July 12th date?

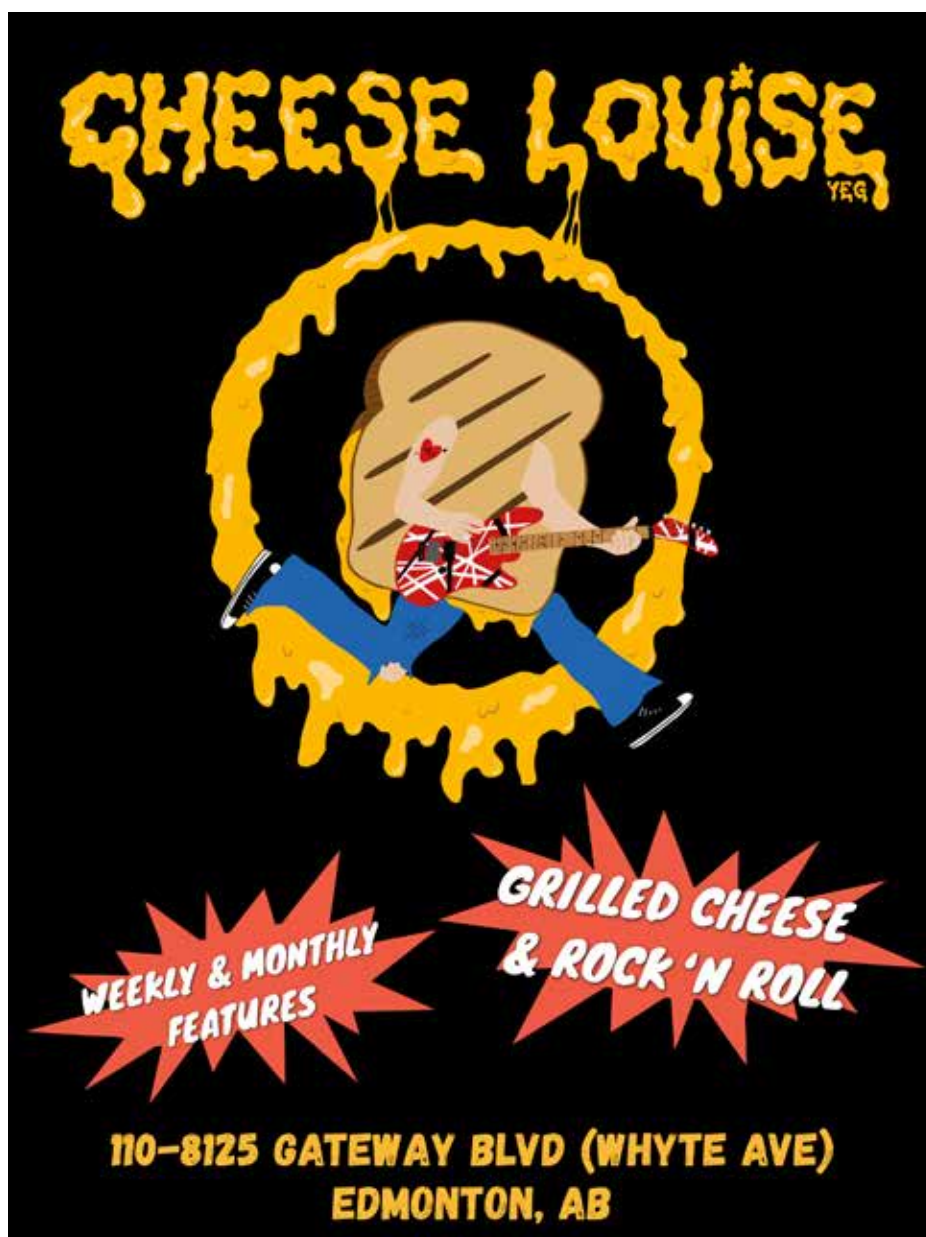
Naoko: I'm happy if people listen to our music and have a good time.

AU: Well I wish I could be there or at least see and hear you live again. Finally before I say arigato (thank you) and Mata ne (see you later), please leave our readers some parting words to keep us hoping you return to Canada.

Naoko: I really want to see our audience in Canada again. I will ask our agent to book our show in Canada for our next tour!

shonenknife.bandcamp.com

Photo credit: Kai Taylor



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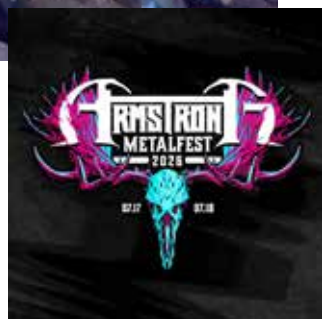
ARMSTRONG METALFEST REVIEW

July 17-18, 2026

Hassen Arena, Armstrong, BC

By Ross Hansen & Jess Escobar

Day one of Armstrong MetalFest kicked off bright & early Friday morning with Vernon's Skeksis warming up the pit. They were solid and set the tone for what was to come. Later, in the afternoon, we were treated to Syryn's performance which was a fantastical journey. Their impressive lead vocalist, Sloan Voxx, the



Shotgun event before heading back in to catch Seattle's, Nott.

Cyborg Octopus had THE most fun set of the fest, with booty shaking, saxophone solos, and a massive conga line. Cyborg Octopus came out wearing tracksuits. They all looked like someone's creepy gym teacher. They then proceeded to rock your out-of-shape world.

powerhouse behind Decimate Fest, belted soaring vocals through Alyxus Rose & Paolo Rage's driving riffs.

Between some sets was Swordfighting and Wrestling where everyone was a winner! Nah, I'm kidding; some people got their asses kicked.

If you were at Armstrong, looking for loud Traditional Heavy Metal, then you probably saw Iron Kingdom. Shredding frontman, Chris Osterman, belted out screaming vocals atop the pristine guitar work of Megan Merrick. Bass guitarist Leighton Holmes addressed the crowd like soldiers he would lead to Valhalla. Then we all took a quick pause to grab a beer for the 100-Man-

Friday headliner Rivers of Nihil know their strengths and play into them so well by balancing dreamy melodic moments, and massive, pummeling, neck-breaking rhythms. Saxman, Patrick Corona, pulled double duty after performing with Cyborg Octopus, completing Rivers's iconic sound. They left the crowd in awe, closing strong with the fan favourite, "Where Owls Know My Name".

Sleeping in on Saturday was not an option. The morning started off with bagpipes, heard across the grounds. It felt like we were getting ready to go to war, which we kind of were, because the bagpipes signaled that it was time to suit up for The Beer Helmet March. This is where hundreds of people gather for a march around the festival grounds donning the armor they made in the arts & crafts area. The Beer Helmet March featured knights, princesses and families of soldiers to show off their might and solidarity for all festival goers to see. At the end of the march, prizes were given out for the best costumes. The winner was a giant AT-AT Walker reinforced with Molson-made armour. One of the prizes was a 10' x 10' inflatable dock. This led to an incredible experience as this GIANT inflatable dock became "The Raft of Doom" in the mosh pit for headliner, Dying Fetus. I knew, good or bad, something was about to happen! When the dock hit the mosh pit, it was hoisted up and tossed around for a bit before people started climbing on it, standing on it, and truly surfing the crowd. I haven't seen anything like that before and it was fucking cool!

Saturday's Empalement carried the "scary metal" torch. Skulls, inverted crosses, and bloodied bodies immersed the audience in a classic black metal ritual. Leaving a lasting impression on everyone with blast beats, thick riffs and their monstrous stage presence. Vocalist, Man'anghal, may have been the source of all the blood, as he was jacked enough to Sub-Zero your skull and spine out of your body.



Nameless King is a Vancouver-based, melodic death metal band. Their catchy, dynamic songs are packed with deliciously chunky segments. In a touching moment Colton paid tribute to his late bandmate Cayle Charlton (Param-Nesia), acknowledging the weight of performing on the Matt Depper (Omnia Nihil) memorial stage.

My favourite new find, Vintersea from Portland, OR, impressed with their incredible stage command. The group flexed their versatility, by expertly weaving thrashy, deathy, blaring beats into low-tempo gorgeous clean moments. Given the chance, don't skip these Melodic/Progressive Death Metal heavyweights!

The grand finale of the festival was Dying Fetus, the legendary brutal death metal band we all know. Having been around for 35 years, it's amazing they remain so fucking consistent! This genre-defining closer is a perfect example of how AMF continues to deliver mind-blowing experiences that you just had to be there for.

Throughout all the fanfare and sick riffage, my favourite part of AMF is the community!! AMF has done an incredible job creating an event and environment that embraces newcomers and keeps people coming back.

See you next year!

armstrongmetalfest.ca

Photo Credit : Jess Escobar



38 DATES LATER TOUR REVIEW: FROM TOKYO TO ISTANBUL WITH BIG CITY GERMS

By Kevin McCauley

When we left Vancouver in March, we had a rough plan, a slew of shows confirmed through Instagram DMs, and a lot of faith. Two months later, we'd performed 35 shows across 13 countries, traveled through some of the most fascinating places on earth, and completed what may be one of the most ambitious tours ever undertaken by a Canadian punk band.

The tour took us through Japan, Taiwan, Mongolia, China, Indonesia, Cambodia, Thailand, Nepal, India, the UAE, Georgia, Armenia, and Turkey. In many of these places, local promoters told us we were the first Canadian punk band they had ever hosted, or at least the first in living memory. In Georgia, we were told the last Canadian artist anyone could remember performing there was Bryan Adams in 2008. Everywhere we went, people were curious about

Canada. They wanted to know what life was like, what Vancouver was like, and especially what the music scene was like. I'd tell them there are probably a thousand punk bands in Vancouver and shows happening every night of the week. More than once, people's eyes widened in disbelief.

One of the most memorable parts of the tour was discovering how little language actually matters. There were countless situations where we could barely communicate verbally, yet still formed genuine connections through music. After a show in Niigata, Japan, a group of local punks took us out for barbecue skewers. Throughout the evening they kept raising their



glasses and shouting "Iyasaka!" We joined in despite having no idea what it meant. At the end of the night, one of them pulled out a translation app and showed us: "A dying prayer for a lost war." Somehow that perfectly captured the spirit of punk rock and the strange, beautiful moments that happen on tour.

The landscapes often reminded me of home. Mongolia, in particular, felt surprisingly familiar. The vast open spaces, rugged terrain, and resilient people brought back memories of growing up in the Yukon. Standing in the middle of the steppe felt strangely similar to standing outside Dawson City: isolated, mystical, and larger than life.

Not every lesson came from music. Traveling through parts of South and Southeast Asia exposed us to levels of poverty that most Canadians never encounter firsthand. Conversations with locals gave us a deeper appreciation for the challenges many people face daily. At the same time, we were constantly struck by the generosity of people who often had far less than we did. Whether it was a promoter offering us a place to sleep, a fan buying us a meal, or complete strangers helping us navigate unfamiliar cities, we were repeatedly reminded that kindness exists everywhere.

The final week of the tour was overshadowed by conflict in the Middle East. Airspace closures forced the cancellation of our scheduled performances in Iraqi Kurdistan, Lebanon, and Syria. It was disappointing, but it also served as a reminder that for many people, geopolitical events aren't headlines on a screen. They're realities that shape daily life.

Every night, regardless of where we were, we ended our set with "See You In The Pit." The song was written about the legendary Westminster Hotel in Dawson City, Yukon. Shortly after we returned home, the Westminster was destroyed by fire. Looking back, it feels especially meaningful that we had the opportunity to play that song across Asia while the building still stood.



After 35 shows, countless border crossings, overnight buses, missed trains, language barriers, and unforgettable encounters, the biggest thing we learned is that punk rock remains a truly global community. Whether you're in Vancouver, Ulaanbaatar, Kathmandu, Yerevan, or Tokyo, people are still gathering in small rooms to create something meaningful together. And that's a pretty good reason to keep going.



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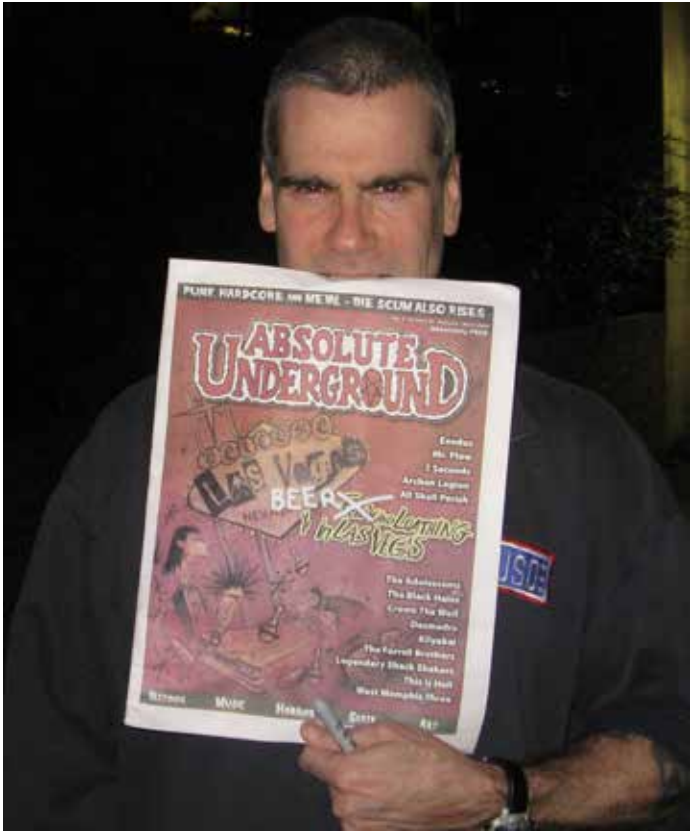
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HENRY ROLLINS

Audio Archeology: The Cramps – Part 1

By Ira “I Was a Teenage Werewolf” Hunter

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

My name is **Henry Rollins**. I did a lot of music, I've written a lot of books and I've travelled to a lot of places. I'm a big pain in the ass on the fringes of the entertainment industry.

AU: What was your first introduction to The Cramps?

Rollins: That would be late 1978 or very early 1979. It was a mixtape that my best friend of 52 years, Ian MacKaye, was playing. The song “Human Fly” pops up on the tape and I had never heard it before. I said, “What was that?” he said, “It’s a band called The Cramps. You’ve never heard of them?” He went to the cool school. I went to the uptight prep school out in the suburbs. One of his classmates had turned him on to The Cramps. He got the first two 45s and I heard that song, which I’ve never really gotten over. It’s just perfect in every way, I think, and I became a fan of the band.

AU: Do you think The Cramps can be defined by a genre of music or did they invent their own subgenre?

Rollins: To me, they really are self-defining. The first time I saw them was April of 1979 at a bar in Washington, DC. It was the first club show I ever saw. So, it kind of ruined me for club shows because it was never better than that night. I’ve seen a lot of bands play in small clubs but it was never as epic as The Cramps were with like 70 people. I walked out of that and I said to a friend of mine, “That wasn’t punk rock was it?” he said, “No! That’s rockabilly.” I asked, “What’s that?” I was just young and very ignorant. He explained there’s a couple of records I needed to get to understand rockabilly. Which is kind of like hillbilly rock and roll. So, I got some records, I listened and I started reading Cramps interviews. They talked about rockabilly quite a bit. But for me at least, they were just The Cramps, they always just sounded like The Cramps. Kind of like AC/DC doesn’t sound like anything but AC/DC.

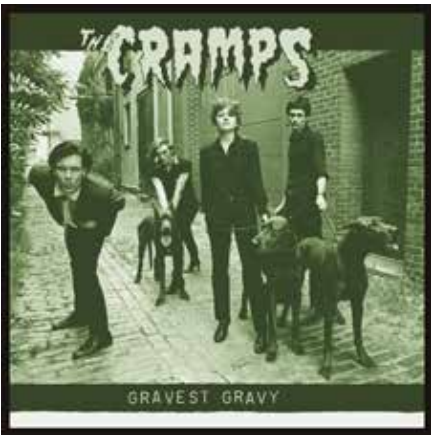
AU: You are resurrecting Vengeance Records. What original Cramps records were put out on that? Were those the original 45s that came out on that label?

Rollins: Well, yes. But then they did their two very

well known records for I.R.S. Records, *Songs The Lord Taught Us* and *Psychedelic Jungle*. They had a rough time with I.R.S., a label that, in my opinion, seems to screw up every band they put their hands on. It’s all a long time ago. I think I.R.S. Records is gone now. After I.R.S. I can’t speak for them, but I think they learned a lesson from dealing with people who aren’t them and Lux and Ivy became fiercely independent. They made Vengeance Records into a very full-time label. Instead of just putting out two 45s they started putting out their own albums. They remained independent like that until the end of the band. Some of their records went out of print a few years ago because Ivy, for one reason or another, just

didn’t keep up on things. Larry Hardy, Jimmy Maslon and I decided that’s not right so we said to Ivy, how about we run everything for you? That’s when Jimmy and Larry came into the fore and they formed Cramps Inc. for Ivy. Larry runs it. Ivy is just there to go, ah good, and just be basically left alone so she can be happy and peaceful. Jimmy does a lot of the lawyering stuff and I work for Cramps Inc. I’m not Cramps Inc., I work for them. My job is to maintain all the audio and to come up with potential releases culled from the archives of The Cramps. Of all of these jobs, I have the coolest one by far.

AU: What is the first album that is being released or re-released?



Rollins: Well, the re-releases are the entire Vengeance album catalogue, all of those out of print records. That’s being done by Larry for Vengeance through the distributor, Revolver.

When Larry was packing up The Cramps’ master tapes out of Ivy’s garage several months ago, he saw seven quarter-inch tapes clustered together. He asked

her what they were and she said, that’s a project called *Greatest Gravy*, which we shelved.

It’s more songs from the October ’77 sessions that gave you the first two Cramps singles. They had a name for it, *Greatest Gravy*. They had the cover photo selected by Stephanie Chernikowski, who recently passed away. So, Larry took the tapes to our good pal Brian Kehew over at Warner Brothers, and he digitally transferred them so we could hear what was on the tapes. What’s on the tapes are multiple mixes and versions of all of these Cramps songs you’ve never heard. It’s basically unheard Cramps music. Pretty much everything of The Cramps has been bootlegged, except for these songs.

We are guessing the record was supposed to come out in 2008 and we’re just assuming that it was when Lux Interior, the singer of the band who passed away in 2009, so when his health started to decline. It’s probably not a stretch to consider that Ivy would postpone Cramps activities to take care of her husband.

So my job is to pick out the correct mixes to use for the record. I started to realize I am the translator and interpreter of The Cramps’ recorded catalogue. Over a few nights of listening, I made my selections. Then I called Ian MacKaye, whose ears are far better than mine. I said you’re going to

listen to all the takes, read my notes and see if you agree. So he took some time to get it right and he said I like all your selections they’re the obvious keepers. I’d like to do some EQ work on one track and some level work on another. So he got to work on two of the tracks at Inner Ear Studios in Arlington, Virginia. He sent his work to Infrasonic Sound in Nashville, Tennessee. There I met up with Pete Lyman, the great mastering engineer, and we mastered *Greatest Gravy*. Revolver Records said they would like to do this record immediately, August of this year. Which is great.

That’s how this first release came about.

Cramps fans should get ready because we have the next project already mastered and it comes out, I think, for Record Store Day next year.

AU: It’s such an amazing album cover. Where did those big giant dogs come from?

Rollins: When Larry said Ivy and Lux had picked out the photo by Stephanie, I said, “What’s the photo?” Larry said, “It’s that one where The Cramps have the dogs.” I’m like, “I have that!” It’s on some bootleg 7-inch. I remembered it immediately. He asked me to get in touch with Stephanie, who was my neighbour when I lived in New York. I said, let me do some recon. I found out she’s in New York, basically slipping away and she sold or gave all of her photos to Getty. They’re expensive, they’re unpleasant, and thankfully, that’s not my job. Larry got the photo. I said, let’s deal with far friendlier people for the back cover. So, we started working with a guy named David Godlis. A great New York photographer. The back cover of *Greatest Gravy* is a great Cramps photo David took. We’ve already selected another great photo of David’s for the next release’s cover.

AU: I heard a story that a producer had them record all the songs they knew and then picked “Lonesome Town”. Is that right?

Rollins: They’re were working with a guy named Alex Chilton, who has sadly passed away. He was kind of a legend and a visionary maniac. He liked to drink a bit and take some chemicals and go record. He’s was an amazing songwriter, and a great producer. He wanted to take them into the studio at Ardent in Memphis, Tennessee. The Cramps, being fans of Elvis and all that old rock and roll, they leaped at the chance to be in Memphis. So, in October of ’77, they went to Memphis. So, they went into Ardent with the idea of recording two or three songs for a 7-inch single. That’s what Lux and Ivy wanted to do. They wanted to record a song of theirs called “TV Set” and I don’t know what else they wanted to record. But Alex said, “Here’s how I like to work, I want you to record every song that you know and we’ll just pick out the ones that sound good. Forget any rules. Let’s just start playing to where you forget that you’re playing and you just start having fun, and it becomes more natural.” We’re very lucky that he said that because The Cramps recorded a whole bunch of music. Some of it you hear on *Greatest Gravy*. The reason it’s called *Greatest Gravy* is the first two singles came out in America. A 12-inch of those songs came out in England called *Greatest Hits* and they added a song from those sessions as an incentive to buy it. It made me buy it. It’s called “Lonesome Town” by the great Ricky Nelson. They wouldn’t have recorded that, maybe, if Alex had not said that. So, one of the many great things about *Greatest Gravy* is you hear some of the songs that were in their early set that they dropped very, very quickly because they were writing their own material. One of those songs is called “Hungry” and it’s by Paul Revere & the Raiders. If you listen to their early live tapes, like at CBGB’s and Max’s Kansas City, you hear them do “Hungry”. They also did a song by Sam Phillips, who owned Sun Records, called “Problem Child”. There’s two or three live recordings of that, but they did it in the studio. Which is fascinating and it’s probably only because Alex told them to do it. So, what you get with this record are like snapshots. Songs that fell out of the set and could have never been recorded in the studio and you get songs they did for their second album, but with the first album lineup. That’s really cool, to hear Bryan Gregory on guitar doing songs that Kid Congo would do on the *Psychedelic Jungle* album. There’s a good chance that you’ve never heard these songs before, or at least these versions. It’s truly a collection of rare Cramps songs that sat for decades. So, a truly amazing



archaeological musical find is going to come out in August. I think Cramps fans will be completely happy. Sadly, pretty much everyone is gone. Alex Chilton is gone, Lux is gone, Nick Knox is gone, Bryan Gregory is gone. The engineer is gone. Everyone’s gone except for Ivy. So we are left to tell these stories and put this music out into the world for Cramps fans.

AU: What is the main goal of Cramps Inc.?

Rollins: To keep everything in print, keep the bootleggers at bay and make sure Ivy has a good day, every day.

AU: Will there be a Cramps documentary?

Rollins: They are definitely a band that deserves a documentary because the story is so cool.

AU: For a Cramps biopic, do any actors come to mind for Lux or Ivy?

Rollins: Wow, that’s a really good question because there’s some people, they are such a one-off. Like who would you get to play Iggy Pop? You’d have to get a really good actor.

AU: Who could play Henry Rollins?

Rollins: Oh you just get any criminal. Lux was a really rare type. I can’t think of a young, fresh face actor with great cheekbones and a charismatic jawline to be Lux. You’d have to be tall, very quick-witted and good-looking. I can’t think of who would be Lux or Ivy or Bryan or Nick. Maybe someone should do that, you know? Would be a fun band to try and do one of those biopic things.

AU: I’m assuming in your extensive record collection, you have all the original presses of The Cramps records. Is there a rare favourite?

Rollins: Yeah, the record that brought me to the dance was the *Human Fly* 7-inch and I have that. Not really a rare pressing of it, but there’s a rare picture sleeve of it where The Cramps logo is hand-painted by Lux and I have one of those.

AU: What do you recall about the year 1986?

Rollins: I was in a band called Black Flag and it was the last tour we did and it was a very, very hard tour. The audiences didn’t like Greg Ginn, he’s the leader of the band. The audiences really disliked his new music, which I was the vocalist for, so they would take out their displeasure on the singer and I never said, Well he wrote them. They would get mad at me so I was the recipient of a lot of abuse and the band started to fall apart with a lot of shows left to do. So it was a very 24/7, unhappy, very hard-to-exist-in environment and it went on for months. So that’s what I remember from ’86 was the tour coming to an end and the band breaking up. But then by October ’86, I was in a studio in Leeds, England making new music and making my first solo record. So it had a happy ending, it was hopeful at least. But the bulk of ’86 was just a tough year to be on stage and have people throw things at you.

AU: What are you most proud of when it comes to preserving the legacy of The Cramps?

Rollins: Our job is to protect the estate and the legacy of The Cramps. That is our job for the rest of our lives. That’s a pretty intense thing. We can do it, but it kind of hit me as I was sitting alone at my desk, Wow, we’ve got to get this right. So, I would dare say that we’re going to do our best to get it right.

To Be Continued Next Issue...

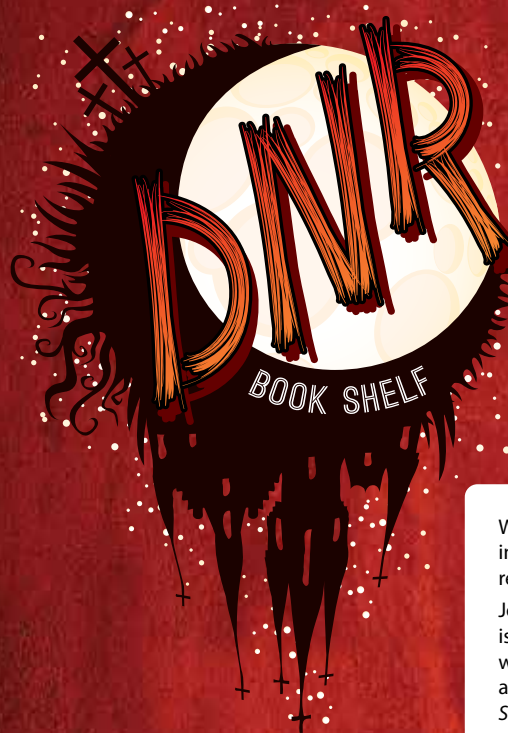
thecramps.com

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DO NOT RESUSCITATE DO NOT READ

Dedicated to reviewing the newest releases in Extreme Horror, Bizarro, Splatterpunk, Noir, Grindhouse, Weird Fiction, Underground, Occult, Transgressive, Erotic, and music-related books. No classics. No nostalgia. Only that new shit!

MURDER BIMBO



Rebecca Novack
Avid Reader Press / Simon & Schuster
February 10, 2026
With a name like *Murder Bimbo*, how could I resist when I saw the matte black cover and glossy pink bubble letters of the title waiting on the shelf?

Rebecca Novack's debut novel follows a 32-year-old sex worker who has found herself pivotal to a political assassination plot. Told over three acts, and largely via e-mail, *Murder Bimbo* describes how she came to be in this bizarre circumstance—though the details seem to change with each telling. The result is a sort of absurdist millennial bildungsroman for the modern sociopolitical climate. Mixing intrigue, love, sex, murder, and so much more, Novack gives her readers an unreliable narrator par excellence as *Murder Bimbo* navigates irritating clients, white supremacist cells, and winning back her ex.

Seek out this title if you want to read something timely, satirical, and truly unique. If you find yourself needing an added dose of fever-dream gore to up the ante, *Murder Bimbo* would pair nicely with Amber Dean's 2025 debut *Hysterical*.
Laura Phaneuf

THE OCCULT TIMOTHY LEARY: THE TAROT, MAGICAL STATES, AND POST-TERRESTRIAL EVOLUTION



Joseph L. Flannery
Inner Traditions
April 7 2026
Timothy Leary was one of the most well-known counter-cultural figures of the 20th century. His mantra:

"Turn on, Tune in, Drop out", has ensured his immortality, even if you don't know who he is, you've heard what he's said.

Furthermore, he is justifiably famous for his advocacy of psychedelic drugs. Leary, it's fair to say, understood that the answers to our questions do not lie outside of ourselves, they are already within us, buried deep in our subconscious. "We are blind to the worlds within us, waiting to be born."

A SCREAMING LIFE: INTO THE SUPERUNKNOWN WITH SOUNDGARDEN AND BEYOND



Kim Thayil,
Adem Tepedelen
William Morrow
June 9, 2026

Grunge-related books seem to be on the rise, with *This Angry Pen of Mine: Recovering the Journals of Layne Staley* released a handful of months ago and now a memoir from one of Seattle's key surviving figures, Kim Thayil. His book on Soundgarden is chronological in structure, but its real focus is the creative process inside the band: how songs were built, how roles shifted, and how instinct rather than precision defined their identity.

Thayil repeatedly emphasizes that Soundgarden functioned on feel rather than structure. The band never aimed for rehearsed perfection, and even in mid-90s live footage the performances feel like they could collapse at any moment, yet never do, because the members knew the material so deeply. That instability becomes part of the sound itself.

Thayil was the texture guy. The guy who saw sounds as colors. The one who never learned to read music and went by feel. The one who made the songs feel either dreamier or sludgier due to his involvement. A key insight in the book is Thayil's description of "Black Hole Sun," written by Chris Cornell. Thayil initially didn't recognize it as a typical Soundgarden song, describing it as feeling closer to a piano composition than a guitar-based track. It had to be shaped and adapted by the band before it fully became a Soundgarden song, given those certain textures.

That tension feeds into his broader view of *Down on the Upside*, which he compares in spirit to the Beatles' *White Album*: a fragmented record where individual members increasingly wrote songs separately (on guitar) rather than building them collectively. Thayil frames this shift as central to his discomfort, since it weakened his role as Soundgarden's guitarist and contributed to further fragmentation during the tour cycle that followed.

Thayil describes fatigue and apathy accumulating over time, culminating in a volatile 1997 performance in Hawaii where bassist Ben Shepherd stormed off stage, reportedly over equipment issues. Thayil

followed him backstage, leaving Chris Cornell and Matt Cameron to continue the performance. Shepherd's remark, "See, they just went and did it without us," captures the fractured state of the band at that moment, their last full performance together before the reunion years later.

Thayil is equally candid about what came after. He expresses confusion and distance toward Cornell's later projects, particularly Audioslave, which he describes as a more straightforward, stripped-down version of Soundgarden - "Soundgarden minus." He also questions aspects of Cornell's solo work, not as dismissal but as genuine uncertainty about the artistic direction taken after Soundgarden's dissolution.

His reflections on Cornell's death are notably restrained but emotionally unsettled. He describes moments of hindsight reinterpretation, including Cornell suggesting Thayil contact a keyboardist for a potential solo project, and recalls a remark during their final concert that now reads differently in retrospect when technical issues forced Cornell offstage and he reportedly said the band could "do it without him."

The book also touches on Soundgarden's interactions with legacy rock culture. Thayil, a lifelong KISS fan, recounts involvement in discussions around a KISS covers project where internal disagreement prevented full participation (not every member of Soundgarden was part of the KISS Army). He also reflects on broader generational overlaps with Metallica, highlighting how 1990s alternative bands moved from outsider status into peer relationships with established rock acts.

Throughout, Thayil maintains a calm, observational tone. His philosophical background is evident in his framing of events as evolving systems of interaction rather than fixed narratives, and he rarely leans into mythologizing.

Ultimately, *A Screaming Life* shows how creative tension, instability, instinct, and shifting individual voices formed a garden of sounds that could feel simultaneously on the edge of collapse and completely unified.

Ryan Dyer

CARRION CROW



Heather Parry
Pushkin Press
June 30, 2026

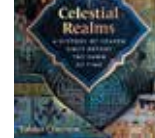
Described as a "gothic gem" of historical fiction, I was not expecting Heather Parry's *Carrion Crow* to also be the most repulsively entrancing body horror I have read this year. Beginning with a painful, scrapingly slow unfolding we are introduced to Marguerite Périgord. Named by her mother for a French princess (and receiving all of the weighty expectations placed upon her

along with that endowment) Marguerite has made the unworthy decision to seek a marriage with her social inferior. Though a pleasant and hardworking man, Mr. Lewis is told that the engagement is to be a long one while Marguerite's mother Cécile trains her obviously incompetent daughter in the ways of properly managing husband and household. Due to the lowered standing Marguerite can expect, she is told that she must learn to do with less. To eat less, to be more resourceful, to not expect any of the luxuries she was afforded during her upbringing when she embarks upon this new married life. Cécile encloses her daughter in the neglected attic of their London home with books, a disused sewing machine, and increasingly sporadic trays of food—all in the name of furthering her required education. The longer Marguerite's confinement lasts, the more she learns, and the more difficult it becomes to please her mother. An object of relief and distraction comes in the shape of a carrion crow that roosts in the crumbling rafters of Marguerite's attic, and becomes a catalyst for disturbing change.

Carrion Crow is a must read for those who enjoy a dark, dismal tale with grotesque prose and the pace of a creeping rot.

Laura Phaneuf

CELESTIAL REALMS: A HISTORY OF HEAVEN SINCE BEFORE THE DAWN OF TIME



Tobias Churton
Inner Traditions
April 7, 2026

A new book by Tobias Churton, the world's greatest authority on Aleister Crowley, is always a welcome and significant event, 'Celestial Realms' is no exception.

In a nutshell, Tobias explores, displaying meticulous research as always, the idea of heaven in various cultures and religions.

Aleister Crowley appears here of course! Tobias writes, "it is well known that later-day theurgist Aleister Crowley (1875-1947) spent his early magical career attempting to enjoy the 'the knowledge and conversation of the Holy Guardian Angel'... ultimately successful to his own estimation, he recommended this experience as essential for his magical students' progress, and saw it's analogy with Jung's understanding of the 'unconscious'... as Crowley also observed: if we wish a more noble conception of God, then we need to render our minds more noble. We cannot rely on solely on the vision of others: vision may be enlarged."

This is wise advice as we now live in a world of misinformation, the more we think for ourselves, and listen to our true self, our wise inner-voice that our ego usually shouts down, the better.

Steve Earles

"EVERYBODY IS A BOOK OF BLOOD: WHEREVER WE'RE OPENED, WE'RE RED."
CLIVE BARKER. BOOKS OF BLOOD: VOLUMES ONE TO THREE

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FIVE SUMMER SCARES HIDING IN THE SAND

By Ed Sum

Anyone wanting to beat the Summer heat may find more problems ashore. Amusingly, there has never been a *Sharknado* published for print, but instead, we have other ideas this year. One promises the return of some famous movie properties, and others are original works. As writers are not developing for a season in mind, what's presented is listed as soon to be available for comic book readers who love horror.

Here's a closer look at five of the season's most interesting releases.

Killer Influences

On sale: July 1, 2026

IDW Comics love their true crime, and with *Killer Influence*, Melvin needs to find a schtick to make him famous. When he doesn't have anything to brand him a true American nightmare, that's a whoops! No one has connected his crimes and based on the marketing spiel to sell this comic, Kylie, an aspiring journalist working for a small-town newspaper knows. According to the spiel: "When she reaches out to him...she figures out how she's going to become a star. She will give Melvin the identity he needs to be the iconic serial killer he wants to be, while she follows his exploits on her channel and becomes famous. Kylie and Melvin make a pact that will

make their dreams come true and destroy their lives in the process. Eisner Award nominee Joey Esposito (*The Pedestrian*, *Batman: Urban Legends*) and rising-star artist Valeria Burzo (*Castle Full of Blackbirds*) deliver a scathing and thrilling true crime serial killer saga!

Kingdom of Earth: Monsters Finally Get The Lease

On sale: July 15, 2026

No, although the title implies the coming of Godzilla, writer David Dastmalchian has other ideas. After spending his time crafting tales about *Count Crowley*, he's doing something different with partner Leah Kilpatrick. The premise is 2036, two years after monsters rose out of the earth and sea and devoured most of civilization before realizing they needed humans around after all. Now people have two options: serve or become dinner. When a kid named Frankie narrowly dodges getting turned into livestock, they find out surviving the first close call was the easy part.

Soo Lee's art carries a lot of the load here, and given her Bram Stoker win, that tracks. Dastmalchian himself has called the book "the ultimate mash-up," which is a pretty honest way to describe a comic that apparently throws every folklore creature you've ever heard of into one apocalyptic sandbox. Four issues, and issue one hits shops July 15 for \$4.99.

sits in the middle of downtown LA, ignored by everyone walking past it, until a murder drags it back into the light and reveals the centuries-old evil buried in its catacombs. This creator said the whole thing came out of a genuinely vivid nightmare, which is either terrifying or extremely on brand for the guy who made *The Thing*.

The art team of Federico De Luca and Luis Guaragna gives the book its visual backbone, with Sian Mandrake on colours and Marshall Dillon lettering. And because Carpenter can't resist a good soundtrack, there's a companion metal album dropping days later on Sacred Bones Records, recorded with his son Cody Carpenter and Daniel Davies, with each track lining up to a chapter of the book. It's a multimedia haunted house, basically. 120 pages, \$22.99.

Universal Monsters: Phantom of the Opera

Publisher: Image Comics / Skybound

Trade on sale: August 2026 (per Image's August solicits)

Skybound's Universal Monsters line has already given *Dracula* and *Frankenstein* the prestige treatment, and now it's a certain Phantom who needs center stage! The story leans on the 1943 Claude Rains film rather than the Lloyd Webber musical, which means Raoul gets reimagined as a detective instead of a wealthy suitor investigating a string of violent crimes rocking the Paris Opera House. Christine's career is in freefall, the Phantom's whispering from the rafters, and

COMIC-GEDDON

nobody in this version is quite who they seem. Boss and Simmonds are billing it as a twist "no one will see coming," and while I'll believe that when I see it, the pitch of a moody, murder-mystery Phantom is a fun swing for a story that's been adapted about a hundred different ways already.

Tyler Boss is the conductor here, orchestrating the story, and Martin Simmonds, fresh off his Eisner-nominated *Dracula*, handles both art and colours in a painted style that is guaranteed to please.

Dungeons & Dragons: Ravenloft

Publisher: Dark Horse Comics

On sale: August 19, 2026

Timed to land close to the release of Wizards of the Coast's new *Ravenloft: The Horrors Within* sourcebook for Dungeons and Dragons, this four-issue miniseries sends monster hunter Ez D'Avenir into the frozen wasteland of Lamordia. He is hunting for a certain undead creature that might hold the key to saving the whole cursed realm. Naturally, Darklord Viktra Mordenheim isn't thrilled about that and turns the hunt around on her. The official pitch promises the story will bring together several of Rudolph van Richten's protégés from across Ravenloft's various domains, so expect some fun crossover moments if you've been following the wider Ravenloft fiction.

Bram Stoker Award winner Amy Chu writes, with Ariela Kristantina on pencils, Arif Prianto on colours, and Haley Rose-Lyon lettering. For anyone who's put actual table time into Ravenloft as a DM or player, this reads like a solid companion piece rather than a cash-in tie-in, given how closely it's timed to the new sourcebook.

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"DEFILES ALL EXPECTATIONS" - THE CULTURAL AMALGAM FORMERLY KNOWN AS MARGARET ATWOOD AND ANN MURRAY

"A DEPRAVED ONSLAUGHT OF SONIC ABSURDITY FROM 'THE LEAST PRETENTIOUS BAND EVER'" - DOUG FORD, DIRECTOR OF THE ONTARIO WORKS ARTS COUNCIL

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Just as KNIFEHAMMER was set to perform at the Ontario Works Arts Council Showcase, Youth Jihad drugged his bandmates with a D.I.Y. Judgment Enhancer. Now, mere moments into what was to be a career-defining gig, the powerful psychoactive takes hold!

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FUCKIN' CAT!

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WHY AM I SO TURNED ON??

FUCK OFF STUPID WORLD!

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DUGS! YOU'RE BRU-LAPS! I THOUGHT YOU COULD HANDLE SOME DRUGS!

STAY TUNED TO THE NEXT ISSUE FOR THE CONCLUSION OF THIS TERRIBLE TALE

Absolute Live Reviews

PHILLIPS BACKYARD MUSIC FESTIVAL

July 10-12, 2026 — Phillips Brewery Backyard, Victoria, BC



Saturday nights in Victoria aren't what they once were for this mom of 2, but when Father John Misty comes to town, an effort is made. I have it on good authority he took mushrooms just before hitting the stage, which may or may not have set the mood for the sexy, commanding performance he gave. Backed by an amazing group

of musicians, complete with a sax player, the performance was technically tight and full of energy. The crowd was engaged and packed, and yet it felt intimate. For me it was a perfect show, I felt uplifted and special, like he was putting the show for me. A solid reminder that when all you have to do is buy a ticket and show up, it's worth the effort.

— Amanda Lawrence

THE LAST MILE

July 17, 2026 — MTELUS, Montréal, QC



Opening for Social Distortion is no small task, but Montréal's own The Last Mile rose to the occasion with confidence and intensity. From the opening notes of "Water Mary", the band wasted no time winning over a crowd eager for the night's headliner.

Blending melodic hardcore with punk rock, they delivered a tight, energetic set highlighted by "Malfeasance", "Give It a Name", "Hot Box" and "Anything". Their chemistry on stage was undeniable, and rather than relying on gimmicks, they let the music speak for itself.

The hometown crowd responded with growing enthusiasm throughout the performance, a testament to the band's ability to connect with both longtime fans

and newcomers alike.

The Last Mile continues to build momentum in the Canadian punk scene, and performances like this show exactly why. They weren't simply an opening act; they set the tone for an unforgettable night of punk rock at MTELUS.

— Jean-François Gosselin
Photo by @jfgosselin.
photo

SOCIAL DISTORTION

July 17, 2026 — MTELUS, Montréal, QC



Some bands eventually become nostalgia acts. Social Distortion refuses to.

Nearly five decades after forming, Mike Ness walked onto the MTELUS stage with the same unmistakable presence that has defined the band for generations. There were no elaborate visuals or overproduced theatrics. Just four musicians, a wall of

amplifiers, and a catalogue of songs that have earned their place among punk rock's finest.

Opening with "Born to Kill", the band wasted little time reminding Montréal why they continue to sell out venues around the world. "Untitled", "Ring of Fire", and "Tonight" followed, each delivered with the confidence that only comes from thousands of performances. Mike's voice has aged alongside the songs, gaining character rather than losing power. Every lyric carries the weight of experience, making familiar classics feel even more authentic.

One of the night's most memorable moments came not during a song, but between them. Looking out over the crowd, Mike smiled and

said, "Gray hair is wisdom. You can't buy that at the punk rock shop." The audience erupted in laughter, but there was truth behind the joke. Social Distortion has never chased trends. They've simply continued being themselves, allowing time and experience to become part of their identity.

The middle portion of the set showcased the band's remarkable consistency. "Mommy's Little Monster", "Far Side of Nowhere", "The Way Things Were", and "Partners in Crime" flowed effortlessly before giving way to "Ball and Chain". Few songs capture heartbreak and resilience quite like that one, and hearing hundreds of fans sing along made for one of the evening's emotional highlights.

If there was one song that united the room completely, it was "Story of My Life". Every word echoed back toward the stage as fans of every generation celebrated a song that has become more than just a punk anthem. It has become part of people's lives.

The final stretch was exactly what longtime fans hoped for. "Don't Keep Me Hangin' On" led into "Reach for the Sky", followed by "Dear Lover" before the unmistakable opening chords of "Don't Drag Me Down" brought the night to a thunderous close. The crowd barely stopped moving, with fists pumping and voices carrying every chorus.

Credit is also due to Jonny Wickersham, Brent Harding, and David Hidalgo Jr., whose performances were tight, powerful, and effortlessly locked in. There wasn't a weak moment all evening. Every member played with the confidence of musicians who understand exactly what these songs mean to their audience.

Social Distortion has reached a point where they no longer need to prove anything. They aren't trying to relive their glory years because, in many ways, they're still living them. Their music has matured without losing its edge, and Mike Ness remains one of punk rock's most authentic voices.

Gray hair may indeed be wisdom. On this night in Montréal, it was also a reminder that some things simply get better with age.

— Jean-François Gosselin
Photo by @jfgosselin.photo

ANGINE DE POITRINE

June 27, 2026 Festival
International de Jazz de Montréal
— TD Stage



Few bands ask as much of their audience as Angine de Poitrine. Even fewer are rewarded for it.

In just a few years, the Québec duo has grown from an underground curiosity into one of the province's most compelling musical acts without compromising its identity. Anonymous behind oversized masks, communicating in their own invented language and ignoring nearly every convention of modern rock, Angine de Poitrine has built its reputation on complete artistic freedom. Their appearance at the Festival International de Jazz de Montréal showed exactly why that approach continues to resonate.

The band's sound begins with Khn de Poitrine.

Few guitarists are redefining what a rock guitar can sound like. Khn's custom-built microtonal double-neck guitar immediately separates Angine de Poitrine from virtually every contemporary band. Rather than limiting himself to the familiar twelve-note Western scale, he explores intervals that introduce harmonic colours rarely heard in rock music. The resulting tension never feels forced. Familiar resolutions are simply delayed, drawing the listener through each composition.

Equally important is his use of looping. While many guitarists use loopers to make one instrument sound bigger, Khn uses them as a compositional tool. Every layer has a purpose. Melodic figures gradually evolve as new rhythmic ideas and harmonic textures emerge, allowing the music to grow naturally rather than simply repeat. Combined with exceptional control of dynamics and phrasing, he builds crescendos patiently, giving each piece a natural sense of direction.

If Khn provides the architecture, Klek de Poitrine gives it movement.

Klek doesn't keep time—he shapes it. His playing shifts effortlessly through odd meters, displaced accents and intricate subdivisions while maintaining an undeniable groove. More importantly, he doesn't simply accompany the guitar; he responds to it. As Khn expands a looping passage or increases harmonic tension, Klek subtly reshapes the rhythmic foundation, changing the emotional character of the music without interrupting its momentum. His restraint is every bit as impressive as his power.

Watching the duo from the photo pit offered a perspective easy to miss from farther back. Between songs there was little communication, yet once the music began they anticipated one another instinctively. A brief glance or subtle shift in posture often signaled an approaching transition. Their chemistry never felt rigid or rehearsed, but reflected years of trust and a shared commitment to the composition.

That interplay ultimately defines Angine de Poitrine. Their virtuosity

is undeniable, but technique never becomes the destination. Every unusual tuning, rhythmic detour and carefully controlled crescendo serves the music. Complexity becomes expressive rather than self-indulgent, inviting listeners into the performance instead of shutting them out.

For one remarkable evening at the Festival International de Jazz de Montréal, Angine de Poitrine demonstrated that ambitious music can captivate a broad audience without compromise. They aren't merely expanding the boundaries of progressive rock—they're quietly redefining what the genre can become.

— Jean-François Gosselin
Photo by @jfgosselin.photo

VOIVOD / MIDNIGHT

June 17, 2026 — Dolans Limerick, Ireland

Great kudos are due to the promoters of this gig Bad Reputation. To put their achievement in perspective, in the days before Bad Rep began promoting gigs, local metal fans would have to travel to Dublin or even the UK to see bands of this quality, so their sterling work is much appreciated!

Cryptosis played a spirited set to warm up the crowd, but things really came alive when Cleveland's finest Midnight stormed the stage slaying all in sight with their Venom-ous black 'n' roll! This is metal as it should be. All hail!

Could Voivod follow Midnight? Yes they could! They played a blinding set, so positive and so powerful at the same time. Voivod are unique, number one in a genre of one, they sound like no one else. With favourites like "Tribal Convictions" and "Astronomy Domin", how could they go wrong, such an uplifting set, something, the way the word is going we need now more than ever.

An early review of Voivod from the much-missed Sounds magazine said wisely, 'Voivoid have all metal's strengths and none of its weaknesses.' Happily that's still true today.

Both Voivod and Midnight will be assured a warm welcome when (not if) they return to Limerick.

I'd also like to send our best wishes to Snake and his partner Christine, who is bravely battling cancer. Hopefully we'll see Christine well, and Snake back on stage with Voivod soon. **GoFundMe: gofundme.com/f/standing-with-christine-mcdonald.**

— Steve Earles

DAVID LEE ROTH

July 13th 2026 — Vogue Theatre, Vancouver, BC

Picture this: We're halfway through the show. The audience is covered in sweat like it's 1982, cell phones all put away, a classic rock n'roll crowd. The band is playing the sexiest



version of Tom Petty's "Breakdown" that you have ever heard. Two of the backup singers are holding Dave's mic stand while he rides it and tells us a story about a woman in Vancouver's Nelson Hotel. There is a slight pause and Dave says "Let's see Motley Crue do this".

At age 71 Dave is throwing the show he always wanted to do. Picture a Vegas nightclub act: part Sinatra, part James Brown, a touch of Michael Jackson and some of the greatest rock n roll ever written.

Do we even need to talk about the band? This is the guy who sang for the mighty VAN HALEN. Of course he's going to have the best of the best with him, plus an actual gospel choir singing his backups. That reminds us how good Michael Anthony's harmonies were – it takes four guys to sing his parts.

I know the internet is saying he can't hold a note anymore but on this night he was on fire. Hitting the notes when he could, holding back when he couldn't and that acapella outro on "Little Dreamer"? Wow... just wow.

As expected, Dave told lots of stories, and really focused on his time recording in Vancouver. It would have been nice to hear some of his solo stuff but it's pretty hard to complain about a night of Van Halen. He showed us how fit he is and that he's still "got it" by doing a round of limbo while wearing a cowboy hat. It never fell off his head.

Dave seemed to really enjoy being back in Vancouver, he changed up the setlist from previous nights. "DOA" was a personal highlight, and they did a really cool version of the Muddy Waters classic "Rock Me".

The moral of this story? Subscribe to all promoters mailing lists. Most metal heads wouldn't even be aware of MRG Live, but you never know when they will whip something special. This night was all that and more.

— Mike Metal
Photo credit: Mike Metal

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SUPREME ECHO

Absolute Live Reviews



DAVID LEE ROTH
July 13th 2026 — Vogue Theatre, Vancouver, BC

I'm a self-proclaimed Van Halen purist. I love the band's first six albums with David Lee Roth fronting the lineup. I never got to see the classic Van Halen lineup in concert, but I did see Diamond Dave ten times over the decades while waiting for the reunion tour (minus Michael Anthony) in 2007. This past July 13, Dave brought his Don't Love Me, Rent Me tour to Vancouver's Vogue Theatre, and I was standing third row centre for the fandango.

There has been plenty said lately about the quality of Dave's vocals, but that shit doesn't change how I feel about the man himself. He is, after all, one of the architects of the mighty Van Halen.

The show kicked off around 8.00p.m. with Dave strolling out from stage left to the intro of Van Halen's "Panama." His band consisted of guitar, bass, drums, keyboards, and four backup singers. Every one of them was stellar and delivered the goods without exception. The setlist was made up entirely of classic Van Halen material, including the obvious hits like "You Really Got Me", "Ain't Talkin' Bout Love", "Dance the Night Away", "Unchained" and "Jump". But Dave also dug deep with "Little Dreamer", "Mean Street", "Romeo Delight", and my personal highlight of the night, "D.O.A."

Throughout the show, Dave shared retrospective stories about his adventures in Vancouver, including renting the entire top floor of the Nelson Plaza Hotel for a couple of months while recording *A Little Ain't Enough* in 1991. He attacked every song like it was the encore, spending more than two hours onstage without ever looking like he was anything less than thrilled to be there.

I didn't look around the venue to see how full it was, but the buddy who went with me works in the concert industry and told me it was one of the better-selling dates of the tour.

Going into the show, I figured it would probably be my last time seeing David Lee Roth in concert. So after he closed the night with "Jump" and said, "I hope you all have a great summer," I couldn't help but smile and think to myself, "Fuck yeah, Dave... you too."

— Reverend Donny Black

NAPALM DEATH/PRIMITIVE MAN/ DYING REMAINS/CULLED

June 13, 2026 — The Palace, Calgary AB

The music of Napalm Death has, for the good part of 40 years, been a battering ram bastion that doesn't just speak up about but amplifies issues which are constantly shaking up our world. When the music and sociological views converge in such a way, the style of music we have christened grindcore can actually be a vessel of enlightenment. Truly, and seeing Napalm Death live is in some way like seeing a rally, a sermon, a protest and a rock and roll concert all in one. So the masses have come to The Palace in the year 2026 then for the return of who some call "The Godfathers."



Flashback to roughly 15 years ago when Napalm Death played The Distillery in Calgary. At that time, a few local acts opened – Kataplexis being the band on the brink of future success. Tonight, the honours went to local Albertan acts Dying Remains and Culled. Both had their strengths, with Culled pulling out a Nasum cover and Dying Remains pulling out thick, bloody, riffs.

Primitive Man I last saw at Sled Island in the downstairs of the Palomino and their set felt like being sucked into a slow-moving, red tinted vortex without a way out. This time the band had screens with Skinny Puppy/Traces of Death-esque videos playing so there was something to get lost in as the doom took over The Palace.

Bare bones set up, simple lighting and braces accompanied Napalm Death, who were without Shane Embury tonight. The blokes blasted through a set of noise featuring tracks spanning their entire damn career, including the obligatory short but sweet bursts those who maybe took a piss break missed. They suffered. Interestingly, a girl in the crowd got into a minor back and forth with Barney Greenway about there being barricades. Seems she wanted more chaos and when watching things like the old Napalm Death: The DVD, all that stage diving does look appealing, but as I age and the band ages, sometimes seeing the message communicated is good enough without needing to break a bone to get the point across.

— Ryan Dyer

ROUNDUP MUSIC FEST 2026

July 8-9, 2026 – Prince's Island Park, Calgary, AB

Day 1, July 8

The fans who arrived early were treated to some classic rock hits from Toque. I had always been a fan of The Age of Electric, so I was pleased when frontman Todd Kerns pulled out their track "Ugly" for the audience as some dark clouds began to stain the sky overhead. After the band performed Rush's "Tom Sawyer," those clouds sparked something concerning enough to



cause the concert to be stalled for around 20 minutes. When Toque returned to the stage, the clouds and thunder never did.

What better band to play a relaxed, midday set for people to chill out to and sip their half and half vodka lemonade and iced teas than Canadian rock radio nice guys Sloan? "If It Feels Good, Do It" almost sounds like a David Lee Roth song title, if you think about it.

The festival-goers refilled their drinks, with some carrying one

in each hand, for the legendary former Van Halen frontman David Lee Roth, who brought his black and silver chap-style leather pants and cowboy vest to the stage for the "Roth Show." The man was pure entertainment at all times as he and his large, very capable backing band tore through Van Halen classics. In between songs, Roth told stories in typical fashion, proclaiming, "I love the smell of horse shit in the morning," before moseying on into a story about his first kiss in Texas.

From 71 to 70, Billy Idol then took the final spot at 9:30 p.m. to close out the first day of the 2026 edition of Roundup Music Fest. Idol, while not moving around like he was 30 years younger like David Lee Roth did, certainly looked great for his age, exuding his timeless cool rebel visage while delivering a selection of songs from his storied career.

While good, the set felt a bit safer compared to Roth's. Idol, with his various costume changes and iconic poses, delivered what one would expect from a singer with the last name "Idol," whereas Roth may as well change his surname to "Entertainer."

Day 2, July 9

Compared to the classic rock crowd of Day 1, Day 2 felt unmistakably different from the get-go. Upon entering the festival on the first day, there were already people drinking and getting half-cut. Day 2 started much quieter, with a few dozen twenty-somethings gathered in front of the stage on an even sunnier day than before, without a rain cloud in sight, for opener The Royal Foundry. This three-piece electro-Edmo-pop act did their job, providing a few sing-alongs and hum-alongs for the daytime concert-goers.

The New Pornographers performed next, with A.C. Newman being culturally on point with the moment, referencing the horror film *Obsession* while dismissing their Juno Award win, which was mentioned during their introduction: "That was like 30 years ago."

The Prince's Island Park field was mostly filled when Grouplove took the stage. The band spoke about their history with headliners Foster the People, explaining that they toured together during the 2010s, making this performance something special for both groups. It just goes to show that it is difficult to see the future, and that hauling gear from van to club might eventually pay off, as it did for Grouplove and Foster the People.

The Roundup crowd purchased their final beef-on-a-buns and hard iced teas for festival closers Foster the People. While this was not the desert setting of Coachella, standing back and watching the light show grow

brighter as the sun set and the sky darkened, with a sea of young people vibing to the music, there was a sense that popular modern music does have a place in a major outdoor festival

setting in Calgary.

— Ryan Dyer

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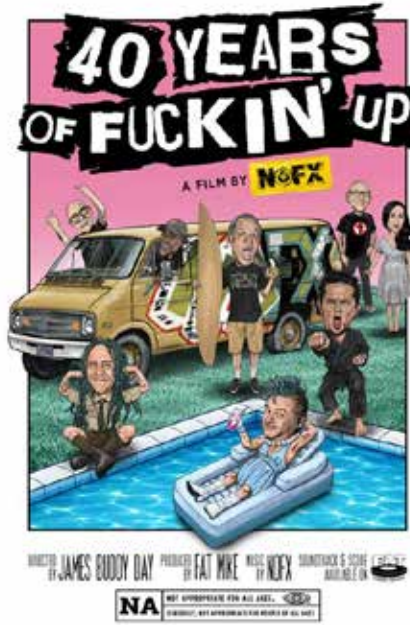
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Absolute Film Reviews

40 YEARS OF FUCKIN' UP — A FILM BY NOFX



I cannot stop thinking about this film. I laughed, I cried, I threw up in my mouth a little bit...

I've been a NOFX fan since the Victoria's punk house shows back in the early '90s, so I was stoked to be able to attend a screening of *40 Years Of Fuckin' Up*, a documentary chronicling four decades of one of punk rock's most dysfunctional, influential and beloved bands.

The film traces the band's journey from its formation in the 80s to their farewell tour in 2024. It explores their struggles with substance abuse, internal conflicts and the band's unique dynamics and personal challenges. Some of it is difficult to watch, but that honesty is part of what makes the film compelling.

It doesn't shy away from the chaos. It's funny, uncomfortable, heartfelt and surprisingly emotional. I learned a lot about the band... dare I say too much. It is indeed up close and personal, backed by a killer

soundtrack of NOFX songs. Watching this with a theatre full of NOFX fans felt a lot more like being at a show than watching a documentary.

In keeping with NOFX's DIY approach, *40 Years Of Fuckin' Up* is being presented in theatres only — a fitting choice for a band whose music has always been about community and shared experience.

If you haven't seen it yet, find a screening before it's too late. You'll laugh, you'll cry, and you might throw up in your mouth a little bit.

The world may be NOFX-less, but it will never be without NOFX. Thank you for 40 years!

— Marisa Flora

THE SUMMONING (OF BABY BLUE)



The Summoning (of Baby Blue) is an anthology of shorts designed to get under your skin. Whether it succeeds depends entirely on your tolerance for fragmented

storytelling. It opens with a driver travelling through farm country who encounters a masked scarecrow on a foggy road. The imagery hints at something larger, and the emphasis on agriculture feels deliberate. But once he's slain, the segment ends, and the film never looks back.

Directed by a collective that includes Sergio Gonzalez and Felipe Vargas, the anthology eventually settles into a more familiar framework. When Laura (Valeria San Martin) finds herself alone, a small nod to *Scream* helps set the tone for what follows. Her friends arrive and convince her to test the "Baby Blue, Blue Baby" urban legend. It feels like an evolution of the Bloody Mary myth, shifting the fear away from mirrors and into something tactile. Once the chant begins, the participant feels an invisible burden growing heavier in their arms, and surviving the encounter becomes the challenge.

The shorts themselves lack intertitles. Between the big story to the individual pieces, to know exactly what story is called what requires waiting for the end credits to spill the beans. That includes the intro, called "Scarecrow," has no relation to "Hive," where Xochitl Gomez plays a babysitter slowly losing control of her situation.

The real substance of the anthology lies in its recurring imagery surrounding the womb. Three of the four stories revolve around primal fears tied to motherhood, pregnancy, or loss. Even the phrase "Baby Blue" feels like a grim reference to the physical reality of a lost infant.

In "Carnivora," Gigi Zumbado plays Ana, a teen burdened by caring for an elderly mother who could pass away at any moment. Although this anthology feels like a scattered collection of compelling ideas that never fully unite, the attempt to bring it together feels more like an examination about child-care, motherhood and perhaps abandonment. If that was the goal, then the film succeeds.

3 Stars out of 5
— Ed Sum

JESUS CHRIST VAMPIRE HUNTER

Jesus Christ Vampire Hunter is celebrating a milestone. After twenty-five years of being very, very quiet, Lee Demarbre's cult classic is being honoured with a fresh revival. Library and Archives Canada provided a new 2K scan of the original 16mm negative for restoration, and a new DCP has been created to bring out the colours. It's ready to sing! And the song will be heard as art houses take this work in for local screenings.

With a lot of mad science going on, JC (Caracas) is the only one able to turn the undead and maybe make the crazy plastic surgeon (Josh Grace) see the light. Mind you, there's some plausibility in the doctor's idea to help



vampires see the sun every once in a while. Apparently, vampirism is an infection. While it can't be surgically removed, this doctor thinks it's possible to change body parts. Had this film decided to push that *Frankenstein* theory into a sequel, it could still happen. But when considering the age of the original film, the chance of a follow-up feels slim, much like how *Bubba Ho-Tep* hinted at a sequel that never did get made.

What makes this work a must-see for vampire enthusiasts are the easter eggs. Not everyone will recognize that the big bad evil vampiress, Maxine Shreck (Murielle Varhelyi), is a reference to Nosferatu. Even Mary Magnum (Maria Moulton) is an obvious nod to a certain holy figure. Though they don't become husband and wife, keeping in line with what the Bible suggests about their relationship, what's presented hints at the opposite.

Jesus Christ Vampire Hunter is silly, budget-averse, and action-hero absurd in the best way. After all, if all JC did was ping the undead with the flick of a finger, that would be far too easy, especially when considering the powers he has acquired since his ascension and return home to replace Van Helsing. This work isn't meant to be nitpicked because the surreal moments are part of the fun. Whether it's the fourth-wall-breaking narrator, a talking cherry sundae, or hip hop as a musical number, this film should simply be enjoyed as the strange piece of Canadiana that it is.

4 Stars out of 5
— Ed Sum

Absolute Album Reviews

ANVIL— *One And Only* AFM Records



When it comes to the most influential bands in the history of heavy metal, Anvil consistently ranks among the top. This group from Toronto, Canada, led by the talented duo Steve 'Lips' Kudlow and Robb Reiner, along with bassist Chris Robertson, has not only enjoyed an illustrious career filled with numerous highlights and well-documented challenges but has also left a lasting impact on many internationally renowned musicians, from Metallica to Slayer and beyond.

The album opens with the title track, "One and Only," which serves as a fantastic introduction. The transition from "One and Only" to the second track, "Feed Your Fantasy," is seamless. "Feed Your Fantasy" is classic Anvil, featuring a guitar solo about two minutes in that truly grabs your attention.

The third track, "Fight for Your Rights," picks up the pace, showcasing Robb's drumming prowess and highlighting his decades of experience. The fourth track, "Heartbroken," slows things down a bit, but the guitar solo around 1:52 is another standout moment that demands attention.

Tracks 5-7 are expertly crafted,

featuring impressive guitar solos and exceptional drumming by Robb Reiner. Tracks 8 and 9, "Rocking the World" and "Run Away," are well-written and guaranteed to get your head bobbing and your feet tapping.

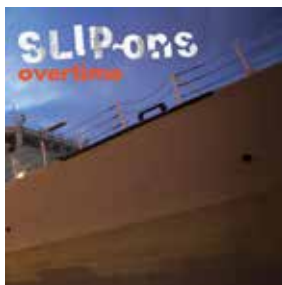
Track 10, "World of Fools," is my favorite on the album. The combination of riffs and drums is so perfectly executed that you'll want to restart the song as soon as it ends.

The album concludes with tracks 11 and 12, "Condemned Liberty" and "Blind Rage," both of which provide a satisfying end to the listening experience.

I thoroughly enjoyed this album. It is excellently written and clearly shows that Anvil has no intention of slowing down. As an Anvil Album i would give this a 10/10

— Stan Schinners, Broken Neck Radio
brokenneckradio.com

THE SLIP-ONS — *Overtime* Scamindy Records



The Slip-Ons have been simmering and stewing up the Vancouver rock scene since 2012, and after almost 15 years in they're finally getting the wider recognition they've been long overdue for with the release of

Overtime, their second EP from Scamindy Records. The band is a Supergroup in the non-bullshitty sense of the term: we've got the mighty Brock Pytel (ex-Doughboys) on lead vocals and rhythm guitar, No Fun City's perennial mainstay Rob "Shockk" Matharu (of the Spitfires) on lead guitar, resident genius Brian Minato (formerly of Sarah MacLachlan's band) on bass, and thudsy drummer stalwart Shane Wilson welding it all together on drums - and the visceral chemistry present here is plainly evident in the casual strength of the songs...which is the point that any rock band worth their Les Paul Juniors seeks to target. The sound and vibe brings forth many of the best elements of classic Alternative Rock (back when that genre-title actually meant something): Afghan Whigs, Husker Du, Urge Overkill, with more than a sweet sprinkling of Power Pop, and even old-school nods to the best years of the Rolling Stones here and there, all punching out with guitar-driven smarts and sharpness. The title track "Overtime" kicks over your living-room speakers, "Graystone" might be the killerest tune here, and the fact that you'll never hear "Nerve Damage" on CFOX-FM primetime only proves how those useless terrestrial-radio dinosaurs wouldn't know a good rock song if it smashed them across the eyes with the flat of a Cub Scout axe. Speaking of axes, did I mention the guitars? *Overtime* is not just another fine fistful of Summer Anthems, but the songs are hot enough to melt the last of the glaciers too. Get this record now. You'll love it.

— Ferdy Belland

HAIDUK — *Archdevil*

Over the years I've faithfully reviewed pretty much every Haiduk album. They are certainly one of



my favourite one-man Blackened Metal bands. Founder Luka has an admirable adherence to his dark art putting out album after album with little to no change or regard for trends. I admire that purity of intention.

The newest independent album, *Archdevil* is out and it is majestically untainted by modernity. Haiduk perfected his signature sound very early on and has felt no need to deviate. The physical CD looks good featuring a winged demon-dude on the front artwork and the simple booklet includes lyrics. The production is raw but clear and loud. The drums sound pretty decent too for programmed drums but the technology has come a long way.

Speaking of lyrics, Haiduk's tradition of very minimalist lyrics continues, just a word or phrase here there... sometimes not even resembling sentences. But each matching the song title, simple stories, if you can even call them that, where the details are largely left to the listeners imagination. Luca's raw vocal delivery is gruff but still mostly discernable. The songs titles are clever, each following a pattern as you can see on the track list below.

The album is short, 11-tracks just over 30 minutes, again keeping with the minimalist approach of the entire project. Each song is a quick blast, good ideas developed then moving on, rejecting traditional song-structures with verse and choruses. Highlights for me are 'Infester' and 'Necrifier'. The guitars are relentless, as is the speed all across the dark blast of an album.

It has been five, long years since the last album *Diabolica*, his longest period between albums, and this fifth album *Archdevil* as Luca continues to create the darkest sounds of one of, if not Calgary's best death/black Metal bands.

— JP (Joshua Wood)

MICKEY MOONE — *Reptilian Warlock*



This dude is the ultimate one man band with super musical hands. Influenced by classic rock, pop punk and rebellious country, Mickey Moore takes style changes and musical integrity to a gritty new level. From Niagara Falls Mickey hits rips and kicks and works hard at it.

This dude is a musical freak; he can play drums, and guitar while singing live, the One man Band extraordinaire event. The energy live and on the album will make you believe you're listening to a full band. The effort certainly is intense and enjoyable to watch as it is to rock out to. A tinge of surf punk mixed with straight raw garage band adds an old school element and makes the old bean bop. Thumbs up for the Reptilian Warlock. Give him some numbers on Youtube and Spotify, he deserves it.

— Matt Norris

HAIDUK — *Archdevil*

From Calgary Canada Haiduk were formed in 2009 to positive recognition, five albums in the onslaught of musical mayhem continues making metal heads proud, and making headbangers worldwide necks strained. *Archdevil* is a perfect album. Thrash, death metal experimental. Contoured black metal soundscapes just up the intensity and show further commitment to the craft of metal. I love metal, and what ? Yeah, I love this album. It's brutal but it's artistic, it has mass musicianship and awesome long musical sections. Vocals are heavy as a truck landing on your skull, then spinning the tires on your face. The riffs are fast and the layered guitars are the perfect shred us metalheads need and feed on. Check out song Infester and support

Canadian talent. Buy the album and some merch and bang your damn head.

Archdevil kicks it up a level.

— Matt Norris

BOAR GOD — *Hunting Season*



From Montreal, this band is here to make the dark a little darker, with a sound I've never heard of called Ghost punk. Mind expansion music that doesn't actually stick in the punk realm, more like psychedelic dreamscape rock, but who's judging. It's a great listen, the musicians are top tier and play like seasoned pros. This is an album that needs a good night of listening while eating mushrooms and staring at the moon. It's a beautiful wall of great sounds and textures vibing poetic. Super super talented musicians creating borderline symphonies intertwined into a wild ride and a great overall experience to the listener. Every song has a style change and the effects of the layered vocals make each song unique beside the next. Cool band for sure, go give them a thumbs up they rock. Creative and original. Cool album.

— Matt Norris

FAMILY MAN — *And So It Ends*



This album is a straight up brutalizing of the senses, just a non stop musical assault full of style shifts and genius riffs. Originality and integrity along with a perfect mix and mastering make this a joy to listen to. It's like Mr. Bungles old albums as far as creativity goes, and that is a serious compliment to creativity and artistic merit. They sound like themselves and it's like a breath of fresh air, mixed with chaos and self absorption through experimentation. If this is their final album then they are going out on their own terms. This is one of those albums that has so much to offer, an album to take to a desert island to listen to on repeat till you croak. From Montreal this is a never-ending car crash that blissfully lands on its wheels, stereo playing on full. And so it Ends. 10 out of fukin 10!!

— Matt Norris

CHUNK — *Earth is Down*



Right from the first notes this just slams me right in the stoner metal side of my brain, and with that I couldn't be happier. Song 1 "Save the Cat" has killer thought out riffs and a wall of sound production that makes it a perfect listen for us doom and sludge fanatics. The vocals are the added twist that winds the fabric of cool songs into next level mastery. Great melodic vocalists with trippy layers make the tracks shine. There's elements here that remind me of my Favorite COC album *In the Arms of God* and that is possibly in my top 5 albums ever. Slow powerful groove grunge and riffs the mighty Sabbath would drool over. Fukin stoner rock Maximus. The end of the song "Caviar" is the heaviest piece of music ever! Song 3 "The Heist" reminds me of Thin Lizzy mixed with Kyuss. This band has a future, pure talent and awesome songs and splendid musicians. Check out this release on Soundcloud or give your head a slap. Perfect release.

— Matt Norris

BRAIN FOG — *Alive*



This album is true punk rock, no pop fluff here. Total energetic mosh pit inducing full throttle ass kicking no holds barred real deal raw punk. The way it should be. 17 tracks of intensity with great production and superb riffs. The vocals are screaming but intelligible which makes the hooks and choruses stand out. Check out the first track "Are you Ready" on bandcamp, and crank the living fuck out of it. This is an album based and made out of resilience and pain, but overcoming obstacles and hurdles some of us luckily have never had to endure. I give it the honour of punk rock excellence, exactly the way it should be. As always please support Canadian talent and go order yourself a green splatter vinyl. I need one for my collection, that is a guarantee. Brain Fog seems to have risen above the fog and is shining bright.

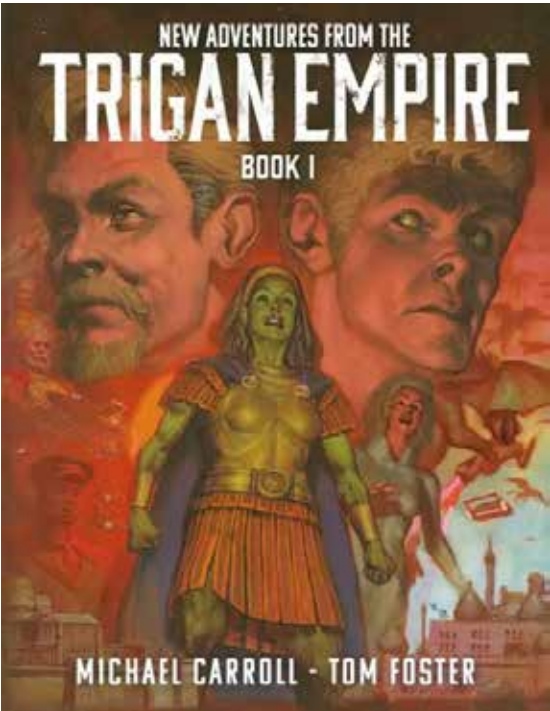
— Matt Norris

Crossword Answers

Thinking Outside the Box												
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CROSSWORD NO. 124

SUMMER, 2026



INTERVIEW WITH MICHAEL CARROLL ON THE NEW ADVENTURES FROM THE TRIGAN EMPIRE

By Steve Earles

Absolute Underground: Michael, I felt both yourself, artist Tom, and publisher Rebellion showed a great deal of courage continuing the classic *Trigan Empire* saga.

Michael Carroll: That's true, Steve. Returning to a beloved comic like *The Rise and Fall of the Trigan Empire* after an absence of forty-something years was definitely a risk for Rebellion... They could have just stuck to their reprint volumes, which would have been a lot safer. But they took a chance on creating a continuation, and I'm extremely grateful that they asked me to write it!

AU: Were you concerned about the reactions of fans of the original series?

MC: Of course, it wasn't without it's challenges, because the die-hard fans of the original all have their own opinions on how it should play out, or, in a few cases, they believe it should be left alone forever.

AU: Well, I'm glad ye didn't because you wrote a fine continuation.

MC: Well, I knew from the start that winning everyone over would be like trying to juggle elephants...

AU: Now, there's an image to conjure with!

MC: No matter what we did, there would be some people who didn't like it. On the other hand, if we allow ourselves to be governed by fear of failure or ridicule, then nothing new will ever be created.

AU: A wise philosophy! One I follow. Did you feel a need to change your writing style?

MC: I could have tried to mimic Mike Butterworth's writing style on the original scripts, but there was a great risk of it turning into parody... Plus we didn't want to alienate new readers.

AU: For the benefit of readers not familiar with the original *Trigan Empire* tales, can you explain the difference between Mike Butterworth's original style of script-writing and yours?

MC: The original scripts were designed to be read in two-page episodes, one episode per week, so the pacing of the story had to be updated. Plus the originals are heavily populated with narrative caption boxes that tell the reader what's going on, which was often the style back in the 1960s and 1970s. But comic storytelling has moved on...or, rather, it has evolved like all creative processes. The tricks

and techniques that give the best results are generally identified and adopted by the next generation, who develop tricks and techniques of their own. So, instead of sprinkling the new *Trigan Empire* adventures with narrative captions, I chose to allow the characters' dialogue and actions to deliver the story. That is, you don't tell the readers 'Trigo was exhausted after the battle' and show him on the ground, leaning back against a tree, his armour battered and tarnished, with his sword still on one hand. Instead you show that picture but also have him wearily discuss the aftermath of the battle with someone else. 'They're scattered to the hills... But they'll be back come nightfall, plundering the dead for weapons and armour.'

AU: I really enjoyed your script, how do you feel about it?

MC: Whether or not the writing is successful in the revival, that's not up to me to say. I think I did a pretty good job. But then I would think

that! I'd never deliver a script I wasn't happy with.

AU: How do you feel about the artwork, Michael?

MC: Tom Foster was absolutely the right artist for this job! He's amazing. He absolutely captured the spirit of the original strips while also bringing a lot of his own magic to it. And wait until you see what he's doing with Book 2. He's surpassed himself again!

AU: Ah, Book 2! Tell us more!

MC: Book 2 is, again, 60 pages long. As is Book 3, so together this revival will comprise 180 pages...And if it's successful enough, we might go further! There are lots of stories to tell... I hope I get to be part of the team that tells them!

AU: I hope so too, Michael, on the strength of Book 1, you very much deserve to!

Graphic Novel Review

NEW ADVENTURES FROM THE TRIGAN EMPIRE BOOK ONE Michael Carroll and Tom Foster Published by Rebellion

Just to give readers some background, *The Trigan Empire* began in a magazine called *Ranger* in 1965. Shortly thereafter, *Ranger* was merged with *Look and Learn*, a popular magazine for young readers (and their parents!) of the time. There were no devices then, and well, as the very popular *Trigan Empire* it featured well-written and illustrated articles on science and history. Running until the 1980s, this is where the legend of *The Trigan Empire* began. Initially illustrated by Don Lawrence, one of the greatest comic artists of all-time, the strip

merged science-fiction elements with an epic Roman Empire-style scenario. When Rebellion began reprinting *The Trigan Empire* a few years ago, it rightly became popular all over again

Now writer Michael Carroll and artist Tom Foster continue the saga of *The Trigan Empire*, a brave move on the part of both publisher and creatives.

It works very well.

Dealing with the art first, Tom's work is excellent, very detailed but also very expressive. He really brings the characters to life. Moreover, he is a good storyteller, a trait sadly lacking in many comic artists.

The most important new element

is Michael's story. With the original *Trigan Empire* tales, exciting and engaging as they are, it was the art that sold them. Here, we finally have a script of equal quality to the art.

Michael has expanded the original into new and exciting directions while still remaining faithful to the original. He has come up with terrific and realistic new characters.

Not surprisingly, being Irish, Michael has our God-given gift for dialogue and his words really shine in this context.

Overall, a cracking tale and I look forward to Book Two!

— Steve Earles



Absolute Snacks Reviews

PRESIDENT'S CHOICE WORLD OF FLAVOURS Halifax Donair Flavour Rippled Potato Chips

I recently discovered the Loblaw's downtown, occupying the old Post Office



like a hermit crab filling out a snail's discarded shell. The place is an ungainly expanse with nearly as many isles of branching pathways as the fabled backrooms of internet lore. I found myself in a dizzied state of lustful consumption, my eyes dazzled by numerous outrageous products I'd never before imagined.

First on that list was this bag of chips, claiming to be flavoured in a style reminiscent of the donairs eaten in Halifax, Nova Scotia. I've never been there, but I've met some who've travelled through the area, their descriptions gave the region a grimly Lovecraftian tone, detailing communities beset by nocturnally scuttling sea creatures and land-dwellers with disturbingly aquatic features.

Regardless of their inspirational point of origin, these chips were delicious, perfectly capturing the tang of sweetly sour garlic sauce one would find on a beef donair, though being a west coaster, I associate this spice profile more with Chicken

Shawarma.

Regretfully these were so good that when I went back later to purchase or pilfer another bag, none could be found. The city knew what I had just discovered: they're damn good chips.

PRESIDENT'S CHOICE WORLD OF FLAVOURS Spicy Caesar Flavour Rippled Potato Chips

Next on my tour through President's Choice's world of Flavours was the Spicy Caesar, credited to all of Canada rather than a single locale.

The expanse of the downtown Loblaw is incomprehensible enough to be considered psychologically threatening. Those who have a compulsive need to familiarize themselves with the store's entirety will become lost in a floorplan that unfolds into an eldritch purgatory of ravenous delights.

This is because the Loblaw is not built for exploration, it is built for survival. Grab what you need, no more than what you can carry, and then get to the exit. Trust no one you see and do not trouble the workers, for they are already paying a high enough psychic toll simply through their labours.



I've never beheld a potato chip and wished it tasted more of clamato and worcestershire sauce. The premise is repellent, and thus I was prepared for something gross and almost didn't try them at all.

But these were pretty decent. Buy a second bag tasty? Not sure, we're gonna have to see how that one goes. But for a chip I assumed would be inedible, these were surprisingly okay.

PRESIDENT'S CHOICE WORLD OF FLAVOURS Korma Flavour Rippled Potato Chips

A korma is a braised curry, with braised being a method of cooking which utilizes both dry and wet forms of heat. Isn't that neat? Now if you're like me, you just learned something new.

These chips taste like they were dipped in curry and maybe left in it overnight. When you open the bag a pungent, though not unpleasant, odour enters the room with the charming allure of a funky dance beat from the streets of Mumbai.

Do you ever look at the faces of the other shoppers when you're in the store? In Loblaw's the other patrons' facial features



were rendered mute by the plentiful displays of surprising snacks in fanciful flavourings. I could've walked past my mother and not recognized her when standing in the shadow of a stack of store-made sushi and whatever else they were selling in that sprawling monument to human hunger.

These chips were a one and done; intriguing enough for a sample, but not wondrous enough to reach for a second bag. I appreciate their honesty though; these chips are exactly what they claim to be, and if you're a fan of intense Korma vibes, you'll dig these guys.

PRESIDENT'S CHOICE WORLD OF FLAVOURS Peameal Bacon Sandwich Flavour Rippled Potato Chips

I'm told that the Peameal Bacon Sandwich is an Ontario staple, but having spent the majority of my life west of the Rockies, I have no familiarity with this intriguing speciality. However, after a bag of these, I'm open to giving the sandwich a try.

The chips possess a sharp hit of maple syrup which combines nicely with their artificial baconing, creating a flavour that somehow manages to replicate the taste of dunking pork strips into pancake runoff - a delicacy enjoyed by more



refined palates - with the sharp snapping of the rippled chip reminiscent of the crunch of properly-burned bacon.

Rusticly familiar, yet somehow fascinatingly novel and original. Like the physics of a bumblebee's flight, it shouldn't work, yet it does. Sweet, yet bold, not unlike my mother. Finger-licking good, not unlike your mother.

As I went to depart I realized that I'd become lost within the Loblaw's and was only able to reorient myself towards the exit by configuring my spatial coordinates based on wailing cries of three separate babies, though I suspect one of them may have been a man in his mid-forties; I suspect one of them may have been me.

DARE Ultimate Apple Fritter - "Donut Inspired Cookie"

Cookies inspired by donuts seems like the kind of whimsical



bedevilment conceived by a mind already driven mad by external pressures, though the conceiving of such an item as even an audience-goer presented me with plenty of passageways to a state of mind which could at best be considered heightened and at worst, devoid of reason and rational sense.

At this point I decided that this Loblaw's was some sort of liminal structure, an aspect of reality dictated by the instability of the collective subconscious. How else could I explain the continuous bombardment of so many outlandishly unconventional items?

I forgo these peculiar confections on my first sojourn through the establishment, but was forced to return when I found the mere concept of the cookies haunting my casual conversations and sneaking into my oneiric reveries.

So I went back and got them. And even though my mind was certain they'd be naught but a repugnant mockery of my desires, two contradictory impulses combining to form a featureless trifle, I instead found a cookie so uniquely tasty that I worry that even revealing its existence to others will result in my acquiring less than I will eventually require.

— Hank Pattison



KAMLOOPS' GREGORIOUS RETURN WITH *FOOTSTEPS TO NIHILISM*

Just over a year after releasing their debut album, Absolutely Nothing, Kamloops death metal band Gregorious returned with *Footsteps to Nihilism*, their second full-length album, released July 10.

The new record builds on the foundation of its predecessor with a tighter, more cohesive collection of songs while continuing to lean into the heavy riffs, groove, and dark humour that define the band's sound. Recorded by Brandon at Stay Media and

mixed and mastered by Diego at Oracle Studios, the nine-track album features songs including "Footsteps...", "Meat Hook Puppet", "Start A War" and "Beautiful Sunset."

The artwork was once again created by the band's own "Roadkill" Riley.

Fans can catch the band live at the Heavy Metal Barbeque in Abbotsford on August 23, with additional shows expected to be announced.

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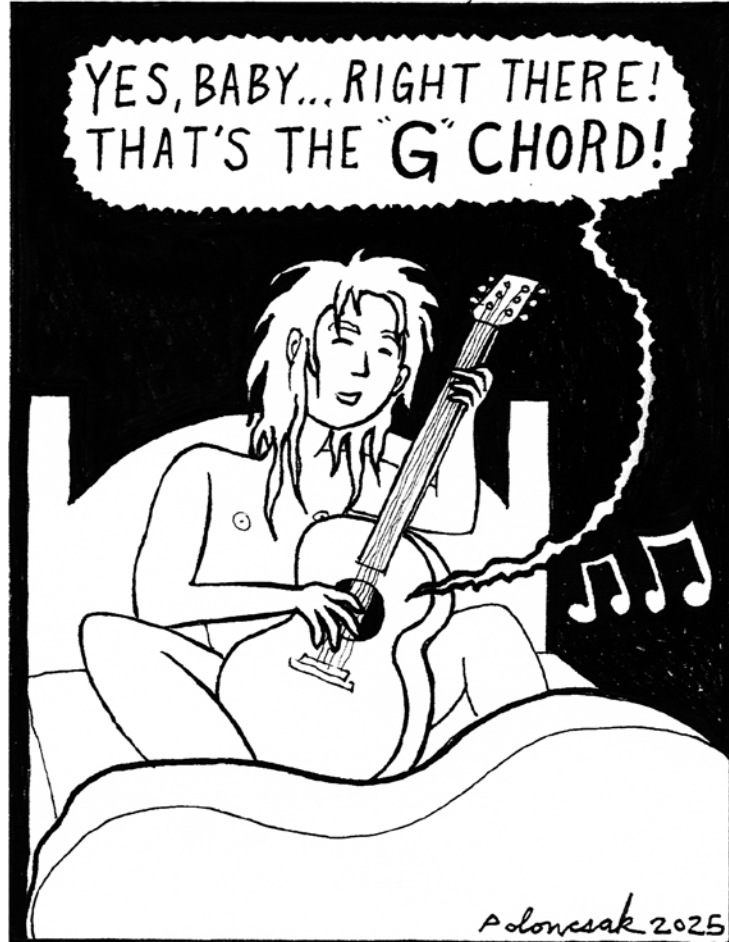
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by Keenan Poloncsak

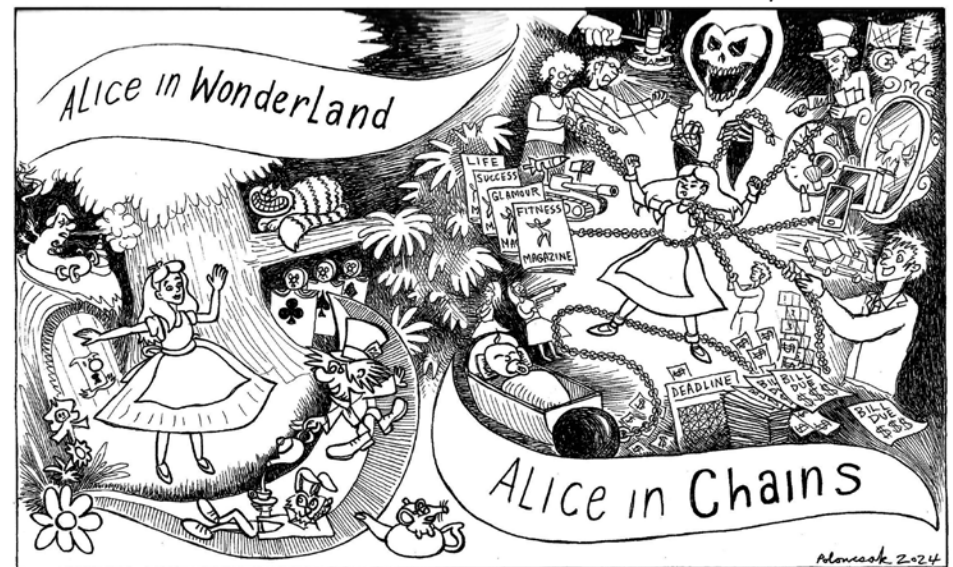


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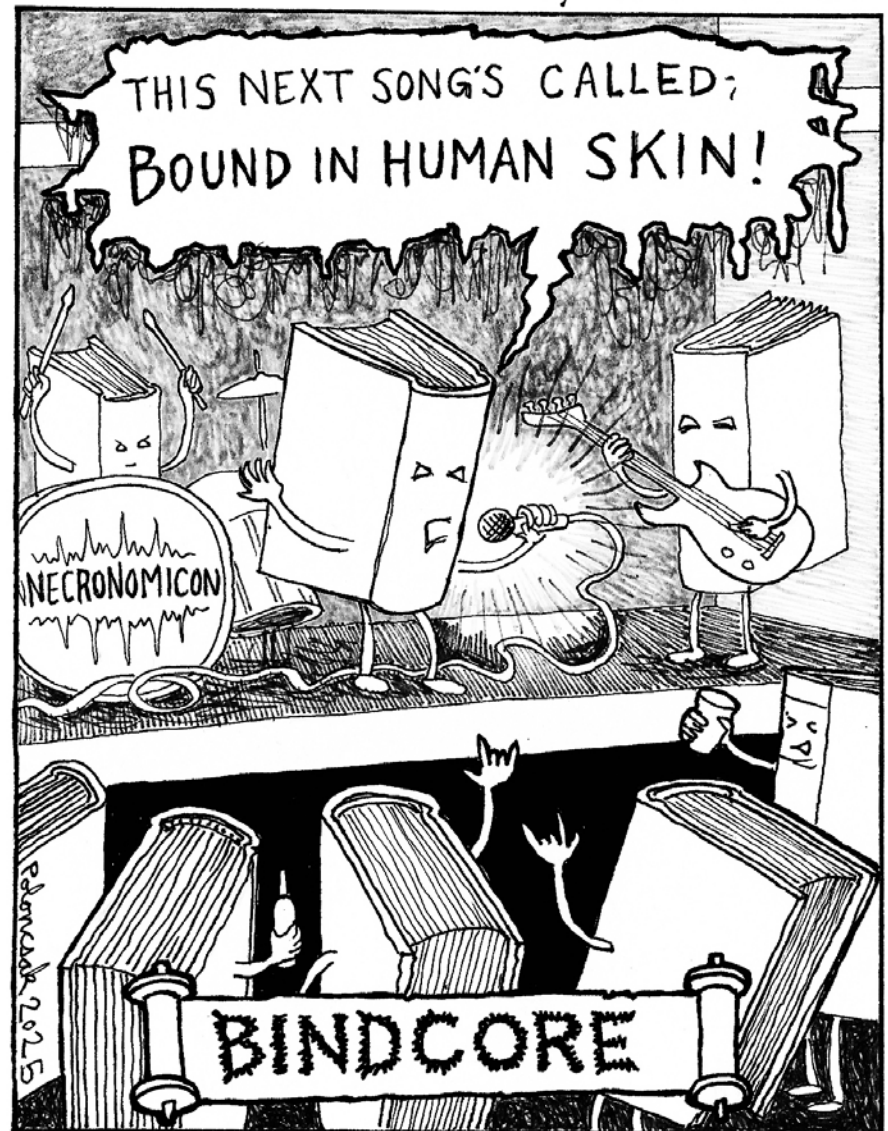


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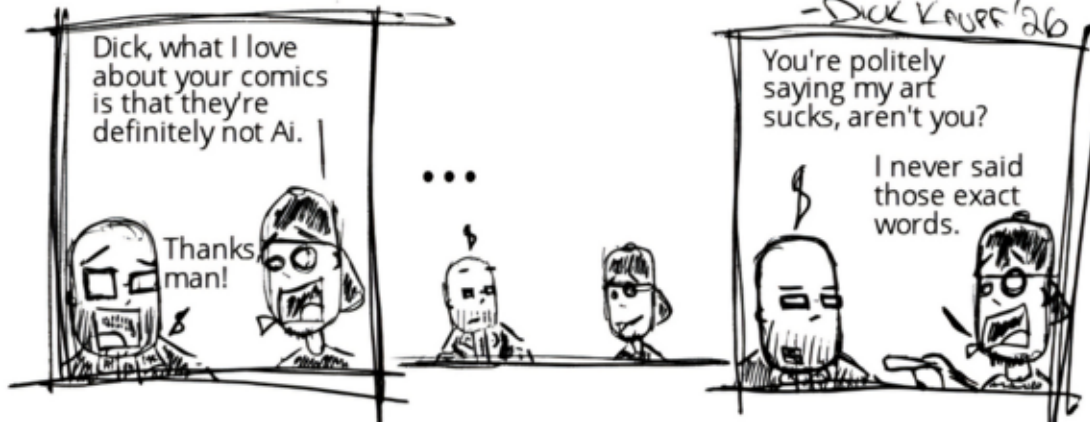


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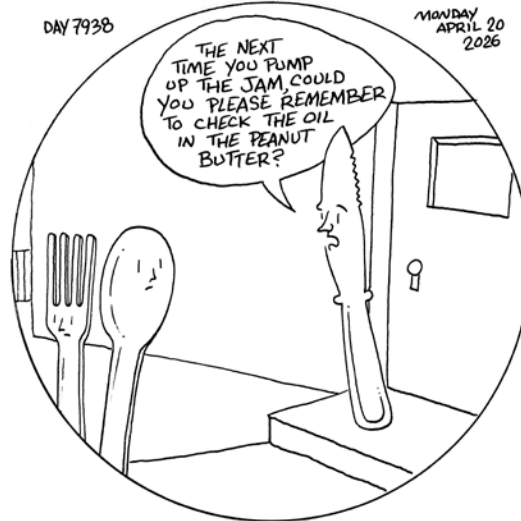
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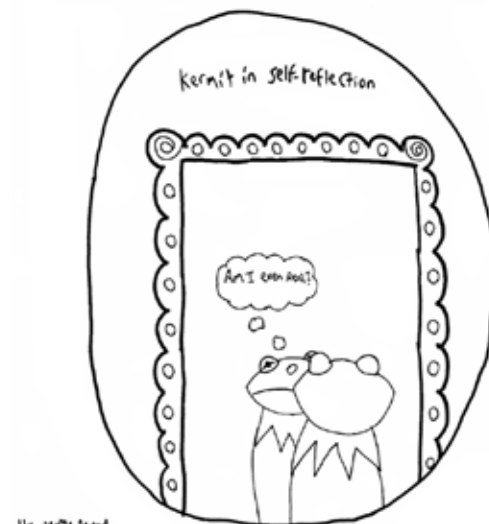


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by garet 2026

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PULL THEM OFF AND ON.
MOMMY, WOW!
CAN I GO OUT
AND KILL
TONIGHT?
I'M A BIG
KID NOW.

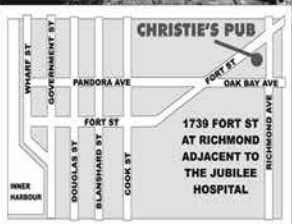




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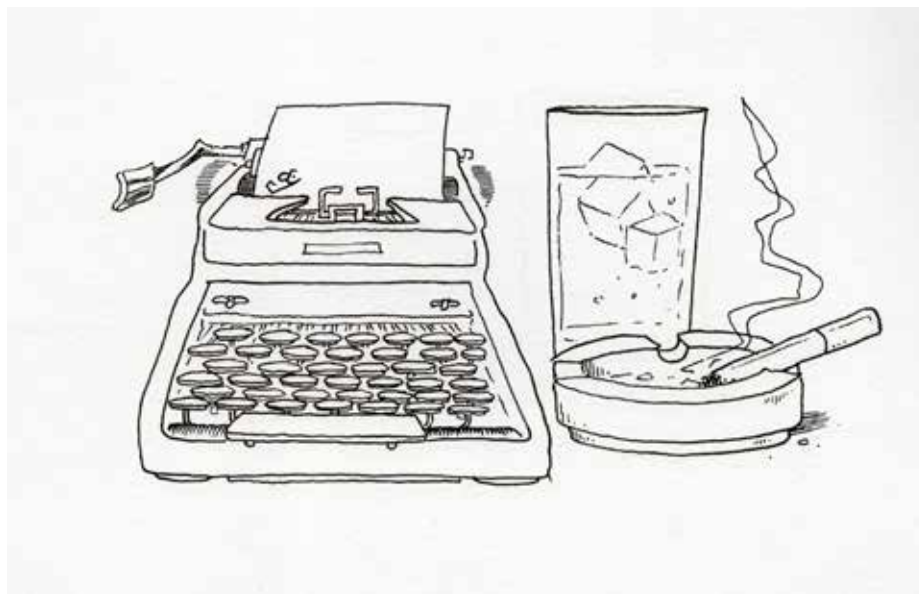
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TIPS & TALES FROM THE TYPEWRITER: Lights Out

By david eugene everard

Local late-night radio talk show host, Robert Howard Lovecraft, told the tale so well you'd think you were right there with him when it happened.

As we gathered around an exceptionally well-stocked, leather-bound bar, beverage manager Billy Sparks set up a fresh round of drinks before turning to Robert and asking him if he knew anything about the incident at the drive-in theatre last night.

He nodded, took a quick sip of Southern Comfort to settle his nerves, and started from the beginning.

Ever since Martin Quatermass moved his Mercury Drive-In Theatre to the abandoned slaughterhouse over by Antonio Bay, Lovecraft reminds us, our local motion picture appreciation society has held their annual film festival there.

Traditionally, the VIP Space Cadet package at Q's

Inter-Galactic Snack Shack included early access to the venue along with a buffet-style dinner that featured Sputnik flavoured peanut butter and bacon hot dogs, freshly peppered Venusian pretzels and a slow-grilled, Saturn-sized, triple-stacked, cheeseburger platter—all served in a southern style tin foil hat for your take home pleasure.

While the adults contemplated the Drive-In's legendary menu, their kids were free to navigate the Milky Way merry-go-round and manhandle the mis-matched monkey bars on their way to the Atomic Arcade where they could squander what was left of their allowance on ice-cold soda pop, old school pinball, and the newly installed *Donkey Kong* game.

The walk back to his car didn't take very long, Lovecraft recalled, but by the time he figured out how to attach the hard-wired speaker unit to the port side window of his Volkswagen Beetle, the thirteenth annual Spring Falls Science Fiction & Horror Film Festival was underway.

Held over the course of the Labour Day long

weekend, this year's edition featured American film and television director Jack Arnold's influential run of science fiction films during the 1950s.

While Friday night's triple-threat tribute included the first Universal-International picture to be shot in 3D, they wisely saved Arnold's masterpiece, *The Incredible Shrinking Man*, for Saturday night's bug-eyed, spider-filled, double-feature finale (with *Tarantula* serving as an appropriate appetizer). Based on a short story by Ray Bradbury, *It Came from Outer Space* opens as amateur astrologist, John Putnam (Richard Carlson), and his lovely girlfriend, schoolteacher Ellen Fields (Barbara Rush), witness a malfunctioning alien spaceship as it hits the Arizona Desert hard enough cause a minor earthquake (which effectively hid it from prying eyes).

Putnam's friends and neighbors were initially skeptical of the story, but their opinion eventually changes when a pair of familiar-looking doppelgangers are spotted searching nearby hardware stores for spare parts.

Despite the difficulty of shooting in 3D, the interplanetary aliens depicted here were far better designed than the truly laughable, budget conscious, attempts that have appeared in other, much less noteworthy films.

Jack Arnold's science fiction movies of the 1950s examined the philosophical concept of 'ethical intrusion'; and, more importantly, how the idea itself might be applied to various groups of 'uncivilized creatures' and 'warmongering aliens' in general.

Creature from the Black Lagoon was the first major studio underwater feature to be shot in 3D. The movie stars Richard Carlson, in the role of the benevolent scientist, and his girlfriend, Julie Adams (as the object of the creature's long-repressed sexual desires).

With that in mind, the most memorable scene in this 1954 movie occurs when the Gill Man discovers Adams as she goes for a swim in a bathing suit that leaves little to the imagination. Although their eyes never meet, their mirror-imaged bodies do lock into an underwater

romance dance that, like Bogart and Bacall's horse racing analogy in *The Big Sleep*, managed to slip right past the censorship guidelines of the Hays Motion Picture Code.

John Agar plays the part of sympathetic professor Cleve Furguson in *Revenge of the Creature*, while Lori Nelson co-stars as his girlfriend, Helen Dobson. On his return to the Black Lagoon, the heavily sedated creature is captured and transported to an Oceanarium in Florida for the purposes of 'scientific' research. Once he escapes his undersea prison and kidnaps Helen, however, the chase is on.

Robert Howard Lovecraft paused to light an unfiltered cigarette. After a moment of somber reflection, he turned to Billy and said that the incident he asked about earlier occurred near the end of the movie. He took his second sip of Southern Comfort and proceeded to tell the tale.

After tracking the creature to a secluded beach, a group of sharpshooters raised their rifles in unison and took aim at the partially submerged, barely conscious creature.

Unfortunately, just as that first shot found its mark, Lovecraft said with a shudder, the film in both 3D projectors suddenly snapped at precisely the same time.

In the chaos that followed, a thick, London-style fog slowly drifted in from the Antonio Bay shoreline and headed straight for the Mercury Drive-In.

By the time it faded back into the cold, dark night, a squadron of silver coloured, cigar-shaped, flying saucers had filled the now starless and bible-black sky to acknowledge their landlocked prey with laser-beam precision.

Artwork: Gareth Gaudin.

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THE AMAZING DIGITAL CIRCUS: THE LAST ACT

By "Vaudeville Demon"

theatres ahead of its YouTube and Netflix release? It's a big deal, it's a big deal for the indie scene, it's a big deal for animation, and if the finale can stick the landing, it's a big deal for the show and the fandom.

The Last Act, which was really just the combination of two episodes of *The Amazing*

Digital Circus, episode eight; "hjsakldfhl" (Yes that is the actual episode title) and the finale, episode nine; "Remember", serves as a satisfactory ending to the incredible series. Getting to see some of the memorable moments from episode eight on a massive theatre screen will be an experience few will forget, from the charming song "The One Who's Running the Show", sung by the talented Alex Rochon as the circus ringmaster Caine, or the nightmarish torture sequences is a different experience to watching the YouTube premier, and not having to wait another two months and going straight into the finale with a callback to the introduction from the first episode was a special kind of forebodingly beautiful that only a show that has mastered the art of the bittersweet unease in storytelling could accomplish. The aftermath of Caine's accidental deletion, and how the circus members try to rebuild. The tragic reveal of who they really are, what the circus really is, the tragedy is in both the inevitability of the story, there was only ever one way it could have gone, but the bittersweet themes of the show, that there can be beauty in a stagnant life and that people are more than their mistakes and their past make for a really touching pair of episodes.

Little details make the finale, and by extension the entire show, so much more nuanced and fun to rewatch. One of the characters, Jax (Voiced by Michael Kovach) has been hinted at being Queer, possibly trans for a good while, and the final episode all but confirms these hints with just the smallest of friendly gestures, a gesture that Jax the ever repressed and insecure person who can never allow himself any vulnerability ultimately rejects. A touching scene between Caine and the Moon shows the growth and humanity in these characters, even if they are Artificial Intelligence at their source. Small moments between characters like Gangle (Voiced by Marissa Lenti) and Zooble (Voiced by Ashley Nichols) show strong bonds of friendship and well, if you did not pick up on their tension you're blinder than Stevie Wonder. Speaking of, the Stevie Wonder song "Isn't She Lovely" plays over a montage that could mean one of two things depending on how you view

it, either it is about Pomni (The main protagonist of the show voiced by Lizzie Freeman), or it is about Jax, again hinting about Trans Jax being canonical.

The entire show is a combination of Harlan Ellison's *I Have No Mouth, and I Must Scream* and the 1970s Richard Williams movie *Raggedy Ann & Andy: A Musical Adventure*, with the aesthetics of early 90s Computer-Generated Imagery, and it has its cute and whimsical moments that get balanced out by more serious and emotionally hard-hitting scenes. While episode eight has a fantastic villain song before some hard to watch torture scenes, episode nine continues this idea with a heartwarming final get-together from our main cast, including a parallel with the first episode, only to continue with a heavy scene starring Caine as he is stuck in the void trying to fix what he has ultimately broken. To summarize the finale in one word would be impossible, it is equal parts heartwarming and heartbreaking, it is as lovely as it is tragic, it is as awe-inspiring as it is wearing its influences on its sleeve.

To have seen *The Last Act* in theatres, even in subpar seating, even with a chattier crowd, was something special, an experience that not very many will get the chance to experience. The closest now is watching the finale on a large television screen in a dark room, which is a perfectly fitting viewing location for such a finale. If you have yet to experience the laughs, horrors, thrills and chills of *The Amazing Digital Circus*, let this be your opportunity to start, it is available for free on YouTube, it is only nine episodes long, and it may just be what leads to a massive indie revolution. Glitch Productions and Gooseworx had something real special on their hands and we truly cannot thank them enough for sharing it with us. As two separate episodes, *The Last Act* pulls the curtain on a fantastic series with near perfection, and as one full theatrical experience, it was something truly special.



LORDS OF APATHY

Interview by Jay Flett

Absolute Underground: Who are you, how long have you been a band, and how would you describe your sound?

LOA: We are Lords of Apathy. It's been five years. We are playing all kinds of punk rock. Noise, older punk rock.

AU: How did you get started and how many lineup changes has it taken to get here?

LOA: No lineup changes. We made some calls to each other and luckily got Rick. Basically, we became the Lords of therapy cuz we all got mental problems. We are more a mental health group than a band.

AU: What have your major influences been and has that changed as you've progressed?



TERMINAL SESSIONS

LOA: Epitaph skate punk since high school. These days, super into No Means No and Dead Bob. A lot of local stuff has been great too. We have a great local scene. Mostly local bands is what influences us. First two Dayglo records, Gnar Gnars, Rebel Spell, AWT.

AU: How has the Nanaimo scene changed since you started?

LOA: We think its improved, not to toot your horn, but since you've been doing The Terminal, its been a better scene and that's spilled out into Nanaimo. We got lucky too cuz we started just after Covid and everyone wanted to get out and see bands. So it was perfect timing.

AU: You guys are based in Nanaimo. Do you have a favourite show or shows you've played?

LOA: Playing the boxing ring at Eastside Boxing Club Vancouver was pretty awesome. The show at the Vault Skateshop was one of our favourites.

AU: You have some material coming out soon?

LOA: We are working on recording, doing it DIY. We hope to have it done before we are dead.

AU: What motivates you to continue to play?

LOA: Mental health! Honestly, just getting together with your friends makes you feel so much better. Like, hey man, lets go to practice and by the second song everyone is smiling. A big part of our band is therapy.

AU: Johnny Ramone or Greg Hetson?

LOA: Greg Hetson!

AU: How are you finding attendance at shows?

LOA: Depends on who we play with. It's been pretty good for the most part, but a good bill with a few good bands on it makes a difference. We've been lucky to open some great shows. 14-year-old us would be happy.

AU: What's down the road for LOA?

LOA: Selling feet pics. Hopefully get some recording done, put it out online. We are excited to play more. Find our IG @lordsofapathyband

Photo credit: Jay Flett

@theterminalnanaimo

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JENNIFER FINCH ROCK IN PEACE

Aug 5, 1966 – July 18, 2026

This one really hit hard as it had become known that Jennifer was fighting aggressive brain cancer. I had already begun crying and called to the gods of rock and roll for mercy and her recovery. When I got the news on July 18th of her untimely passing I cried a lot more. She was a brilliant photographer, musician (Other Star People, The Shocker, L7) and most of all a fire goddess burning with energy, light and heat that would ignite and spread to anyone in her presence. Her smile, her eyes, her voice, her

laugh, are all burned deep in my heart and shall never leave. I choose not to think of her spirit as a fire that was doused or burned out but more like when you see one of those embers that fly up still glowing until they are out of sight, settling in the night sky to join the other stars shining down on us. Shine on sister Jennifer Finch in the heavens as on earth you rocked my universe.

– Billy Hopeless

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