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Opening words

This book before you was a winding road. Not only 10 years of cumulative writing and staying afloat in a changing musical scenscape, but the book itself. For we, a webzine, still love print and we wanted to find a way to mix the digital age with the classic. First imagined as a print-on-demand or zine proper, the ebook became the logical choice for collecting our voice into a 10 year project. It's exciting to be here 10 years after starting up. While I'm only in my third year as editor (sixth with the site), I've already seen a number of established and respected sites come and go. It's a tough game: it's hard to find time; it's hard to find a unique voice. As Napster and Myspace sunk into the black hole of archive.org, and Bandcamp, YouTube, and Spotify have arisen, it's a changed game from 2010, not to mention 2003. Scene Point Blank is here because of dedication on behalf of every writer who has contributed and because we want our voices to be heard, individually and collectively. That's what SPB is all about.

This collection is the same concept. While it's not necessarily new material, it's an archive, a spotlight, a retrospective, and a benchmark as we look ahead. It's a lot of things to me as the editor-in-chief and hopefully to the loyal readers too, and it certainly isn't all downhill from here. We're just gaining more inertia as we plow ahead, jumping and skirting the obstacles as they fall.

Thanks to everybody who has ever written for SPB or read our work.

– Loren

A note on the title

This collection opens with an interview with the iconic Ian Mackaye. The interview took place after a show by his newest band The Evens, whose song “Shelter Two” has a refrain of “it’s all downhill from here”. Mackaye explains during live shows that this lyric isn’t as pessimistic as it seems: according to him, if it’s “all downhill from here”, it means you’re at the top of the hill right now; in a pretty good place with your life. After a decade of publishing Scene Point Blank, that’s how we feel right now.

– Matt

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Section one

Introductions

Zed Cutsinger

Founding member

To understand the formation of Scene Point Blank it's important to understand the internet. Not only does Scene Point Blank exist on the internet, but its formation was equally as acquiescent with the internet. Yes, I understand you're reading this in a physical book, but bear with me.

My first memories of using the internet date to 1995. I was in the fifth grade. My first reaction was that it was novel but impractical because how could anyone expect to memorize all those URLs? The teacher mentioned something about Webcrawler. My second memory was AOL chatrooms with middle school friends. Nude JPGs, ASL and getting disconnected when somebody called the house. By eleventh grade my house got a computer and a then state-of-the-art 56K modem. Napster, AIM and the AFI messageboard. I downloaded every record someone ever mentioned in a positive manner.

Prior to this technological achievement, I used to stand over my boombox recording songs from the radio and make mixes of these nineties alt rock singles. But now with the internet I could lift songs without having to cut around radio taglines and commercials. A year later I lost my virginity to a girl I met from the AFI messageboard. This was 2001, when everybody was afraid that everyone on the internet was an old man poised to rape anybody dumb enough to meet them. But alas, she wasn't an old man, she was my first mistake. I would've downloaded a car if I could.

Then in 2003 some "friends" I had "met" from the AFI messageboard and I decided to start a website that covered music. I had no idea what I was doing. I just knew I loved music and wished to help others find the same music that I loved. I was failing college at the time and "dating" a girl I met from MOC. I hated every high school English teacher I had and, as still is the case, resulted in my ability to write. Writing was a chore. Hopefully none of these sophomoric attempts at music criticism make it into the book. For your benefit and my own. Mostly yours though.

Ten years later Matt direct messaged me via Twitter to contribute a small piece of writing for the preface. Between looking on Tinder for someone with low enough self esteem to be interested in me, I wrote this. Hopefully you found something great from the website. A website that took its name from Grosse Pointe Blank. A movie about a high school reunion. A book about a retrospective look on what was. It's all connected. Just like the internet.

Michael Phillips

Former editor

A retrospective piece like this is a bittersweet experience. I am pretty sure that's how they always end up so, in that light, mine will be no different. I am now four years removed from the last time that I wrote for Scene Point Blank, which seems like both an eternity and, at the same time, like it was yesterday. At the time of my departure I was burnt out on the demands of the day-to-day operations of a webzine and the writing of reviews, features, news, etc. Over a six-year span I wrote nearly 600 reviews (the vast majority of which were written in a four year time period) plus a plethora of features, interviews, and news stories. Needless to say, SPB was a major part of my life for a number of years. And that is something that I am quite proud to say.

Looking back at all that transpired during my time with SPB, I look at where I am today and it's not surprising to see that this website helped create a number of friendships that I still hold today. Individuals that I met through the business side of dealings with press agencies, record labels, magazines, and webzines are now people that I call close friends. Bands that I discovered through the site - whether they are still bands or have come and gone - boast members and former members that I speak with daily. At the time I doubt I thought I was forging lifelong friendships with these people, but it is funny how life works out.

In an attempt to put my time at SPB into perspective I found myself going back and reading reviews that I wrote as far back as nearly ten years ago. Some of those reviews were rather cringeworthy. Who the heck thought that I should review records? On the flipside, I also found moments throughout my years of writing that made me proud of what I produced. I wasn't sure what exactly I was looking for as I perused the catalog of reviews I amassed, but I was hopeful that it would help me summarize my time with SPB. While doing so I came across a review of Last Lights' self-titled 7". Not only do I think this excerpt speaks to my time at SPB, but also life in general:

"I don't expect everyone to take away the same feelings from this ... as I do, but when I look back on my life some thirty years or so from now I know that I will be able to pinpoint the impact that this ... had on me. And that's a feeling that I know everyone understands..."

If anyone that I have fallen out of touch with would like to reach out to me, I

would love to hear from you. I can be reached at the following email address:
escapistrecords@gmail.com

Loren Green

Editor

Time flies and the gigabytes accumulate in my inbox. It was the start of 2011 when I inquired about the editor-in-chief role. I'd been with the site for a few years, mostly writing reviews and a few features, but I'd had a quiet seat in the back of the room. I'm not the outspoken type. Most of the local scene doesn't know me—I'm a face in the crowd, and that's how I've always been. However, the site had seen a lull of activity, followed by a re-launch with a new design, and it was time to get moving. Conveniently, my interest in freelance writing was growing. It just made sense.

I've learned a lot, made good connections, and every day seemingly brings something at least a little bit new. There are trials where it feels as though the only readers out there are also industry "insiders," but SPB is a fruitful outlet and one I'm proud to represent. We've come a long way from the 2003 start-up—though admittedly, I was not involved at the time. I came on board via word of mouth, having found the site through the quality features and interviews. (It may have been a Dan Yemin/Paint It Black one, but time passes and memory fades.) But I do remember bookmarking the page and reading through the archives, which mixed timely hardcore such as Paint It Black and Modern Life Is War with classic punk figures like Henry Rollins and Ian McKaye. Hell, SPB has even interviewed Two Gallants and Cursive. We get around stylistically, and that's really what sets the site apart; anyone looking at Scene Point Blank today isn't going to see it and think AFI. Some weeks it can be all metal or hip-hop, though the running tone is one of respectful criticism of (largely) independent music. (Full disclosure: I'm not an AFI fan.)

Highlights from the editor's seat come in working with musicians I've long respected. To email Frank Turner, get hold of Jello Biafra (even if just for a One Question Interview), or to work out columns with Joe Lally and Blag Dahlia—it's all reinforcement on the power that this music holds over me and the fact that it's still a community despite the miles and stage barriers between us. It can feel pretty distant at times, but interacting with artists it always feels like we're peers, not business people making a transaction or stumping for something by deadline. It feels like people

who want to talk about their art and understand that there are people out there who want to know the forces that drive them. It's a cyclical effect, not only entertaining or educating, but it inspires me to keep seeking out new music, to keep digging in those dusty crates on the floor at the used stores, and to sink too much income into hard copy vinyl and (yes) cds.

Scene Point Blank, despite the work, keeps me young. Life interrupts hobbies. Homeownership, family crises, careers, and such pull away from free time and resources for things like buying music and going to shows. It's just a fact that it gets harder to find new music or to find energy to stay up until bartime in a dive bar on Saturday night as these other forces tug. Scene Point Blank, almost daily, reminds me of the fruits of staying atop the current crop of music instead of just talking about "back in the day." There is an enormous catalog of amazing classics; one could live on them alone. One could live on nostalgic items from his/her youth, one could just turn on Spotify and see what the interwebs thinks I should hear. The bottom line is that I'd rather find it for myself and I'd rather look forward. The independent music being created today is every bit as vibrant as the elders', and whether derivative or avant, it's all relevant. Let's look forward instead of back.

Matt Andrews

Founding member

Scene Point Blank has come to represent a kind of mirror for my adulthood. I was one of four people posting on the official AFI messageboard—back when such things were popular—who got together to set up an online zine. I was 16 years-old at the time with a burgeoning interest in the world of loud, fast, aggressive music, and was immediately thrown into the brand new surroundings of hardcore, US cultural references and, of course, music writing.

I answered the call for a web designer, pointing to my basic experience creating sites about Japanese anime I liked at the time and random small band websites. I quickly found myself listening to music I'd never otherwise have come across, receiving stacks of promo CDs and mysterious press onesheets and even being placed on the guestlist at shows to interview bands I loved. The earliest of these experiments can be seen within these very pages: my nervous, somewhat fawning interview with Tiger Army's Nick 13 was a rite of passage – all thanks to SPB.

As the site grew and we gained writers and readers so, too, did my basic web development skills. The site iterated and changed as I learned new things: gone was the static HTML website, replaced with an all-the-rage PHP framework and database which I didn't really understand. I battled to keep the site running as dodgy web hosts went down and closed shop and evil hackers exploited the page to promote their anti-USA messages. I even managed to graduate university and get my first job being paid to build websites, partly based on my long-running work on SPB.

The site's undergone a few more rebuilds and redesigns since then as I've picked up more things and gotten more serious with my craft, moving to London to take up a more senior software development role. I love music and love writing and try to combine them when I find the time, although it's not always easy. It was my idea to create this collected edition of our work, mostly out of a sense of pride that something I started as a teenager has managed to survive into the era of Facebook, Spotify and whatever comes next.

I'm immensely proud of Scene Point Blank: not just for its longevity, but for the huge cast of talented people who've contributed to it over the years. There have been many dozens of writers, news article submitters, interviewers, proofreaders and even an editor or three: all of them have been brilliant, dedicated, and creative people. The site doesn't make much more than its running costs and anything above that gets pumped back into it for ventures like this. Those who contribute do it for nothing more than the love of sharing great music and their passion for it with our readers. Every time we cover a new band or get a comment thanking us for highlighting something awesome, I feel a renewed sense of gratefulness that we—as a team—managed to keep it going for a decade: we've been around longer than Facebook, which is pretty old in web years.

I don't know what's next for SPB after this and, to be honest, we've never really planned like that anyway. The music industry and the digital world have been colliding for a while now and our role in it is just as uncertain as everything else in that sphere. I'm still excited about sharing good music with our readers, though, and working with some talented, funny, passionate and hardworking people to keep providing you with content like this. Here's to a life-changing decade.

Bob Morgan

Senior writer

Listen, there are probably tons of people out there who have considered themselves music journalists in the past that eventually get just completely burnt out on writing about all of this; and yes, that situation is very easy to succumb to the general malaise and apathy that burnout brings. Those of you out there that can sympathize because you have been there know exactly what I am talking about and just maybe are nodding your heads while reading this gibberish (those of you who cannot identify still should keep going, I promise that this gets better), and some of you nodding your head in agreement can also relate when I say that there always seems to be that record that draws you back into writing, particular if you write music reviews of any sort. First though, let me talk about why some of us torture ourselves with writing such hyperbole when so many people out there could care less about these giant musical reacharound that we all take part in and perpetuate.

I know why I got myself into this mess, and it is actually very simple but that would be no fun to just out and say it. Two movies are to blame for my overly cantankerous take on music. Now, some of you who are semi-familiar with my writing will more likely remember that I gush and wax ecstatic in the vast majority of my writing may just disagree, but ask anyone that knows me how horridly unforgiving I can be about music in person, though I almost never allow people to read hardly anything where I speak ill of artists or their work and that is where me and one of my music scribe heroes deviates. More on that in a bit as this is where the two movies come in to play.

Watching *High Fidelity* for the first time was like seeing MY people be thrust into the spotlight; the scenes where the record store clerks are viciously berating their co-workers and customers for their taste in music was akin to the feeling of *simpatico* that you feel when you first meet someone else into Minor Threat or Joy Division or Entombed or Rudimentary Peni or Discharge... blah blah blah... in high school. This movie made me feel ok for feeling like the “unappreciated scholar” and baring some general disdain for the willfully ignorant while simultaneously be hoping to impart some of the musical knowledge to the willing.

Almost Famous had a similar revelatory effect on my younger and

still impressionable mind, and it had little to do with the Cameron Crowe character and everything to do with the real life denizen that pops on Raw Power in the middle of the day to assault the straights. Yes, this movie introduced me to the amazing Lester Bangs to the point where I tried to absorb every written word about music that he wrote and, while I could never be him, I could sure as hell ease my way into his rambling vibe where he just goes off about music that so few others have on their radar. I would be lying if I did not say that *Almost Famous* did not also turn on the light bulb in my head to write about music, if only (and here is the singular simple reason that I wanted to write about music, specifically records) because as Phillip Seymour Hoffman said as Lester Bangs, "...first, you never get paid much; but you will get free records from the record company." Sign me up.

So Scene Point Blank did allow me to write, excessively, about music (my first review for them was for *Hex: Or Printing In The Infernal Method* from Earth); and I did get free records (until everyone started doing the digital promo thing and thus making me think that I wish, like Rob Gordon in *High Fidelity* that I wrote for *Rolling Stone* from 1976 to 1979 so that I could get to meet the Clash, Chrissie Hynde, the Sex Pistols, David Byrne and get tons of free records). Then something happened; I realized that free records were like getting spoon fed my music and my first burnout set in and writing became a chore for a while.

Eventually there was a record that brought me back (though for the life of me I cannot remember what one it was), and this kept happening over the years that I have been writing for the fine folks of Scene Point Blank while watching some of my journalistic compatriots give up the ghost as writers one-by-one. Still, for some reason, there is always that record that brings me back (and probably others). You know the kind whether you write about music or not; it is that record that you toss on and feel as though you have to tell the world, even if the world won't listen. You pop the album on your iPod or your car stereo or (god forbid) your phone or your record player or tape deck etc and feel the music in your soul; you do more than tape your feet or nod your head. A smile comes over your face, and you stop doing anything but drown yourself in what you believe deep down are awesome sounds coming out of those speakers, be they exceedingly large or those ridiculous ear buds. At some point you remember that these feelings and motions and emotions are manifestations of the best kinds of excitement. After listening to one of

these albums a few times, people feel the urge to enlighten their friends about how great it is; or in my case, I also write down a few hundred words about how exciting the music is.

And just like that, I pump out reviews in batches: some get published, some I keep to myself and a few others that might appreciate the spittle-inducing anger and pain of listening to a horribly disappointing record (like my break up letter with Cave In following the release of *White Silence*). Still, I start writing again and it feels good to jot down a few thousand words a week. As I type this, I am coming up on my five hundredth published review for just Scene Point Blank and, due to their rules, just about all of them break the four hundred word mark with a great many hitting six or seven hundred (I think the most I ever wrote for one record was for the re-issue of one of my favorite albums ever, that very same *Raw Power* from Iggy and the Stooges that Lester Bangs pops on the radio in *Almost Famous*). I am sitting here and threatening to write past my one thousandth published review for these folks.

I guess we will see if I succumb to burnout or if I will continue to hear that one record that brings me back just in time to keep me going and writing about music; I bet those records will be out there when I need them most.

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Section two

The interviews

There are a lot of great features and it was hard to pick the finalists you're holding right now. There were oversights in our selection, as well as those great pieces with artists that we wanted to include (Hated Youth, Coalesce, Xiu Xiu, Justin Pearson, and many many more), but had to keep some kind of reasonable length in mind. It was Scene Point Blank's interviews that first drew me to the site.

Our selections include our most popular, our most influential, and a few of our favorites that we just think more people need to see. They cover a wide range of time, from early 2000s interviews to some from just the last year. The recurring themes throughout are the processes of making art, the relationship between fan and artist, and a reflection of life in the scene as best we could summarize it over 300 pages.



Living legends

The figures who defined a movement

EVERY SCENE HAS its icons: the founders of a culture; the creators of legendary art; the pioneers of new innovations. Scene Point Blank has been lucky enough to interview half a dozen or so of these people over the years. Here we speak to label owners, DIY revolutionaries, underground heroes and eccentric geniuses – sometimes all in the same interview. Each of them unique, their contribution to our music scene has left it changed and improved, giving them the legendary status we've ascribed to them here.

Ian Mackaye

The Evens / Fugazi / Minor Threat

Matt Andrews, April 2006

When SPB saw Ian Mackaye's new band The Evens play, it was situated in a large ornate church hall, with a crowd of varying age seated on pews in some twisted parody of a church sermon. If the crowd represented a congregation, did that make Ian Mackaye the preacher? Leading everyone in the refrain to *Mt. Pleasant Isn't* ("The police will not be excused / The police will not behave"), it almost looked that way, but as our man Matt spoke to him, it became clear that the role of a preacher to the masses is far from how Mackaye regards himself.

Scene Point Blank: On your current tour with The Evens, you aren't playing with any support. How come?

Ian Mackaye: Well, because we have our own little PA, that little thing, and it's just not appropriate for other bands really. Last night, actually, we did play with a band that was just a double bass and accordion, no PA. That was really nice.

Scene Point Blank: Dischord has been relatively quiet lately - why is that, and when can we expect something new?

Ian Mackaye: There hasn't been a whole lot of bands at the moment in DC, making music, so the label's been quiet. The label's actually a conduit, you know, and if the river's running a little dry, then there's just fewer things that come out. However, there's some action right now, there are some new bands, the Evens are working on a new record.

Scene Point Blank: When's that gonna be out?

Ian Mackaye: I dunno. Hopefully by the end of the year. I think French Toast are working on a new record, Joe Lally's working on a solo record, which is fantastic, it's such a great sounding record. So I imagine some things'll show up. It is an organic process... it comes when it comes. We're not worried about it.

Scene Point Blank: What's the current situation with Fugazi?

Ian Mackaye: It's just... it is what it is. We are on indefinite hiatus, which means we don't know. However, we are a family. Me, Guy and Brendan are working with Joe on his solo record. We're all in touch with each other regularly. It is a fact that you get to a point where... our lives made it *impossible*... for the band to function in the way that we needed it to function. So instead of like saying "Well fuck it, let's break up", we said we'd put it on indefinite hiatus. That means it could be a year, five years, ten years, fifty, who knows? But it at least means that... the four of us, if we decide that we wanna make music together again, that we wanna sit down and make a song together, then, we will.

Scene Point Blank: Regarding Nike's Major Threat posters, how did you react to that? Would you have said yes if they'd asked permission?

Ian Mackaye: No. The thing is... plenty of people have engaged in using symbols or icons from our label or from our bands or whatever over the years... especially Minor Threat, and that's... that's fine, it's not a big deal. But we usually aren't too bothered by it. But in the case of Nike, it seems a little ridiculous, frankly. They're a multi-national, massive \$14 billion a year corporation, and it just has so little to do with us, and we would never ever let our music be used by them, or our image being used by them. It's a little embarrassing for people to think it would be a possibility.

Scene Point Blank: Presumably, that means there's Minor Threat fans working at Nike - are you annoyed with them?

Ian Mackaye: There are, I know who did it. I'm not annoyed, they're friends. I know who they are, and it's a colossal mistake on their part. They were old punk rockers, and they were doing something they thought was kinda cool, because that's what they would have done with their smaller companies they used to work for. They just didn't think about the fact that they don't work for those small companies any more. They work for Nike. If your webzine had a parody of a Minor Threat thing, friendly or unfriendly. It'd be like, okay, that's fine, because we exist in that kind of community, and that's where those guys were coming from. The problem is, now they work for Nike, so it changes the rules. I think, mostly, it was incredibly irritating for me to have to spend weeks contending with

the fallout from that. It's just so ridiculous. The fact is that it wasn't an advertisement, it was a *flyer* for a skateboard demo. It was just a ... a nothing, but the internet just blew it up.

Scene Point Blank: How do you feel about the commercialisation of straight edge? Or do you not even wanna go into that?

Ian Mackaye: I dunno what to say about it, it's nothing to do with me really at all.

Scene Point Blank: Do people feel like it is?

Ian Mackaye: Do people...? You'd have to ask the people that.

Scene Point Blank: But do you think people come to you as some kind of authority on it all?

Ian Mackaye: Are you? (*laughs*) What can I say? You're asking me a question, so I assume that you're people, and you must think I'm an authority on it. You know, I'm a punk rocker, and for me, ideas should be free. But they're not free for other people to profit on. They're just free. I think that the idea of straight edge, the song that I wrote, and the way people have related it to, there's some people who have abused it, they've allowed their fundamentalism to interfere with the real message, which in my mind, was that people should be allowed to live their lives the way they want to. By and large, I think most people who identify with that are just good people, who are just trying to do something good in their lives, and it's a shame they have to suffer the kind of stigma that other people have put on that thing. But in terms of it being a movement or whatever, it's just not a movement for me, I never thought of it. The mass marketing - I don't even know, I could never go to a store that engages in that. I keep hearing about it, so... I guess it's for real.

Scene Point Blank: Have you ever considered writing a book?

Ian Mackaye: I've thought about it, and I think at some point, if I feel I can contribute something, I will. But I don't just wanna write a book because, I should write a book. I should write a book if I have something to write about, so I can do it well. I understand that I could write something, and there'd be a few people out there like "Yeah, I'll buy it", but that's not

enough. I need to actually have something of merit, that's worth writing. So we'll see. But for now, I'm in the Evens, I'm working, I have good things to do. I feel *fortunate*.

Henry Rollins

Solo / Black Flag

Graham Isador, August 2007

Henry Rollins has made a name for himself in all avenues that he has put forth his effort towards. He's an accomplished musician, public speaker, actor, television host, etc. Scene Point Blank recently had the opportunity to correspond with Mr. Rollins, and to delve into his psyche.

Though I've been doing this for years now, the most difficult interviews I have to conduct are always with the people I admire. On one hand this is what I'd like to do with my life, so there is a need to make myself seem both professional and astute, but on the other I still feel the want to gush about how much they have done for me as a person, and how greatly I appreciate their work. I'll try to keep that aspect minimal, so first thanks very much for your time in replying to this email, Henry, and second on behalf of myself and everyone else at the site, thank you for remaining one of the most definitively outspoken and upfront individuals in media today.

Scene Point Blank: You've been a prominent figure among certain scenes for years, and well it's undeniable that there has never been a time you've been shy in voicing your opinions. When did you first realize that your thoughts had any bearing/influence?

Henry Rollins: I never expressed my opinions to influence anyone. I always have done it to vent. I never thought they were important; I just like to get what's on the inside to the outside. I perhaps provide some perspective but I don't think I have any real influence. Anyone is free to take anything I say with a grain of salt. The same goes for Rush Limbaugh.

Scene Point Blank: Despite your success in numerous public avenues you've remained constantly opposed to the term celebrity in self-reference. Given that you hold some obvious notoriety, how do you view your line of work? What would you use to describe it?

Henry Rollins: It is mainly an obsession I think. I work all the time on all these projects. I don't know if they are any good, all I know is that I work on them all the time and it's pretty much all I do. If you are out

there in the public eye, someone will attach the celeb albatross around your neck and it's a foolish thing to give that any attention. The work is important, not the amount of people who want your autograph. I get recognized everywhere I go. I am writing this answer in Damascus, Syria, I have been recognized here of all places. I answer the questions, shake the hands and do the photos, answer the letters as best I can and try to be cool to the people I meet. Past that, I am just a worker ant.

Scene Point Blank: Over the course of your career you've done hundreds upon hundreds of interviews, but more recently with your television show, you've had the opportunity to be on the other side. Has that experience changed the way you view interviews as a whole? In addition to that what do you think makes for the best interviews?

Henry Rollins: It has made me answer questions more succinctly, as that's the best thing for me as an interviewer, someone who knows what they're talking about. That being said, you have to know how to pitch that question so the person can lay into it and really deliver. This is a matter of knowing who you're talking to and taking time to really think about what you would like to get out of the subject.

Scene Point Blank: While the intention right now is heading out on your spoken word tour, and continuing with your show on IFC, there is a lot of interest regarding your next steps both as a musician and an actor. Have you any plans for the upcoming future?

Henry Rollins: I don't know what lies ahead for me in the world of music. I have some ideas but it will take awhile to get clear of other work to address them. I don't think I will be doing music to the extent I have in the past. I feel very much been there / done that with music in a way. As far as films, that's a day job to me. If I am not doing anything else and I can get that work, I will go after it and try to get that employment. I work for a living.

Scene Point Blank: Speaking of your acting during your performances you've been an anarchist cartoon on Batman, beaten up Drew Carey's best friend, and appeared as yourself in a video gaming revolving around fighting rappers. Do you actively seek out these roles, or do they mostly come to you?

Henry Rollins: Both. I am always looking for work. I go after things and sometimes they come to me. I'd rather be working all the time than only part of the time. Perhaps I have no real clue to what real life is so I am doing all this stuff instead. That's what I have been told.

Scene Point Blank: I find that one of the biggest reasons that political activism dies out in people is their failure to know what to do past the stages of awareness. As a man who is a strongly advocates both action and knowledge in regard to the world around us, what would be your suggestion to combat this loss of interest? How would you suggest people move into action?

Henry Rollins: I think for one to take activism to heart, you really have to see your place in it. You can't do it as a gesture. It has to have real meaning for you. Americans should see that if they don't take a hold of America, they are going to lose all the parts that are so great about it. It's now down to that I think. We have taken this country back from the corporations, who use Americans as human ATM machines. I think the best thing is to be aware and start small and local. Something in your town, neighborhood probably can be in a better state. Get in there and change it. The only change it will make on its own will be to degrade. Voting is also a good thing.

Scene Point Blank: Since the beginning of this year I've asked everyone I've had the opportunity to interview these questions in attempt for me to help give definition to their mediums and mindsets. Why do you create art/music/writing, and what does that do for you?

Henry Rollins: I do it to get what's inside me outside me. For me, it's the scratch that temporarily relieves the itch. Then the itch starts again and it's back to work. Past that, I don't know. It's not exactly fun all the time. A lot of this work is very painful and hard on the psyche.

Larry Livermore

The Lookouts / Lookout! Records

Matt Andrews, May 2012

The phrase “elder statesman” doesn’t really feel appropriate for the punk scene, but people like Larry Livermore are the closest thing we have to it – founder of Lookout Records, frontman, columnist, blogger, and now, curator. Larry is teaming up with Adeline Records to release *The Thing That Ate Larry Livermore*: a compilation of up-and-coming bands that Larry feels need more public exposure, in the same way Lookout used to do a decade or more ago. SPB chatted over email with Larry about the past and future of the punk scene, rioting, novels, and quite a bit more.

Scene Point Blank: When introducing the concept for “*The Thing That Ate Larry Livermore*”, you talk about introducing music to people who might not otherwise hear it, like you did with Lookout in the 80s and 90s. What do you think are the major differences between then and now in terms of releasing a record and promoting a band? Do you think those changes are for the best?

Larry Livermore: The changes are what they are. Each generation has to work with what’s available. The explosion of DIY culture that Lookout was part of in the 80s and 90s was at least in part due to changes in technology that allowed us to accomplish things indie labels and bands couldn’t have done, or at least would have struggled to do a few years earlier. With time it’s become easier and easier to make a brilliant-sounding recording. I hear stuff today that people did on laptops in their bedrooms that’s of higher quality—at least production-wise—than the most expensive record we were ever able to make at Lookout “back in the day.” But no matter how good or not-good your music is, the trick then, as now, is letting people know about it and getting them to listen to it.

Scene Point Blank: Billie Joe Armstrong’s son’s band features on the record. Did that feel like a conflict of interest or was it simply a case of them being the right fit for the project?

Larry Livermore: I guess you could see it as a “conflict of interest” if

there had been any pressure from Billie or the label to put them on the compilation, but actually it was just the opposite. I knew from the start that Emily's Army was one of the bands I'd want to ask to be on it. So one of the first things I did was ask Billie if he'd be all right with that, to make sure he didn't see any conflict of interest. Fortunately, he didn't. Emily's Army are a great band, the kind of band who love writing and playing music, and who will do well regardless of who any of them are or aren't related to.

Scene Point Blank: You also talked about your initial desire for people to "take [you] out and shoot [you]" if you got back into the music business. What prompted that feeling, for someone who's been heavily involved with it for decades?

Larry Livermore: That might have been a little hyperbolic on my part, but it's essentially what I'd been telling interviewers for years when they asked if I'd consider starting a new record label. When I left Lookout in 1997, I was burnt out by the behind-the-scenes machinations of the music business, and disillusioned by having been unable, despite my initial ideals and intentions, to keep Lookout from getting involved in some of the shenanigans and hype that big labels typically engaged in.

At the time I blamed my problems on the industry itself, probably as way of avoiding taking responsibility for my own mistakes and shortcomings. In the first couple years after leaving Lookout, I could barely stand to listen to music at all, especially music that I'd worked on personally, but gradually the hurt feelings faded away and I started enjoying music as much as ever. More so, actually, because I could do so simply as a fan, rather than someone who was constantly being pressured and expected to think of music as some sort of product.

I could have happily gone on that way for the rest of my life, but as I say in the liner notes to the compilation, there came a time when I realized I had an opportunity to do something to help out a bunch of bands I loved by putting them in touch with a bunch of fans who I knew would love them. Which is pretty much the situation I was in when I made the fateful decision to start Lookout: "Well, somebody's gotta do this. I guess maybe it's me."

Scene Point Blank: What's the current status of *Spy Rock Memories* and when can we expect to see it in print? How has the process of writing it

been?

Larry Livermore: The current status of *Spy Rock Memories* is that it's taking a hell of a lot longer to finish the final pre-publication work than I ever imagined. It's frustrating, seeing it so close to done, but not quite there yet. We've even got the cover art, an absolutely beautiful painting by the award-winning cartoonist Gabrielle Bell, who also grew up on Spy Rock. The process of writing the book was surprisingly easy and enjoyable; what's been a bit hellish is editing it. Right now we (myself and my editor, Zach Gajewski) are going through the text for the second time, and I keep finding more things that need polishing up or rewriting. I was hoping the book would come out at the same time as the compilation, but at the rate things are going, I think maybe toward the end of the summer is the soonest we can expect to see it in stores.

Scene Point Blank: You're a pretty prolific blogger and a frequent Twitter user. Are you grateful for not having the internet's distracting presence during Lookout's glory days or do you think it would have improved things?

Larry Livermore: Actually, Lookout was an early adopter when it came to internet technology. Depending on when you consider the "glory days" to be (some would argue 1987-89, others insist on 1994-95, and I personally would go for maybe 1991-93), we already had a presence on the worldwide web (does anybody still call it that?) for at least some of those years. And though the early 90s internet contained only a tiny fraction of what's available today, having to access it through ridiculously slow dial-up modems made it possible to waste just as much time. When we moved into our first "real" offices (as opposed to my bedroom) in 1995 we had the whole place wired for broadband, and I soon became aware that at any given time, half or more of our employees, myself included, were doing something online. On one level, sure, it was a distraction from the important "work" that had to get done, but on another level—the level you could argue virtually every media enterprise operates on today—it enabled us to connect with and keep in touch with people and potential fans all over the world. In the same way that cheap xeroxing made fanzines and punk rock flyers not just possible but inevitable in the 80s, the internet gave us the ability to instantly reach huge numbers of people that otherwise might have never known we existed.

Also, I wish I were a prolific blogger! When I started that thing, it was my intention to post on a daily or near-daily basis. Now sometimes I don't go near it for a month, despite having (as anyone who routinely sees me in real life will tell you) no shortage of things to say.

Scene Point Blank: Lookout went bust, Punk Planet died, CBGBs closed down. Is the modern punk scene doomed to simply pay homage to what went before or is there new blood and new ideas still to come?

Larry Livermore: Although Lookout only officially closed down this year, I think you could argue that it had been effectively dead for many years, and you could say the same about CBGB. Seriously, when was the last time CBGB was a major factor in introducing new bands or scenes? Like 25 years ago? Punk Planet's only been gone for five years, but though it was a vital source of ideas and information right up until it shut its doors, it had its roots firmly planted in the 90s, don't you think?

My point being that what's happening with punk rock during the first decade or so of the 21st century isn't just a rehash or revisiting of what went before. I mean, we heard the same thing from scene veterans in the late 80s when the Gilman bands were starting to emerge: "Hey, c'mon guys, don't you know punk's been dead since the Sex Pistols broke up? You're just recycling the Clash and the Ramones." It used to annoy the hell out of me back then, because I'd been around during the '77 punk scene, and I knew damn well that what was coming out of Gilman, while influenced by the punk rock of bygone days, was a whole new thing.

As far as I'm concerned, the same is true today. Some of the musicians on *The Thing That Ate Larry Livermore* weren't even born when Operation Ivy broke up or when Green Day made their first record. They love that kind of music, but it's like ancient history to them. Personally, I think punk rock today is more diverse and creative and full of potential than it ever was. Will it ever be as commercially successful as the punk rock of the mid-90s? Maybe not, though you never know. But precisely because there's no expectation of fame and fortune, precisely because today's punk rock bands are playing out of pure love for the music and the community that has grown up around it, I find things more fun and exciting than ever. That being said, I can all but guarantee that at least some of the bands on this compilation will be the names people will be talking about 20 years from now when they're complaining about the bands of 2032 not having the same spark and magic as back in the good old days of 2012.

Scene Point Blank: I know you formerly lived in London and as a Londoner myself I'm curious to know if you have any thoughts on last summer's London Riots. Do you think there are any parallels between the anger those kids felt as they looted shops and the anger of the 80s punks in the Thatcher and Reagan administrations? Or is it simply "mindless violence" like the Conservatives put it...

Larry Livermore: I did have thoughts and feelings about the riots, fairly strong ones. I only lived in London from 1997 to 2007, but I was regularly spending time there as far back as the mid-70s. During those years I witnessed a fair bit of chaos in the streets, but this seemed to be on a whole new level. Except for a brief period in Brixton back in the 70s, I always lived in Notting Hill, and I saw it change from a hippie and West Indian slum into one of the wealthier neighborhoods in London, which in turn gave me a bird's eye view of some of the tensions and hostilities that were at work last summer. There were minor outbreaks of looting in the Portobello Road, though they were a pale shadow of what happened in 1958 and again in 1976 (the latter, of course, being the inspiration for the Clash song, "White Riot."

Inasmuch as the events of 2011 could be compared to what went before, I'd say they had more in common with the 1976 Notting Hill riots or the Brixton and Tottenham riots of the 80s than they did with anything specifically punk-related. In each of those there was a racial and a class component, and while punks and young people of all races joined in, the prime movers were black and, to a lesser extent, Asian youth. While I wouldn't dismiss the violence as "mindless" (in many cases both the looting and the battles with police were remarkably well organized), I also wouldn't characterize it as being political, at least not in the sense that the anarchist and leftist punks of the 80s were.

During my years in Notting Hill, I lived on a council estate (public housing, as Americans would call it) that had been partially privatized. There many young people, mostly black, Asian or mixed race in our building, and I got to know some of them fairly well, not always under the best circumstances. There was a gang who regularly vandalized the corridors and harassed residents and I took it upon myself to sort out or at least minimize these problems. Some of the kids turned out to be quite decent, but I don't doubt at least a few of them were kicking in windows in the Portobello Road last summer. Not necessarily out of poverty—they

weren't rich, but neither did they lack for most necessities—and not out of frustration with the direction England was being taken in by the Conservatives—many of them couldn't have told you the Prime Minister's name, let alone what party he belonged to—but simply because they were so alienated and isolated from the possibilities and promises that the more privileged and fortunate among us take for granted. When the Sex Pistols sang about “No Future,” it was mostly marketing and hype; for these kids, it's everyday reality.

Scene Point Blank: Aside from the bands on the Adeline comp, what other artists/records are currently in rotation on your stereo?

Larry Livermore: I've long been a big fan of the Weakerthans, and their singer, John K. Samson, has just put out a wonderful solo record. Jesse Michaels, who sang for Operation Ivy, has a new-ish band called Classics Of Love, and their new album is, in my opinion, the best thing he's done since Operation Ivy. If not for some crossed wires, they definitely would have been on the compilation, too. Speaking of Op Ivy, I recently found a tape copy of the long-lost and never-released Downfall album (the one that Lookout kept announcing and then having to postpone because the band never gave final approval), and I've been enjoying that all over again. One of my favorite local bands here in New York, though they've been broken up for a couple years, was the Steinways (their singer/guitarist is now in House Boat). Delay are an outstanding band from Ohio, and I recently rediscovered For Science, from New Jersey (also broken up), who I sadly never got into when they were around, but who I really appreciate now. Plus I'll always enjoy my hillbilly music, my Broadway show tunes, and my doo-wop, soul, and rock and roll oldies.

Scene Point Blank: You've blogged in the past about online spaces like the Pop Punk Message Board, and how they've come to represent the best parts of the 'old' punk scene. With print magazines in seemingly terminal decline do you think these types of places are good for the wider punk community?

Larry Livermore: I'd hesitate to venture an opinion as to whether they're “good” or “bad,” they're just what is. As always with alternative culture, with any kind of culture, really, we do what we can with what we have. People romanticize all sorts of things, be it vinyl records, cassette tapes,

xeroxed flyers, hand-lettered fanzines, crappy cheap-sounding recordings, whatever, as representing the “real” punk aesthetic, but punk just happened to come in those particular packages because that’s what was available for people to work with at the time. It doesn’t make something less “punk” or “authentic” to use the technology and media of today; if you didn’t, it’d be like trying to work with one hand – if not both – tied behind your back. I don’t mean that as a dig against those who cherish those old school approaches to communication and community. But in my view, social media, message boards, online hangouts, etc., are just that many more tools to accomplish what we’ve always tried to accomplish: creating awesome art, music and culture and making it available to those who want and need it.

Scene Point Blank: Finally, what’s next for you? Once the book and this comp are out, do you see yourself swearing off music once more, or could you be persuaded into something else?

Larry Livermore: Writing is probably going to be the main thing I do for the foreseeable future, that and traveling. I’ve got two more books on the agenda after *Spy Rock Memories*. But considering what a good time I’ve had putting the compilation together, yeah, I think I could see doing a little bit more work with music. Maybe helping a few bands I like get signed, maybe some production work, maybe a little talent scouting. Who knows? I’m open to it, but probably not as a fulltime job. As long as it’s fun and I feel like I’m accomplishing something worthwhile, why not?

Evan Dando

The Lemonheads

Evan C. Chase, April 2006

Scene Point Blank writer Evan Chase sat down to talk with former Lemonheads singer-songwriter Evan Dando upon the release of his first solo recording, *Baby I'm Bored*, out now on Bar None records.

Scene Point Blank: Nice to finally meet you, Evan.

Evan Dando: Nice to meet you, Evan.

Scene Point Blank: We crossed paths a few times, back in the Vineyard Days, 1997.

Evan Dando: The Vineyard Days have not ended yet.

Scene Point Blank: You played a friend of mine's wedding, Jon Fiutak, married an Amherst girl.

Evan Dando: Yeah yeah yeah. Somebody had some mushrooms.

Scene Point Blank: Yeah I was wondering if you enjoyed playing the show.

Evan Dando: Definitely, it was at the Chilmark Community Center.

Scene Point Blank: Really, where they have the Feast?

Evan Dando: You weren't there?

Scene Point Blank: I hadn't discovered the Vineyard. It was much later, I saw you - you were rolling around on Gay Head, I introduced you to my mother actually.

Evan Dando: Cool.

Scene Point Blank: Yeah it was cool. Good times. And I saw you out back at the Hot Tin Roof. You sat down with me and my brother and we had a smoke. So how's the tour going?

Evan Dando: Good.

Scene Point Blank: Enjoying yourself?

Evan Dando: Yeah totally.

Scene Point Blank: I know you spoke with the New York Times, and you're living in New York now.

Evan Dando: That is correct.

Scene Point Blank: Happily married?

Evan Dando: Yeah, definitely. Very.

Scene Point Blank: A sweetheart, your wife, Elizabeth? Congratulations on that. (Evan shows me a picture of Elizabeth in his journal, on a rooftop behind which are the ruins of the World Trade Centers.)

Evan Dando: See those buildings in the background? That's where the World Trade Centers were.

Scene Point Blank: Oh, right on.

Evan Dando: We live two blocks away. I was on the roof when the second one hit. We were south of it.

Scene Point Blank: So are you happy in New York?

Evan Dando: No, no one is. We want to move to Paris. New York just recently became part of America. When the towers came down, now it's a part of America. Before it was more international, like an island off the coast of America. It really was. It felt a little different. And since that happened, it's totally changing. It sucks right now, I think. Rent's too expensive for anyone interesting to live there. Not that rich people are boring. I know.

Scene Point Blank: Well, they are, we both know that.

Evan Dando: What I mean is they don't come out of their houses. It doesn't make for a good community.

Scene Point Blank: Yeah, and they're kind of the enemy of art in a lot of senses.

Evan Dando: Well not traditionally. I'd say art never would have happened without rich people. The whole patrons thing.

Scene Point Blank: You're right, patrons. If only you could have a patron. Well you've got a patron in your new label, Bar/None. In your long history, I'd say you've lived three full waves, from the indie days with "Stove" and all that, that's when I got turned on to you, that was the first one, and that song broke my heart.

Evan Dando: We have a stove in our trailer, too. The busdriver just happened to have brought one. I wanted to bring it on stage for that song.

Scene Point Blank: Right on.

Evan Dando: I was just joking.

Scene Point Blank: Yeah, I know.

Evan Dando: He's a no-nonsense kind of guy, he wouldn't.

Scene Point Blank: So you did that, and you did a number of records for Atlantic, very commercially successful.

Evan Dando: Yeah, two of 'em sold tons, like they both went gold in the States. We were in the Top 50 of all-time Atlantic recording overseas. At least we were when I checked in '97.

Scene Point Blank: Right. A Top 50's recording star, that's a beautiful thing.

Evan Dando: Like, overseas sales. In other words, they were gold in the States but they did a lot of business in other countries, too. Like England and Germany.

Scene Point Blank: Wonderful. And you're gonna tour Europe.

Evan Dando: We already toured Europe.

Scene Point Blank: And I hear the feel's really good, a lot of sing-along, a lot of enthusiasm.

Evan Dando: It's amazing, yeah it's great.

Scene Point Blank: I have a lot of enthusiasm for your work, old and new, and I think... a terrific job on the new record. I wanted to ask you, the three waves, obviously the indie days, the Atlantic Years, now you're with Bar/None. Where are you gonna go from here? You're on New York time right now. Are you going to head back to a major at some point?

Evan Dando: I'll go... yeah... I don't know anything. I'm going to do my music as best I can. All I care about is the playing of the music. The money is a side effect of the playing of the music. Sometimes you don't have any and sometimes you have tons. Basically that's the way I look at it. Wonderful. Whenever I have money, I spend it. That's the feast or famine nature of things.

Scene Point Blank: Yeah, my bank account's overdrafted right now, 300 bucks but that's...

Evan Dando: Me and my friend were talking about writing a screenplay though. The best thing with money is to just have just enough just to get by. Because if you have too much, it screws you up, if you have too little it screws you up. So we're doing really good that way right now.

Scene Point Blank: You ever read *The Importance of Being Earnest* by Oscar Wilde?

Evan Dando: Yeah.

Scene Point Blank: Where he talks about the whole concept of style over substance came from there. And the guy who's playing the piano says, "I don't play it well. I don't play with accuracy. I play with tremendous style."

Evan Dando: Cool.

Scene Point Blank: What I enjoy about your music is that you have a combination of style and substance. Can you speak to that about your songwriting?

Evan Dando: I'd say I'm underrated as a singer. I am a damn good singer.

Scene Point Blank: Oh, the stuff I've been reading online says you have a beautiful voice.

Evan Dando: Don't listen to that shit. I wouldn't.

Scene Point Blank: It's coming from the New York Times, it's shit?

Evan Dando: I guess I don't believe in anything, really. I just believe in today.

Scene Point Blank: You trust people?

Evan Dando: Nah... yeah. I do. I do trust people. I'm a trusting person, for sure.

Scene Point Blank: Good. That's really important. Having an open heart, open mind. That is important. You've seen a lot. You've had a whole lot of experience. Let's talk about any particular influences. You did the "\$1,000 Wedding" with Juliana, your version of (Big Star's) "Thirteen."

Evan Dando: Let's see. Neil, Sabbath, Marvin Gaye, Martha and the Vandellas, Velvet Underground.

Scene Point Blank: That's it?

Evan Dando: Hank Williams, Sr. I love the Beachwood Sparks.

Scene Point Blank: Oh they're wonderful. How about the Glands, you share a label with them currently.

Evan Dando: I didn't know that.

Scene Point Blank: You should check out their records. They're on Bar/None.

Evan Dando: See, I'm not really familiar with Bar/None, they just had the money, you know?

Scene Point Blank: Right. You considered Anti because of Tom Waits?

Evan Dando: Yeah I have.

Scene Point Blank: Have you met Waits?

Evan Dando: No, I'm a huge fan.

Scene Point Blank: Anybody you enjoy that you haven't had a chance to meet yet? Westerberg?

Evan Dando: Anybody in particular? I've talked with Westerberg on the phone.

Scene Point Blank: Has he had an influence on you?

Evan Dando: He had a huge influence, yeah. [Plays "Color Me Impressed" on his acoustic.] Or else there's that great Bevis Frond song. [Plays "Lights Are Changing."]

Scene Point Blank: Two more questions for you. One, with the mp3 thing. Kazaa, Napster, you're all over the place.

Evan Dando: That's a good sign.

Scene Point Blank: Get your stuff out there.

Evan Dando: I think computers are going to kill mankind.

Scene Point Blank: Advice to young songwriters?

Evan Dando: I think the key to everything is relaxation. To find a way to relax while you play.

Scene Point Blank: You wrote "You Were the Last High" (on Welcome to the Monkey House) with Courtney from the Dandys.

Evan Dando: Yeah, I was just hanging out with Courtney the other night. He was telling me what I contributed to that song. I did the "na na na na" part.

Jacob Bannon

Converge

Michael Phillips, October 2009

When Converge released *Axe to Fall* it quickly became a front-runner for album of the year. The long-running hardcore band once again found new ways to impress and surprise even the most open-minded listeners with the music that comprised the album. Scene Point Blank spoke at length with vocalist Jacob Bannon about all things Converge, his various side-projects, and Deathwish Inc. happenings.

Scene Point Blank: Tomorrow is the release date for *Axe to Fall*. It's been nearly twenty years of playing and releasing music for Converge...

Jacob Bannon: About that, nineteen, twenty years. We like to think we started making relevant music fifteen years ago when we started to shed influences and be our own animal.

Scene Point Blank: What kinds of emotions are raised with the release of a new album?

Jacob Bannon: It's really no different. For us, we're still just a band of four guys that tour in a van and trailer and share music with people. The only thing that is different is that we are older and have more responsibly, more complex lives. The older you get, the more life experiences you have. Nothing else has really changed. Our goals have never been any weird commercial success. Our goals have just been to play music that we enjoy and share it with people. And we're still doing it.

Scene Point Blank: Given the fact that the band is a full-time venture, how do you keep it fresh?

Jacob Bannon: With this album, we brought in some collaborators to work with us, some outside people that we've known for years to work on songs with us and that was a way to keep things interesting and challenging. Some bands just start getting stale after a while and we just don't want to ever be that. We never want to release a sub par record. So to bring in people, that was a great experience. Doing some challenging

tours every once in a while, as opposed to doing relatively safe tours with bands that we all wholly enjoy. We do those kinds of tours all the time, like the last time we were at the Grog Shop with Ceremony and Rise and Fall and Coliseum. This tour that we're on right now, High on Fire, we've been friends with them for a long time, and Mastodon, we've been friends with them for a while too. Dethklok are a whole new animal, but they're becoming friends as well. And we're playing for anywhere from two to five thousand fourteen to seventeen year olds that are first level listeners to aggressive heavy music. Their knowledge base of heavy music doesn't go past the Metallica's of the world, the more accessible commercial metal bands. So we are a very challenging thing to those kinds of people. It's challenging to be in an environment where you are judged before you even take the stage. Sometimes it's fun to put yourself out there and not be in safe positions.

Scene Point Blank: Speaking of collaborations, it was in another interview that you said that the collaboration with Cave In was sort of the catalyst for the new album.

Jacob Bannon: It was the first time we really started doing something like that. A bunch of years ago we all went into Kurt's studio together, starting writing music together, and recording at the same time the base of a bunch of songs. And we were going to release it, but our schedule got real busy and we really didn't feel that motivated to finish it at the time. And Cave In has this awesome character quality about them where they always want to move forward and do stuff so they just focused their energies elsewhere. And to make a long story short, it's going to stay dormant for a while. The seed was planted within us to pick up some of those songs and re-address them and to take that conceptual idea of bringing all these people from outside parties and try to make it happen.

Scene Point Blank: Is it something you might pick up and revisit?

Jacob Bannon: Well we've used all the songs. There were only two other songs, I believe, from the session that were half-finished that were songs that Steve wrote. I believe they could end up becoming Cave In songs; I would think that more than likely they would become Cave In songs at some point. Two of the songs ended up on this album and "Plagues" from *No Heroes* was the other song from the original session when we started

writing with those guys. The songs took on a different character once we started working with other artists. The Cave In tracks are still there, but we brought in Genghis Tron to work on stuff. And Steve Von Till from Neurosis worked on a song with us. The songs at that point took on a whole other character that weren't just Cave In and Converge. So they became these different animals. It would have been nice to finish that project, but it is what it is. I don't really like to think about things that could have been. I think about this thing that we did create.

Scene Point Blank: That exciting and cool that you still used the songs in some manner.

Jacob Bannon: Exactly. They were great songs that we wanted to utilize. We'd always say, "We got to do something with these, something, anything." I'm just happy that a couple of those songs came out. But they still sound like Converge songs too. That's the thing, it's not like they're a huge departure.

Scene Point Blank: On the new album you worked with a lot of different musicians. What was it like working with musicians that you both have immense respect for as well as having been profoundly influenced by, like Steve Von Till and Uffe Cederlund of Entombed?

Jacob Bannon: It's awesome. I'm just really appreciative of the fact that they acknowledge our existence. To me, I'm just the sixteen-year-old kid playing in a band. So when those guys actually give a shit about what we're doing, it's very flattering. Steve's a very humble guy and we're all very glad to have him involved in the record. And Uffe, he quit Entombed a while ago but he's in Disfear, and we're really close with them.. But it was really natural working with him. He's a good guy and he wrote some of the greatest death metal songs of all time. For him to contribute, it's awesome.

Scene Point Blank: There has been an immense amount of praise to the album, especially to the last two tracks on the album. Given the experimental nature of these songs when compared to the bulk of the Converge catalog, how satisfying is it to have them appreciated in such a positive manner?

Jacob Bannon: We experiment on every record. Every release that we've

done since 1998 or 1999 has had some sort of stylistic departure, some sort of instrumentation that isn't traditional band instrumentation in some way and this is an expansion on that idea. It's not like we're reinventing the wheel at all, we're just refining our experimental approach. Heavy music and aggressive music doesn't always have to be raging and thrashing. There needs to be a dynamic to give these things power. If you just race forward with a billion beats per minute, it's going to sound like white noise after a while. So it's nice to be able to allow an album to breath, to create an organic environment to it. Those kinds of songs are the way we've always done that. I don't think we'd ever want to come out with an album that is all that. We just like to have diversity in each record to show versatility.

Scene Point Blank: The leak of "Axe to Fall" was fairly publicized given that the source of the leak was pointed to a fairly large music publication. As a music journalist I often notice that albums leak to the Internet around the time that review copies begin to circulate.

Jacob Bannon: I can say, from a Deathwish perspective, the day that we send out any unprotected promos is literally the day that we start seeing the release leak. To me, there are pros and cons to leaks. I actually feel that it's fine for listeners to download and share it and preview it. And hopefully they'll be motivated to support our band or any band that they discover that way. There is nothing wrong with that. I find the issue more with the leaker themselves. What is it about? Why does someone feel that they have the privilege to take this release that was entrusted to them and give it to the world? That's not really the terms of how it works. And it makes your job for difficult. You're running a web-based hardcore and punk publication, and you want to be able to get releases early and preview them. And you're putting in all your own fucking free time and all you're making is maybe a small revenue from banner ads and some free records. Those people are in turn making your job harder by taking away your ability to get anything. And that's sad. We want to be able to give thanks and give people a little bit of a preview of a product that's not ready for the public yet. And it's sad when people overstep those boundaries.

I would never want to demonize the listener, and I never want to demonize the leaker. But I question their motives. If someone is a fan of music, of our band for example, how do they justify wanting to share the music? At that point, we're not getting compensated for it, the label that

fronted money for the thing to exist isn't... and mind you, we're a meager-ass band. That's what we travel in. [Points to a van and a trailer.] We're not this frivolous rich band. People think that we're insanely wealthy. I live fucking paycheck-to-paycheck just like everyone else and I work really damn hard. Our band works damn hard and we just want to insure that releases are paid for, not by the listener, but that the expense is paid for. It's not free to record a record. That time isn't free to get all the stuff done. Mind you, we're a hands on band, so things are still pretty affordable for us to do things. But we do everything ourselves and make sacrifices. But the label still has to pay for manufacturing, they have to pay for promoting, they have to pay for their staff making it visible and available. Regardless of how flawed the aging dinosaur that is the music industry is, there is still a base of consumerism that drives it. And you still need to be able to participate in it a little bit. Or it just becomes complete chaos. And nobody wants that. They would say they want that if they were fourteen years old and living in their parents' basement, but they wouldn't say that if they had something to lose.

Scene Point Blank: With Deathwish, the label offers a free digital copy of an album when it is pre-ordered. Do you feel helps individuals seek out ownership of the release?

Jacob Bannon: We've been doing download coupons for a long time. It's a similar system to what Sub Pop uses where if they purchase a physical copy we give them a digital version of the record. And why not? They purchased a copy. I don't want to limit someone to just having that. They can have it in that other flexible format; it's not doing any damage. The band is getting compensated. The label is getting compensated. And it helps everybody out. We have the technology to do direct downloads too. We just did the Rise and Fall album, for example, which doesn't come out until next Tuesday, but anyone that pre-ordered the record got a copy instantly. Basically, we just want to get people familiar with the band. They're a great band and it's a great record, and we'd rather get it out that way and take that risk and support the band than hold onto it and have the band tour the states and people not be familiar with it. You take a risk, but hopefully people enjoy the material and support them.

Scene Point Blank: Earlier in the year Converge took part in one of the Burning Fight book release shows in Chicago.

Jacob Bannon: Yep. We did three shows in Chicago that weekend actually. We did the two pre-shows; we played two shows on a Friday. An evening show and a late show. And then we did the Burning Fight on Sunday.

Scene Point Blank: What was it like playing on that show with bands that come and gone since Converge has been in existence?

Jacob Bannon: I had mixed feelings towards it to be honest. There are some bands and some people I really support in that world. Others, I don't. There are a few reasons for that. I should probably start off by saying that back then, in the mid 90's, we weren't a band that was accepted by that scene of people. We were always misfits, never really accepted by... I don't know how you would describe them, because they don't really exist now... scene kids that gave the stamp of approval if you were a band that should be supported. It had more to do about who you knew and who you were friends with as opposed to the quality of your music or the message that you were putting out there in some way. Honestly we didn't care and we still don't care. We just put our heads down and played our music. If people dug it, cool. If they didn't, that's all right too. It's interesting, because I had some great conversations there that weekend with people that actually understood that and remembered that rather than people that were over romanticizing that era. One of the guys that used to be in Groundwork from Arizona had a really great conversation with me that lasted a half hour or so just acknowledging that. And their place was essentially the same too. And we didn't know each other back then, but we kind of came from that same place of being misfits that didn't fit the hierarchy of hardcore at the time. So it was nice to see some people that had done some relevant things. But I also think it was too self-congratulatory in some ways as well. The book, I kind of flipped through. It's not exactly a comprehensive reflection on the community back then. It's one person's view of it, and that's fine, that's what books are. There is another book about that period coming out as well that I will think be a little more all encompassing.

Scene Point Blank: Deathwish has been a label for just under a decade. When you began the label, what was the most difficult obstacle you saw for operating an independent label? What do you see as the most difficult obstacle today?

Jacob Bannon: It's not that much different. Still poor as hell, still small as hell. Intentionally. Not intentionally poor, intentionally small. We do things the way we want to do them. We've released a whole lot of records. Some of them have been successful. Some of them haven't been, in financial terms. That's not really all that important to us. We just want to release great music from great bands. And we feel we're still doing that. When we started, it was at the peak of Napster and file-sharing taking off, so it's never really been a safe environment for a record label. It hasn't swayed us in any direction. The one thing about Tre, myself, and the people that are there is that we're kind of lifers in this community. We've been involved in it for a long time. We're used to the hard work and the true worth ethic that it takes to survive in it in some way. And we just do what needs to be done. We work twelve to sixteen hours a day. We literally break our backs for this place. We unload trucks. We take out garbage. We assemble records. We answer emails. We talk with bands. We buy bands planes tickets. We lose money. We sell records. We have all these great highs and exceptional lows running a label. That's most of the label experience in a nutshell. You get your heart broken by bands. Running a record label is almost like being in twenty-five dysfunctional relationships at once. There are some that are amazing experiences and there are others that you feel like you're fighting an uphill battle the entire time, but you do it for the love of the music and you do for the love of the bands and artists. I wouldn't trade that hard work for anything. It gives us a sense of purpose and a place to go. We employ some great people. It's just good.

Scene Point Blank: What is the status of Malfunction? Is it still a functional piece of the DW family or have those artists and releases been assumed into DW?

Jacob Bannon: We didn't just buy Malfunction or anything. People think we're just some giant monopoly. It's so funny because we're not. Basically, our friends Tru and Linas ran Malfunction for many years. They're really close friends. We've worked with them in the art world and the music world, doing shows, whatever. They were getting tired and weren't in the place to give everything to the label anymore. And they asked for help. And we were really flattered that they came to us to take over the duties of Malfunction. They didn't want to just chop up the label and sell titles to other labels. They wanted someone to keep the label intact the way they had it and fulfill the obligations to bands that were already committed to.

We said all right, we helped them out. We paid off some things that they owed. Took over their stock and daily running of things. And I still talk to Tru almost every day.

Scene Point Blank: A couple have graduated up to Deathwish over the years?

Jacob Bannon: Our intentions weren't to hold onto anything. Our intention was just to fulfill what they already started. If there were records that they already had coming out - the Bitter End record was the first record that came out right in the throws of the label transition - we did it. The label was essentially done. So that was the first release that we did. And the rest of the records, we honored those deals. Reign Supreme, we were actually talking about working together prior to them working with Malfunction, so it was almost meant to be. Essentially, it's the same thing; we just put a different logo on it.

Scene Point Blank: Dear Lover was the original moniker for your solo material. You've since decided to use your surname. Will any of the material from the Dear Lover sessions appear on the upcoming full-length?

Jacob Bannon: I had a bunch of working names for it, mainly because I would talk to friends and say, "What do you think of this name?" I would continue recording and writing, I still do all the time. I recorded an album that's been done for like six months, I'm just kind of sitting on. I released one of the songs on a 7" it was recorded and not even intended for the album. I released that song and I released another song on a Deathwish sampler in May, and that song is one of the mixes from the album. The album is done; I just need to release it. One of the things with Deathwish, and myself, I never want Deathwish to be the Converge label and take pretty big steps to make sure that doesn't happen. That's one of the reasons why we never wanted to take on all the responsibilities of releasing Converge records. It's the same mindset that Aaron has with Isis and why Isis isn't cranking out Isis records on Hydra Head. To make a long story short, I put my shit on the backburner all the time. So, if something is coming out, "That Converge thing can wait and my record can wait. Let's get these records out so this band can go on tour and do whatever." We have the power to do that, because we run the asylum. I've

moved it around the bunch and I was planning on releasing it around this time, but then this record came out and then the Doomriders album is coming out. There are countless projects and I didn't want to saturate the world. So I'll wait a few more months, it's not going to kill anybody.

Scene Point Blank: You've been working with Dwid Hellion and Stephen Kasner on Irons. Given the geographic distances between all of you, I'm interested in how the writing and recording of this project is handled.

Jacob Bannon: It's interesting and bizarre. It's almost a musical experiment. Dwid approached me about doing some work with him, like years ago, and we would talk about it occasionally. We have a lot of the same tastes in things outside of aggressive music world. He wanted to bring in Stephen. And that's great; he's a fantastic artist, a wonderful musician, and a visionary in many ways. Since we're scattered everywhere, Stephen is in California, Dwid is in Belgium, and I'm in Massachusetts, it would be impossible without the Internet. Basically, a song starts with one of us, we send it to the next guy, he adds his elements and he passes it along to the next and then it comes back to the maker of the song to be refined and mixed. We recorded a split 12" with Pulling Teeth that we are going to release. We were going to release it this past Spring, but the Pulling Teeth album was ready to be released, so we released that and put the split on the backburner. It's completely done and it's mixed. It's just sitting on a hard drive right now.

Scene Point Blank: And the status of the *Jane Doe* vinyl repress?

Jacob Bannon: Well, it is an expensive project. We're doing something much more elaborate than the original version. The original version didn't have any insert of lyrics or anything like that. At the time, we couldn't pay for it. So we're doing a twenty-eight-page version of the original booklet so it will be a big 12"x12" booklet. Plus it is a double LP, so as opposed to manufacturing one record, you're doing two. You're not manufacturing 5000 records; you're manufacturing 10,000 records. So we're doing it in pieces. It's been a really busy time for Deathwish and we're small as hell. There is only so much money that we can throw out there in projects before we need money to come back in so we can pay for stuff. Basically we ran into a situation that we paid for so many recordings and so many projects, and so many bands were late or delayed in finishing their records

that things piled up and became a traffic jam. It was a financial traffic jam and a release traffic jam. We've been responsibly getting all those records out there, making sure all those records have their time and visibility and the bands have records so they can go tour. And then the Converge stuff happens. We're also doing a 12" for Ben's band, Acid Tiger, as well as United Nations, which is doing a 7". There is a bunch of Converge things happening as well that we haven't even technically announced. So it gets busy.

Scene Point Blank: At the beginning of the year, an individual was caught producing and selling fake prints, including a number of your prints. Just curious, as an artist, how you reacted to this?

Jacob Bannon: It's sad when that stuff happens. It's sad when I literally couldn't pay my mortgage that month, but there was a guy profiting off of not only my work but also my friends' works. It's a sad thing when you're struggling to do things in the most ethically and sound, clean way you can. But karma will get him one day. I won't have to.

Scene Point Blank: After your current tour, Converge heads to Japan for a few dates. What's on the agenda after that?

Jacob Bannon: Japanese tours are always really small, like a week. There is only so much you can cover. But it's Brutal Truth and us. We haven't seen those guys in a long long time. They reformed and put out a new record. It's a great opportunity. We're also hoping to do a Deathwish showcase over there soon. We have a couple of friends that run the Deathwish branch in Japan and they want to do some sort of tour, so we're working on that.

Scene Point Blank: And then there is the Maryland Deathfest.

Jacob Bannon: That's really the only other thing that was announced because they confirmed us so early. As for other touring, we'll definitely do a tour after this. We'll do a headlining tour and put together a really unique package some time next year and of course tour Europe as well.

Scene Point Blank: That's all I got. Thank you for your time.

Jacob Bannon: Thank you.

Rob Miller

Amebix

Cheryl Prime, June 2011

Amebix are a band cloaked with such intrigue and myth that, for a long time, I wasn't sure that they actually existed. Forming in 1978 around the core of brothers Rob and Stig Miller, they released two albums and a handful of 7" singles before disbanding in 1987. They were a band spoken about on the fringes of both the punk and metal scenes, being one of the earliest bands to adopt both styles as their own.

In 2009, Amebix came together to collate a history of the band in the form of a documentary style DVD. This served as a catalyst for the band to begin an entirely new chapter in their story, and we find them now on the verge of releasing new material for the first time in over twenty years. Sonic Mass is due for release on September 20th, and vocalist and bassist Rob Miller recently took the time to answer a couple of questions I had for him.

Scene Point Blank: How did the reformation, as it were, of the band come about?

Rob Miller: It really came about through the Risen DVD project that was supposed to have been a complete documentation of the Amebix myth, dealing with the unanswered questions and really wrapping the whole episode up. However, Roy (Mayorga - drums) flew over to help us record three tracks for the end of the DVD and it became glaringly obvious that we had stumbled into a new chapter, everything was aligned. It was the very last thing I wanted to get involved with, but once the doors were opened we had little choice but to follow on.

Scene Point Blank: Was the making of a new album something you intended to do, or were initial plans just for a few shows and re-issues?

Rob: I think the idea of a new album was something we sidestepped for a bit. We needed to get used to playing again first. I had spent 22 years without even touching a bass guitar, so the primary focus was on trying to make Amebix tight as a live band again. To that end we rehearsed for a solid week before every tour, so that we would come back out stronger

than we ever were before. The new songs only really started to filter down after the European shows, when we had time and place at our disposal, firmly planted in the British countryside again and drawing the energy from the earth.

Scene Point Blank: The album wasn't something you'd really set out to do, so how was the idea of new music approached? How did you go about writing new music and was the process different to how you wrote in the past?

Rob: For me it was the same, I have never written a song on demand. Inspiration is the key. We are at the mercy of the creative force, if something comes down then I have to try and find a way to interpret that through the very limited ability that I have personally. Roy has brought a lot into the album too, he has a grasp on composition that we never really had (yeah, I know, we still put out a 6 minute single, but.. Stig (Miller – guitar) brings moments of genius and his own inimitable style. Lyrically I am also very proud of this achievement, it has given us free rein to express ideas that were always at the heart of Amebix.

Scene Point Blank: How did Roy become involved and were you fans of his prior to him joining the band?

Rob: I had left the whole music “scene” some twenty years ago, and never listened or saw any new bands in that time. I simply moved to a remote Scottish island (Skye) and learned my art as a Swordsmith—this consumed me for all that time. The internet arrived and I began to get an idea that Amebix had become a cult phenomenon (everybody loves you when you're dead), and a personal myspace brought in people who wanted to contact me after all this time. Alicia from 13 (American doom band) suggested I befriend Roy Mayorga, and he seemed like an interesting and multi talented guy. But she disappeared for six months after Hurricane Katrina hit her home town. She anachronistically popped up again exactly when we had been talking about the idea of reworking old material for the DVD, something that was obviously not possible as Spider (ex-drums) cannot play anymore due to tinnitus. I came home from Ireland to find a message from Alicia with Roy's phone number, so just on the chance he might say “yes,” I phoned him. Roy arrived a few weeks later and spent a week with me on Skye, where he forged his own sword as an initiation, and we

travelled to Ireland again when this story took off.

Scene Point Blank: Do you have any major influences? And are they any different to the things that initially turned you onto the path of joining a band?

Rob: There were so many back then, but I no longer have so many. We grew up with Bowie, T Rex, Brian Eno, and then the first wave of punk. I suppose what was most inspirational was John Peel, the radio DJ. He was absolutely the champion of all weird and wonderful music, and he opened my eyes to so much: when conformity was the enemy, and music was the Art. Bands that burrowed into my flesh were and always will be Black Sabbath, Accept, Mercyful Fate (the first two albums), Bad Brains, Stranglers, Killing Joke. I haven't heard much lately that has found such a deep place.

Scene Point Blank: What have the initial reactions to the new music been like ?

Rob: We have played the single to about a dozen people: old diehard fans, and younger kids, and people who don't even listen to heavy music. The response has been very emotional from the old fans, we have brought back everything they felt about Amebix. It has totally vindicated this whole journey. *Sonic Mass* will totally open the gates, I really don't think there is anything like this out there. I am stunned at what we have somehow achieved. This may be popular or unpopular—it makes no difference to us—we have actually created a piece of living Art.

Scene Point Blank: Are you looking forward to getting it out there? Do you have plans to tour the album?

Rob: The first priority is to allow people some time to get acquainted with the new material. I don't want to be a band that just plays the "old favourites," so would like to tour the album as a work. This may take some planning, but I would expect us to be around in 2012.

Scene Point Blank: Do you have any clear ideas as to how you want the band to progress after this record? What's the future for the band?

Rob: No idea at all. We have to roll with the punches and walk on

through when we can. We can only be aware of opportunities that present themselves. Personally I have a load more material that I would like to work on, but who really knows. Enjoy life in the moment and make the most of what we have now, I reckon.

Scene Point Blank: Thank you for your time! Do you have anything else to add?

Rob: I think that we recognise that there is an incredible amount of goodwill towards us out there. It has been a very difficult journey but it's made easier by the real love and well-wishing that we have from old fans and new alike. So, thank you. Enjoy the music!

2

Punk rock veterans

Digging deep and branching out

THESE ARE THE ones who made it their lives. Some bands plug away and never quite make it; others stretch but implode when the pressure becomes too much. For the bands featured in this chapter, they've managed to find a way to stay aboard the moving juggernaut that is the modern punk scene, as well as staying relevant, urgent and passionate. We hear about life in the trenches of touring, straddling the divide between the underground and the mainstream, and continuing in the face of adversity.

Tim McIlrath

Rise Against

Graham Isador, August 2006

After the success of their recent record “The Sufferer and the Witness”, the melodic punk/hardcore scene’s favourites, Rise Against, continue to promote their political ideas with a keen emphasis on provoking thought rather than sloganeering and preaching. Our man Graham put together some questions for frontman Tim McIlrath; here’s what he said.

Scene Point Blank: The new CD “The Sufferer and the Witness” sees a fairly wide range; from a spoken word short story written on a tour with the Mad Caddies in ‘The Approaching Curve’, to the band’s softer bits and a duet with Emily Schambra in ‘Roadside’, to your classic melodic punk sound of the first single. So tell me a bit about where all of these concepts came from?

Tim: Well, those specific concepts came pretty naturally as we were writing the songs. Roadside was a song I’d been working on for awhile. It started as a part that I thought might fit into a different song, and it slowly became it’s own monster. We weren’t planning on including it in the record, but after playing it for Bill and talking about it, we decided to work on it and see what comes out. After playing around with the song and putting it together, we just started hearing female vocals on the song, as well as some other songs. Emily plays in a band called Holy Roman Empire and is a friend, so we decided to fly her out to the studio so she could grace us with her beautiful voice. It came out amazing, and she actually sang on a few other songs on the record if you listen closely. The Approaching Curve was a song we had written together, instrumentally, but I never added lyrics or vocals to it until we arrived in the studio. I just had a lot on my plate as far as songs we were working on, so I put that one off. By the time I got around to working on it, I was brainstorming ideas, and I had done so much singing around that time, that it sounded like fun to try something different, so I did.

Scene Point Blank: The major topic with you guys as of late has seemed to be over the ‘Ready to Fall’ video. I’m sure I’m not the first to ask this one, and I know you covered it briefly on your website, but would you mind

explaining the video in general, its PETA connection, and the reason you chose present all this imagery?

Tim: The video is definitely an environmental piece, and a comment on what is going on in our world right now. So much of what is happening to our environment is just not shown on TV or presented to the public, and we were given the opportunity to do just that. It's a huge privilege for someone to say, "Here's some money to make a video, and we'll do all we can to get it on TV where you will have the chance to share whatever you want to millions of people. So what are you going to share?" With that, we decided that instead of strippers and SUVs or videos of us looking like rock-stars, we wanted to use this specific video to expose people to some real life imagery about the suffering that our world endures everyday. There's also a lot of truth to the expression 'a picture is worth thousand words'. Sometimes we can talk until we are blue in the face about the world's problems, but until you see these images, some people don't really get it. I was one of those people. It took movies like "Meat Is Murder" for ideas like vegetarianism to sink in. Our video manages to show the viewer these images without interjecting an opinion into the subject matter. That allows the viewers to decide for themselves about how they feel about what's happening in the video.

Scene Point Blank: Rise Against was involved heavily with the Punk Voter, and the Rock Against Bush campaigns. During that time we saw a lot of bands, and people, who had never necessarily been involved politically take strong stances on significant social issues. After Bush won the election, and now a few years after that fact, there has been a large decline within the punk community, and the population in general, in reaction towards these same issues. As a band that has been socially conscious from the beginning how do you react to this dramatic change in various scenes across North America?

Tim: It was very encouraging to see so many people and bands within the punk community really amped on politics, change and awareness during the last election, but I think most of us knew that wouldn't last. But for some people and bands, it did have a profound effect on them and they have stuck around and held fast to their ideals long after the hype was gone. That, in itself, is a victory for punk. We didn't change everything, but we changed something and left a lasting impact on many people.

Scene Point Blank: So what do you think is the aftermath of the Anti Bush Bandwagon?

Tim: I think the problems of this world are so much bigger than the Bush Administration. Bush is simply one element to a much bigger problem. I think so much of the Anti-Bush movement led people to believe that the world's problems would be solved if we could just get Bush out of office. But, in reality, we need so much more than that. While the Anti-Bush Bandwagon definitely attracted people who were simply in it to be a part of the flavor of the week, it also served to motivate a mass amount of people and introduce politics into their lives, and for that, I don't think it should be discounted.

Scene Point Blank: A lot of people seem to lose interest in political/social consciousness because they don't know what to do with it. What would you suggest to those looking to become actively involved?

Tim: Find something that is close to your heart, and a place where you feel like you can be effective. I'm a big believer in the fact that sometimes revolution happens more often at kitchen tables than it does at some imaginary 'front line'. Revolution happens when you are sitting there with a friend or a family member and speaking your mind and questioning what is happening around you. It happens every time you stop someone after they make a racist or sexist or homophobic joke and tell them why it is wrong to do that. There are lots of places to be actively involved, and it's very easy to become overwhelmed with the world's problems. When I feel frustrated I remember two things: 1) Just because you can't change everything, doesn't mean you shouldn't try to change anything, and 2) the lyric in the Minor Threat song 'In My Eyes': "You tell me that I make no difference, but at least I'm fucking trying".

Scene Point Blank: Almost all the independent reviews and interviews I've read have been quick to mention your association with Geffen label, or how your songs have appeared in video games, or on certain compilations, and the like. Though you've explained the major label conflict many times, with the numerous naysayers out there do you ever feel the need to justify any of your actions as a band?

Tim: I think all of the justifications we ever felt we needed to provide are

in our records, our music, our lyrics, and our actions.

Scene Point Blank: In a previous interview you were quoted as saying that you didn't feel many bands were carrying the torch of true punk rock ideology, and a lot of that feeling was being lost. As we've digested a growing number of pop punk bands, as well as the growth in popularity with bands such as yourselves, do you feel that statement still holds true? Who do you think is doing it right?

Tim: I really try to focus on the positive parts of the punk scene instead falling into the bottom-less pit of people who get lost in their own shit-talking about our scene or the current state of punk. That said, obviously there are some aspects of the punk scene today, especially some bands, that can be very frustrating for someone like myself to witness. But you can't discount the fact that there is a scene out here that is very much alive and vibrant and thriving on subversive material. There are people out here that are working hard to open so many eyes and it's working. Bands like Strike Anywhere, Anti-Flag, Against Me!, Boysetsfire, Pennywise, the International Noise Conspiracy, Propagandi, and NOFX are reaching so many people everyday. Those bands are just examples of some of the bigger bands out here, but there are so many smaller bands that I'm not even aware of and bands that are starting everyday, inspired by some of the above bands. There are local bands that are just as relevant, regardless of how big their crowds are or how many records they sell.

Scene Point Blank: When I told my girlfriend I'd be doing this interview she replied with "Rise Against? They're that band that does the cute 'Swing Life Away' one, right?" Ironically a lot of the success of 'Siren Song Of The Counter Culture' came because of that single. As a band with a melodic hardcore sound, how do you react to those who simply know you for that song?

Tim: I hope that a song like that, which I'm very proud of and stand by, may serve as a gateway drug to our band and lead people to the rest of our songs and records and hopefully a show, and not just one song.

Scene Point Blank: One of your ambitions as a band was to get over to South Africa and help with Aids awareness, as well as some fundraising. Are you any closer to that goal?

Tim: We had one tour fall through prematurely due to circumstances beyond our control, but since then we've met with another promoter who is trying to bring us over. Our schedule is busier this year than ever, so we are having a challenging enough time trying to play for our existing fans in areas of the world like the UK/Europe/Australia/Japan much less try to break ground in new areas like South Africa. But it remains on our grand 'to-do' list.

Scene Point Blank: We'll close up with a couple of one liners: If the fans take any message away from your music what would you want it to be? If you could suggest any piece of literature to read, what would it be, and why? And lastly why should people listen to Rise Against?

Tim: I'd like to think that our band puts forth a message of change and awareness; and the belief that both of these ideas are within our grasp. Books? I just recently read the book 'Ishmael' which a really interesting read that I'm glad someone turned me on to. Why should people listen to Rise Against? Because they want to. I'm not out here to sell myself to anyone, and our band is not meant for everyone.

Scene Point Blank: Anything you'd like to add?

Tim: Much love to all the Rise Against fans out there, you guys never cease to amaze me.

Tim McIlrath

Rise Against

Graham Isador, Oct. 2010

Rise Against have steadily risen in popularity from their punk and hardcore roots into a major label backed group that nearly topped the Billboard charts. In spite of their success the band has continued to set forth a political-minded assault on the music world. Scene Point Blank corresponded with vocalist Tim McIlrath about the band's latest full-length, *Appeal to Reason*.

Scene Point Blank: Since the last time the site had a chance to speak with you Rise Against have seen a fairly significant increase in popularity. Though there has always been an ardent political theme to your music, does the idea of more people listening change the way you write lyrics? Do you feel as if it has made you rethink the focus of your songs?

Tim McIlrath: I guess I can see that, from an outside perspective, we might appear to be getting significantly more popular, but from the inside, it's still a very slow and gradual process that is allowing us to grow into without too many growing pains. We've been fortunate enough to do everything on our own terms, which has made doing all of this a lot of fun and pretty easy and natural. The only thing I approach differently lyrically is that I try hard not to repeat myself. I'm sure I fail inevitably in some ways, but I make a conscious effort not to have our records be redundant. I want to plug into culture right now as it is happening and have the record be a reflection of that culture, while maintaining the roots of punk and hardcore, where we came from. It's a tricky balance, and only the listener can really decide if we accomplish it.

Scene Point Blank: Who do you write the songs for – yourself or for the people who will eventually listen?

Tim McIlrath: I guess the simple answer is both. But it's important to note that we don't cater to anybody specifically. We write what we want and what we think people might be able to relate to. We've been lucky that apparently what we like is also what the fans like, so it's easy.

Scene Point Blank: With a growing popularity there may be some fans who are less concerned about the message/themes behind your music, and are just looking for something rocking to listen to. How do you react to that?

Tim McIlrath: I think that tide is turning. I think the fact that a band like us had the third best selling record in America the week it came out is evidence of that. I don't think we hit #3 on Billboard because we are so awesome or something like that, I think it's a wake up call that people are looking for something deeper in their music. I mean we never expected to even crack the Billboard charts. People are attracted to music because it reflects the complex emotions of human beings, and makes us feel a certain way. Right now, we live in uncertain times, and some people want music that reflects that, not music that ignores that. That's encouraging.

Scene Point Blank: We recently saw the release of the music video for "Re Education." The imagery used in the video suggests a drastic stance to the problems faced in everyday society, with a fictional bike gang eventually setting fire to a city. While I know that the video works as a metaphor, would you mind explaining to me how its concept came about and how you think it reflects the band/song?

Tim McIlrath: The video starts with a quote from JFK that says "Those who make non-violent revolution impossible only make violent revolution inevitable." That's the jumping off point for the video. The video takes you on a journey with a fictional group of people who represent someone who has been muzzled by America, someone who has been left with no options. When people are backed into a corner, they take desperate measures. This video is about those desperate measures, as a reminder that we need to fight for the freedoms to voice opinions, lest the voiceless lash out in other ways.

Scene Point Blank: Though I know a lot of the subject was addressed in the "making of" that can be found on your website, is there any fear of negative reaction from those who might view it as a "pro-bombing" message?

Tim McIlrath: We can't hold every viewers' hand through everything we do, and we can't hold back from creating something important even if it might be controversial. MTV plays videos that degrade women, glorify

gang violence and suicide, and emphasize that money is the answer to all your problems. It's hard to jar people awake and get them talking, and it takes a strong video to do that.

Scene Point Blank: The JFK quote used at the beginning of the "Re Education" video suggests that violence might be needed when a peaceful revolution is impossible. I know I touched on this the last time we had the opportunity to talk, but do you feel that awareness in activism is enough? Is it necessary to do more than just understand problems/does knowledge force you to act?

Tim McIlrath: I don't think that JFK was suggesting that violence is ever needed. JFK was warning that if we don't allow people to protest, to voice their opinions, and even encourage that, then people will look for other ways to make their voice heard. I think violence is the inevitable response to irresponsible government. People are only going to watch so many documentaries about election fraud, healthcare, and the illegal occupation of Iraq before they get fed up. It's time these people get listened to, because if no one listens to them, the alternative is ugly.

Scene Point Blank: The last time an election was being held in the U.S. there was a huge up cry from the punk community in regards to an Anti-Bush stance. Though the stakes on the current election seem as high or higher than the last, we've seen fewer people making statements in regards to politics. Why do you think this is?

Tim McIlrath: I think these statements are being made, but mass media tends to ignore them. I wish more of the music and art of today reflected the tumultuous time we live in, but I also think that people like Strike Anywhere or Banksy or Amy Goodman are doing a great job getting the word out. I think the Bush Administration has done a pretty effective job of scaring people into silence, and that is only beginning to thaw now.

Scene Point Blank: There is a really great quote you had that said, "When you leave people without options there are repercussions, and maybe you leave people with one option." Do you think it takes a drastic change to get the general population to pay attention to anything?

Tim McIlrath: Unfortunately I think that is the case sometimes. Perhaps if any good comes out of the last eight years it will be a country hungry

for change.

Scene Point Blank: What do you think the effects of another conservative might be on America?

Tim McIlrath: I really don't want to think about that. I think it could get ugly.

Scene Point Blank: On a lighter note, the band recently did a cover of "Making Christmas" for Nightmare Revisited. Can you tell me how that came about?

Tim McIlrath: We get approached to do lots of covers, and we usually turn them down. But we loved this movie and its legacy, which is strangely intertwined with the punk scene, so we jumped at the chance. Danny Elfman is a brilliant composer, so for a bunch of punks to take a stab at his work was certainly challenging, but in the end, and with Bill Stevenson and Jason Livermore's help, we were all really happy. We even got a note from Danny Elfman the other day saying he loved our version! Listen for Bill Stevenson singing on it too, it's brilliant.

Scene Point Blank: I also came across a version of Rise Against doing the former "Weeds" theme song, was that ever going to be used on the show?

Tim McIlrath: I don't know; we're not sure to be honest. We were not only fans of the show but also fans of the song and its tongue-in-cheek message about suburban sprawl. It was right up our alley. I'm not sure our version was up their alley though!

Scene Point Blank: "Hairline Fracture" has a coloration with Matt Skiba of Alkaline Trio fame. What was it like working with him in a studio setting?

Tim McIlrath: This isn't true, though it's a great idea!

Scene Point Blank: I'd like to see if the answer of this question has changed since the last time I asked it. If the fans take any message from your music, what would you like it to be?

Tim McIlrath: I don't know what I said last time, but I would like people

to take away the idea that change is possible, and it takes each of us to create the awareness that will be its foundation.

Scene Point Blank: Thanks very much for taking the time to do this. Anything you'd like to add?

Tim McIlrath: Thanks to all of our amazing fans, we're glad everyone is digging the new record and we can't wait to play your town.

10,000 Marbles & Pink Eyes

Fucked Up

Jon Kirby, November 2006

As a band, Fucked Up operates outside the parameters of traditional society. No one in the band (comprised of Pink Eyes - vocals, Concentration Camp - guitar, Mr. Jo - drums, Mustard Gas - bass, 10,000 Marbles - guitar) owns a cell phone or can legally operate a vehicle. Relationships between band mates are often strained (Pink Eyes has even avoided a European tour because, "The prospect of sitting in a van with those dudes made me sick to my stomach"). 3/5 of the band is plagued by bouts of mental illness ("Pink Eyes has been diagnosed with schizophrenia. Concentration Camp and I have been depressed for good parts of our adult lives," says guitarist 10,000 Marbles.) The band has been accused of championing fascism ("Mixing fascist imagery with a leftist anarchist punk band is like a bomb going off," according to the band.) With this kind of press, SPB had no choice but to get their side of the story.

Scene Point Blank: One of my questions was going to be if you had any plans to make *Looking For Gold* more widely available, but you recently made it available online. Why did you decide to release it online rather than re-pressing it on vinyl or releasing it in some other format?

10,000 Marbles: We didn't release it as a record because we didn't want people to have to pay for it. The original 12" became such an economic fiasco that we just figured fuck it, why put effort and money into releasing a record that people are just going to flip for more cash anyhow. The song fits thematically with *Hidden World*, so we want it to act as a companion piece, but one you don't have you pay more money for. Regardless, music isn't really about physical objects anymore anyhow, so why waste the petrol if people are going to listen to it on the computer anyhow? I can't tell you I haven't listened to an actually record in a long fucking time. The song is available online here.

Scene Point Blank: Your website takes a different form than most bands. I can't bring myself to say it's more than just a blog since it is more engaging than a lot of the band websites that are just boilerplate templates. How self-conscious a choice was this?

10,000 Marbles: People want to give us a lot of credit for being different because we have a blog and not a website, but it's honestly only because I don't know HTML and I wanted to have a website where I could update it whenever I wanted without relying on someone who knows how to program.

Scene Point Blank: I've heard it said that you will pay for any Fucked Up tattoos your fan base gets – is there any truth to this?

10,000 Marbles: Not true. We may have told a few friends that, but we don't have that amount of paper to be paying for so many tattoos.

Scene Point Blank: It seems like a lot of your lyrics use a classic rhetorical strategy where you talk over an audience's head in hopes that they'll educate themselves. This is fairly uncommon in the broad world of punk, which is usually much more didactic; what's the rationale behind this and what kind of responses have you seen?

10,000 Marbles: I just write how I'd like lyrics to appear. We don't want to tell anyone what to think, really, I just like my lyrics to rhyme, use interesting imagery and words, and be about interesting topics. I'm not in this to spread any particular worldview. And yeah, when we do have particularly objective topics, they're usually tucked inside a metaphor, so the song is more interesting and you aren't hit upside the head with rhetoric. I had militarism in mind when I wrote "Triumph of Life," and smoking when I did "Dance of Death," but I like being discreet, you know?

Scene Point Blank: By being called Fucked Up you've sort of precluded a certain level of popular success – how interested is Fucked Up in capturing a broader audience?

10,000 Marbles: We're sort of toying with it now. The record got reviewed in Spin, and our ethos when it comes to mainstream press is "whatever makes my life more interesting". We've been doing some radio and TV interviews, and we think it's fucking hilarious. We're playing on MTV in a few weeks.

Scene Point Blank: One of the most interesting developments I've noticed in hardcore in recent years is a slight relaxation of some of the compartmentalizing that goes on – the boundaries between the different

subsets of punk look more blurry. Fucked Up seems to be part of this, since for example at your record release shows you're playing with both Cold World and Dropdead (not to single them out as archetypal). Is this a real phenomenon or am I just making it up?

10,000 Marbles: I think what's going on is that the relaxation is becoming its own compartment. You have bands like Gorilla Angreb and shit, and I think part of why bands like this get attention is because people take real pride in not being pigeonholed into whatever fraction of the culture they've escaped from. What happened of course is that all these people did the same thing and ended up in the same place, and now you have all these middle of the road bands that only created a new niche. I like GA a lot though, don't get me wrong. You can bet that the people watching Dropdead and The Fest aren't going to be the same ones watching Cold World.

Scene Point Blank: In past interviews, as a band you've expressed mixed feelings about playing live. Has that changed at all?

10,000 Marbles: Nah. Sometimes it's good, sometimes it aint. I always get real curious when I read dudes saying "playing live is a real release for me" - I'm like, are you lying? It definitely is no release for us, it's just more stress. Playing is fun sometimes when I get to fuck with people standing near me, but a lot of times it's just put your head down for half an hour and then go back to reading a book in the van. I'm more into recording shit in the studio.

Scene Point Blank: Some of the recent Fucked Up material seems to be pushing in a bit more of an aestheticized direction in terms of content - with songs like "Teenage Problem" referencing Andre Gide and "Vivian Girls" with Henry Darger. What kind of artistic traditions do you see yourself engaging with or inhabiting (if any), beyond punk rock?

10,000 Marbles: None. This is what a punk band does - borrow, steal, etc. We're just a patchwork of a million other things. I don't think we have a defined or central aesthetic or ideology, we just know how to pick parts from other ones really well. I don't even read or like poetry, and I didn't really like Darger's book, but I do understand the power the things we use hold to other people. Recently I guess we're into illegalism, but that's not

really art, and we can't really get arrested anymore. In fact - fuck art, it's the biggest scam racket going.

Scene Point Blank: "Neat Parts" seems like an account of being disillusioned with certain varieties of politics ("empty slogans they just fall on my left and deaf ear"). The question of Fucked Up and politics has always been fairly complex and uncomfortable for some; how does this fit in?

10,000 Marbles: Pink Eyes wrote "Neat Parts" about girls, I'm pretty sure. "Neat Parts" and "Reset the Ride" - that shit is about women.

Pink Eyes: "Neat Parts" really is two different songs in one, I guess. The first verse is definitely meant to be an attack on the sloganeering of punk. Where bands talk about being anti-racist only to turn around and have totally misogynistic views (or homophobic and classist) there by totally ignoring the intersectionality of systems of oppression. Or most of the time they do talk about being anti-oppression it is on a very surface level; like I'm anti-Nazi therefore I'm anti-racist, totally ignoring how deep these problems truly go. And it totally boils down to some idiot with a microphone telling us how to live so they can feel that they have somehow had a positive effect on the world. The other half of the song is about people subverting science to reinforce systems of oppression. For me these two things are linked because they are both examples of people taking things and twisting them to serve their will. Both are totally different but both are equally self-serving.

Scene Point Blank: "Carried Out to the Sea" attacks naive postmodernism, but it seems to me that an argument could be made that the broad theme of *Hidden World* is a kind of deconstruction - the way that totalizing, Manichean oppositions are unstable and create a "hidden world" that overcomes them. Is this just a misreading?

10,000 Marbles: Pink Eyes has this lyric cycle going on lately where his songs are about this constant awning of change that is just a recycling of old parts.

Pink Eyes: "Carried Out to the Sea" is more about being frustrated that we live in an era where nothing is new and every time something comes into existence that looks as though it may turn into something worthwhile it

is immediately jumped on before it has a chance to fully develop. There will never be another Seattle because nothing will ever develop to that point going unnoticed.

Scene Point Blank: What's "David Comes to Life" about?

Pink Eyes: David is about a kid who figures out that everyday he lives his life he is just going to commit more sin and thus take him further away from heaven. So instead of waiting in this horrible life like the rest of us to simply die one day riddled with sin and have to then try to get into heaven, he is going to just kill himself, sin free, to get to heaven and plead his case.

Scene Point Blank: You've made a lot of references to David Eliade; how did you come into contact with him and what kind of effect has he had on Fucked Up?

10,000 Marbles: We met him at a show in NYC once. It's like how they say in the Kabbalah tradition - you can't seek a teacher, but one will appear in your life when you are ready. He showed up at the right time for us. He's like an invisible hand, we don't have much contact with him but he influences us a lot. I chat with him on the phone sometimes, but we only see him in person every six months or so, and we'll do a lot of heavy chatting and planning when we're together. He gives us a lot of influence; I don't really want to say a lot more than that.

Scene Point Blank: Jade Tree seems like an odd but appropriate choice of label for Fucked Up. What was it that made you decide to release *Hidden World* with them? I could be way off here, but you guys don't really strike me as Lifetime or Promise Ring fans.

10,000 Marbles: Jade Tree is diversifying, you know. They threw a lot of money at the record, more than a smaller label could have afforded. They did it for the ages - if we had of stuck with Deranged, *Hidden World* would have been ten minutes long. Honestly who gives a shit what bands a label has put out in the past, it's more about how they are able to deal, you know? They are fair dudes and they seem to be into soccer from what I can tell, so what the fuck.

Scene Point Blank: What are you listening to lately, and are there any

recent records that have really impressed you?

10,000 Marbles: I like those Uffie 12”s for some reason. I’m really into the new Cassie record, how they use the synth under her voice, I’m really glad someone finally did that shit. I liked that Lily Allen record a lot until I saw her live. Also that new Justice track “Waters of Nazareth” I listen to basically everyday. At work we listened to the new Camera Obscura all day. I like stupid music.

Scene Point Blank: Fucked Up has always seemed to be a band with ambitious plans for the future – so what’s on your agenda in the days to come?

10,000 Marbles: “David Comes to Life” soundtrack LP, “David Comes to Life” musical, Nation 12”, another double LP, Army of Goldfaces, “Triumph” movie soundtrack (directed by David Eliade), split 12” with Mind Eraser, Black Sun side project (collaboration with Wyrld Visions), and Cassie remix 12”.

Nick 13

Tiger Army

Matt Andrews, January 2005

After their second show on their new UK tour, Tiger Army are still settling into the routine of playing with a new band lineup. Their first time playing in the UK for three years, the band were keen to spread the psychobilly love with UK veterans The Hangmen and with thrash/hardcore zombies Send More Paramedics. Our man Matt sat down with Nick 13 and asked him a bunch of questions.

Scene Point Blank: Hey Nick. How did the show go yesterday?

Nick 13: Um, it was a good time, it was a bit weird for me, you know, the first show of a tour is always a little strange, you're kinda finding your sea-legs. Also, the jet-lag didn't help.

Scene Point Blank: You got here yesterday?

Nick 13: We got here the day before yesterday, but I didn't sleep the night before. It was just a bit strange for me. I mean, it was still a pretty good show as first shows of the tour go, but tonight was much better for me, I just felt a lot more..

Scene Point Blank: It seemed really natural on stage. So why don't you guys play the UK more?

Nick 13: Well, a lot it has to do with, you know, uh... 2003, we were here the beginning of 2002, and then 2003 was just such a strange year for us, from our drummer Fred getting shot, and then we were in the studio for a long time making this newest record, Ghost Tigers Rise. Really we hadn't played in the states for a long time, when we were done making the record, so we spent basically all of last year on the road in the states, and also in the studio.

Scene Point Blank: How long did it take to record?

Nick 13: It was about 4 months total, but we came out of the studio to do a tour with Rancid, during the making of it, so it was kind of broken up to

a couple of different sessions. But it's a shame really, cuz I love playing in the UK, we'll definitely have to get back here.

Scene Point Blank: How has it been playing these shows with the new band lineup?

Nick 13: You know, it's actually.. surprisingly, it's really really good. You know, it doesn't seem like the type of thing you should be able to do, but somehow I think we managed to pull it off. Part of it has to do with the instrumental skills of Jeff (the new Geoff) and James. They're such excellent players, and another part of it is the fact that they had played in a band together before.

Scene Point Blank: So they already had the..

Nick 13: They already had the rhythm section chemistry that's so vital to it. So I think when you put those things together.. I have to say that live onstage, I think Tiger Army sounds as good as it ever has, if not its' best ever.

Scene Point Blank: Just today on the internet I saw you guys have added some shows in Australia. Have you played there before and are you excited?

Nick 13: No. I'm very excited about it, it'll be our first visit to Australia, uh, to do a tour there in March. It's really the last place that people play that we've never been, we've been in Japan, the US, Canada, the UK, Europe, so... I mean, there's certain countries in Europe I'd still like to get to, but it's a whole region of the world. Not many bands I know have been there. The only bands I really know that've toured there are AFI and Rancid, so it's quite a nice thing to be able to do it.

Scene Point Blank: You debuted some new songs tonight, so how much new material do you have written? Are you ready to start recording anything or is it too early to say?

Nick 13: Well, yeah, actually I have been writing, I just started writing the last couple months, and I would say.. we've only just scratched the surface of actually playing with the other band. I've started jamming the material with those guys. I have about three or four songs. We're pretty busy

touring the first half of this year, but I would say we can start working on a new album in some form, at least rehearsing the material if not going into the studio, by the end of the year.

Scene Point Blank: Do you guys write in a different way now the lineup has changed?

Nick 13: Well, generally what I've always done is written the completed songs and then brought them to the practice room and taught them to the rest of the band, but I've been toying with the idea of changing the approach for this record, to kind of keep it fresh. I think I'll be bringing in material that's a little less developed, and bouncing it off them, seeing what happens.

Scene Point Blank: Do you think the next record could sound different because of the different approach?

Nick 13: It's possible.. I think each record we've done has sounded a bit different, and I think that's a good thing. I would hope the next album sounds a little different from the last one.

Scene Point Blank: Have you had a chance to look around Nottingham while you've been here?

Nick 13: Uhh yeah, I had a stroll about. It seems really nice, there's a lot of cool stores.

Scene Point Blank: Is it true that british food is that bad compared to American stuff? Bands say that all the time.

Nick 13: Um, I think it depends, you know, there is a lot of British food that I quite like, like uh.. Shepherd's Pie, but some of it is.. kinda bad, yeah . I think the chain fast food here is a lot better than the states.

Scene Point Blank: Did you see 'Super Size Me'?

Nick 13: Yeah, it was pretty disturbing .

Scene Point Blank: Could you ever see yourself doing something with Geoff (Kresge) again?

Nick 13: I have no idea. I mean, who's to say? It's not really in the plans, but who's to say what's gonna happen in 5 or 10 years.

Scene Point Blank: What do you think of the current trend in metalcore bands?

Nick 13: Well, you know, some of that stuff is cool. To me, metalcore is really a live music. There's certain bands we're friends with like Bleeding Through, where it's cool to just go to the show and watch it live, but... metalcore in general is not something that I really listen to at home, as I've never been a big metal fan. The hardcore I tended to like was eighties, the kinda more old school stuff, I suppose.

Scene Point Blank: Green Day released a rock opera album, AFI slowed down and became more melodic.. what's next for Tiger Army? A jazzcore psychedelic prog-rock record?

Nick 13: I don't think so. I mean, to me, the new album we've just done, Ghost Tigers Rise, is a fairly intense album, but a lot of people were concerned that it was slower than the last record. I still think it's hardly a slow record, there are slower songs on it, but really I think you need to explore different tempos and different times. Sometimes playing something slower can add more power to it. But at the same time, we obviously have a lot of fast songs in our set. As for the next record, who's to say what you can see, you'd probably see a bit of everything.

Scene Point Blank: What bands do you think should be big in 2005?

Nick 13: Well.. Unfortunately it seems like the bands that should be big never are and vice versa. Bands that I think are good that are around right now.. AFI, Interpol...

Scene Point Blank: Do you think AFI can get any bigger?

Nick 13: It's possible. Their last album just went platinum in the states, which I'm sure if you'd have asked this years ago, you couldn't have imagined that.

Scene Point Blank: Could you ever see Tiger Army reaching that level?

Nick 13: You know, I would like to become as big as possible, on our own terms... I don't ever see us getting that kind of massive success, but I'm certainly not gonna tailor the music I play in the hopes of getting success, but I do think that any musician who tells you that he/she doesn't want as many people as possible to listen to the music and be into it is lying.

Scene Point Blank: What have been your favourite records of 2004?

Nick 13: Let me think. Um.. the new Morrissey album *You Are The Quarry*, it was definitely my favourite record of 2004. Next would probably be *Antics* by Interpol. Gosh, after that, it starts slowing down for me. Those were the records that made an impression on me at all. There's probably some industrial/EBM stuff but I can't remember if it came out within 03-05. The Explosion's new record was good, *Black Tape*. The new Social Distortion album is pretty good too.

Scene Point Blank: You guys have just been touring with them in America, how has that been?

Nick 13: It was a good time. It was a bit long, it was 9 and a half weeks on the road, 46 shows.

Scene Point Blank: No breaks?

Nick 13: No, just straight through it. Longest tour we've done. Yeah, I can't say, um.. well, it had it's bright spots. But as far as 2004 in music, I'd have to say it was a pretty dead year.

Scene Point Blank: When it comes to doing a tour that long, and you just wanna go home or go to bed, how do you set yourself up to play shows and you're so tired you just wanna die onstage..

Nick 13: Ha! Well, fortunately I'd have to say that more than 90% of the time I'm really happy to be onstage. I'm not always happy to be on tour, especially a tour that length, but.. really, the downside of tour doesn't have to do with the time you're onstage, that's the fun part.

Scene Point Blank: What's the one band you'd give anything to see?

Nick 13: Would it be in a time machine or now?

Scene Point Blank: It could be back in time or right now or whatever..

Nick 13: I have to say that I'm really tired of bands getting back together.. it's getting more and more depressing and it seems like it's taking away from them. I mean, if they were really good then it's cool, but more often than not it just takes away from what they did originally. I'd like to see maybe, Joy Division or The Smiths.

Scene Point Blank: I've heard you guys shy away from political stuff in your music, which is a rarity in punk bands these days. Why is that?

Nick 13: Really, it's just that I would hope that the people who listen to and enjoy our music are intelligent enough to form their own opinions on stuff.

Scene Point Blank: Without being told.

Nick 13: Yeah. Exactly. And research the issues for themselves if they care to do so, without needing to be told by me what to think. More so I think it has to do with the fact that... politics.. they're obviously important, I wouldn't say they're not of interest to me personally. They don't have anything to do with our music, they don't have anything to do with the lyrics.

Scene Point Blank: It'd seem contrived if you tried to fit it in.

Nick 13: You know, the things that I'm personally trying to express with the lyrics happen on a very different level than that, of everyday life, and the kind of that politics is a part of. So, um, there is pressure sometimes to say what you think about this or that, but it's not something I'm interested in doing, because if it had something to do with the song or if it had something to do with what I'm trying to express through music; the reasons I'm playing it, then by all means I would, but it just doesn't. As far as the kinds of things I am trying to say in the lyrics, it has more to do with things that are timeless and don't change regardless of the year or the decade. A lot of times the music that talks about political topics really directly is just kind of dated and it might be thrown away. I mean, it might ultimately become relevant again, but...

Scene Point Blank: I've seen in other interviews that you guys wanted to

put a DVD together. Is there any news on that, and what would be on it?

Nick 13: Well, that's a bit on the back burner for now. I mean, at one point we were going to put out a DVD/EP of just the few videos that we've done, but it's still definitely something that's important to me, as the visual aspect of the band is something I'm really into, as well as the musical obviously, but we have four videos now, I'd like to wait until we do a couple more and then kinda do a longer one.

Scene Point Blank: Would you ever do a live show on there?

Nick 13: That's possible.

Scene Point Blank: What about a live album?

Nick 13: You know, I've never cared for live albums, but as the years have gone on, I've noticed the way the songs kind of organically kind of evolve through playing them many times, they develop little hooks and things that weren't necessarily there originally, and sometimes take on different aspects that are kind of cool that just aren't on the record. So, um, I can't say it's something we're really planning on, but if you'd asked me that 5 years ago I'd have said never, I hate live albums, and I wouldn't say that now, so.. maybe someday.

Scene Point Blank: Thanks for your time Nick.

Nick 13: You're welcome.

Thomas Barnett

Strike Anywhere

Matt Andrews, December 2006

Anyone familiar with Strike Anywhere will be aware of their sincerity and consistency throughout their career. Equally sincere is their frontman, Thomas Barnett, a force of lyrical fury and intellectual reason. When Scene Point Blank's Matt sat down with Thomas, we talked about the recently uploaded footage of a UCLA student tasered by police on YouTube in between recording. Barnett's reaction to the news of independent footage exposing corrupt police was simple: "Fucking awesome". In the interview we talked about similar themes: operational purity, working class ethics, Japanese prisons and the ubiquitous major label discussion.

Scene Point Blank: Where did the idea for the video for "Instinct" come from?

Thomas Barnett: We always had a concept of having a guerrilla show with a generator at one of these strange old abandoned factories that are by the James River, in our hometown of Richmond, Virginia. We had the idea of having this filmed, and then we wanted Instinct to be the song, and then Justin Sacks from Minneapolis, really seemed to get it, instantly, and he submitted the treatment for the film that had this narrative about all of the different kids who were coming to the show - helping to build the show by stealing batteries, siphoning gas, taking Christmas lights, getting power, and us bringing the generator, and having that narrative be worked into the document of a live event. So, it worked out better than we ever thought, and we spent the hottest weekend of last summer in our hometown breathing in red dust that was probably laced with particulate petroleum and lead from the battery reclamation center and gas works where we filmed it.

The whole punk community came out, older legends and bands such as Four Walls Falling gave us lights, we had everybody help with all the different production aspects and about a hundred kids jumping around and screaming their heads off. Instead of it being a story about a generator show, a DIY show, it actually is now a documentary of a DIY show, so it was like that fourth wall or whatever that happens in journalism when it

becomes the thing which you think is fiction. We loved it, it was really fun to do.

Scene Point Blank: I heard that you've moved out of Richmond, Virginia, is that right?

Thomas Barnett: Garth and Eric still live in Richmond, Matt Smith lives in Baltimore, Maryland for four or five years. Sherwood has moved to the mountains of western North Carolina, which is... in US terms, not that far, it's like ten hours, twelve hours away from Richmond -

Scene Point Blank: - Ten hours away from right here would be a different country.

Thomas Barnett: Yeah, like Denmark or something, right. So I guess it's hard to relate that, but I live 3000 miles from Richmond now; I live in Portland, Oregon. But I lived in Richmond for thirty years. My wife is in law school in Oregon, so between tours I stay with her. But yeah, that's why I'm there. But Portland is a really neat city, and it's newer than Richmond, Virginia, but of course it's still got a lot of old history and ghosts and raw industrial beauty, and a hell of an amount of counter-culture, like punk scenes on top of punk scenes, overlapping, like ghosts and the city at the same time. It's amazing.

Scene Point Blank: Does that make it harder to feel attached to Richmond?

Thomas Barnett: No. I mean, after you live thirty years in one place, and not just live there passively but read about the forgotten histories and take place in street marches, spend nights and days on train tracks and in alleys and basement shows, everything that our punk community was about was built in the city itself, and trying to find a space where you can have it, because it's very conservative and high-bound and aristocratic place, and there's all this ignorance, but there's these little moments of beauty, like subversive culture; like the history of Southern abolitionists, the American Civil War is seen as this very monolithic thing, it's like racist Southerners versus liberating Northerners, when in fact it's a lot more complicated and nuanced, and there's a lot of folks in the South, who are agitating for liberation of black people, and they were also helping to subvert the cause, and there's a lot of amazing stories about that. But

then, in the present day, there's a great deal of civil rights history that happens, these great marches for the Living Wage, this anti-poverty group we worked for, and still do.

We come to Richmond a lot, I spend a lot of time there, on the bookends of tours, rehearsing, writing songs, playing shows. We have special acoustic benefit shows for the Living Wage group, and we would march with the progressive African-American clergy, the eldest of whom had marched with Dr. King. So, it's Caucasian punk kids and other radicals, in this fabric of human civil rights movement, all together, marching for a living wage – that's something I could never forget or be distant from. These are huge things in my consciousness. There's other things to learn about other cities, but there's so much that was invested in Richmond, and this band wouldn't have happened if it wasn't for Richmond, Virginia and its counter-culture, so we definitely still claim it as our hometown and always will.

Scene Point Blank: Bands with a similar political message to Strike Anywhere such as Anti-Flag and Against Me! have recently signed to major labels. Do you think they deserve the criticism and “sellout” accusations they're getting?

Thomas Barnett: No. I think that as long as people are critical but they also understand that those folks in those bands – good people, friends of ours – they made these choices to the best of their abilities for good reasons, and everyone changes. And everyone changes, and they still change from the heart. In the States, things feel really desperate and our counter-culture is under attack from all kinds of things, and there's not any sign of support for underground arts. I mean, even on a business level; businesses are closing all the time and, in Richmond, our hometown, our university is in collusion with the city council to take away all the spare property, so the all-ages club that we'd had for twenty years got shut down the other day, for good.

Getting punk ideas, and ideas about anti-war activities and peace, changing consciousness, changing society, there's not a lot of avenues; they're all closing, in the sense that you can go into a corporate machine and try your best to save lives through that process, or you can stay extremely isolated in a narrowing field, pulling people into this increasingly elitist and leisure class, middle class white kid specialised university city basement scene that is obsessed with operational purity. It

just depends on what you want to do. Like, if you wanna build something that is exclusive, and constantly in this defensive posture, then you'll have that, and it'll be this precious commodity. But if you want a counter-culture that makes mistakes while it lives and breathes and tries to share its ideas and build something, and bring new people into it, then you will make choices that sometimes that other people will be critical with you for.

I think it's really comfortable to be a journalist or be a musician and then have opinions about other bands having not walked in their shoes. Plus, there's so many other moments where like, Chumbawamba, and the Clash, and a litany of other bands with brilliant politics and brilliant ideas – *At this point, Strike Anywhere's UK Tour Manager Lloyd comes in bearing drinks for Thomas and the band.* – Oh, you're a genius, thanks Lloyd Chambers! I love you! I don't even know what Lucozade is, should I have a Lucozade?

Scene Point Blank: It's an energy drink.

Thomas Barnett: Is it *crazy*?

Scene Point Blank: It's pretty crazy, yeah.

Thomas Barnett: Anyway, that was a long answer, but that was a good question, I don't wanna take up your time with the answer. But those guys are our friends and we know why they made those choices. And we would not necessarily make the choices that they did, but we back them, we would tour with them. Especially in the case of Anti-Flag, they tried their best, as big as they were in the independent community, to make a difference. And they had this opportunity that they thought was as good as it could be under a corporate context to try and make a move. And they also have mentors such as Tom Morello and people in their lives who did have a good deal of effect and influence, being on a major label and being a political band at the same time. So I think that's where they're coming from with their choice.

As far as Against Me!, I don't really know. Like, we know those guys socially, but we've never played a show together. And we actually don't know how many of the same audience we share. We heard that they've had their tyres slashed; they've had people protest their shows... just like, hurtful, hurtful things to them. It's strange that people would believe in a band so much, and want them to be this idea so badly, I think the folks who

feel so hurt and compromised by these choices spent a lot of time putting all of this unjust weight on Against Me!, you know, being four guys from Florida who just wanted to play music and tour the world and have fun. I think it's really difficult. Again, maybe it's time for anarchist bands to take risks, to be under those bright lights for a while and see if it helps. We should have this vertical scale of communication within the punk scene, like: Against Me! should be able to call on a special red Batphone, like Batman, and call Chumbawamba and say "Hey, fellow anarchist band! We have this choice that we're being faced with, much like you did, and you did this, and how was it? Where are you now and what does it mean? And what did it mean then?" – that would be interesting.

For us, it's more like, we feel comfortable and happy in the independent community, it's not part of our self-righteousness that we're compromising our operational ethics; that happens on a day-to-day basis, there's all kinds of choices that you make, and collaborations that you despise that are also part of just continuing to transform and live this life. I think it's shrill and mean-spirited and revisionist to talk about punk as collectively only pure when it's in this DIY context, because I think it's meant a lot of things to a lot of people, and done a lot of good on a lot of different levels. And bands have to understand what they're gonna be the best at doing, how they can make it make sense and project their ideas, and stay disciplined, and still make all the connections into their roots that they need to make.

Scene Point Blank: It seems like every band lately is becoming political, like even Green Day who never had political ideals before. Do you feel this is diluting the message of Strike Anywhere?

Thomas Barnett: I don't know. I mean, Green Day came from the East Bay punk scene, and they were surrounded by incredible bands like Operation Ivy and things like that, those were their people, their peers. To me, it made more sense that that record [American Idiot] didn't seem that out of place, even though they'd never written songs like that before, as people I just imagine that it felt natural, maybe they just reached a boiling point and realised they had to make a political record, because times were just crucial. And that's pretty respectable, I think. I don't know, it doesn't have much to do with what we do. We definitely come from a political punk scene and a movement, and it's something we believe in and want to build, but other punk bands are doing other things in other worlds away from

this.

I think it's the gateway theory, and maybe that's naive, but I think folks could listen to American Idiot, because that's like, the best-selling record in America, and the cool kids at their high school are listening to it, so they can also listen to it and find other punk bands to get into; maybe they'll get into Anti-Flag after that; maybe they'll get into Fat Wreck Chords bands after that, and then finally they'll be putting on shows in their basement and listening to Discharge reissues. That's the real cause and affect. Me and Matt Sherwood in our band are 33, and we are the last part of the punk generation before 1993, who got into it before Green Day and Rancid broke into the mainstream... before Nirvana. So, after that it's all open for people to get into aggressive music that has punk roots, at least, through whatever, the mainstream radio, music videos, and then continue to dig deeper. And it's also the way that you can embrace this on whatever level.

In the late 80s when I got into this, you were just gonna get beat up, for having funny hair, for listening to this music. There was nothing remotely mainstream about it. College radio stations, they had like one show once a week at 2am on a Saturday night that reached about 1200 houses or something. It's the kind of thing where you really had to search for it; it just seemed like it was close to death. And now it seems like punk is always there in the mainstream now in some way, but as long as those bands have some integrity and have some heart, they can open up these gateways for the rest of us that are doing this in different stages of being operationally pure.

Scene Point Blank: The Dead FM booklet has a quote about “building a new society in the physical and psychic wastelands”. Could you elaborate on that theme?

Thomas Barnett: That's a big part of Dead FM. It's not just about the physical fallout from all of this economic injustice and the push for globalisation; it has a lot more to do with the social realities and psychological issues that happen, like having songs about child abuse and dysfunctional families, and about the roots of all of this. Not just because people voted wrong, but because our educational system is flawed, in the hands of consumer capitalism and those kinds of competitive and adolescent things. It's more like, there's many many things that have been

wrong for a long time that we have to look at. This is the part of our music and our band that reaches into the personal hardcore culture of coming to terms with your traumas and trying not to repeat them in future for the next generation. I guess those would be the psychic wastelands.

We're living in communities devoid of real history, and people are just living in this infinite present of this desperate competition with everyone thinking this individualist dream of "the rest of the people around me, they've gotta get theirs and I've gotta get mine". Outrun each other, outdance each other, out-connive each other. I think that the rat race is getting so crazy and there's so many venues for people to compete and to lose touch with themselves and the things that they love; connecting with other folks. So I think that's why there's so much depression. Attention Deficit Disorder; all this obsession with entertainment and distraction - every moment that you have not working two jobs, trying to figure out how you're gonna pay for healthcare or university - in the States there's no free university and there's no healthcare - so if you're on that edge and still think you're entitled to the fanciest a car and a new TV every two months and all that stuff, you're just not really embracing any of your soul any more. There's a bit of that being lost out here too. In the US it's like, having fun is something that can really heal you and make you positive, like an antidepressant.

Scene Point Blank: Dead FM is about censorship, government control and the media. How do you think websites like Myspace/YouTube are affecting this? Do you think they're revolutionising the media?

Thomas Barnett: I do. *Laughs.* I think it's awesome. We really like utilising the internet, and people trading ideas and music and film and things like that: it's great. Having a moment where everyone can take possession of a camera and take their perspective and put it out there, it might help all of us as a society. And certainly we're not dependent on one media anymore. I think in some ways that's very dangerous, because it makes everything very relative, but I also think it's possible for people to come to consensus, and get a lot of clear, multi-dimensional understandings of things, whereas before it was just whatever the media barons decide to tell us.

Scene Point Blank: Although Rupert Murdoch owns Myspace, though...

Thomas Barnett: Yeah, Myspace is different. It's another way of having a more interactive website, sort of like there's a place for free music, people can talk to each other in these different little forums, and I think it's okay. I don't love it particularly, but I think YouTube is really interesting, it has that freshness and rawness. We did a lot of tiny films on YouTube about making Dead FM in the studio, they're somewhere on there.

Scene Point Blank: The song "House Arrest" on Dead FM talks about being imprisoned in Japan while trying to cross the border. Does that make it hard to go back, since you guys are touring there soon?

Thomas Barnett: No, we've been back there successfully since that song was written. That happened in 2003 and we went back to Japan in 2005 and had a good tour. What we had to do, though, was go to Australia first, get the Japanese consul in Sydney to do the thing that needed to happen at the border two years before but didn't, and the work visas were put over the top of our rejection stamps that would have red flagged us again had we tried to go through without them. And then we got in fine, had a great tour, it was so much fun. We worked with the same promoter, it was really good to finally see him. We were all very choked up when we got through, when we got across the point where we taken the last time. There was this huge wave of relief.

Scene Point Blank: At the acoustic benefit shows you mentioned, you played some Inquisition songs. Is there any chance of a reunion?

Thomas Barnett: I don't know. I guess the longest answer to this, and the best answer, is on lollipop.com. There's an interview with me exclusively, for some reason, about Inquisition. What I mean is that, that's happened once every three or four years, like Robbie and I will get together and play at some pub in Richmond. And then when Strike Anywhere started, we could do a Strike Anywhere acoustic show and then Robbie would appear and we'd do some Inquisition songs, or while Strike Anywhere was touring and River City High, his other band, was touring. He lives in London now and I live in Portland, Oregon, so for the four of us to get back together, it would be 12,000 miles and 11 hours of that, and pretty diverse and committed lives to other bands.

I mean, I love those guys and it would be really cool, but we just don't know physically how it could happen. Everyone's getting along really well,

and it would be a really good time if everyone happened to all live in Richmond and not be in other bands, and not have families *laughs*. But I think it would be hard. The door is always open though, and I think Robbie and Russ, who remain in Richmond, they're pretty excited about trying something but it's really hard for me and Mark. We could try to schedule bookends of River City High - Mark is in a band called River City High - one of their tours and Strike Anywhere tours, and we stay in Richmond and try to practice and rehearse and wait for that to happen again and schedule a reunion show or something, that would be a really good thing to do, but it seems like it's gonna be real difficult.

Scene Point Blank: The song "Sedition" talks about your grandfather's unwitting involvement in weapons production and his consequent suffering. Do you think things like this still goes on?

Thomas Barnett: Yeah, I do. My wife is in law school, and she's been doing a lot of cases about environmental damage, like giant chemical plants and weapons plants. There's people in a town in the middle of Louisiana, and they're right in between these huge chemical factories. The people are working class African-Americans and they're dying at 40 and 50, and having horrible cancers. The young women are having cervical and uterine cancer before they're menstruating - crazy things happen, and that's just the tip of the iceberg. Of course, it's the most under-reported, because nobody has any money to help or fund litigation, unless there's some intrepid journalist who can convince their bosses to give them the resources to go and uncover these stories. Otherwise, they'll never be told. It's crazy.

It's also deathly difficult in our society to discuss feeling like you're the product of some kind of industrial accident. A part of you has been forever altered - 'forever' meaning your children and your children's children altered, because of unwitting participation in helping to build something that never existed till it was shown to the world after it killed 30,000 people in a flash of light. It killed my grandfather slower, but it still took him. Especially because people want to feel proud about using their skills, engineering, steam fitting, bricklaying and everything that people do, you don't wanna think you're helping build something that's killing you, something that's hurting the Earth and hurting civilisation. That's another part of the American Dream, or the western idea of working in the industry. Maybe it's slowly transforming and people are realising that

what my cynical side would call the “greening” of capitalism and industry is occurring, where they just put a PR face on and do devastating things. But on some level there’s also a trickle down of some kind of conscience. I hope so.

Scene Point Blank: The Democrats just won a record victory in the US Midterms: do you think much will change?

Thomas Barnett: Yeah. We were so stunned and happy. It sucks because a lot of the ballot measures in the States that were for gay marriage were voted against, and I guess that means that 55% of Americans don’t think that homosexuals should be allowed to marry. That’s really devastating and messed up. But knowing that possibly it won’t get worse, although it won’t get better since the Democrats don’t have a lot to work with, and they may not take the risks that they should, to really try to change the face of foreign policy and the corruption in US politics, we’re not big shills for that party either; we don’t think they’re really answering any questions or doing anything important, but these elections were important especially because it hinged on Virginia, and that was really cool, the last Democratic senator to beat a Republican was in Virginia, so that was good.

Scene Point Blank: Finally: any predictions for 2007, music-wise?

Thomas Barnett: You know, I don’t know. We just see little bits of culture and bands we like but we don’t really know if our perspective is very accurate. As far as bands’ careers or something...? I guess, totally removed from the punk world that we’re in, Bedouin Soundclash is really good, we tour with them, we like them a lot. They’re probably already pretty big. Yeah... I’m sorry, our brains are on tour so I don’t know if I feel qualified... the bands that we just hear at different moments are just good bands. I think the new Smoke or Fire record is probably going to be really good. I’m really curious, like everyone is, about the new Lifetime record that’s gonna come out. I don’t know what’s gonna happen, but hopefully we’ll be able to play with some really great bands and get inspired. Like right now, the Down and Outs are playing so we should go see, we love them. *SPB and Thomas leave to watch the Down and Outs, who, incidentally, were pretty cool.*

Chris #2

Anti-Flag

Michael Phillips, March 2008

Anti-Flag is a band that has always worn their beliefs on their sleeves. The politically conscious punkers will see the release of their sixth full-length this Spring and take the road to promote its release. Scene Point Blank recently spoke with bassist Chris #2 about the band's new release as well as who he intends to vote for in the upcoming election.

Scene Point Blank: Anti-Flag recently released an EP of both new material and live songs. Proceeds of the album's sales go to The Center for Victims of Violence and Crime. The circumstances surrounding the album are ones you wouldn't wish on anyone. When dealing with the loss of your loved ones, how did the idea of releasing a benefit album come about?

Chris #2: In punk rock, we generally find ourselves not rich with wealth but rich with creativity, whether it be benefit records, mix tapes, or whatever. We've always used our music as a tangible way to raise funds. This EP is an extension of that idea, we had songs laying around that we had recorded during the *For Blood and Empire* session, and we were recording the live shows on the *War Sucks, Let's Party Tour*, we just put the two together to try to create a positive and give back to some people who were helping myself and my family.

Scene Point Blank: Several of the songs featured on the recording previously appeared as b-sides/bonus tracks. Are the versions found on the EP re-recorded? How did you go about choosing the songs that made their way onto the EP?

Chris #2: No, they're the songs that did not make it onto *For Blood and Empire*, not necessarily because they weren't good enough, but mostly because they did not fit thematically inside the concept of the last album. We just wanted to put as much content on the record as possible, make it something that people would want to get their hands on. That is also why we made the pressing limited, that way people went and got the record quicker and put the money in the hands of people who need it faster.

Scene Point Blank: In addition to the new material, there are also two interludes containing audio samples, what can you tell us about the sources of these samples?

Chris #2: We recorded the interludes in the studio, they were just interesting ideas we had... “Oh, Katrina” is actually a whole song that I wrote, we recorded a short version of it which is found on the EP.

Scene Point Blank: Can you shed some light on the meaning behind the song “Corporate Rock Still Sucks”? It seems rather ironic given your current label situation, not to mention the increased number of punk bands signing to major labels.

Chris #2: Yeah - obviously it is in reference to some of the things Nirvana were doing in the early 90’s. Music moves in cycles, and I truly believe that manufactured corporate sponsored music is quite terrible, made to be force fed then thrown up later. In our case, we were poking fun of ourselves, writing a song about the corporate stooge life and being a band on a major label, is our life as monotonous as those working 9-5 in towers of capitalism, is it any different than going to work at Taco Bell? All you can do is hope to exist inside this system and to make your money in humane ways and spend it in humane ways.

Scene Point Blank: It was recently announced that for your next album, you’ve chosen producer Tony Visconti, who is known for his works with David Bowie and Morrissey, among others. Why choose a producer without any attachment to underground music as opposed to the producers used on previous releases?

Chris #2: We have made five full-length records, *The Bright Lights of America* is our sixth, we did not want to repeat ourselves, not only for the people who have listened to any of our records before, but for ourselves, it is important to staying inspired and relevant.

Scene Point Blank: A recent press release revealed that the band is looking to evoke a D.I.Y. sound on the new recording. Do you think it’s possible to truly demonstrate a D.I.Y. attitude and sound with a big name producer and major label backing?

Chris #2: Honestly that line was taken out of context, we played more

instruments and made this album live, the last four records we made were far more calculated and removed a lot of the spontaneity that we have on this record. So in a sense it is a DIY record, in the way that it was made.

Scene Point Blank: In a recent rundown of the tracklisting, it was revealed that the new album would contain some interesting instrument choices – timpani drums, xylophone, trumpets, and the harmonica. What can you tell us about the band’s decision to include such an array of instruments into these songs?

Chris #2: Yea, it was a further extension of wanting to make a record that Anti-Flag has never made before.

Scene Point Blank: With the Bush regime coming to a close, did you feel this album was your final chance to focus lyrical topics towards Bush and his advisors? Did you attempt to look outside of domestic issues given the impending end of Bush’s presidency?

Chris #2: There are many different issues on this record, I think at this point people know where we stand on the Bush Administration, a lot of the issues on this album are ones that exist regardless of presidents. Life and living are very political things, how we are brought up, the places we spend our money, the things we put on and in our bodies are all political statements. This record looks at the more personal and grey sides to politics, versus, perhaps, the more black and white political agenda that you are wondering about.

Scene Point Blank: Anti-Flag have been adamant in their opposition of the war on terrorism, specifically the war in Iraq. What kind of role did the Iraqi war have in the songs of the new album?

Chris #2: It has certainly influenced the album and band, however this is less of a specifically “anti-war” album then the last two have been.

Scene Point Blank: After thirteen years as a band concentrating its lyrical content on political topics, how does the band keep things from going stale? Does the band ever consider lyrical content that is not politically oriented?

Chris #2: We write songs about things that are important to us, the thing

that keeps us going more than anything is touring and meeting new people. People that care about this world, which is more inspiring than any song, just being in the same room, the solidarity. That's what changes the world, not a song or a band.

Scene Point Blank: Since 2001's *Underground Network*, each Anti-Flag release has been accompanied with essays pertaining to the lyrical content of the songs. Is this something that we will see continuing with the new album?

Chris #2: There is a more interactive approach to *The Bright Lights of America*. The record comes with postcards that can be mailed to various U.N. branches and hopefully the mail in campaign will push the worlds governments in a more progressive manner, it will also be a tangible action that people can be proud of taking.

Scene Point Blank: Earlier Anti-Flag releases seemed to be more varied in their musical styles, particularly the incorporation of ska elements. Is there a particular reason for the distancing from these types of songs? Can we expect a reintroduction of these influences on the new album?

Chris #2: Um, I feel like we've always been quite varied in our styles, the last record had some of the ska/reggae type elements you speak of "The W.T.O Kills Farmers" and "War Sucks, Let's Party." On this album there are a lot of different styles and influences present.

Scene Point Blank: Anti-Flag received quite a bit of flack for signing to a major label after taking a strong anti-capitalism stance. Do you still feel you are looked down upon for making the jump to the major label? How do you respond to individuals calling you "sell-outs?" Do you still feel the same disdain from fans for moving to a major?

Chris #2: I really think that most people are past this idea. The last record proved that we are more focused and more passionate about seeing the ideals of this band through, more than ever. This helped with any questions and concerns people may have had about our bands move to a major label.

Scene Point Blank: You signed a two-album deal with RCA. The album you've finished writing will fulfill that contract; do you have any plans on

continuing on in the major label world? Or will you sever your ties and use your newfound notoriety to return to your roots?

Chris #2: Well, let's worry about this album, you know the one that hasn't even been released yet... ha...

Scene Point Blank: As bands release more material, they tend to look down upon their earlier releases as immature and juvenile - some going as far as completely disregarding it. What are your thoughts on the early Anti-Flag catalog? What kind of role will those songs play in the current and future plans of Anti-Flag?

Chris #2: We love those songs, we play a bunch of them, we rotate them through various tours, we are not ashamed or embarrassed by anything that we have created...

Scene Point Blank: In punk rock, or any form of underground music - hardcore, metal, etc - being a bass player usually means little recognition or notice. And yet, Anti-Flag's music seems to rely heavily on your bass playing. Is this an intentional part of the songwriting process for the band or just an incidental expression of one of the band's main influences - The Clash?

Chris #2: It is just something that we've used as a melodic device in the band... All of us love music that has melody, so we try to make as many instruments in the band have an impact on the song.

Scene Point Blank: Is there a particular album that made you pick up a bass as opposed to setting out to play the drums, guitar, or sing?

Chris #2: Not really, I just wanted to play music, the bass presented a way for me to do so.

Scene Point Blank: You've been a member of Anti-Flag for a number of years now. How comfortable are you now bringing your songwriting ideas to the band verses your first joining? Do you remember the first time you brought an idea to the rest of the band?

Chris #2: Yea, I've been in the band for almost ten years now, and have had many songs that I sing, I've written songs that Justin has sung and

vice versa. We are all very comfortable with each other, no one is nervous about bringing ideas into the band. I think the first whole song I brought in was for the *Underground Network* session, it was “Bring out your Dead” and it was fun, I remember that, recording it was not fun... ha.

Scene Point Blank: Anti-Flag wrote the song “Drink Drank Punk” in response to the rambunctious party lifestyle that many punks were bringing to shows. Are the members of Anti-Flag still straightedge? Do you identify/label yourselves as straightedge?

Chris #2: None of us drink or smoke, but labeling ourselves “straightedge” has always been more of a label of convenience. Like if someone was offering us drugs rather than turn it down and have a full conversation as to why, we might say, “No thanks, I’m straightedge” – crisis averted.

Scene Point Blank: Over the years, Anti-Flag has adopted a slight militaristic image with members all donning similar wardrobe. What was the motivation for this move? How do you respond to critics that see your “uniform” as ironic given punk’s ideology to be unique?

Chris #2: I think when you’re making any type of statements you have to believe in them and have confidence in them, if you need to dress a certain way to be more confident so be it. I truly believe that there are statements and attention that fashion can draw and it is not all negative. We wear what we feel comfortable and confident in; I suggest all should do the same.

Scene Point Blank: On your last headlining tour, you went on the road with a diverse line-up of artists: Big D and the Kid’s Table, Alexisonfire, and Set Your Goals. How involved were you guys with the lineup of this tour and others that you head out on?

Chris #2: We put the line up together ourselves, the same way we do every tour. We find bands that we think are creating honest music with integrity. I prefer that the bands on our tours be unique and diverse, so that the people that come out to the shows are witnessing something new that they might have not seen unless they were there.

Scene Point Blank: You recently completed a Canadian tour. Will you guys will be embarking on another U.S. tour in the near future?

Chris #2: March 28th we start the full U.S. *Bright Lights of America Tour*.

Scene Point Blank: Now that Anti-Flag has grown in popularity, will you abandon playing smaller clubs at the D.I.Y. level for the large concert clubs?

Chris #2: We play a mix of all club sizes. It is important to us that all who want to see us, regardless of age, sex are able to get into the show and are safe. We are not abandoning any place or any one.

Scene Point Blank: It's one thing to be a political band on record, and another to get involved in the real world. How involved do you guys get in your local political scene? Do you have any upcoming projects planned that you can tell us about? **Chris #2:** Unfortunately, we've been on the road so much that we haven't been able to be a part of what's happening locally as much as we would like. We've donated a lot of time and money to local organizations; the benefit EP is currently doing so as well. Right now were getting all of our ducks in a row for the mail in/post card campaign that will be going out with the next album.

Scene Point Blank: How did you guys get together with Tom Morello in the first place? What are your thoughts on Axis of Justice, the group he co-founded with Serj Tankian of System of a Down?

Chris #2: I think that Axis of Justice is doing great work. We've known Tom since he asked our band to tour with Rage Against the Machine in 1999 on their Battle of Los Angeles tour.

Scene Point Blank: The current presidential campaign is underway and there is an astronomical number of candidates to choose from. The Daily Show has gone as far as to call it a "clusterfuck." Of those candidates running - political party aside - who would you choose to vote for as of today, and why?

Chris #2: I've always backed Kucinich, at this point now on the Democratic side it is either Obama or Clinton. Of those two I pick Obama hands down. The last thing our country needs in more dynasty politics; The Bush Family, The Clinton Family, kings and queens, monarchs... it is not democracy. However what George W. Bush has taught us is that who is elected president matters. Even if that person is the lesser of two evils,

vote in the lesser and then push them to be even more progressive. Using our memory of the past as a reason for doing so, cynicism is our biggest enemy. The moment we remove ourselves from the debate, they have won.

Scene Point Blank: Recently, a student at The University of Florida was arrested and tasered for resisting arrest at an open forum speech by John Kerry. What are your thoughts on the outcome of event? Was the student out of line? Did the police use excessive force?

Chris #2: I've seen the video, you've seen it too. It obviously was an abuse of power. No one was out of line other than the people protecting and serving.

Scene Point Blank: Another major topic of 2007 was the situation surrounding the Jena Six. What is your reaction to the treatment and fast-tracking of the perpetrators? How can we as a people stamp out racial injustice when areas of our country are still living in the 1950's?

Chris #2: Dialogue, if you hear or see someone using racial slurs, call them on it. That's what we need to learn from our history. It does not take many; it takes someone putting people's ignorance back in the face of the ignorant.

Scene Point Blank: In a recent interview in Spin Magazine with Johnny Rotten, Rotten says that the Ramones weren't punk - agree or disagree?

Chris #2: I disagree, I'm not really sure anyone, including Johnny Rotten, can tell anyone they are or are not punk. Also, who the fuck were the Ramones to call Sheena a punk rocker!

Scene Point Blank: A-F Records has been fairly dormant with the exception of the Inquisition and Darkest Hour re-releases and the benefit album. Are there any upcoming releases in the works? **Chris #2:** We've slowed to pay attention to some of the bigger releases, the aforementioned Inquisition, Darkest Hour, and EP, but we've also done Incommunicado who are fantastic. Since we were flooded we've been assessing and making more calculated moves.

Scene Point Blank: Is there a possibility of a Whatever it Takes reunion show or has that been laid to rest?

Chris #2: Never say never, but we'd all have to speak to one another first. I know for a fact that we all loved that band and the songs that we created.

Scene Point Blank: Anything else you'd like to share with our readers?

Chris #2: For more about the world please visit: <http://www.democracynow.org> and <http://www.indymedia.org>



Solo troubadours

The rugged individuals

BEING A SOLO artist might seem like plowing a lonely furrow – is it the inevitable conclusion of the breakup of a popular group, or the solitary act of a talented loner? In this chapter we hear from a variety of individuals choosing to go it alone with their music, whether permanently or occasionally. Often more philosophical and introspective than whole-band interviews, a conversation with a solo musician often offers clarity and openness that's refreshing in a scene that can sometimes be driven by ego and groupthink. Here we speak to some well-travelled and widely-known solo artists about their experiences.

Frank Turner

Solo / Million Dead

Graham Isador, October 2010

After cutting his teeth with the short-lived British post-punk act Million Dead, vocalist/guitarist Frank Turner has moved on to a hugely successful solo career, making his mark as an alt.country influenced folk punker playing alongside acts like Social Distortion and The Offspring. SPB sat down with him during a Canadian tour earlier this year to get his opinions on songwriting, punk scenes and underwear.

Scene Point Blank: This isn't the first time you've played Toronto, but the last show was support for the Offspring in a much larger venue. Can you tell me a little about how a smaller headlining show differentiates from some of the gigs you've done with The Gaslight Anthem and the upcoming tour with Flogging Molly?

Frank Turner: Well there's a different skill to it. With a support slot you're trying to achieve something different than you are with a headline show. In a roundabout way I really enjoy supporting. You've got something to prove and you go in swinging. It's fun and as long as it's going well it's really rewarding to finish a song and get a smashing round of applause. It's like you've achieved something. Headlining shows are fun, too. Tonight is a funny one, though. I've only ever done one other gig in Toronto and that was in an arena. Everybody thinks there will be loads of people here this evening. It's awesome but strange.

Scene Point Blank: It's got to be weird playing a place you've barely been to and already having a fan base.

Frank Turner: Yeah. The one that really blew my mind was Germany. I recently did my first headlining tour there, and it was only the second time I had ever been there in my life. It was sold out. There were like five hundred people at the shows going fucking crazy. They don't even speak the same language as me. It was a really surreal experience. In the UK I play pretty big shows because people like my stuff. It's been a long and gradual process to get there, which is a good thing in my opinion.

Scene Point Blank: There has been a certain amount of buzz that's gone along with this tour as well as the Poetry of the Deed album. You're playing a sold out show tonight and I've noticed a lot of the other dates are getting sold out as well. Has the growth in popularity been something you've noticed?

Frank Turner: I have. I think that's a direct result of working with Epitaph. They are a fantastic label at promotion and the word has spread. I also think that the American punk scene is kind of tight knit. Once you've got some people in that scene who like your stuff you get in. I played some shows with Pennywise last year and they had my album and knew who I was. The first person who started hyping me over here was Chuck Ragan.

Scene Point Blank: You had played the Revival Tour with him. Is there any plans of taking that tour across the world?

Frank Turner: The thing about the Revival Tour is that everyone who has been involved with it has been messianic about it continuing. From a musician's point of view it is the fucking coolest tour. It's a different thing, but I think that some people really enjoy it. We've talked about taking it to the UK and Europe. I know Chuck wanted to take it through the US and Canada as well.

Scene Point Blank: I'm sure you're a little sick of talking about, but the coverage you've gotten for the latest album has come from all over the place. You seemed to have won over some of the people at CNN.

Frank Turner: Yeah, there is this guy over there named Pete who is just into what I do in a big way. In a kind of 'maybe I'm going to not sit so close to you' kind of way. He's a cool guy though. It came out of no where, and we just sort of did it. Loads of people's parents were calling and telling me I was just on CNN. Everybody was asking what the fuck was going on.

Scene Point Blank: I had won over my mom with Love and Ire Songs but she thinks you say "fuck" too much. Do you think it's better to have songs that are lyrically driven as opposed to musically?

Frank Turner: People can do whatever songs they want. Lyrics are a big part of what I do, but it's not like I just put a couple of chords together to back up some lyrics. I certainly am not into people publishing books of

lyrics as poetry, because the two are very distinctive art forms. I get obsessed with a good lyricist: someone like John K Samson of the Weakerthans or Craig Finn from the Hold Steady. I am really into it, but I know a lot of people who couldn't give a fuck about lyrics.

Scene Point Blank: You've gained a lot of your success with very personal subject matter. Does that ever strike you as strange?

Frank Turner: Not really. I think that that is what all great songwriting is about. There is detail in my songwriting. It's emotional detail but it's not actually factual detail. I'm very careful that there is still a private realm that doesn't get into songs. It's hard to explain. When it involves other people it's difficult. It's not my place to put their stories in the public domain. I'm very comfortable with emotionally raw stuff, but there is still a distinction between the public and the private. For me the art of great songwriting is to take the very specific and make it universal. There are times it can be weird when people think they know everything about me when meeting me for the first time.

Scene Point Blank: I had read an interview with you that said you needed some sort of detachment when playing the songs live.

Frank Turner: You can't relive an emotional song every time you sing it otherwise you'd be a nervous wreck. I don't think there is anything wrong with having a degree of detachment when playing a song live, which isn't to say you're just throwing it away. To pick an obvious example I wrote a song about my friend passing away. I don't go through every emotion I have about Lex each time I sing that song. There are nights when it's harder to sing that song.

Scene Point Blank: You said once that you think art is empathy. Can you explain a little more of what you meant by that?

Frank Turner: The reason why I'm interested in, and why I use the term, Folk around what I do - which is kind of contentious in a way because it's nearly as argument inducing as the word punk, and sometimes use the two together which becomes a bottomless attic of genre discussion - is, to make a broad and sweeping statement, life is an essentially painful, awful, and sad condition and the point of art is to alleviate that through empathy and through people realizing that we're not alone in this.

That's a broad statement but I think music is at its best when it becomes transcendent. When it ceases to be something as boring as a white kid with a guitar playing some shitty songs he wrote to a bunch of people who are drinking beer and not paying attention, when it rises above that it becomes not so much about the performer or the audience. It becomes an act of distinction and that is when I get excited. The easiest way to do that, and the most powerful way, is to get people to sing along at a show. It's great to step away from the mic and step into the crowd. I was never comfortable with art being higher class and talking down to a lower class. I just don't care. I don't care about David Bowie. Woop-dee-shit. He's a space alien. It's just not interesting to me. That whole royalty thing where people are pained to take time out of their day to entertain the proles... it's like, fuck that shit. It's empathetically important to me that when I'm not playing on the stage that I'm no different from anyone else. The only different when I am on stage is that it's my turn. I'm more interested in leading a congregation than singing at anyone.

Scene Point Blank: We'll at least have the choruses down for you this evening. I think the lack of division comes from growing up with punk rock.

Frank Turner: Definitely. I remember I was fourteen and I had just started getting into punk. It was my first hardcore show with Agnostic Front and Vision. The first band finished and they packed up their shit and leaped over the barricade and hung out. Then the guy who was standing next to me went to set up. It turned out that he was the bass player for the next band. That meant that the guys in the band were also in the crowd. I realized that it wasn't about me waiting for the airbrushed to come play for a bit and fuck off. That was the first time I ever saw anyone stage dive too. My mind fell apart. The singer from Vision was right up with us and it was like 'fuck'.

Scene Point Blank: There a couple of things I want to get down before we finish up. There is a quote of yours I really like that says "people who grew up on indie rock get a taste in music, people who grew up on punk rock get a taste in music and an ethos."

Frank Turner: I'm weary about saying that because I don't mean to be elitist about where I come from, but I've got a lot of friends and Blur was

the big band for them. What they've taken away from that is they like a band called Blur. I think if you grew up liking Black Flag than you like a band called Black Flag but you also have certain ideas about how music should be done, and that extends to other things. No matter how far away I grow from punk rock I'm proud and I'm happy that I did grow up on it. If people are vaguely in that ballpark, or know who Henry Rollins is or something, I think that's fucking great.

Scene Point Blank: Could we see some Frank Turner talking dates then?

Frank Turner: You know what? Somebody asked me to do one the other day! Not yet dude. Rollins can pull it off because he has such a gravitas of who he is and what he's done. I wouldn't for a millisecond put myself at that level. Also because he's the only person who's done it everyone will think you're ripping him off.

Scene Point Blank: Well I'm sure you could top the 'Long hair is a state of mind' stuff from the early days. Not to disrespect him.

Frank Turner: Probably the best show I've ever been to was in support of the West Memphis Three where Rollins Band played Black Flag. When the show was announced, because I'm a fucking purist asshole, I thought that I wasn't going to that. Then I bought tickets and I thought I have tickets but I'm still not going. Then I was in the venue and I thought I'm here but I'm not going to the front. Then I was at the barricade and I thought.. shit. They opened with Nervous Breakdown and my best friend broke two of his ribs. The thing that was hilarious about that was it was old people moshing. Down in the front everyone went crazy for the first two songs, and then there was a collective 'fucking hell, I am too old for this shit.' They played every song you ever wanted to hear and it was just so fucking good.

Scene Point Blank: Is it true that you learned how to play guitar to *August and Everything After* by the Counting Crows?

Frank Turner: Yeah. That's the only album I mention because it's the only one I still like, but it wasn't the only one from that era. My sister also made me learn how to play *Jagged Little Pill* by Alanis Morissette and I still know way too many of those songs.

Scene Point Blank: There was an underwear incident last time you were

here...?

Frank Turner: Oh, Jesus. I had forgotten about that. I bought some Y-fronts as well call them. It was like a little man cupping my balls. That period of my life is over. I'm kind of glad that I'm back in Canada doing shows where I can introduce myself to the city.

Scene Point Blank: Just to finish up, what will be going on with you in the future?

Frank Turner: Well I fell in love with Jim Ward of Sparta and At the Drive In during the Revival tour. We had a total bromance and he gave me a pair of shoes. We were talking about doing a band: have Ben from Million Dead play drums, Jim to play bass, have me on vocals and guitar, and Jim Adkins from Jimmy Eat World fill out the lineup. We were all hanging out and drinking and came up with the idea. We're going to call it 'Hammer Ziet' which is German for Hammer Time. Basically the idea is to sound just like Hot Snakes because they are the best punk band to have ever existed. If anyone disagrees with that they are factually incorrect. We're more or less going to do an entire cover album of Automatic Midnight. The only thing stopping it is the timing. I'm having this massive side project kick. This summer I'm going to go live with Jon from Drag the River for a couple of weeks. We're going to try to write and record an album. I have also been talking to Beardyman. We are going to try and do a dance record together.

Scene Point Blank: I look forward to it. Thanks a lot, Frank.

Frank Turner: Thank you. This has been enjoyable.

Ted Leo

Solo / Ted Leo and the Pharmacists

Matt Andrews, May 2008

Everyone calls Dave Grohl the nicest man in rock, but they've evidently never met Ted Leo. Perhaps 'nice' is the wrong word though: the New Jersey musician is one of the most energetic, engaging, passionate and genuine artists to emerge in the indie/punk scene for quite some time. Touring like a relentless music machine and armed with a back catalogue of organic rock and roll influenced by everything from Thin Lizzy to Crass, Ted Leo and his Pharmacists are easily amongst the most exciting bands still making music.

It was with this in mind that SPB sat down to chat with Ted on a rainy evening in Leeds. Midway through their European tour (to make up dates from a cancelled visit last summer), the band were in good spirits and seemed glad to be back in the UK. Matt met Ted and chatted about a bunch of topics, including politics, war, arrogance and English degrees.

Scene Point Blank: Hey Ted! To open up with, how's the U.K. tour been so far?

Ted Leo: Good, man, it's been hectic a little bit, but great, actually. We started in Ireland, which I think is always a good thing for us to do from now on, because we haven't been over there that much. It's surprising because we haven't been over there that much, but our shows there wind up being really fun and it puts me in a good mood for the rest of the trip, you know? Compared to the last trip which we had to cancel, the last U.K. section... that was just fantastic because we're actually *doing it*. Every day has been a little bit of a rush, some minor snafus that on another tour might be bothering everybody a little bit more, but since we're actually surviving and able to make it to the shows and play them on this trip, I think everybody's doing really well actually.

Scene Point Blank: Any news? Are we going to hear any new songs?

Ted Leo: Yeah, we've got some new stuff that we're working on. We've got a lot of music; I just have to get around to writing some lyrics first for it. We've been playing a couple of new songs on this trip, which are on

the kind of... poppier side of the spectrum, I think that we're shooting to record a record in the beginning of June. And I think the way things are going writing-wise... it's really simple, a lot of it very short and almost... Pink Flag, Wire-y... I mean, the songs aren't that short, but they're that kind of... we're just settling back into just writing some short punk songs, and it feels really good. The stuff we've been playing on this trip is a little more... developed and on the poppier side of things.

Scene Point Blank: I know that when you wrote *Shake the Sheets*, your intention was to write some more stripped-down, shorter songs in response to the longer ones on *Hearts of Oak*. On *Living With the Living* we have all these long songs once more... is this the same thing again but in reverse?

Ted Leo: I guess in some ways it kind of is. I think the difference between what I'm writing now and *Shake the Sheets* is that... for as long as I've been writing songs, I've been trying to cram all of the things that interest me and move me into every song, so even the really short songs are like... oh, it's kind of a hardcore song, or it's a punk song, or it's kind of an indie song... like Badfinger-y pop songs, or there's reggae elements or folkie elements. And with *Shake the Sheets* I was trying to strip everything down and write a more concise record, but I still tried to do everything that I could with every song, you know? I think that making *Living With the Living*, even though I went back to writing some longer songs and letting things flow a little bit more, I also started to not try and cram every influence into every song. For instance, there's a reggae song on there that instead of making it a punk/reggae song, I was like "You know what? I just wanna write a reggae song, so I'm just going to let it be a reggae song", you know? It was the same thing with "Bomb.Repeat.Bomb", I just kind of want this to be a hardcore song, so that's what it's going to be. Yes, having done a long record with really long songs, I do think I am going through that same process of wanting to go the opposite direction in the next record, but I'm also taking a step forward from that record, and not trying to do everything with every song again, just make everything a little simpler.

Scene Point Blank: When I first heard "Bomb.Repeat.Bomb", it was totally unexpected, like a mixture of The Dismemberment Plan and Stephen Colbert (Ted laughs). Was it a little scary releasing something like that before the record was out?

Ted Leo: Well, I'm going to say no, because while I understand how it differs from everything else, it's just like... a little more screamier, a little less melodic. I don't think it's extremely different from a lot of stuff that we've done before. It's just a little more aggressive. Also for me, I'm twenty years into making music now, and I started out in like, blastbeat hardcore bands, so it doesn't feel strange for me to do stuff like that, it feels like... liberating, like I'm not being strange, you know? It's like, "Oh yeah, that's still in me, I'll let it out!" you know? But also, I don't know if you know the specific history of that song, but in the period between *Shake the Sheets* and *Living With the Living* I wrote the music for a musical that was about U.S. involvement in Central America in the 50's and the overthrow of the government in Guatemala, and the banana trade, and all this stuff. The director kind of dropped off the map and the project never happened, but I had all this music and that was one of the songs that grew out of that project. By the time I decided to put it on *Living With the Living* I had already lived with that song for a year or something, so it was actually the oldest song on the record.

Scene Point Blank: How was it working with Brendan Canty on the new record? Did that bring anything different to the mix?

Ted Leo: Yeah. Well, I also did *The Tyranny of Distance* with Brendan, back in whenever that was, 2000/2001, something like that. Actually, I did the EP before that with Brendan too, *Treble in Trouble*. He's been a really good friend of mine for years and we, I think, see eye-to-eye about music in ways that I don't with a lot of other people. We have a language that he can finish a lot of my sentences, like if I'm having trouble describing a sound I want to get, or experiment I want to try, whatever. Not only does he usually know what I'm going for, but he also is a really fun guy to work with in terms of experimenting himself. Like, he's just up for anything. So yeah, it felt very comfortable. We did a tracking for three or four days with the whole band, and then Dave and Chris were done so it was Brendan and I for ten days, living together and just getting... maybe a little too drunk every night (laughs), just finishing everything, and it felt really comfortable, it was nice.

Scene Point Blank: One thing I always wonder about bands with an obvious frontman is how they start out like that. Like... do you ever feel arrogant being Ted Leo with your backup Pharmacists?

Ted Leo: Yeah, sometimes I do feel a little bit arrogant actually, to be honest with you. It's something that I try to find the right balance with, because I don't want to come off as arrogant, I don't want to be arrogant. This project, Ted Leo and the Pharmacists, grew out of me playing solo, for many years in the States. From the time when I quit this band called Chisel which I was in '97, really until we started touring on the *Tyranny of Distance*, which would have been summer 2001, I was mostly just playing alone. Everything I'd built to that point was just me and my guitar, except for the fact that I had a lot of songs that I thought were better served with a band, so I would record everything myself and I'd play with backing tapes and stuff. And then I did the *Tyranny of Distance* record with Lookout! and it was just like... this should be done live with a band. So I started playing with Chris and Dave, who only just left us this last August, and James Canty, who's back playing with us again now. It was a really interesting dynamic for a long time because we were all geographically separated too, so songwriting just kind of naturally lent itself to me writing alone and then us getting together, learning the songs and stuff.

But also, I just got really lucky, falling in with musicians where we all enjoyed playing with each other and we all became really great friends. So, I don't think it's ever hit a point where I come in with my songs... it's not like I give people a score that they have to play to. If I have a suggestion about an idea that I want somebody to do, I can suggest it, and by the same token, there've been plenty of times when the opposite has happened, like Chris would say, "Yeah, you know, what if I did this and it would kind of change the song in this direction, what if that happened?" And I'm like, "Yeah, it's a great idea". We've been riding this sometimes awkward but sometimes cool middle way of doing things for a while. Now, we're all actually back around New York, and in the writing of this new stuff, I think one of the reasons it's taken on this more simply organic sound for us is that we're actually playing together a lot more, so the songs are still generally starting with me having an idea, but I've been kind of purposely bringing unfinished ideas to the table so we can work on them together, which used to not really be able to happen by virtue of the fact that we all lived in different cities on the East Coast.

Scene Point Blank: You mentioned Dave leaving... how has that affected the band?

Ted Leo: Well, it was time, you know. Dave didn't want to be on tour anymore, and he was very unhappy it seemed. Our schedule was so rigorous that I wasn't about to confront him about it. It was rough timing-wise, because he told me he wanted to quit the band right before we had this tour in August in the States booked, and he didn't even want to do that. I was like, "We need you", so he did that with us, and that gave us a little bit of time to get ready for the fall, and Marty, who's playing with us now, has also been a friend for years, been in tons of bands, toured with tons of bands, so we kind of got lucky again in finding a guy who we're all friends with, work well with, who could slide right in. The only problem is that we've been touring so much, so we can play a pretty long set, but we can't pull from our entire back catalogue. Like, with Dave, if anybody yelled anything out in the audience, we could go, "Alright, let's do it!", but we haven't quite got to that part with Marty yet, but we're working on it.

Scene Point Blank: A slightly personal question for me, I know you studied for an English degree... I'm just about to graduate from mine, and I'm worried that it's going to be no use to me in everyday life. Obviously your lyrics are full of literary references, but how does it benefit you as a musician?

Ted Leo: Hmm... that's a really good question (laughs). I mean, in my opinion, the greatest thing that I got from my course of study, the things that I focused on going back to before university, was just learning how to think, how to think critically. Specifically, in terms of the English degree, I love language. I just think it's an amazing creation and tool. I love being able to put things into words; sometimes I use too many words because I love words. I don't regret having gone through that course of study. I regret a lot of things about school, and where I went and the things I went through, but not about the course of study that I chose.

Scene Point Blank: I saw online recently that you've been booked to open up for Pearl Jam. How do you feel about something as huge as that?

Ted Leo: Honestly, I'm hugely conflicted about the whole thing. I mean, from all accounts that I hear, Pearl Jam are really nice guys, they very actively try to take out indie and punk bands with them. At the same time, it's a world that I've actively chosen to not be a part of for most of my life, so... you know, I won't deny that it's flattering to be asked, and I

figure... what the hell, I mean, everybody that I've spoken to who's ever been involved with them in any capacity, even a passing acquaintance, speaks very highly of them as people, so how bad could it be? It'll challenge our comfort zones. And in terms of going from like, playing to what will probably be a half-empty room at the Cockpit tonight to playing to sold out Madison Square Garden, it's always like that for us anyway. I mean in the States, an average tour for us is... thousands of people in the Northeast/ New York, to fifty people in Fargo, North Dakota. It's just the nature of the beast. Again, not to make too much of this, but having grown up playing basements, it doesn't feel all that weird; a show is a show. It's harder to shift to the big shows than it is to downshift. It'll be interesting, but I figure... how bad could it be? We've played at festivals before... it'll be weird, but hopefully it'll be cool as well.

Scene Point Blank: Yeah. I spoke to Against Me! and they talked about opening for Green Day and playing shows for people who go to one concert a year who just didn't get what they were about. I hope that doesn't happen for you.

Ted Leo: I wonder about that, yeah. The thing about Pearl Jam, at least, I think they've developed a reputation for cultivating who their opening acts are, like Sleater-Kinney, Buzzcocks, all these kind of bands... so their fans have become interested in who they choose to bring out, it's always someone that most of their fans aren't familiar with.

Scene Point Blank: When *Living With the Living* came out, there was a bonus EP, *Mo' Livin'*. Was that always the plan or was it more intended as a tribute for the fans who went out first to get it?

Ted Leo: That's exactly what it was. It was a complete afterthought, but it was a thing that once we were done with the record, we know it's going to be passed around to half of our audience, so for the people that do go out and buy it, it's the one cover and four other songs, so I was like, "We're going to bang out a bunch of new songs and give an extra EP with it." And if anyone bought the vinyl they got a free download of it.

Scene Point Blank: I have to say... when the album leaked, I was really torn between wanting to hear it but wanting to wait for it to come out. I had it downloaded on my computer but couldn't bring myself to open it...

Ted Leo: You don't have to do that in the future. (Laughs)

Scene Point Blank: In terms of music downloading, where do you stand on it? I know it's a clichéd question.

Ted Leo: But it's a good question to keep asking, it's such a shifting landscape. I mean my own feelings are continually evolving on it. I'm continually conflicted. It's so hard to say how one is benefiting from it, how one is being hurt from it, what are the positive or negative aspects of it. I can say this: this last year in particular, I have found it somewhat frustrating that our live audience has grown greatly, but our record sales have stagnated. You have to chalk that up to downloading, but at the same time, at least your live audience is growing. It's one of these back-and-forth things. Unfortunately for a band like us, I feel like we kind of live in this weird nether region where we've finally, just in the last three years, finally gotten to a point where everybody can pay most of their bills. Everybody still works when they can when they're at home, but it's become almost a living, to do this. Just as we're all getting just old enough that the curtain is starting to close a little bit (Laughs), how much longer can we keep doing it? And just at that moment is when we really feel a true pinch. We're not selling so many records that we can just write it off, the things that we lose from downloading. It's not like when Napster first came on the scene and I was playing to literally two-ten people most nights, turning around a loan, and just to know that somebody was sharing my stuff on the Internet, I was chuffed! "Oh my god! Yeah! That's mah stuff man! Somebody cares! They're sharin' it with somebody else, that's great!" And in some ways I still feel that way, I just wish there was some other method for surviving. And the answer is, you go get another job, but then the other flipside to that is that we can't tour as much as we do. There's this constant back and forth of pros and cons, and honestly, I've given up trying to sort it out. At this point I'm like... I just need to keep writing songs; that's what I need to keep doing. However it all shakes out, I'll just keep rolling.

Scene Point Blank: What about the sorts of methods used by Radiohead or Nine Inch Nails recently?

Ted Leo: Well I think it's unfair. Honestly, I'm kind of pissed off at Radiohead for doing that because they're fucking multi-millionaires. So fuck them, you know, they can do whatever the fuck they want. It makes

it harder for everybody else to try to figure out a workable idea. It's like a red herring or a cul-de-sac to me to go down that road. Now, if the whole world becomes 'you release your music for free' and playing live becomes the way that you get compensated for it, then so be it. But it's not at that stage right now, and the overhead for actually making a record with a label and putting it out still requires an investment, and nobody wants to lose money. Nobody wants to fucking wind up in the gutter in a year or two. The Radiohead thing also was like a weird scam in my mind because they knew that they were going to be releasing the hard copies of the record eventually. It's bizarre, man.

Scene Point Blank: It annoys me that they get all the credit when bands like Bomb the Music Industry! have been doing it for years...

Ted Leo: And so was Public Enemy; Public Enemy's been doing it for years as well. And that's a whole different model, that's just like 'you know what, we're just giving our shit away on the Internet. You wanna come to the shows... and we're self-releasing our record, etcetera etcetera.' We're not quite in a position to be able to accommodate either model properly, like having big label support or doing things completely gratis. It'll shake out as it will and we'll roll with it.

Scene Point Blank: I recently watched the Naudet brothers' documentary '9/11' and was struck by a scene where a firefighter commented that he wanted to 'go out and kill' or words to that effect. In light of that, do you think the 21st century is the era of the 'righteous war', where those provoking it really believe they're doing right and good?

Ted Leo: I think that if George W. Bush had not been President, it would not be. I was there... I was loading ships on the docks in Jersey City with relief material to bring over there for the week afterward. People I went to high school with died that day... my only point being that I was there. And I'm telling you right now man, the spirit in the region, the New York region... until George W. Bush came on the scene and it became a national event, the spirit was in no way, shape or form aggressive or antagonistic or warmongering. Everyone was just taking a deep breath. It was extremely circumspect. The memorials that popped up around the city in the immediate aftermath of the event were *explicitly*... explicitly calling for... not war. It had a very anti-militaristic, anti-violent sentiment. And that

pervaded the whole region, I'm telling you right now. Of course there are people who're going to be like, "I'm ready to kill, I wanna kill," but the overarching sentiment was not about war. It became a national thing; the media fans the flame, that's the way it goes. Our President had an agenda that went back to long before he was in office. It's not a fuckin' conspiracy theory, this is documented fact that the Iraq agenda was on the table by this organization called the Project for the New American Century, PNAC... which had been pushing this for years. They found their man in office, and they changed the entire zeitgeist of the world. If he had not been in office, their man wouldn't have been there. Fox News wouldn't have been able to do what it did; it wouldn't have been able to practice its jingoistic, yellow journalism like they did in the Spanish-American war, like they fuckin' did in every war. So my answer is simply that: it's still very early in this century, and my hopes are that America itself is not so far gone down that road that this next election will continue the pattern and make it worse. I don't understand how he ever won, but I really don't understand how he won the second election, and the second election, in fairness to the American people, he won by the smallest margin of any sitting American President ever. So there's still half of the fucking country that hates the man's guts, and probably more that are just too chicken to vote against him while we're in the middle of some military action. So my hope is that the answer to your question is no. The other component though... is that honestly, it's not a popular thing to say, but you've got to take religion outta the picture. And this is not directed solely at Al-Qaeda and Islamists' sentiments, this is absolutely about Christianity and pretty much anyone who feels they have a mandate from some divine power to... I don't wanna say 'enforce their will', that's kind of a trite statement, but it feels that they have the moral high ground, and can therefore justify things like killing and they're a religion. That's going to be... ironically, the end of evolution will be religion. (Laughs) I feel like it's really got to be... put in its proper place, if we're not to have a century of war.

Scene Point Blank: You answered that better than I asked it. Anyway, Myspace is responsible for a huge surge in the careers of lots of new bands, like The Arctic Monkeys in the U.K., but a lot of them are missing out on the years of work before playing arena tours. How do you think that'll affect the future of music?

Ted Leo: That's a good question too, and also one I don't think I have

the answer for. I think it's brilliant that bands can do what The Arctic Monkeys did, which is outside of the system...

Scene Point Blank:...except it's owned by Rupert Murdoch...

Ted Leo: Yeah, you're in Rupert Murdoch's system, but outside of the record system, and I respect that, man, I think it's cool that kids can do that these days. Having said that, I will pull the 'crusty old man' card out a little bit and say that as old-fashioned as this, I value hard work, (in old Irish dude accent) "Oi tink it builds character." (Laughs) I think there's something to be said for slugging out for more than a tour and a van, before you get a trailer, and more than a tour and a trailer before you get a bus. There's something to be said for that, but at the same time, certain people handle that transition well and others won't... what are you going to do? I'm too old to worry about that. (Laughs)

Scene Point Blank: I read recently that Red Star Records are re-releasing some Chisel demos.

Ted Leo: What?

Scene Point Blank: Er...haven't you heard?

Ted Leo: No I haven't. Who's Red Star Records?

Scene Point Blank: Um... I read it on Punknews.org... It said they're re-releasing demos and stuff from Chisel... have you literally heard nothing about this?

Ted Leo: I have literally heard nothing about this. Alright... I remember this Red Star Records thing, I think I told them that I would give them a song for a comp, but if they're releasing Chisel stuff they better fuckin' tell me about it, for the record.

Scene Point Blank: I guess that changes that question...

Ted Leo: Way to drop a bomb on me. (Laughs)

Scene Point Blank: So moving on... what does the typical Ted Leo fan look like for you? Has it changed?

Ted Leo: You know, it hasn't changed. But it's also impossible to pin down. Another thing that we're really lucky about is crossing a lot of lines that get drawn in the punk and indie world. It's the same in the States, but I think a really good example is our show in Dublin the other night. There were kids there with Crass patches and Zounds t-shirts, and then there were also normal hair gel looking' dudes who had obviously just come from work who were fans, who were singing along. That's a joy man; that's great. It's impossible to pin down what our fans look like because you do have that spectrum at most of our shows. I'm very glad for that. That makes you feel good.

Scene Point Blank: How do you reconcile Ted the activist with Ted the pacifist?

Ted Leo: Well, I'm not necessarily a pacifist to be honest with you. I think that war on a grand scale is... pointless and evil. But honestly, it's not like I won't personally fight if I have to (Laughs). It's a matter of degrees I guess, abuse, who's being used and by whom. While I would always seek to find the non-confrontational out of a situation, sometimes people literally won't let you find a non-confrontational way out. I'm a) not going to let my face get kicked in the dirt, and b) not going to let my friends' faces get kicked in the dirt. That's on a very personal level. On anything that moves into any sort of societal realm, yes, I would generally come down on the pacifist side of things.

Scene Point Blank: It seems like *Living With the Living* was written during a time of political stagnation. With the current elections going on now, has that acted like fuel for the fire and inspired you?

Ted Leo: Honestly, not so much. I wish that it was inspiring me more, but the level of dialogue that has gone on - with the exception of Barack Obama's pointed speeches that he's given - the level of dialogue that has gone on surrounding all of the same fuckin' issues that are always on the table in the States: war, healthcare and taxes. War, work, healthcare, taxes. War, work, healthcare, taxes. When he gives a stump speech, he treats these things in the grander, visionary way that I wish they would get treated when we're actually having debate about it. When debate goes on so far in this election cycle, it becomes mired down in exactly the kind of political discussions that everybody I think is... well, I shouldn't say

everybody, but I am actually sick of. Which is this very personal kind of ‘what are you going to do for me?’ politics. We wind up spinning the same wheels over and over and over again, and I haven’t been particularly inspired. At the same time, on a street level, there’s still nothing going on. We’re getting constantly and consistently lied to about what’s happening in Iraq... it’s off the front of the news cycle at this point, we barely even hear about it when a bomb goes off or whatever anymore. It’s defeating. It’s not inspiring. My hope is that with a new administration, things can get inspiring again. But the lead-up to it winds up being just as defeating to me as the last couple of years have been.

Scene Point Blank: Last summer you cancelled half of your U.K. tour. In terms of your personal life, is it difficult to discuss issues in a dialogue to a crowd as opposed to in a song? Does it feel like it’s expected of you?

Ted Leo: Yeah. It depends on what kind of mood I’m in. What happened to me last year, what actually happened to somebody else last year that I needed to rush home to... it was of a nature that I really am not super comfortable laying out publicly. Nor do I think that the person who’s involved would appreciate it if I did. Yeah, it really just depends on the circumstances, you know. It’s interesting because you draw the distinction between putting something in a song and speaking something or writing something on a website or whatever about it, in a direct way, and, it’s rare that I’ve felt like I’ve had to draw that distinction before. I don’t really know that I’m drawing that distinction about it right now, like I’m not really writing songs about this. I guess it just depends on the circumstances.

Scene Point Blank: I guess what I’m saying is, and I cringe to use the word, it’s almost like you’re a celebrity, and suddenly personal life becomes a factor.

Ted Leo: I know what you mean. Yeah, because the audience is going to take that for what it is, which is a song, and however literally they take it, there are places you’re ‘allowed’ to go that don’t feel as awkward. We don’t cancel shows unless we absolutely have to, and in situations like that I feel we owe people an explanation. I’m not enough of a celebrity to keep that distance from the people that we’re playing for, I mean, physically, not even conceptually. I do feel compelled to give explanations but it doesn’t feel invasive, it hasn’t gotten to that point. I don’t feel like anything’s

creepy or invasive, people that I think know who we are and appreciate what we do, it's fun and they enjoy it, but they kind of take it as seriously as we do so I feel like they deserve some explanation. But nobody bugs me about stuff like that.

Scene Point Blank: You guys play quite a few covers: how do you choose them?

Ted Leo: Yeah, generally it's just songs that I at one point in my life, or like yesterday just thought it'd be fun to cover and we just do it, as simple as that. Sometimes for example, with The Mekons song that we're going to do tonight, that just came about because we were listening to The Mekons in the van and we were like, "You know, we should fuckin' cover this song. It'll be fun to play!" and we take a sound check or two to learn it then do it.

Scene Point Blank: I saw recently that The Specials are re-uniting. I know you're a fan (Where Have All The Rude Boys Gone? pays homage) but where do you stand on older bands getting back together? The Sex Pistols are notorious for it...

Ted Leo: I have mixed feelings and I think it goes case-by-case. I would never begrudge anyone the right to play their music at any point in their life. I dread to think about if I stopped playing music for a certain period of time, then I decided I wanted to again, I would hope that I wouldn't have to feel awkward about doing that. But of course, cynically, you always have suspicions about why people are doing it, and that can color your impression of whatever given reunion. I try to give everybody the benefit of the doubt because they deserve it, and who am I to judge, you know? (Laughs)

Scene Point Blank: Do you think you'll you go see them?

Ted Leo: I don't know, honestly. I'm assuming they'll come to the States later, so I'll probably read some reviews first. (laughs). Inform my opinion.

Scene Point Blank: What sort of stuff are you listening to currently?

Ted Leo: Let's see... the last few weeks, The Nazz, Todd Rundgren's old really psyche band, kind of like The Who but a little more psychedelic going on. They were from Philadelphia, 60's... I've recently been working

with Kristeen Young; she toured with Morrissey for years. She's got a new record coming out that I played some percussion on and helped mix and stuff, and I've been listening to that and I think it's great. Listening to Daft Punk [playing in the club as we speak]... Ohhh, yeah, I just recently got a bunch of old stuff that had been missing from my collection, this old U.K. punk band called Crisis, a lot of that... a lot of Rich Kids, late 70's/early 80's punk stuff. But that's always on deck, you know.

Scene Point Blank: One last question: in terms of your music, if I had to pick one adjective to describe it, it would be "hopeful." What are you hopeful for?

Ted Leo: Honestly man... I'm glad that you say that because I try to keep it that way, but I'm in a particularly hopeless state of mind right now, to be honest with you. I don't mean to bum you out. (Laughs) I'm hoping that I'll come out of this tunnel, but I don't see things going all that well in a lot of areas of life right now. I'm nervous about how the US elections are going to go, and that's going to affect the whole world for the next fifty fuckin' years. My personal life is a shambles. (Laughs), I'm having trouble writing lyrics... Ask me again next year and I might give you a better answer.

John Frusciante

Solo / Red Hot Chili Peppers / Ataxia

Evan C. Chase, February 2004

However little you may think of the nowadays more-or-less declassé (in indie circles, anyway) punk/funk band Red Hot Chili Peppers, if you're a pop music lover it's still pretty hard to ignore the seemingly extraterrestrial talent of their lead guitarist/songwriter John Frusciante. John's immense contributions to multi platinum recordings such as 'By The Way,' 'Californication,' and 'Blood Sugar Sex Magik' have been critically hailed as beautiful and even at times staggering.

He's written a string of incredibly catchy pop tunes that have dominated AOR radio in recent years, and as L.A. rock icons go, John surely sealed his infamy in the 1990's during a six-year heroin habit that nearly cost him his life. In person, John has a reputation for being soft-spoken and often slightly less than coherent. This is a man who's said he lives in the fifth dimension, and judging by my conversation with him, it's easy to believe that's true.

I talked with him to discuss his new solo record, his recent work with legendary producer Brian Eno, his new band with Fugazi bassist Joe Lally, his upcoming performance at All Tomorrows' Parties with Jim O'Rourke and Vincent Gallo, creativity and madness, and his newfound love of the modular synthesizer.

My Radio's My Heart - A Conversation With John Frusciante

Scene Point Blank: Congratulations on your new release, 'Shadows Collide With People'---the press I've seen has been fantastic. 3 stars from Rolling Stone, a rave from the London Times. Are you psyched?

John Frusciante: Those things are all well and good but for me I was psyched at the end of making the record.

Scene Point Blank: It's a thing of the past?

John Frusciante: It's already behind me now. It's always nice to be appreciated, but onward and upward. I'm more concerned with going forward and doing new things.

Scene Point Blank: Great, that's what I want to talk to you about. Where you are now?

John Frusciante: Yeah I'm proud of the record I'm glad that people like it. But I am very much in the state of mind of doing new things. But I have been avoiding talking about what I'm doing now because it's frustrating for people to hear about things that aren't available yet. So it's better for me just to talk about the album that exists now, and it's an album I'm really proud of.

Scene Point Blank: As a longtime fan I'm really happy with it as well; it's sitting well with me personally. I just wanted to share that the first time I saw you was in '89, we were both 19. You've certainly come a long way since then. I was wondering if you could talk about your work with Brian Eno (legendary Talking Heads/U2 producer) at all?

John Frusciante: He came to one of our shows in England with his kid and I was really excited to meet him because he's been a hero of mine since I was a little kid. And he invited me over to his studio and we spent a day just listening to records and stuff and taking a walk and we ended up recording some stuff mainly because he wanted to show me a sort of a set-up he had for processing the guitar. And to demonstrate it we recorded me soloing on the guitar. So I recorded some guitar soloing and he ended up building a song around it. And it came out really good; I really liked the song he did. He's going to release the song. I've been really focused on the modular synthesizer in the last couple of years and he gave me some interesting tips on that whole world. Just ways of doing things that you wouldn't think of doing because they're technically wrong. Basically just using it in an unorthodox way. Actually that one day that we spent together really ended up having a big influence on the direction I've gone in musically since then.

Scene Point Blank: Yeah that's why I asked the question. I would imagine that it really lit afire for you. I would see kindred spirits getting together and you really taking something away from that.

John Frusciante: Yeah I did. My music, my whole approach to the synthesizer has completely changed now. I don't really use it anymore for the oscillator or tone generator. It means basically I'm using the

synthesizer more to change the sounds of other things rather than to use it as the source of the sound. Basically I'm using it in a much more subtle way. You could listen to a recording and you could think it was a recording from the 60's because the things with the synthesizer are so subtle – they end up changing the basic timbre of the various musical elements. You can tell something different is going on but you can't tell what it is that's making it sound strange. I'm going in that direction rather than the 80's synth-pop direction where it's more obvious you're hearing a synthesizer.

Scene Point Blank: In your live shows, in addition to playing your originals, you cover an interesting array of great bands and songwriters from the past such as Joy Division, Radiohead, Nirvana, Fleetwood Mac, Elton John and REM. I've also seen it written that your recent influences include Depeche Mode, Kraftwerk, Human League and other famous synth-driven bands? Talk about how that influence happened for you? Did you seek out this music or did someone introduce you to it?

John Frusciante: That was stuff I was listening to a lot while we were making Californication and while we were writing By The Way, but for this last year and a half it's been more really experimental electronic music and British folk rock and Velvet Underground and Talking Heads.

Scene Point Blank: Of course, some of your staples, right?

John Frusciante: I've been going back to something like Velvet Underground, I listened to it so much; all through my 20s, basically. For a couple of years I didn't listen to it as much. Right now my taste is going more for things that are organic where the people are using all the sonic possibilities in interesting ways. Where people are pushing the boundaries of what you can do with texture of music but not doing it with a synthesizer, which is such an easy sort of route to do it with. I'm also very impressed with the best people in experimental electronic world, like Peta and Eckart Ailliers and Finez and Jim O'Rourke and Oren Umbarci and Francesco Lopez. Most of them use the computer as their main instrument.

Scene Point Blank: I only know the most obvious and acclaimed of the bunch which is Jim O'Rourke and he's fantastic. Would you be open to working with him?

John Frusciante: Yeah, of course I would. He's playing in April - I'm going with Vincent Gallo because we're performing on the Sonic Youth day of All Tomorrow's Parties. He's playing another show at Royal Albert Hall with Jim and Steve from Sonic Youth as his backing band, and I might play mellotron on a song. So I will be working with him if I do that. I think he's one of the best producers. I think Jim O'Rourke he does everything so well - he's such a great guitar player, he does folk-type things really well and the electronic stuff, the noisy stuff and he's just a master.

Scene Point Blank: Yeah I know, 'Halfway to a Threeway' was mind-blowing for most of us.

John Frusciante: Yeah, it's great.

Scene Point Blank: In a way that a lot of your stuff has been. I'm going to change gears and talk about your new record a little bit. 'Time Goes Back', 'Every Person' and 'In Relief' are three of my current favorites from your new CD. They're just gorgeous. They seem very personal and at the same time speak to the universal experience of simply being a human. Can you reflect upon your songwriting muse, where it comes from and what your intentions as an artist are?

John Frusciante: That's kind of a few questions in one.

Scene Point Blank: Those songs touch my heart. They're very immediate. I have a very visceral reaction when I listen to 'Time Goes Back' I think about my relationships to people. They're abstract, they're sort of like abstract paintings, but they say very specific things about being a human and feeling your feelings. There's something really nice about them; you're doing something very original and I want to congratulate you for that.

John Frusciante: Thanks. I think the feelings in my music were suggested to me before I even had the ability to play music. And this whole period of time of gradually working at being a better guitar player and songwriter have gradually led me to the point where I feel I'm doing a clearer representation of the thing that I've been feeling inside me since I was four years old. It's something that I definitely don't feel responsible for that feeling that's there. I realize that it's me but I always think of it as me combined with all these other energies that've been carrying me since I

was a little kid. I would say a lot of the emotion in what I do is a sort of a thankfulness for those energies being around, because there's been points in my life when they weren't around, and it's a real sort of miserable existence. So when I feel the spirit upon me it's something I don't take it for granted, and I don't think I'm solely responsible for these things.

Scene Point Blank: There's a Northern California poet Robert Hass who has a poem called 'Privilege of Being' and that kind of speaks to that, that we're lucky to be here at all.

John Frusciante: Yeah, I really like being alive. But I definitely don't have any intentions as an artist. I write songs because I have to write them, and if I didn't I'd be doing some other kind of music that didn't require a song. It's just something that I have to do, and I'm at the point now where I'm just doing it and it's not something that I feel like anymore that I'm doing it because I'm told to do it. I just feel like the songs that come out are the songs that come.

Scene Point Blank: Keith Richards used the metaphor of just sticking his creative antennae up and seeing what sticks to them. Would you say the process is similar for you?

John Frusciante: Yeah: see what's out there and if something's out there it starts coming through you and you just sit there and try to be disciplined about it and take it to its state of completion. Or nothing comes of it and you just do something else.

Scene Point Blank: Where do you see your music fitting into the landscape of the current rock scene, or is that not your intention with your solo work, particularly? Are you looking for mainstream airplay?

John Frusciante: I don't want to fit into it at all. I don't want to be on the radio. I don't want to be on MTV. I feel like I'd like to continue putting out records and start putting them out more rapidly than I have until now and for me if I can keep selling the records to the fans that already like me that's fine. And if a few other people come along who discover my music because they in some natural way come across my music, cool. I'm not interested in forcing my music on people, and that's what the whole music industry nowadays is based on is forcing stations to play it, forcing people to listen to it. In the Chili Peppers I'm a part of that world in a

pretty big world and that's just the way it is. I don't let it affect the music I write for the Chili Peppers. I try to put the same spirit into that that I put into any other music endeavor I'm involved in. As far as my solo record, I don't want a gold record or anything, I'm happy to be small and to have the people appreciate the music who really like me for being me.

Scene Point Blank: Is it true you already have another new CD's worth of material ready to go that you recorded with Fugazi bassist Joe Lally? Can you talk about that now or is that supposed to be a secret?

John Frusciante: It's two CDs; it's all finished and ready to go.

Scene Point Blank: What's the name of the band?

John Frusciante: Ataxia.

Scene Point Blank: Can you dispel the myth of the self-destructive artist/musician for us, please. Do you think the music business tends to attract more than its fair share of people prone to excess than other businesses? Put another way, which comes first, creativity or madness?

John Frusciante: I think you get people taking things to excess in all fields, doctors, lawyers - it happens to all kinds of people. In music you have people exposing this very vulnerable part of themselves, and you also have the lifestyle is so fast that oftentimes people search for whatever the easiest way to feel relaxed in the midst of all of it, or the easiest way to have energy. And so you end up taking drugs to sort of balance yourself out. But I think I know just as many creative people who've never taken drugs in their life as I do who have taken a lot of drugs. I don't really think it means one thing or another.

Scene Point Blank: Let's talk about your sobriety. Is there anything you'd like to share about this lifestyle change?

John Frusciante: No. (laughs)

Scene Point Blank: Ok. Fair enough. There's an old saying 'Experience is the only teacher.' What has your experience taught you, John?

John Frusciante: Are you talking about drugs specifically?

Scene Point Blank: Well, no not specifically. Experience is the only teachers. Some of us learned some hard lessons with drugs out there.

John Frusciante: The main thing experience has taught me is that one has to sort of hone their relationship to time, you know. Because time has a way of running off and not taking you with it. And for me the only way to live life is to grab the bull by the horns and call up recording studios and set dates to go in recording studios. To try and accomplish something. To do the various things in life I want to do. For me, that's the fruit of what I've learned. I'm going through a phase where I'm really accomplishing a lot of things and in that is everything I've learned. There were years where I didn't do anything and at the time I felt that's what I needed to do. But had I had a well-balanced relationship with time in my youth, I wouldn't have to have gone through that. For me it's important to be in balance. To not let fear get in the way of things, to not worry so much about protecting yourself all the time. Things like this can be your worst enemy. Something like trying to protect yourself all the time, things like trying to outwit fate. Those things can be the worst thing you can do for yourself. I find that the best way to do things is to constantly move forward and to never doubt anything and keep moving forward, if you make a mistake say you made a mistake. You say 'That's my mistake, that's me, that's what I am, I made that mistake.' You can't make a mistake and look back and say oh god why did that happen I wish I could change that. Making mistakes doesn't slow you down at all, making mistakes is part of living and you can look back and learn from them. That's something that took a while for me to learn that, but once I did learn that my life start speeding up rapidly and at this point it feels like everything's going so fast that I can't imagine looking back for a second.

Scene Point Blank: Yeah, we're perfectly imperfect and it seems like you've done a lot of growing and you're grounded and you know exactly what you're doing.

I've heard it said that 'Life is a beautiful mess.' Would you agree?

John Frusciante: Yeah, if you want to look at it that way. For me I think everything is very much perfect. There was a time when I looked at everything and I thought it was a mess and I didn't think it was so beautiful, but now I think it's very beautiful and very orderly. To me

there's a perfect balance of things like pleasure and pain, and sadness and happiness. Everything's very perfectly balanced; for all the horrible things in the world there's lots of good things. I don't see how people can expect that there should be more good things or more happiness, for the people who want sadness there's sadness, for the people who want happiness, there's happiness. There seems to be a sense to everything. But when I thought everything was a chaotic mess, everything seemed really ugly to me as well, but I'm glad that I don't see it that way anymore.

Scene Point Blank: I've also heard it said 'Life is the journey to the self.' This is sort of the biggest question, what is the function of life? Have you studied Buddhism? You know, we're not here just to be happy; life is the journey to the self---and where are you in that? In the Buddhist sense that we all have God in us.

John Frusciante: There have been points in my life when I saw clearly that everything in the world and everything in the universe is all inside of me in really precise detail. The whole world is inside of everybody, and the whole universe is inside the whole world and things like that. I haven't really taken these sorts of things very seriously in the last two years because it's been so clear to me what I'm supposed to do. So I just wake up and do whatever those things are. I take the responsibility of being me very seriously, and I feel like I have to spend my life the way I know is the wisest way to spend it and I don't really feel any kind of a void in myself where I feel like I need to use something like religion or spiritual matters to sort of fill up or to get me on a good path. I love all those things because it's great when people do feel those things inside them and they can go do those things. But for me if I'm gonna read about something I'd rather read a pamphlet or the instructions to a synthesizer than a book on Buddhism.

Scene Point Blank: OK. What's the single most, or what are a couple of important relationships that've been in your life and where you are currently?

John Frusciante: For me, my friendship with Omar Rodriguez from Mars Volta. That friendship really means a lot to me because he's another creative person who works as hard as I do. He really pushes himself and the people around him to be the best they can be. Anybody who's a guitar player that's spent that time with another guitar player, there's nothing

better than that. It means so much to me to have a friend like that. I feel the same way about Josh Klinghoffer, the guy who plays on my record. He just inspires me a great deal and his ideas are things I wouldn't have thought of and also the times that we've spent together. I could talk about people from the past but for me it's more important to really appreciate the people who are around now, because of having friends die... To really appreciate the friends you have when they're around because this is your time to be with them.

Scene Point Blank: Yeah, I've heard it said that we only get to be here for a short period of time, and I've seen that played out in my life, and with friends as well.

John Frusciante: You just never know when somebody's gonna die. It could happen at any moment, so you've got to really treat everybody that way. Just really let everybody know how you feel about them.

Scene Point Blank: Yeah, it's funny. The first time I heard the expression that we're spiritual beings having a human experience I sort of braced at it, but over time I've warmed to that idea. Not in the Sting sense, that we're 'spirits in the material world.' Thank you for your time. This has been a pleasure.

John Frusciante: Cool, thanks man. It was nice talking to you.

Scene Point Blank: Be well.

Tim Barry

Solo / Avail

Kristen Swanson, August 2012

You might recognize Tim Barry as the former lead singer of Richmond based punk band Avail, but lately he's been hitting the music scene as a solo act. Barry is not trying to relive his punk days, but he is completely embracing his own style of music in such a raw and honest manner that it's hard to ignore. Not only is Barry insightful and probably one of the realest musicians you will ever meet, but his latest record, *40 Miler* deserves far more recognition than it's received. Scene Point Blank had the gracious opportunity to talk to Tim Barry about his latest record, his obsession with freight trains, and what his favorite thing to do on an airplane is.

Scene Point Blank: You have a new record out and you're constantly touring. Is it safe to assume you will keep making music and touring until you can't anymore?

Tim Barry: That's what I've always said. I started touring in my old days when we were kids and we always said that we would continue to tour and play music as long as it was fun. I'm shocked that I'm still really enjoying it. I know that, generally, there's no longevity in music. You know, people generally lose interest very quickly. The real answer to the question is: Yeah, I'm going to keep doing this as long as it feels right. Sort of every record that I do I consider it my last one, I've always done that. I go, "Oh, I can't do this again; it's such a tedious process," but there's something really enjoyable about it in the end. I think it's a neat cycle. Like I've been home all winter and I was really nervous about getting in the studio and making a record. Now it's done and I'm tired of being home and it's time to get on the road. In six months I'll be tired of being on the road. I'll still have fun playing the shows, but the traveling and inconsistency in schedule is so bizarre, insane, and scary, that sometimes the traveling gets to you. So it's this over-and-over again cycle. I'm going to keep playing music until it burns me out.

Scene Point Blank: I heard it said that the new record is more hopeful than previous albums. Would you agree with this?

Tim Barry: You know, it's writers that are going to say that the record is more hopeful. The cliché is that all musicians use music as their therapy. Well go ahead and let people say what they will about this album and say it's more hopeful. In the end it really is, in retrospect. In listening to it from beginning to end there's definitely a theme of resilience, but all of that is unintentional. I sort of just document what's going on in my life at particular times, and those are the records. It's strange to document what's going on in your life and expect that people would have any interest in it. I guess it is more hopeful in the end. I've been through some shit in my life, everybody's been through some shit in their lives, and I just happen to express it through music. Lately things have been going pretty well, there haven't been that many deaths, that many injuries, and that many fights. Things have gotten a little bit more peaceful as I've gotten older. But, really, I noticed that the theme of the record—after it was done—was more about travel, time, age, and what you pick up along the way. The record is really written while on the road, essentially, and many of the thoughts and stories and topics that I touch on the record were conjured by the people I met, or the stories that people would tell me, or my own feelings while being detached from home and feeling rootless, but in a positive way.

Scene Point Blank: How did you come up with the album title? What is the title's significance to you?

Tim Barry: The title of the record is *40 Miler* and it's sort of an obscure railroad term that only a small minority of railroad enthusiasts understand, and those are the people who ride freight trains illegally and live on the road in a more homeless fashion. I seem to live more in a van. In the railroad world they call that rubber tramping, when you live in a van or a vehicle. I've been illegally riding freight trains for nearly 20 years now and there's different kinds of hobos. There are those who are full-timers who live on the road and then there are the people that are considered poseurs, which is me. The term is "40 miler" and the joke is, "Yeah, he goes 40 miles from home and no further." So I made some fun of myself with the album title. It's very comparable to a mall punk showing up to an Anti-Flag show and the old punks going, "Oh, you're a poseur." Sort of identical, really. There's a certain part of your life were you except your inconsistencies and your hypocrisies. Much of my image has been built surrounding freight trains, it's a part of the world that I feel most

comfortable in. Music is really rooted in ego and I'm more interested in people who like adventure, so a lot of those people who really understand the railroad culture are going to laugh at me for calling myself out on it.

Scene Point Blank: I think it's pretty evident that trains always seem to make their way into your albums. What makes freight trains so important to you?

Tim Barry: Even if I tried to keep freight trains out of my writing, it wouldn't work. I've actively tried to not put that stuff in there, but it always ends up in there no matter what. It's funny that you called me on that too. I don't understand why each person has a fascination with something and I can't say why I am so engaged in such a weird thing. Like, why do middle-aged men sit at train yards and watch trains roll by? Why do young punks get on freight trains and drink space bags and pass out in hobo jungles next to homeless people and in homeless people's shit, literally? Why are we interested in these things? In the same sense that it's perplexing for an outsider to understand it, it's as perplexing for me to understand why someone would want to build a website, or do a Tumblr blog, or be a scientist. I can't answer why that stuff shows up in any of my songs, it's just something that I'm interested in.

For me, trains have always been an escape, a place to go to and I think. When it's time to write a lot of times what you're doing is escaping the situation that you're writing about, and then there are things like freedom of the rails or the nostalgia of times with friends having beers around a fire telling stories, makes the train yards more luring than anything else. I think because we all seek the sense of freedom and contempt, those images creep into my head and then creep into the songs. I do write songs on freight trains a lot which is weird, not that I bring a guitar, but a pad and paper. The second song on the new record, called "Driver Pull," was definitely conjured on a freight train—pretty obviously—the whole song is freight train code. Here I am discussing freight trains and what I've been saying for years now is, "I'm so tired of talking about freight trains, let's talk about current events or something like that." Then I have to blow it and put a bunch of train songs on the record.

Scene Point Blank: Speaking of writing songs, is it true you threw away 25 songs before you created anything worth keeping?

Tim Barry: I don't have a system or a format for writing, Some people have a way of doing it, they pick up a guitar, or they sit with friends, or they write the lyrics first and then add to the songs. I have no rhyme or reason for the way I write. The songs just pop in my head and I go with them—and that does not mean that they're good. I think what was going on when I started writing this record was that I had the realization that people would hear the record. They had expectations where, before, I was just writing for myself. I remember when I did my first album, *Rivanna Junction*, I didn't think anyone would hear it. I wrote that for my family and friends, and I just didn't expect it to go any further than that. That's the way that I've always written, although there's not a formula to how I write the songs, I've always written with that in mind: The only people that are going to hear this are my close friends. That escaped me when I started writing this record and I don't know why. I had some talks about it with a couple friends who are popular musicians and they had some really good suggestions. Then one night I was playing at Asbury Lanes, in Asbury Park, New Jersey and it's so typical, I'm always so close to achievement, but I always fail. It's sort of an overall theme in my life, like I never mastered anything. Can't sing, can't really play the guitar, but that's what I do. Can't do art, but it still looks cool to me. Can't really write because I'm full of typos, but I really enjoy it. Play Asbury Lanes, one person away from selling it out. It's just hilarious to me how my life always goes. How can you be one person away from selling a show out? I just fell asleep drunk in a van that night at 3am, woke up at 6am, and wrote all the lyrics to the song "40 Miler." They were just pounding over and over again in my head. It was that song that broke my mental block. I stopped writing for people and started writing for myself and it came together. From that point on I just essentially dropped all the songs that I had written before because it started feeling a lot better. I pulled a couple of the older songs out that I had written, but I dropped probably 20, maybe 30.

Scene Point Blank: A lot of your songs are like stories, so I see you as this incredible storyteller. Have you always been interested in telling stories or the stories of other people, or is it just something that happened?

Tim Barry: It's definitely something that happened. One of my best friends is an investigative journalist and when I was in my old band I remember him clearly saying, "You should try writing stories someday." And that wouldn't work in my punk band, the format was conflicting.

When I started writing story songs it was by accident. A friend of mine had went to prison and I wrote a song called “Dog Bumped” and that one was my first story song that people took note of. And they’re easy for me to write. Have you ever sat down with somebody in a social setting and that person asks about everything that’s going on in your life? And then when that person gets asked what’s going on in his or her life they don’t really say anything? I’ve realized that I’m that person. I don’t know if it’s that I won’t forfeit information about myself as much as it is I’m clearly more interested in what’s going on in other people’s lives, but I feel like a lot of the story songs that I write aren’t about me in particular. They are from listening to people. I’m really just regurgitating shit that people have said to me, and I have an imagination and believe in hyperbole and exaggerating. I believe all good stories have to be exaggerated.

Scene Point Blank: When you’re a musician that has been doing this for a while, whether it’s on your own or with a band, there’s so much history created. I read that you kept these journals full of show fliers, set lists, photographs, etc. Do you still have them? Do you ever look through them?

Tim Barry: You know what’s crazy about you bringing them journals up is I gotta fly to Austin, Texas and I was just sitting here thinking about what I should bring. I hate flying and you only get so much space and every bag costs more money. And I just realized I hadn’t written in my fucking journal in two months. I’ve been doing those journals since 1993 and the journals are filled with thoughts, stories, letters, photographs from tour, train trips, family, flyers from shows, photographs from political actions, anecdotes, situations—they’re filled with so much crap. Much of it is really immature writing, but the journals aren’t private, they are documents. It’s like reading the newspaper, anyone can open them up and read them aloud because I’m not hiding anything. I do still have them and I do still keep them, but I’ve been concerned that technology has taken one of the fuses from my brain and limited my interest in maintaining an ink and paper journal because everything has moved to this very quickly ego-stimulated Twitter, Facebook, Tumblr, all the music sites, etc etc. It’s a lot easier to put your thoughts there and instantly see how many people like it or commented on your photo. I really want to continue to do these journals and so many cool things are going on that I can’t believe I haven’t been writing about it. I need to change the fuse in my brain to focus back onto almost the primitive style of pen and paper journal writing. The

reason I bring up my trip to Austin is that there's nothing I like more than getting on an airplane, ordering a Jack Daniels' whiskey, and opening my journal and writing for the duration of that flight.

4

New blood

Touring; recording; unrelenting

THE WORLD OF punk rock can sometimes be daunting: touring all year round in a half-working van, playing basement shows to “crowds” sometimes barely numbering double figures, and living off gas station junk food all while trying to hold down a day job. For the bands we spoke to for this chapter, though, they’ve made it their lives. Their dedication to their music and their fans is what makes us proud to feature their words here alongside those of the long-established figures further on down that road.

Dustin Kensrue

Thrice

Michael Phillips, October 2008

With each release Thrice continues to develop and refine their sound, creating more textured, layered, and dynamic music. Scene Point Blank caught up with vocalist and guitarist Dustin Kensrue at the Cleveland stop of their current tour alongside Rise Against.

Scene Point Blank: Today is the first day of the tour, are you excited to be out on the road in the again?

Dustin Kensrue: That is yet to be seen. There is one song we haven't played yet and it's kind of a weirder song to translate live, "The Sky is Falling." We switched out the arrangement the last day of practice and haven't really played it yet. So we'll see how it turns out tonight.

Scene Point Blank: Was there much downtime between tours?

Dustin Kensrue: We were only off for three weeks, we were in Europe and Australia before this. It felt really short though, just kind of a whirlwind and then we're back out here.

Scene Point Blank: In the past year the band has had quite a bit happen. You left Island Records and are now signed to Vagrant. What major differences have you noticed between the two, if any at all?

Dustin Kensrue: There's just a little more accountability with a smaller label. We see where everything is happening now. Nowhere is going to be perfect, but if the ball is being dropped, you're going to see it sooner. I don't think there is anything inherently bad about majors, it's just the bigness makes a lot of room for inefficiencies and redundancies. And you can't really afford redundancies.

Scene Point Blank: A lot of major label bands have been leaving and signing with larger indies, New Found Glory and Thursday are the two most recent. Story of the Year also did it fairly recently. Do you see this as a new wave?

Dustin Kensrue: I think it's more about the majors not knowing what to do with these bands anymore; they never really did. They thought there was money to be made, and in most cases there wasn't. The bands just weren't performing at the level for a major and were dropped. In general, everything is just complicated because the market been bad and worsening for a couple of years. Everyone is trying to downsize if and where they can.

Scene Point Blank: Was there a plan in place when you chose to leave Island or did it all kind of happen after the fact?

Dustin Kensrue: We just knew that we'd rather get out of there. If they didn't want us around, then we didn't want to be there. We'd kind of wanted to leave for a while; they just felt absent. The focus was more just on getting somewhere quick and where we would be comfortable.

Scene Point Blank: Why Vagrant?

Dustin Kensrue: We'd known Rich for a while and he'd wanted to sign us for a long time, even before we signed to Island. We knew they'd be interested and they were excited to get us onboard and get going. We didn't want to have some kind of bidding thing; we just wanted to find a good home for the time being.

Scene Point Blank: For *The Alchemy Index* albums you focused on different elements. With that mind, was the songwriting process different from the previous albums as you had themetical sounds to associate the songs with?

Dustin Kensrue: It was definitely from the bottom up, developed towards those ideas. At certain times, the initial demoing of a part would be like one or the other and we'd push it towards one way. Definitely in the writing at every level we were trying to capture each of the elements in different ways in different songs. That was always a large part of the writing process.

Scene Point Blank: The concept behind *The Alchemy Index* releases was your idea that you brought to the band. Did it take much persuading with the rest of the band?

Dustin Kensrue: No. It just went through a lot of phases. It's a pretty

different and daunting idea, possibly a really bad one. You're not sure. Everyone thought about it a little while. After the initial period, we were all on board and went through some changes in how we were approaching it.

Scene Point Blank: Thrice's sound has evolved over the years, with the diversity readily apparent on the styles of each album of the Alchemy Index. Have there been specific events throughout the span of Thrice that have contributed to this change?

Dustin Kensrue: It's been pretty natural; there have been little points where things have happened. I feel like we're always trying to do something different, trying to do something we're excited about at the time.

Scene Point Blank: Was there ever an effort to change your sound to distinguish yourselves from what other bands were doing that was similar?

Dustin Kensrue: I don't think we're aware of certain effects like that until later. We just want to play music that we're really excited about playing. With artists, it's a really brushed process, in certain ways things end up differently than how we want them to be. And that really made us deliberate about making *Vheissu* exactly what we wanted it to be and making sure we had the time to accomplish that. And that's why there is just a seemingly large jump there. Had *The Artist in the Ambulance* been what we wanted it to be, it would have filled that gap a lot better. As far as the new records, I feel like it's kind of transitioning pretty smoothly from *Vheissu*, at least in my mind. But it's this concept project, so it's all split up and therefore in certain ways it's not natural the way that it got pushed so hard, but it is natural in the context of the project.

Scene Point Blank: Has there been a particular band that has had a major influence on the band's development as songwriters?

Dustin Kensrue: The only band that we'd really bring up in that context is Radiohead, more as a role model for a lot of the career decisions that they've made. It's been kind of an influence and an inspiration in that way. And they're collectively our favorite band, the band we all agree on the most. From there, we really branch out quite a bit.

Scene Point Blank: Many fans have been taking the four Alchemy albums

and putting together new mixes and posting them for others to hear. Have you guys checked any of these out?

Dustin Kensrue: We talked about doing some kind of contest at one point asking fans to rearrange them, but there is really no way to start evaluating it. The number of possibilities is a novel amount, really quite a lot.

Scene Point Blank: Was this part of your intentions when creating the albums?

Dustin Kensrue: I think that is kind of a natural outlook and I think a lot of the songs could go together even though they fit on their respective CD's.

Scene Point Blank: In between 2005's *Vheissu* and the two *Alchemy Index* albums, Dustin released a solo album, which was also of a different direction. When listening to the two *Alchemy* albums, you can hear a lot more of that sound in the music on certain songs. Were you guys more open minded to venture outside what was previously "Thrice"?

Dustin Kensrue: You're referring more to the "earth" stuff. I don't think it has anything to do with the solo record. I think it happened for various reasons... we were making the "earth" record and it naturally lent itself to similar influences of the solo record. And also working with Teppei as an engineer, I'm a lot more comfortable singing how I feel like I want to sing. I think Brian was a really good producer; I just don't feel like he pushed me vocally or gave me much freedom. Steve Osborn was better with that. But you're in this sterile environment in the studio with this time schedule. I got used to working with Teppei on my solo record and it was very easy. We get along really well and kind of think similarly about a lot of things. I feel like that played into me being more expressive vocally. I feel like that went over on all the records, I think the earthy influences were a coincidence, drawing from the same places as the solo record. One of the songs was going to be on my solo record and ended up being pulling over.

Scene Point Blank: Which song was that?

Dustin Kensrue: "Moving Mountains." It's a little different now. We took

a riff that Ed had and rewrote and added.

Scene Point Blank: At this point in your career, you have quite the back catalog of songs to choose from. Most bands tend to avoid inserting older songs into their setlists, yet you seem to embrace it. What goes into the decisions of choosing songs to play?

Dustin Kensrue: We try to. It's hard. It gets to where you're only playing two songs from a record. Like on this tour, we only have an eleven song set. It gets hard to even make anyone happy. If you're trying to please everyone, you can't do it. We try to play stuff that is newer, because it is stuff that we're excited about and proud of at the time. I think it is good to hear it in a live context and we try to play old stuff as well. It's hard to get a handle on what works well versus what you feel like people like. It's really a complicated thing to do. It gets worse and worse with more and more song. We tried to switch up the base of songs we're playing from on this tour, even for the headline shows, to where we're playing quite a few different ones from what we played in the past year or two.

Scene Point Blank: To date you've toured with a lot of bands – Brand New, Further Seems Forever, Coheed & Cambria, Dashboard Confessional, and Pelican. What band have you been most excited to tour with?

Dustin Kensrue: We were really excited about that Brand New tour. We were friends with them already and we ended up meeting the Mewithoutyou guys and became friends with them. That was one of the most fun tours we'd ever been on. It was a super long tour and it would have been awful if it weren't so great with them. We're really excited to be with Gaslight Anthem on this tour. I just started listening to that record a lot and I dig it. We love the Hot Water Music guys; we toured the states with them twice.

Scene Point Blank: Is there a band you've yet to tour with that you'd like to hit the road with?

Dustin Kensrue: That's always a weird question for me, like "Make your dream show that you'd be on." I wouldn't be on my dream show, I'd be watching. This tour is going to be a really fun though, we've know the Alkaline Trio guys for a while, and Rise Against guys a little bit. It's a good group of people and that makes all the difference.

Scene Point Blank: Earlier this Summer you recorded a show for a live DVD. What's the status on that release?

Dustin Kensrue: It should be announced in the next week, with details for when it is coming out this year. The vinyl is going to be coming out. I'm doing a Christmas record that should be out before Christmas. It will be two originals and some covers.

Scene Point Blank: A few years back you covered Minor Threat's "Seeing Red" and "Screaming at a Wall" for a compilation. I was just curious why you chose that specific band and that song?

Dustin Kensrue: They wanted us to do a West Coast band and we kind of fought to do that one. It seemed like they'd be a really fun band to cover; their songs are pretty short so we just put two together. I can't remember, we just really wanted to do them, and certain other bands that we would have liked to do were already taken so it just seemed to make sense.

Scene Point Blank: Digital downloading still is a major issue within the music world. What's been your reaction to craze of digital download - both in illegal form and the now-popularized "Radiohead-esque" campaign?

Dustin Kensrue: I guess it obviously makes it harder to exist to be a band. Any band that tells you otherwise is lying. It's not just making money and records. It makes everyone in the industry scared to take chances and the labels to sign newer bands that they're not sure are going to sell. It affects things on a pretty wide scale. I personally like buying vinyl, but I also buy things on iTunes. It's so easy and it's cheap and affordable. You pay seventeen dollars in a store; you only pay ten dollars on iTunes. I'm really into the idea of doing vinyl with digital download. It's the best of both worlds. You get a product that sounds great when you're at home, but when you're not, you have something with you. I would like to do that in the future. I like the idea of doing single record deals because it is honest. I don't feel cornered and if everyone is happy with the situation you can keep going on. I think we'll do that again.

Scene Point Blank: With each album, portions of the sales are contributed to a non-profit organization or charity. How important is assistance like this to you?

Dustin Kensrue: I feel weird when a lot of attention gets put on us for that. We're not doing it for the attention, but we're doing it to do raise awareness, so it's kind of counterintuitive. I just don't think we're doing anything crazy; we're trying to do something to help and do it our own way. It's not a template to lay out, it's just, this is one way to do something consistently.

Scene Point Blank: Outside of these donations, are you involved in any other charities work?

Dustin Kensrue: We're never home enough to do something consistent, which kind of bugs me because I would like to do something like that. I think we all, for that much, give to various organizations that we feel are doing some good work.

Scene Point Blank: As far as politics and the upcoming campaign?

Dustin Kensrue: I hate politics. I realize they are important; it's just so frustrating. It doesn't matter what people are saying, you're choosing to trust them. Your heart is telling you not to trust them and you know you're just being told what you want to hear. It doesn't mean you shouldn't get involved. I guess my point is that I rarely feel strong enough on political issues, not social issues, to advise others on what I think they should do. I think that's a very personal decision. I don't want to be responsible for influencing others. My biggest problem is I don't fall down party lines, half the issues I sit on one side, half the issues I sit on the other side. Right now, there are benefits to both sides.

Scene Point Blank: Back to lighter subject matter, what bands/ albums have you been listening to most this year?

Dustin Kensrue: Been digging on the new Gaslight Anthem album. I've been listening to a bunch of Christmas music because I'm making a record. In my car, I've had my iPod on random, which is really fun; it's like having a really good radio station. I had three Strike Anywhere songs come up and I was super psyched. What else? Nada Surf's *Let Go*. It's a really mellow and good chill record. I was listening to a lot of Whiskeytown recently.

Scene Point Blank: Following the tour, what kind of plans does the band have?

Dustin Kensrue: Start trying to write and record pretty quick, possibly do some kind of spotted touring next year.

Scene Point Blank: Final question; it's been noted in other interviews that the band is more than just a mode for musical expression. So, besides making music, what specifically do you hope to accomplish with the band?

Dustin Kensrue: For us, the band exists because we enjoy making music together and I think we continue to challenge ourselves and push ourselves. If that stops, I think, maybe there wouldn't be a band? I think that is kind of the reason why we're always moving, I don't think we'd be really happy trying to rehash something as it goes against the grain that we are.

Scene Point Blank: What does writing and performing music do for you?

Dustin Kensrue: I have to do, but I don't really grasp why. There are moments where you feel like you understand why more than others. Certain times it's like trying to get something, an ordering of things, especially lyrically. If I end up getting stuff just right, it feels really good to accomplish that. Not really for anything else, just that it was right. I don't spend a lot of time internalizing things. And there's not like a high that I'm after, it's just a steady push. It feels like what I'm supposed to do. I do it better than I do anything else. I think about what I would do if I wasn't doing this. There are not many things that I would feel as fulfilled doing.

Tyson Vogel & Adam Stephens

Two Gallants

Graham Isador, August 2006

A month or so back, I was given the opportunity to sit down with one of the Saddle Creek label's latest additions, Two Gallants. For the better part of the past four years the band has been on what is essentially one never ending tour, traveling all across North America and Europe, with their distinct brand of folk rock. A very distinct brand of folk rock. Combining a traditional storytelling element with raw instrumentals and somewhat raspy voices, Tyson Vogel and Adam Stephens create a sound much bigger than two members rightfully should be allowed to. Their latest album, "What the Toll Tells" which was released earlier this year, includes just drums, a guitar, vocals, and harmonica, but never comes across as sparse. Rather than trying to create some clever segue into the interview, or attempting to give justice what is easily my favorite album of the year, I suggest you take a listen to the band, or better yet, see them live. They're not a group that is given justice through mere words.

Scene Point Blank: As an introduction for the tape recorder here, and all the people sure to be reading this, I am sitting with Adam and Tyson of the band Two Gallants. Which is pronounced Gull-onts as opposed to Gall-ants.

Tyson: *(laughter)* He's done his research.

Scene Point Blank: I like to think so. As a band you two have approached the music scene without much exposure from the internet, having the majority of it come from word of mouth and playing live. How important do you think "the web" in general is, in terms of exposure?

Adam: I mean, well, I don't really know. I don't really know that side of it. For us it was just playing every single show we could. When we started we kind of put our training wheels on. We learned by playing all those shows, and just sort of let the music guide us as opposed to the crowd or whatever interest we got. We just played, and played, and played, and word got around by that. The internet, in a way, is a little artificial. You can record something and make it sound perfect, then over dub all this stuff, then

put it up on your Myspace thing or whatever. A bunch of people can listen to that and pass it along, but then they go see you live and it's nothing like that. It's cool for some bands to get exposure, and that's fine, but it can be kind of fake. You're not really earning your way, and you're not necessarily, completely, honest to what music should be about.

Scene Point Blank: Do websites like ours, or other forms of media, ever get considered?

Tyson: Again I think we both feel unknowledgeable. Neither of us ever really explore that side of it with computers and such. I mean, I like the internet. It seems like it's a really important medium in many ways. Apart from what I understand about how it affects our popularity and what not, it can be a really great tool for opening up people to new music and new things. It's free information, and on a basis you can't really beat that idea. But people start paying attention to certain perspectives, and certain opinions, through the internet; and whether they're true or not is a different story. Just the fact that you have the option of getting information at an art level is a great thing but all of it is still just opinions.

Scene Point Blank: What do you think is the biggest misconception about your band?

Tyson: I don't know if it's really a misconception, but when we play in certain cities, or get booked with other acts, people tend to think we're a quieter band, or more acoustic, or whatever. We started out kind of quiet but we're quite loud nowadays. I guess that's one...

Adam: I think the big misconception is that we're a two piece. I mean, we are a two piece, but that's not how we define ourselves. People give that so much hype. Two pieces have been around for a lot longer than all these critics are willing to recognize. There have been blues two pieces forever, back in the day. Now there is like a few drums and guitar two pieces, and sure we're another one of them, but it's not how we define ourselves. We're a band, and it happens to be the only way we wanted to do it was with a two piece. I don't think you have to have the whole formula of guitar, bass, and drums to have a band. There are lots of different ways to do it, and we figured we might as well.

Scene Point Blank: Do you ever get limited by that? I had read a couple of

months ago you were looking for a bassist...

Adam: That was totally misquoted. (*laughs*) They asked us if we wanted any other members and we told them when we started we were looking for a bassist. This was before we had even played any shows, and at the time we thought we needed one. Then we started playing shows and people seemed to think that we were fine so we went with it. We haven't looked for anyone else since. I don't like to speak for the future, but for now I think we're fine.

Scene Point Blank: In the vein of critics getting things wrong, the band has come under a lot backlash because of a certain reviewers opinions about your song "Long Summer's Day". As I see it it's just another narrative song in what is really a narrative album, but would you mind explaining the whole situation and your take on it?

Adam: About the narrative bit, that's what I would say as well. The reason why there has been such a big reaction is because it's about...well there are words in there that us as white kids supposedly aren't allowed to use. The N bomb; we're not allowed to drop that because it doesn't concern us; but these days you hear it used completely out of its original context. I mean, you walk on the street you see Asian kids calling Latino kids nigger. White kids call each other that. It's the general vocabulary. I don't use it. I don't call my friends it. There is no disrespect meant, but if it's going to be used as freely as it is now, I don't see why we can't use it in a song that's actually putting it in its original context.

It pissed off one guy because it's a song written in the first person. It's not written that way because that concept of such extreme prejudice is something either of us could understand. It's just written in the first person the same way novels have been written from different perspectives for the last hundred years. It's nothing new. I think the reason that the song isn't as digestible for as many people is because this type of thing isn't done as much in music; it's done in literature. You see this type of thing in praised novels, and poetry, all the time. When you do it in the song, especially as young, white, hipster kids, you're not allowed to write like that. I mean, whatever.

It's obviously created a lot of discussion about it, which to me is really important. I'm willing to talk about it whenever, because I don't think anyone has the right to tell us what we can write about. I guess that can

be the government's job to tell us when we're overstepping our bounds; but some indie rock website has no right to tell us what's right and what's wrong, or tell anyone what's right and what's wrong because they don't write the book, and there shouldn't be a book in the first place.

Tyson: He didn't understand where we were coming from. He thought the song was a cover song, and it's not a cover song. There was one line which was based off a traditional song, and in traditional music that's been happening for hundreds of years. Bob Dylan, Pete Seeger, Woody Guthrie, all those folks did the same shit. We're not nearly the first ones to do that.

Scene Point Blank: Two Gallants is one of the only bands on the Saddle Creek label not coming out of Omaha or having some sort of major ties there. How did that relationship come about?

Adam: Just from touring a lot. Passing through there they say us, and thought we fit.

Scene Point Blank: So there is no big story.

Tyson: *(laughs)* Was there supposed to be a big story?

Scene Point Blank: ...I thought there might be. Why do you think people should listen to your band?

Adam: I don't know... I don't know why they would want to. *(laughs)* Don't listen to our music, we're a bunch of racists.

Scene Point Blank: We'll finish it off with something easy. I get the impression from your music that you guys like to drink a lot, what would be your drink of choice?

Adam: Oh wow...you're really asking this? You were doing so well with all those media questions and what not... It depends on the mood. Sometimes there is nothing like a nice bottle of red wine. But I'd say, I'd have to go with a micky and a 40 of malt liquor on a street corner.

Tyson: I'd like to add a nice bottle of vodka in there, cold.

George Hirsch

Blacklisted

Zed Cutsinger, February 2007

After being blown away by Blacklisted's live performance, it only made sense to set up an interview to figure out what exactly was on singer George Hirsch's mind. The questions were sent. The answers were received. And now you can find out about *Peace on Earth, War on Stage*, collaborating with Dalek, playing guitars on mountains only to jump to an inevitable doom, and more.

Scene Point Blank: You just finished playing some shows with Converge and Some Girls, how was that? Was it weird playing with different sounds and audiences?

George Hirsch: It wasn't weird at all, it was a good experience. Converge and Some Girls are two bands that I think really push and test the limits of punk/hardcore/metal. I believe that is something that those genres really need. Seeing it first hand on tour with them was great. I feel like it made Blacklisted a bit more creative while writing our upcoming record. Sometimes being in Blacklisted makes you feel like you're cemented into one sound, but watching those bands, you see that you can do so much more musically/artistically. The same is true of Modern Life is War; they were great every night. It was personally one of my favorite string of dates we have done. It helped me maybe knock off some chains I felt bound to artistically, which is always a good thing.

Scene Point Blank: Recently Deathwish Inc. announced your new 7", called *Peace on Earth, War on Stage*. What is meant behind that title? How would you compare these songs to ...*The Beat Goes On*?

George Hirsch: Yes, at the end of December we will be entering God City with Kurt Ballou and recording that 7". Someone I grew up and went to high school with is into some type of MMA fighting thing. I was reading up on him and I read this quote, "Peace on earth, war in the ring." I thought it was cool. So when thinking of titles for the record, I was like, "Peace on earth, war on stage." Everyone thought it was cool. As I thought more into it, it sort of made more sense. I try to keep this peace in my regular life, by

using hardcore as my outlet. I feel like everything in my life is me trying to keep a balance, so by playing music and touring I have the perfect outlet - war on stage - and when I'm home things are a lot better. I get along with more people, I don't try to throw anyone out a window, off a roof or something - peace on earth. It makes a lot more sense in my brain.

Scene Point Blank: In addition to *Peace on Earth, War on Stage*, do you have any future plans for releases, such as a full length? If so, want to drop any ideas so far for it?

George Hirsch: I do have plans for an LP, hopefully Deathwish does too, HAHA. I've had a name for it since we recorded our last LP. I wanted to use the title for the 7", but I thought of "Peace on Earth, War on Stage" and decided to hold off on the name I have for the LP. I'm sure I will have some new and old bones to pick, so another LP will happen. You will see the name then.

Scene Point Blank: What's the deal with the Dalek vs. Blacklisted 12"? If you could do a split with any artist (musician, painter, etc.) who would it be and why?

George Hirsch: I got a call from a friend one day and he said he was doing an artist/musician collaboration and Dalek had picked Blacklisted to be the band he worked with. It was very lucky for us. There were eight hundred copies made. Other than that I don't know much... they look great. You can get them in the Deathwish E-Store. If I could work with any musician it would probably be like Thurston Moore or someone crazy along those lines... someone who knows about hardcore/punk and has really established themselves as a musician, just continuously creating something refreshing and great.

Scene Point Blank: What specifically are you most excited about for your upcoming tour with Shipwreck, Sinking Ships and Bitter End and why? Are there any future plans to tour the East Coast?

George Hirsch: Shipwreck and Bitter End are easily in my top five of favorite bands out now, so I'm excited to just see and play with them every night. Sinking Ships is great also; I have only seen them live once. I'm eager to see them some more.

Scene Point Blank: Do you feel a responsibility for what happens at your shows, audience wise?

George Hirsch: I feel a responsibility to play as hard as I can for the people who came to see Blacklisted. Other than that, I have no responsibilities. Some things that happen when we play I personally do not prefer and often wish they wouldn't happen. But I am not the one making the decision to do those things, so my conscience is pretty clean in that respect.

Scene Point Blank: You guys definitely have a NYHC influence... what would you say your other main influences are that make you guys sound like Blacklisted instead of a watered down version of another band?

George Hirsch: I think us as people are the biggest influence. I'll talk about our lineup as of now, from what I've seen while writing *Peace On Earth, War On Stage*. Shawn is spastic and crazy but also very meticulous and precise... often very "OCD'ish" about things, haha. I think that adds to him being a very original and creative drummer but without going over the top, making him really solid. Our guitar player Bean, sort of in a way like Shawn, is willing to experiment, but knows what is too over the top. He's ready to push the limit of what we can do. He comes from a more punk background, which is something that is good for Blacklisted at this point. He is a good songwriter and fits our chemistry perfect. The same goes for our bass player, Dave. As for me, I have no idea...

Scene Point Blank: I've seen you wear t-shirts of bands such as Swans and Cat Power... if you listen to bands like this why do you sing in a band like Blacklisted? In the future would you like to sing in a band that's not hardcore?

George Hirsch: I don't know about the future. I'm not really too good of a singer, so who knows. What I do know is that I love hardcore. I mean, it has been with me the longest; it is the soundtrack to my life's guidance. I'm happy to be able to make music that hopefully someone else can feel the same way about. Besides that I love all types of music. Just music in general is a big interest of mine.

Scene Point Blank: What current bands do you find yourself most consistently being impressed with?

George Hirsch: Shipwreck, Bitter End, Crime in Stereo, Cold World, Iron Age, Ceremony, Rise and Fall... these are all bands I love and think are putting out real music right now.

Scene Point Blank: What's the balance between hardcore bands being underground and making enough money for gas to tour?

George Hirsch: I have no idea. I learned quickly If not, just try to swim as hard as you can for as long as you can, something will happen.

Scene Point Blank: As much as hardcore kids say they hate fashion, it seems (from the internet at least) they talk more about that you wear long sleeve shirts then what your band makes... why do you think this is?

George Hirsch: I think fashion is a huge part of punk and hardcore, even in the early days when people were lashing out at fashion and wearing boots with chains on them, and bandanas, and ripped jeans, and ripped shirts and leather jackets, they were still making a fashion statement. Anytime someone leaves their house with clothes on their back, they are saying, "This is me, this is how I dress. These are the clothes I like." I'm sure there are many trend followers, but you can discredit them. Everyone starts from somewhere, eventually finding their niche or identity. For me, I wear what I want, I didn't realize everyone was going to notice.

Scene Point Blank: If you were the last man alive, what would your plan of action be?

George Hirsch: Probably to stand on a mountain, play guitar as loud as I could and scream at the sky, "I am the best guitar player alive." Then I would go watch movies and listen to music until I got bored. Then I would go jump off a cliff so I could join my friends wherever they were and start a band and go on tour.

Scene Point Blank: Any last words?

George Hirsch: *Peace On Earth, War On Stage* will be out in early 2007. Thanks for the interview. Come see us on tour.

Anthony Anzaldo & Ryan Mattos Ceremony

Zed Cutsinger, March 2006

Watching Ceremony's lifeline getting drawn is like watching an inverted episode of "I Love Lucy" play out. Instead of an unpredictable chain of events forcing Lucy to squack, everything seems to be working out great.

When Ceremony's demo dropped, they soon after got signed to Malfunction Records and got on one of the United States' biggest hardcore fests (Posi Numbers). The hype recently caught up with them when they released their 7", *Ruined*. Critics everywhere, from messageboards to record stores simultaneously said/typed, "These seven minutes are kick fucking ass, but we want more!" Before thing got dangerous (keyboards smashed through computer screens) Malfunction announced the Ceremony full length for incision on 06.06.06, titled *Violence Violence*, which will also contain the songs from *Ruined* as a bonus radicality.

If music don't mean shit to you and you're all about the live show, Ceremony excels in that department too. Their live set has been compared to No Justice and makes it very difficult to take pictures or stand straight. If you get a chance to see them at their homebase at the Phoenix Theatre in Petaluma, California, you should probably wear a helmet.

Scene Point Blank: What is your name and what do you do?

Anthony: My name is Anthony and I play guitar.

Ryan: My name is Ryan or Mad Toast. I play with my cat and play guitar in Ceremony.

Scene Point Blank: How did you guys get hooked up with Linas Garsys and Malfunction?

Ryan: We've been friends for a few years, and always talked about doing something together, and this time it just worked out. I'm glad.

Scene Point Blank: What part of the 7", *Ruined*, are you most happy

about? What about *Ruined* do you wish to build upon the most?

Anthony: I think Ross's voice progressed immensely from the demo to *Ruined*. My favorite songs we have are the new songs that weren't on the demo. I don't wish to build upon it, we're pretty happy with the way it turned out.

Ryan: I'm pretty happy with the whole record. I haven't really thought about what we'll BUILD on, we're just trying to write good songs.

Scene Point Blank: Lyrically, you seem to have themes of introspection and anger towards the outside. How will this style progress on the full length if at all?

Ryan: Ross has pretty much dropped all that, and all the new songs, lyrically at least, talk about how Emergen-C and Airborne don't work when you use beer to dissolve them.

Scene Point Blank: What are your plans to the follow up of *Ruined*? What can we expect musically?

Anthony: The full length comes out in June. The new stuff doesn't stray too far from what we've done. I've been listening to a lot of Pg.99 and Tragedy in the past few months, and I think those two bands have some influence on the new songs.

Ryan: We're writing for a "full length" that will be out in June on Malfunction Records. The last two songs we wrote for it are my two favorites so far. It's nothing drastically different, but it's not stale either.

Scene Point Blank: On future releases can we expect songs to exceed the two minute mark?

Ryan: We don't really write that way--we just work on a song until it's done. Usually they're done pretty quick. Doubt it though.

Scene Point Blank: How did your mini-tour to the NorthWest go? Any funny stories?

Ryan: It went really good. We played with Pressure and Lead By Example, check both of them out, especially Pressure. I can't think of any funny

stories off hand, other than sitting on top of the van in Portland with a bullhorn, making fun of everyone that walked by. We got paid \$1 at that show. Oh yeah, we accidentally picked up a hooker that night too. Obviously we didn't do anything bad with her, we just hung out for a while, she told us some stories, sang to us, some cool freestyle rap, nice platonic stuff. She smelled really bad, and was missing some teeth. She was nice though, we gave her some money for her time and she wished us luck.

Scene Point Blank: What are your summer touring plans? Why are you touring with Lights Out?

Ryan: We're doing 2 tours, the first one is with Lights Out because they're one of the best bands in the Bay Area, and we're excited to see them every night. I love that band.

Scene Point Blank: Even though Ross is opposed to releasing splits, if you could do a split with any band together, what band would it be?

Anthony: I would give anything to do a split/tour/show/rockin jam sesh with Tragedy. Something with Look Back and Laugh would also be incredible. But Depeche Mode would be my first choice.

Ryan: It'd be a 4 way split with Dispute, Life Long Tragedy and Minor Threat. They'd get back together for it.

Scene Point Blank: Is the Hammertime demo going to be re-released ever? Will a Hammertime reunion ever occur?

Anthony: Spider Ghost aka Sammy the Mick of All Bets Off is releasing a xDuckhuntx/Hammertime split. Let's just say, it's a jungle out there.

Ryan: Yeah, Spider Ghost, a label from SF, is going to re-release it as a split 7" with the Duckhunt demo. If they ever did a reunion, no one would care and they'd just want a Duckhunt show, cause people can't tell the difference between a good band and a joke.

Scene Point Blank: What makes the Bay Area so special?

Anthony: 1.) AFI 2.) 924 Gilman 3.) Rancid 4.) NUG 5.) Best Kids 6.) The North Bay 7.) Some good ass vegan food. 8.) Some of the best hardcore

bands going right now. 9.) WWCW 10.) Mike Hood 11.) Rivalry Records 12.) Amoeba 13.) “Hella”

Ryan: It’s the best place for shows anywhere. It has the best club in the country. It’s beautiful here. People are awesome. My grandma lives here.

Scene Point Blank: What have you been listening to lately?

Ryan: A bunch of shit that would make me seem cool.

Scene Point Blank: Any last words?

Ryan: These are always awkward.

Jimmy Stadt

Polar Bear Club

Graham Isador, June 2009

In the last year Polar Bear Club has made the transition to a full-time band, signed to one of the biggest hardcore labels around, and toured the globe. Scene Point Blank spoke with vocalist Jimmy Stadt about the growth of the band, how his theatre background has helped his music career, and the importance of ambiguity in his lyrics.

Scene Point Blank: You guys recently did some shows with The Gaslight Anthem in Europe. Was that the first time you had been over there as a band?

Jimmy Stadt: Yeah, it was. We did a lot of England, a lot of Germany, The Netherlands, some Scandinavia, and a day in Italy. I think we did nine countries total.

Scene Point Blank: Playing with that band is a little different than playing with a band like Have Heart. How have the crowds reacted to you?

Jimmy Stadt: It's weird. We went from touring with Cancer Bats, to touring with The Gaslight Anthem, to now touring with Have Heart. I think it's kind of a testament to our band that we can kind of style hop like that. It's interesting because on The Gaslight Anthem tour we're the tough guys and on the Have Heart tour we're the wusses. We toured with The Gaslight Anthem in the States before doing the European dates. In the States the crowds were similar. The punks kids were still coming out to those shows and they were into us. They're kind of a bit bigger in England, so while there are still the punk kids that come and see them there are adults and younger kids, too.

Scene Point Blank: I'm going to guess it was still better than the Third Eye Blind gig?

Jimmy Stadt: In some ways it was similar. That was the biggest gig we ever played. There were three thousand people and a barricade and all that. On the Gaslight tour, we had a barricade almost every night, and they didn't

get up to three thousand people, but in London they did two thousand. It was pretty fucking cool, but we played pretty shortly after doors. Everyone wasn't always in to see us, but that's fine we're the opening band. Some people really appreciated the diversity of the three separate acts from us to Frank Turner to Gaslight, and some people just didn't really care to see us.

Scene Point Blank: Looking through a lot of old interviews you expressed that Polar Bear Club might never end up as a full-time band. Obviously you've changed your mind about that. When did that switch happen? How did you decide?

Jimmy Stadt: We became a full-time band in August 2008, so pretty recently. We had been a band for about three years before that. I was in school. Chris, our guitar player, was in school. Nate was in school and had a pretty good job, and our drummer had a really good job, too. We just did weekends. It was super fun and super kind of casual. We just started getting all this attention. Suddenly Alternative Press was phoning us up and Myspace...we had featured artist for a week, and a full page in Alternative Press as a part time band. We did our most recent full-length as a part time band and in order to give it a fair shot we had to either stop being a band or go full time. We all had enough faith in it to try. It was a last minute decision because it was completely different than anything we had planned. We all just said "Fuck It. Let's do it."

Scene Point Blank: Well at the time you had been working in a daycare center?

Jimmy Stadt: When I was in high school I was working in preschools, and I did it all throughout college as well. When I was in college I did it as well. I got my degree in acting. My plan was to hang around my hometown for a little bit then move somewhere where I could do that. I started assistant teaching at a really nice school, always knowing I was going to be leaving to go do acting...and then I was leaving to be in a full-time band.

Scene Point Blank: I'm currently studying acting, as well. What had pushed you to pursue that at an academic level?

Jimmy Stadt: It's weird. There are not a lot of people like us in punk and hardcore. When I tell people that I'm really into theatre I usually get a

weird look.

Scene Point Blank: Well you quoted *Long Day's Journey into Night* in one of your songs...

Jimmy Stadt: Yeah. That play is fucking amazing. I could watch the three-hour film version of that play over and over. It moves me to tears every time at the end there. I got into theatre in high school. I was doing improv comedy stuff and then I got into plays. I had a really amazing theatre teacher. Philip Seymour Hoffman went to my high school and had the same teacher. She was great. Most schools were doing the standard musicals while we were doing Shakespeare. We'd still do the musicals but with two shows a year and in the fall we'd do like a Moliere. By the time I went to college I had got into bands, but I couldn't major in bands, so I could either major in recording or theatre. I just kind of haphazardly chose theater and through that I began to love it and understand what it could be. It almost breaks my heart when people in punk and hardcore dismiss it because they don't know how much like punk it really could be.

Scene Point Blank: With like Artaud and stuff?

Jimmy Stadt: Right. They think of theatre like Guys and Dolls and it's not. It's Eugene O'Neil and it's Ibsen. That's the theatre that really resounds with me. It's interesting. Not a lot of punk rock people are into theatre.

Scene Point Blank: I'm usually pretty sheepish to admit it.

Jimmy Stadt: It's almost like a physical education degree, where people just kind of write it off, but it's actually really powerful stuff.

Scene Point Blank: Do you think your training has helped you with what you're doing on stage?

Jimmy Stadt: Yeah. Definitely with my comfort level. Playing a forty-five minute to an hour set of my own material and words I wrote is so much less nerve racking than performing two hours of a play. I'm really comfortable because of my background. It helps with my mentality and just being seen. If there is a heckler I don't freak out because I know what I'm doing and can embrace any kind of improv situation.

Scene Point Blank: A lot of interviewers have badgered you for specific meaning regarding your song lyrics. How do you feel about that?

Jimmy Stadt: Coming from the background you do, you understand that mathematical way to look at texts. To me lyric writing is not mathematical at all. There is no end result. There is no clear-cut answer. There are questions. It's hard for me to answer those types of questions because I'm forced to intellectualize something that I can barely grasp. I think of lyric writing coming from the plays I love, and the films I love, and those don't answer anything, they ask questions. I think it has something to do with our education system. We're taught to find the answer. We're taught to find the moral. I read things in high school and was asked, "What does it mean?" That is literature death. It's not there at all. When I took a Shakespeare class in college it taught me how to really appreciate these things. I was taught how to love it, not to answer it. That's how I try to write.

Scene Point Blank: Do you think it is important to keep a sense of ambiguity?

Jimmy Stadt: I do. I really do. There is interpretation. If you're ambiguous you can have things hit on a personal level as opposed to just saying this is what this means. It could mean a bunch of things to a bunch of different people. On the converse of that sometimes I will just write a straightforward song. Our song "Our Ballads" is a pretty straightforward and literal song. That's kind of rare for me. I don't usually write songs about social things. I'm pretty emotional and internal with the songs I write. Nothing is all one thing though.

Scene Point Blank: Getting down to the business questions: Tell me how you got hooked up with Bridge Nine?

Jimmy Stadt: I think because of the attention we were getting as a part time band there were some labels that were interested to see if we were going to tour. When we made that decision to go full time we got some emails from some different labels and Bridge Nine was one of them. We met with a bunch of labels. When we met with them we just thought that was the one that made the most sense. In terms of the bands on their label it probably doesn't make a lot of sense to other people. Some people

thought that that was such a weird thing. I think that they're trying to branch out and still do awesome hardcore bands but also do other stuff. I think we might be a bridge to that for them. They're hands down a great label.

Scene Point Blank: I've heard the band is back to writing, and there is rumors of you working with a certain producer.

Jimmy Stadt: We spent January writing. After that we tidied things up and after this tour we're off to Seattle to record with Matt Bayles. That's where we're at now. We were just thinking of guys we wanted to work with and that name came up. Our guitar player Chris is probably the biggest Minus the Bear fan there is. Those records sound awesome and that Mastodon record is really good, too. I didn't think we had a shot with him but we talked and hashed out all the budget details and he was down.

Scene Point Blank: Is there a time frame for the new record's release?

Jimmy Stadt: Hopefully it'll be a September release.

Scene Point Blank: Have you ever gotten a response from Silent Majority about the band name?

Jimmy Stadt: Sort of. We've done a ton of shows with Capital, and the singer of Silent Majority sings with Capital. He's never really said anything about it, but he's never seemed mad about it...everyone from Long Island was such huge fans of those guys. When we toured with Crime in Stereo, who are also from Long Island, they were psyched on it. That band was maybe not so big world wide, but they were just amazing. I've never asked about the name. Maybe next time I should.

Anders Johansson

Diablo Swing Orchestra

Sarah, September 2012

If you happened to read our review of **Diablo Swing Orchestra's** *Pandora's Piñata*, then you'll know that we here at SPB think pretty highly of the swinging metalheads out of Sweden. That's why one of our writers jumped at the chance to send a few questions to the band. The verbose bassist of DSO **Anders Johansson** was more than kind enough to answer a few of our questions.

Scene Point Blank: First of all, thank you very much for your time, and congratulations on the release of *Pandora's Piñata*! I don't think it's a stretch to say the album's had literally universal praise, including here at Scene Point Blank where it received a 9.5 out of 10. How has the band felt about this incredibly warm reception?

Anders Johansson: Thank you, indeed, for having us! The expression "universal praise" truly makes me blush over here in modest Sweden, though. However, please watch us bow and curtsy most humbly for that nine-point-five. We are locked in awe over all those high marks across the boards out there. To be totally honest, aside from the highest ones, we praise the lowest grades too, since they tend to contain superlatives and their entertaining counterparts, which in turn usually make for a good read. However, nowadays, we seem to have made do with the all good ones alone.

What happened there? I guess there's something in this piñata appealing to everyone somehow, huh? The in-betweens, on the other hand, tend to be kind of vague and boring. Hence, they seldom interest us much. We're not less grateful for them though. That being said, we are indeed eagerly awaiting all the grand negative ones popping up. The writers of those usually use word-crayons like none other!

Scene Point Blank: *Pandora's Piñata* is your first album to feature a brass section as part of the full-time band. How has that changed the dynamic of the pieces from your first two albums? Has it provided you with any new areas to explore musically that were previously untenable, or have

they mostly been augmenting a similar type of songwriting? Are there any other instruments you wish you could write for or could be included in the band's line-up?

Anders Johansson: With Daniel Hedin (trombone) and Martin Isaksson (trumpet) finally added as full-time members since a couple of years back, we've not only abounded into a dynamically larger apparatus these days, being able to accommodate horns in a much more integrated way while composing. We're also in the process of merging as components of a group, into some kind of creative alloy, if you will. This is truly noticeable on the latest album, as you may have noticed. You can really hear the result of the eight of us being more present throughout the whole process of writing this time, with the aftermath of us being more glued together as both friends and fellow musicians. The latter as opposed to in the beginning, that is. For example, we're way better at rehearsing our songs before we enter the studio. I guess experiences of mutual highs and lows throughout the years tend to do that to you as a group, right? We simply know the songs by heart at the end of the pre-studio phase these days and there is well crafted pre-production material to fall back on, in case of issues presenting themselves while recording. This makes the recording process a much smoother one which, of course, also may be heard audio-wise. I mean, that base helps everything from the producer to any possible additional musicians entering our recording sphere. Also, before, a lot of songs came out sounding like the brass was added on top of everything else, as opposed to these latest eleven songs, where trumpets, trombones, strings, and woodwinds really blend into the mix, broadening the composition in its totality instead of just being the salt and pepper on the surface. So, yes, we are indeed a larger group of creative folks these days, but also a tighter unit at that, in a lot of ways.

Regarding the part-question on other instruments, I can only answer for myself, and since I'm very much into vintage Latin sounds, and Colombian/Brazilian ones in particular, I'd be thrilled to see some percussion instruments such as the cuica, agogo, or berimbau in there. Aside from that, I lately stumbled upon a Swiss drum phenomenon called The Hang. Those would make a beautiful addition to some still unwritten pieces too. Lastly on that note, having witnessed the Norwegian band **Katzenjammer** on stage featuring a giant balalaika with a smug smiling cat, that definitely needs some further exploring too!

Scene Point Blank: Speaking of which, you’ve never been a purely “swing” band—*Pandora’s Piñata* had definite elements of other genres, like opera, spaghetti western music, and electronic music. What other genres do you see yourselves exploring in the future? Are you worried about the premise of the band ever becoming stale?

Anders Johansson: I’m gonna start off by some real deep digging here. Beyond the conditioning of our minds, and its assumptions – and furthermore boredom as a consequence – there is a vast, non-judgemental openness. That’s the place where the arts are best experienced, I’d say. Before I lose ya’ll into that void, I want to sum it up in short: that openness keeps you attentive and appreciating. Since all members of the orchestra enjoy that space, it was easy for us to translate that attentiveness into finding those being like-minded. We all come from rather different disciplines and we all constitute various musical backgrounds. Something surely happens as a result when you blend all that. Everything from baritone metal swish-swosh and mariachi hooks, all the way to spaghetti western crescendos, as you’ve noted, and they all definitely fall into place too. I personally believe our wide spread constitutes the very essence of Diablo Swing, and that this, in turn, bubbles up into a somewhat boiling *håxblandning* of musical crayons, indeed, pardon my Swedish. That being said, I do believe the term “stale” is of another vocabulary than that of Diablo Swing.

Regarding future matters, I myself truly feel ourselves exploring the Latin areas of music further. Partly because we’re widely influenced from touring those countries, but also because we all seem to have those progressions built into our Swedish longing for places and experiences far, far away.

Scene Point Blank: Is there anything else you learned from your first two releases that contributed to the writing of *Pandora’s Piñata*? How has the band changed and grown since *The Butcher’s Ballroom* six years ago?

Anders Johansson: This being our third full album, we’ve had some serious practicing in the matter over the last nine years, and I’d say that this time around we’re, again, a more of a homogeneous gathering of folks. Both regarding how we sound, as well as how we work as individuals in a group, both inside and outside of the studio environment. As you may have gathered by now, all of us are contributing more to the overall result

these days, as opposed to the process of *The Butcher's Ballroom*, for instance, in which Daniel Håkansson did most of the composing. A whole lot has changed since then, though some things seem to stay the same too. Pontus [Mantefors] was already co-producing during our 2005 recordings, which still is the same for today's process.

Everyone of us chipping in like that is truly noticeable on the finished result, being as vivid as I'd like to say it is. Again, the various personalities of the band represented, as well as our musical backgrounds being of such a wide spread. It's all there and audible. That spread is also what I've tried to convey using all those colours while art directing and drawing the latest album art work. We're simply not just red and black anymore. A whole lot of scatterings and hues in there today, in a lot of different ways, wouldn't you agree?

Lastly, the most important lesson we've learned throughout the years is that growing is definitely all about integration, as opposed to excluding what you, per definition, see as "not you." Allowing is key, and our forgiving way of using a wide range of elements in our music, truly is the living proof of that.

Scene Point Blank: Normally it's very trite to ask about influences in an interview, but given the insane stylistic diversity of your music, we're hoping you'll forgive us. Could you humour us and tell us what music you're being influenced by while you're writing?

Anders Johansson: The answers above also apply here and, along with those, since we've come to communicate quite closely with our listeners during the last few years, we've based a lot of the lyrical content on the mix of our own, and other people's own stories regarding relationships, individuality, as well as society and its possibilities and discontents. We're all very alike as humans, and these topics can't be aired enough, really. Also, the band unity described in answers above, was in itself a great influence for *Pandora's Piñata* being produced the way it was.

Also, as you probably know, music is a great way to defuse the seriousness of everyday life, and what better way of doing so, than through a blend of styles keeping listeners alert for every upcoming move? Just as for the case of many of our influences, you never know what to expect next. Depending on who in the band you ask, you'd get a different answer, of course. If I would give an honest shot at this, those artists would range from your typical 1920s: Benny Goodman "Sing-Sing-Sing-Swing," the

guitar-based jams of Django Reinhardt, to Disney soundtracks buried in time, Swedish old school lullabies, vintage Latin grooves, and modern day equals to all of the above. The list could be made into a long one...

Certain songs have, however, been of certain importance to the band, such as "Les Triplettes de Belleville." There's something about that one indeed, not to mention the song we entered the stage to during our last Latin American tour – Disney's "Pink Elephants On Parade," as seen in the movie *Dumbo* from 1941. And there's plenty more where that came from. For instance, I'd surely like doing something on the Disney short "The Skeleton Dance" from 1929. Those vintage animations seem to be a somewhat bottomless influential pit for us. Coming back to the wider sense of influences once again, this time contemporary ones: alternative hard rock must be added here, of course. The latter constituting bands like Djerv, Tool, Porcupine Tree, Stolen Babies, Opeth, Muse, Primus, and Mr. Mike Patton's projects among many others. On that matter, I myself feel drawn to performing (to say the least) a cover of the Muse song "Knights Of Cydonia." Daniel Håkansson does a mean Matt Bellamy! Also, as an example of modern day versions of the 1920s musical glory, the band Katzenjammer would definitely be it. Again, the use of that huge balalaika with the smug smiling cat on it alone. I mean, what's not to like? Music can, and should be, an audio/visual experience like that, right?

Scene Point Blank: Are there any bands or musicians today you feel are really pushing musical boundaries as much as you are?

Anders Johansson: Aside from the bands listed in the answer above, and again, I can only answer for myself here, and I really must emphasise Mikael Åkerfeldt from Opeth and Steven Wilson from Porcupine Tree as constantly exploring the progressive borders (and the lack thereof). Also, since I'm delving into Latin progression right now, the DJ and producer Will "Quantic" Holland surely pushes the envelope in the mix of contemporary nu-jazz dubs, blended with vintage heritage Colombian cumbia, boogaloo and hiphop. Holland resides in Cali, Colombia, and is working on site with an amazing setup of renowned musicians from various genres that almost seem forgotten to the contemporary world. I recently heard his latest project Ondatrópica performing a Black Sabbath cover, "I Ron Man." The pun alone! Holland's collaboration with Colombian heritage singer Nidia Góngora will definitely keep my toes

dancing through the fall. There sure lies a little something-something in the broadening of musical horizons through the blending of styles. This does require the letting go of the regular definitions of what to like and not, though. Otherwise the door remains a closed one indeed...

Scene Point Blank: You toured through Latin America this year—any chance you’ll be in the States or Europe? At least one of our writers is prepared to do a sales pitch to get you to come through the tiny state Vermont.

Anders Johansson: Unfortunately we won’t be touring the US during 2012, since we weren’t able to fit that into our Latin America schedule this time, and the paperwork for playing the US sure is an exercise in itself. One has to have the inside scoop early on to do all the proper planning for such a tour. However, it looks like we’ll be able to visit those much longed for states during 2013. Maybe along with another South America and Mexico visit, and then stay a bit longer than we did this year. Now, that would truly be something, so please have that Vermont sales pitch ready! Regarding Europe, we’ll soon play our first show here in a couple of years. We’re actually heading to the highly acclaimed metal festival Wacken Open Air in just two weeks, and that particular festival experience sure is a much longed-for one to us, I must admit. I’m sure we can work a few wonders down there too, being really worked up post the Latin American tour.

Scene Point Blank: The original Devil’s Orchestra had a quite acrimonious relationship with the church in Sweden. Though The Orchestra is certainly no longer relegated to playing in outhouses or barns, are you at all worried that the church might renew their call for your deaths by hanging?

Anders Johansson: “Hanging” sure sounds a lot more swingin’ than “stale” does. Let’s!

Scene Point Blank: Just one last question to satiate a personal curiosity of one of our writers: who’s fucking idea was “Justice for Saint Mary?” That track is nuts.

Anders Johansson: Something tells me that you’re not talking about the first few minutes written by Daniel Håkansson, but rather the dubstep ending, as composed by our psytrance-knob-fiddling genius Pontus

Mantefors? Yes. In nuts we trust.

Scene Point Blank: Thanks again for your time. We can't wait to hear more from you folks in the future!

Anders Johansson: Once again we bow and curtsey. And remember, boys and girls. Stay attentive, be playful, keep curious! And that future you're speaking fondly of, is now.

Jade Puget

Blaqk Audio

Graham Isador, October 2007

Born out of a shared love for electronic music, Blaqk Audio represents the endless passion that Davey Havok and Jade Puget have to create music. Scene Point Blank recently spoke with Puget about what precipitated the release *CexCells* and what he and Havok hope to achieve with their latest musical venture.

Scene Point Blank: The first interview I actually did was with Adam, of your other band, back in 2003. Since that time there have obviously been a lot of changes in your life. I was wondering if you could tell me a little about those changes and if the success of A.F.I. is what facilitated this release of Blaqk Audio?

Jade Puget: Yeah. I think even if we hadn't have had the success of the last two records, we've loved electronic music since we were young. Really in 2002 is when we started talking about doing this, so I think regardless of how A.F.I. would have done we would have done this record because it was something we really wanted to do. As far as how our lives have changed. There are certain physical external changes that have taken place, but I don't really see myself as being any different from back before *Sing the Sorrow* came out. The things I'm doing, and the reasons I'm making music are the same.

Scene Point Blank: Aside from being an electronic outlet for your eclectic music tastes, what are your intentions in doing this band? Do you see this more as an art project, or music to make people dance to?

Jade Puget: Really, with the idea of this project we had no intentions. As I said, we've loved this type of music since we were kids; I love to program, and it's an extension of that. We thought, "We'll put out a record and people might like it, people might not like it, people might not buy it." But that's fine. It's kind of something for ourselves, you know? People dancing is a definite positive byproduct. It's such a different vibe from A.F.I. shows. A.F.I. shows are very serious and dark, and when we play with Blaqk Audio people are moving and it's a fun vibe that we're not really use to.

Scene Point Blank: Speaking of the crowd reaction, I had read in a previous interview that Hunter and Adam are attending, or have been in attendance to some of your shows. What have their impressions been like?

Jade Puget: Adam came to the first show in San Francisco and Hunter is coming to the one in L.A. which actually won't happen for another couple of weeks. But Adam texted me after it, and he really enjoys the record so he was stoked. He mentioned that it was really weird seeing Davey and I from the front and not looking at our asses. He's really use to seeing the back of us for an hour, so that was something new.

Scene Point Blank: *CexCells* debuted at number 18 on the Billboard chart to the surprise of a lot of people, considering that this is a side project, but also to many an unknown band. Do you feel as if the album's success has been piggybacked on the fans of A.F.I. even with *Black Audio* as a separate entity?

Jade Puget: Though musically and lyrically it is separate, we certainly know that a lot of A.F.I. fans bought the record, and without them we wouldn't have sold as many records as we did. There have also been a lot of people who have approached us and said that they don't really listen to A.F.I. or don't even particularly like A.F.I., but they're really into this because it's their type of music. Initially it was mainly A.F.I. fans that knew about this but now that it's been out there a little bit, I think other people that don't even listen to A.F.I. have been getting into it.

Scene Point Blank: You had mentioned the music being different lyrically. When comparing and contrasting albums with your other band to this, the biggest difference, to me even more so than the music, is the sexual content. Perhaps this is a better question for Davey, but where did this come from? Was it just a reaction to the sound?

Jade Puget: Luckily because I've done a lot of interviews with Davey I know what his answer is to this. Lyrically I think a lot of people were surprised because A.F.I. has six records (Editors Note: A.F.I. actually has seven records) and there has never been any sexual content, or at least that has never been the focus of any of the lyrics. It is based on the music. Dance music inherently is, sort of, a sexual music; that whole scene is sort

of a sexualized scene. Davey's been within the industrial and dance crowd for years now so when he started writing lyrics it was just natural. There were no plans to write a sexually charged record, but after writing a few songs he was just like, "Whoa this is what came out."

Scene Point Blank: Do you feel you have to sell yourselves a little more being a new band?

Jade Puget: No not really, because like I said this is something we did for the love of the music. We never thought we'd just do this other thing to sell a bunch of records or to do a big tour. We didn't desire that and that wasn't the goal at all. We've done press certainly but we're not trying to sell ourselves in any way. In fact I kind of try and shy away from that in terms of really going out there and doing something kind of questionable to promote this record, because that's not what this record is about.

Scene Point Blank: You filmed the "Stiff Kittens" video a month or so back now, when are we expecting to see it?

Jade Puget: No one's seen it yet actually. (laughs) I think because there are special effects in it it's taking a long time. I actually just got an email yesterday saying we're suppose to have it by Monday. We did it with Mark Webb, who we've done a bunch of videos with. There was no money so he was really nice and shot it in the basement of his house, and had all the people running through his house, which I never would have wanted to do. It was really cool of him to do that because since the first time we worked with him on "Days of the Phoenix" he's gone on to become a really big director. I think he was off to shoot a JLO video after us and so it was really just kind of a favor.

Scene Point Blank: In addition to having the "Stiff Kittens" video soon to be released, you have that little video on your Myspace for a song that is not on the album. Is the mix media aspect something you're interested in?

Jade Puget: Yeah. Usually with our shows we have big screens behind us with a bunch of different media and clips playing. The guy who does it, who actually does A.F.I. too, is from England and he couldn't get into Canada. Well, he could, but if he did he couldn't get back into the States. So, unfortunately for these two shows (Editors Note: referring to the Toronto and Montreal shows) we weren't able to have that. I really like

that little video clip, though. In fact I have another piece of unreleased music that I want to do another video like that to. The way things go with the Internet there are so many more avenues to putting stuff like that out there, and it's kind of fun.

Scene Point Blank: For my own interests' sake, there was a clip from "The Fountain" in there, right?

Jade Puget: Yes. Good job! There were some various clips in there, some of them weren't from movies, but that's the first time I've heard someone actually recognize one of the clips.

Scene Point Blank: When A.F.I. won the Moon Man at the MTV Awards it was presented by Lou Reed. The reaction from the band in meeting him was an interesting and amazing thing to watch. Lately I've been seeing similar reactions from fans to meeting yourself. Does the idea of being a notable cult figure ever occur to you?

Jade Puget: We don't really consider that. When I meet people today I still feel the same way that I did when I joined A.F.I. in 1999, and that was eight years ago. It doesn't seem like I'm some bigger than life person. I still think of us as that little band that some people listen to, like when *Black Sails in the Sunset* came out. To some people, since we've been around fifteen years now, and some people who listen to us were just born fifteen years ago, we could be that musical presence that's been around your whole life. I guess that's possible, maybe, and I mean that's very flattering.

Scene Point Blank: Thanks for taking the time to do this. Any closing comments?

Jade Puget: If people are interested in Blaqk Audio, and maybe experiencing electronic music for the first time I encourage them to go out and check out a lot of other bands that are doing it in the underground. There is some cool stuff that people might be interested in if they dig around a bit.

Mike Sullivan

Russian Circles

Michael Phillips, September 2008

Music lovers first took notice of the stellar guitar playing and pounding rhythms on Russian Circles 2006 release “Enter.” Earlier this year, with “Station,” and those same fans and many more became enamored the awesome sounds that Russian Circles put to tape. Scene Point Blank recently spoke with guitarist Mike Sullivan about the band’s latest offering, recent tours, and other guitar wizardry.

Scene Point Blank: Tell us your name and your role in the band. Also, Where does the name Russian Circles come from?

Mike Sullivan: Mike Sullivan, guitar. The name comes from a practice drill introduced by the 1980 Russian National hockey team.

Scene Point Blank: The band is currently in the midst of a tour with Coheed & Cambria. What has the reaction been like thus far?

Mike Sullivan: Surprisingly good. We honestly had no idea what to expect but thankfully everyone seemed to understand what we were getting at when we played.

Scene Point Blank: The response to the band’s debut full-length, *Station* has been overly positive. Did you have any reservations when it came time to write for the full-length? Looking back, is there anything you would have done differently?

Mike Sullivan: There wasn’t any reservations while writing, Writing is always the most rewarding element of playing music. I wouldn’t necessarily say I’d want to do anything different but we learned a lot from that recording.

Scene Point Blank: The band enlisted Brian Cook of These Arms of Snakes to record bass on *Station*. Did this change the songwriting dynamic at all? Were the songs written prior to his joining the band?

Mike Sullivan: The songs were pretty much written and arranged before

he joined. However the songs were left very loose so we could rework or extend parts that sounded different once bass was added. We're eager to write as a three-piece and expand on our last two albums. Brian's an awesome musician and a pleasure to play with.

Scene Point Blank: What is the band currently doing as far as a bassist? Have you found more fill-ins or a permanent replacement yet?

Mike Sullivan: Brian is our guy.

Scene Point Blank: How did the signing to Suicide Squeeze come about? Since signing to Suicide Squeeze and releasing *Station* have you noticed a change in the crowds at your shows?

Mike Sullivan: We did a 7" with Suicide Squeeze a few years ago and they were great to work with. Many of our friends on that label spoke highly of them and acted like recruiting reps, convincing us to go with Suicide Squeeze. We're definitely grateful to be part of their roster. I can't say I've really noticed a change in the crowds at shows. Since the beginning, we've always had diverse following, which we obviously appreciate. I love seeing older people at shows. Receiving a compliment from them means a lot considering how much music they must have seen.

Scene Point Blank: You were in Dakota/Dakota prior to forming Russian Circles. What kind of distinctions did you want to make between the two groups? Was it a conscious decision to remain an instrumental group from the get-go, or was that a decision made after the fact?

Mike Sullivan: When we started this band we wanted to cut out all the technical noodling and focus more on the songs themselves. We're more concerned with arrangement, pacing, dynamics and effectiveness; this was more about restraint than trying to impress anyone. At the same time, we're very open-minded to exploring different ideas. We didn't set off to be instrumental but after the first few songs were written we saw no room for a vocalist. At the time we thought vocals would've been a distraction from the music and would instantly categorize our band on grounds of the vocal style.

Scene Point Blank: During the writing process have you ever written a song that could include vocals on it? If so, how did you deal with the

circumstances? If not, any idea how you would react?

Mike Sullivan: I'm sure a lot of our music could easily have vocals but that doesn't necessarily mean it needs vocals. If a song felt incomplete without vocals than we'd change it. It's not something we really think about. We're not totally adverse to vocals. If it felt natural, we'd be happy to add that if it furthered the song, but so far that hasn't happened.

Scene Point Blank: As a three-piece, you must loop riffs during performances to achieve the same sound as on the albums. What bands, if any, do you look up to for their onstage guitar-looping prowess? What bits of advice would you give to aspiring loopers?

Mike Sullivan: Since I saw Don Caballero at the Fireside in '99, I've been blown away by Ian Williams' musicianship, both with Don Cab and Battles. There's no question that he was the biggest influence for my looping. Dave Knudson from Minus the Bear has an equally impressive command over live looping. There are also many talented noise artists who do great things with loopers that is impressive, but things get a bit trickier when looping with a live drummer,

Scene Point Blank: What bands have had the biggest influence on your sound as a guitarist? What record(s) would you attribute to your picking up a guitar?

Mike Sullivan: Fugazi's *Red Medicine* and Shellac's *At Action Park* were the two albums that literally changed the way I looked at music. I heard both those albums in 8th grade and was blown away at how dissonant and wrong everything sounded. But at the foundation of those wretched tones were catchy rock songs that didn't follow conventional norms or structures. After hearing those records, I didn't want to play powerchords anymore. When I first began playing guitar, I was more interested in Van Halen, Metallica, Faith no More and Pantera.

Scene Point Blank: You've played with a few impressive acts thus far – Minus the Bear, Red Sparowes, Pelican, Dälek, Young Widows, and Mono. What is it like opening up for established acts like these? Do you plan differently based on who else you're performing with to cater to their crowd?

Mike Sullivan: We don't alter our set for any particular audience. We play songs that we're excited to play and if we're feeling the songs, hopefully there will be a meaningful interaction with the audience that isn't genre specific.

Scene Point Blank: What was reception like on your recent tour (as far as crowd reception, the band members themselves, and onstage antics) with Daughters?

Mike Sullivan: Ha. Our fans and Daughters fans are definitely different breeds. I've never seen more fights at shows than on that tour. My parents saw Daughters on that tour and were less than impressed by their onstage banter and nudity, but my aunt saw them a few weeks later and absolutely loved them. Every night was a different performance for them. Made for a hilarious tour, both on and off stage.

Scene Point Blank: Our staff writer Cory has a similarly topic-oriented question for you: you've toured with Fear Before the March of Flames and Daughters. How many collective times have you attempted to commit suicide?

Mike Sullivan: Well, on the Fear Before the March of Flames tour my body flipped out on me and my hands and feet became grotesquely swollen, which caused us to drop off the tour. Maybe my body was trying to kill itself without checking with me first.

Scene Point Blank: "Station," the "Enter" EP and the "Upper Ninety" single were available on vinyl. How important is releasing your material on vinyl?

Mike Sullivan: Very.

Scene Point Blank: What are your thoughts on the CD vs. vinyl vs. digital debate?

Mike Sullivan: I prefer vinyl over all formats but I believe all are important. My only fear with digitally bought music is that the tangible element and artwork of the music is neglected, not to mention labels and bands not getting paid for illegal downloading. As far as the downloading debacle, I'm not that concerned with it, but I think people should be aware of the

repercussions. When the labels aren't getting paid, recording budgets drop and the overall product is affected. I think we'll see more of that in the coming years, especially the smaller indie and punk labels.

Scene Point Blank: How do you react to people saying they've downloaded your music?

Mike Sullivan: Anyone who tells us they've downloaded our songs will let us know that they picked up the album at a show or a bought shirt or something. No one just confesses to stealing the album without making any other contribution, which is probably for the best.

Scene Point Blank: What is the music scene in Chicago like? There's always a constant flux of groups from the city onto the national stage. Is the local scene really that impressive?

Mike Sullivan: I think Chicago does have an impressive community of musicians/artists that are extremely supportive and prolific. Chicago has a deep history of great bands that have an inevitable influence on newer bands.

Scene Point Blank: What music are you currently listening to? Any artists that you'd like to suggest to our readers to investigate?

Mike Sullivan: I can't stop listening to the new Secret Machines album. It won't be out for a while but you should keep an eye out for it. Young Widow's new album, *Old Wounds*, is pretty awesome as well.

Scene Point Blank: What is on tap for Russian Circles for the remainder of Summer and the rest of 2008?

Mike Sullivan: We're doing a full European tour in the fall and then we'll be a home writing for the most of winter.

Scene Point Blank: Do you have any parting thoughts you'd like to share with our readers?

Mike Sullivan: Vote Obama.

Jeremy Bolm

Touché Amore

Adam Houtekamer, June 2012

Scene Point Blank caught up with Jeremy Bolm, vocalist of the powerhouse post-hardcore band Touché Amore, in Calgary, Alberta in early April. Just getting back from a European tour, Touché Amore was touring across Canada with Cancer Bats and A Sight for Sewn Eyes. On this specific date the band played two shows at the same venue: an all ages in the afternoon and an 18+ in the evening. We sat down with Jeremy before the afternoon show. The band last released *Parting the Seas Between Brightness and Me* on Deathwish Inc. in 2011.

Scene Point Blank: You just got back from a European tour with the Architects/Rise Against and a UK run with Pianos Become the Teeth/Basement. How did they go and what was it like touring with those bands?

Jeremy: Those were all in different sections. The Basement one was the first two dates and that was awesome. I really like that band and we had never met them or played with them before. So, when we were going out there, we were asked, “Is there any bands you would like to have support you guys?” I was like, “If Basement’s around that would be awesome.” It was kind of greedy for myself, but I just really wanted to see them play. They were nice enough to do it for two of the three and they’re awesome.

Then we went over to the mainland and started the Rise Against dates, which was very different. It was great and we had a good time, but it was obviously much different than anything we have ever done before. It was at very big places—like they were arenas. The biggest show was 14,000 people and the smallest show was, well there was one show in Denmark of 800 people, but the smaller shows would have been between 2,000 and 5,000.

Scene Point Blank: Was it different playing for such big audiences?

Jeremy: Oh, absolutely. I would be here and the audience would be halfway into the street with the furthest barriers and the highest stages. It was completely out of our comfort zone and what we’re used to. That was kind of the point of doing it: to challenge ourselves. You can’t always do

what you're used to. You're not going to learn anything as a band, you're not going to grow as a band. There were some people who gave us some flack, of course. Internet people were doing stuff like that but, if you play in a band and you like playing music for people, you should challenge yourselves. Do shit that you wouldn't normally do. If you like playing music play music in any scenario. We'll play to 10 people in a weird bar or well play to that.

Scene Point Blank: Do you prefer the smaller kind of venues?

Jeremy: Absolutely. We love to tour...that was interesting and I'm glad we did it. Everyone on the tour was so fucking cool. The Rise Against dudes, I could never say anything less than amazing about them. They're the most punk dudes on earth. They're punk dudes who just lucked out. Seriously, straight up, the most punk dudes around, and then the Architects guys are awesome. It was just like hanging out every day in gigantic venues playing to an audience that kind of stares at you, but it went okay. No complaints.

Then the last part was with Pianos, my best friends, and that was awesome.

Scene Point Blank: Did any good stories coming out of the tours?

Jeremy: There have got to be some. Playing on those Rise Against dates in Poland was awesome. Poland is its own world where people there are just so enthusiastic about anything. The fact that there is a show happening, everybody's stoked. We did two off dates there and it was wild as hell. Then we did the Rise Against date and we were like, "I hope it goes okay." Honestly, the audience treated us as if we were the headliner. Kids were crowdsurfing, the whole audience was like pogoing and clapping along. It was absurd. We were laughing like *this can't be real*. Same thing happened for Architects and, of course, the Rise Against set was the most crazy thing.

Scene Point Blank: Did you notice any other cultural differences?

Jeremy: Europe is always a completely different world. You appreciate things about that place and you appreciate things about here more. It works itself out evenly.

Scene Point Blank: Back in December you played with American Nightmare. What was the experience like?

Jeremy: It was ridiculously awesome. I was scared shitless opening that show, because they made it known that they didn't want to announce the openers. They just wanted to have the show start that day and then have the openers play. It was a band called Weekend from the Bay Area, and then Trash Talk, then it was us. We haven't had the highest popularity in the hardcore community for a little while now - at least internet-wise, you know...So knowing that going into the show, being like, "Okay, there is going to be people who aren't going to be psyched that we're on this show."

But at the same time, we're playing with a band that is responsible for us being a band. I even said that on stage. Like our first show was the only time we ever did a cover and it was an American Nightmare cover. We were like, "This band means a lot to us, we're really fucking thrilled to be here," so we just played a short set. Just get on stage, get off stage, not really talk, and here's American Nightmare. So we played like a 15 minute set. We played like 12 songs and it was really fast and then just got off.

Then I stage dove during the first American Nightmare song and I just stayed on the side of the stage and lost my mind for the rest of the set. I was like, "I have to stagedive and I'll be content."

Scene Point Blank: Was Ryan Gosling there?

Jeremy: Of course not.

Scene Point Blank: Your most recent release, *Parting the Sea Between Brightness and Me* was extremely well received. Could you explain the significance behind the title and where it came from?

Jeremy: It comes from a lot of different things. Whereas *To the Beat of a Dead Horse* is called as such because it's me writing about a bunch of things that a lot of people are going through and not really doing anything about it aside from just yelling about it: beating a dead horse. Everybody does that. They don't do anything to make it better except yelling about it.

Parting the Sea Between Brightness and Me is more of me kind of coming to terms with understanding what those situations might be and trying to figure out how to remedy them. It's not quite saying I have, but I'm working on it. That's kind of the whole point behind that.

Also there are a lot of references to travel and coming to terms with finding comfort in distance and stuff like that, being on the road as much as we have been. When *To the Beat of a Dead Horse* came out we hadn't

really toured, besides a west coast tour, so we didn't fully understand what it was like to just lose connection with everybody. But since then we had been on tour a lot before that record came out. The first year of *Dead Horse* we were out for like seven months out of the year and now we're out. Last year we were out 9-and-a-half months. Home isn't the most normal thing anymore.

Scene Point Blank: Right after that record came out, you guys called out a lot of record flippers online. What led you to make such a public reaction?

Jeremy: That was more of a personal thing for me. I'm a huge record nerd. I have a terrible terrible problem. I don't appreciate people who will come to shows specifically to buy a rare record. And then you look the next day and someone put it up for a "Buy It Now" for like \$200. "Buy It Now" is the most offensive thing when it comes to that stuff. If you are an asshole and you want to throw it on eBay and whatever, don't set a "Buy It Now," because that just makes you look like an asshole. I've sold records on eBay and I would never set a "Buy It Now" because I want it to go for what someone is willing to actually pay for it, what it's worth to them. Do I think one of our records could be worth that much money? Not to me, I don't see it. But I know there are bands in my life where I would spend – the most I've spent on a record was like \$110 or something like that. It's all up to the person and what they can afford. But just trying to capitalize on something like that is so fucking lame and it's disrespectful for everyone involved. No bands get psyched when they see their record on eBay "Buy It Now" for \$100. It's fucking rude.

Scene Point Blank: Did you pick up any interesting records on the last tour?

Jeremy: I have a box in there of everything. And it sucks, buying a bunch of records in Europe and bringing them back with you. That's dedication to buying records because you have to use it as your carry on and you're carrying this heavy box through customs, through security, through all that stuff, and having to put it on the plane and walking it off the plane it's heavy as shit.

I got like 30 records throughout that tour. There is this really awesome store I found in Oslo, Norway. They had stuff for dirt cheap and it was rad. I found a Neil Perry split LP for what ended up only being like \$9US. If I

found that in a normal store it would probably be like \$30.

Scene Point Blank: What are some gems in your collection?

Jeremy: I have a lot, but whenever I get asked that I answer with the same two.

I have the Saetia “The Coffin Kid Club” edition of *Eronel 7*”, which they only made like 20 of—which was for their group of friends, basically. I bought it in New Jersey when I went to Hellfest in 2004 and this guy was selling his personal collection. The doors had just opened and, of course, if a guy’s selling his records I’m going to go through that. I looked and it was like the third record I flipped through and I stopped and looked at it and then looked at him and he was like “I know.” And it was only like \$30. So I was stoked.

And then the other one is that colored shards clear version of the *Axe to Fall* record from Converge, which is out of 100. I had spent a month living in Boston before we signed to Deathwish and I hung out there every single day because our booking agent company shares an office with Deathwish. So I was there like every day just hanging out. One day the girl who does all the mail order (Janelle who is actually Jake Bannon’s wife), was like, “How much have you ordered from us?” I told her I had spent so much money throughout my entire life, like since Deathwish started. So she looked up all the email addresses I had over the years and saw probably 12 pages of orders. We got onto the subject of how many copies of *Axe to Fall* I had. I had 6 of the 10 at the time and so I left to go get coffee and came back and I had all the ones I didn’t have sitting on my desk. They were just like, “Here you go. Thanks for hanging out, we appreciate it a lot.” And the fact that it was a gifted version means a lot.

Scene Point Blank: Back in 2010 you released two splits: one with La Dispute and one with Make do and Mend. What is your connection with these bands? And what was the writing process like?

Jeremy: There are four songs all together, two on each. We had been on tour with *To the Beat of a Dead Horse* for so long that we came home anxious to write new songs because we were overplaying those songs—we needed to play some new ones. So we shat those four songs out so fast, it just came. Really, we had zero struggle with writing. It was like: I have this part; done! Next. When all four songs were written we realized these two

should be on this split these two should be on the other.

We met Make Do and Mend on our first west coast tour. They ended up pretty much booking the same dates as us and the promoter of the shows was like, "I'm just going to combine these tours." It was with Make Do and Mend, Hour of the Wolf, and Shook Ones. It ended up being the four of us for a bunch of dates in a row coming from this fest that we were all on together. It was this typical band bromance: we just watched each other every night, and the friendship continued, and later we were like, "We should do a split together." Our bands don't necessarily sound the same but we have the same understanding of one another.

La Dispute was asking us for so long. Actually, yesterday was my birthday. They're in L.A. right now—they played on my birthday—and I wish I could have been home to hang out with all those dudes. I booked their L.A. shows on their first west coast tour and that was how I met them. We instantly clicked super hard. Jordan and I have a lot of great conversations. We just really, really like each other and enjoy each other's company. Then we ended up playing a bunch of shows - still to this day they are the band we've played the most shows with - from hopping on different tours together and doing different things. We played together in Chicago and Jordan and I sat on the front steps of the house we played. We discussed a split and came to agree that we wanted to make it as collaborative as possible to make it a little more personal and really put forth the effort to make it a special split 7". Nick, the guy who does all of our art, and Adam Vass, the guy who does all of their art (who plays bass in their band and guitar in our band), they collaborated to do all the art together and also Jordan and I were writing each other's parts and explaining each other's parts.

Scene Point Blank: Any splits planned for the future or any bands you would like to work with?

Jeremy: We have some stuff... We can't really release any news yet but we'll have some stuff coming out eventually. We are not doing a new record this year, we'll leave that for next year.

Scene Point Blank: You signed to Deathwish for the release of *Parting the Sea Between Brightness and Me*. What kinds of relationships have formed as result?

Jeremy: There are two owners of Deathwish: there is Jake Bannon and Tre McCarthy. I met Tre at Sound and Fury 2009. He approached us and was like, “Your band’s cool, we should be friends.” I love Deathwish, but we have a weird thing about us where we won’t work with someone unless we are friends with them. No matter how cool someone might be, we have to talk about your fucking dog before we talk about anything related to our band – to be friends first.

It took a long while before we decided what label we wanted to do. There were a couple other label things happening at the same time that we were unsure of, but Deathwish has felt right. Especially after I lived out there for that month I got really close with those guys. Then we did the Converge tour and everyone got close to Jake and it all made sense. Even before, we had been friends with Rise and Fall for a while, The Carrier for a while, Deafheaven – our dudes from the Bay Area who signed after we did, we met those guys as a result of Deathwish and they are some of the funniest, goofiest, skeezy stoner dudes in the entire world. I love those guys. Everyone in that office is so fucking cool. They do it for the right reasons, which is inspiring.

Scene Point Blank: Was this any different than working with 6131 on *To the Beat of a Dead Horse*?

Jeremy: Joey Cahill, who runs that label is, like hands down, my best friend in the entire world. We did that 7” demo on No Sleep and we did the full-length and hadn’t decided what we wanted to do with it. Then Joey was like, “We’ll put it out.” And I was like, “Really?” Because we were kind of the awkward stepchild on that label, where it’s a lot of really straightforward hardcore bands and then us. I appreciated that he was willing to take a chance on us and do that. And that was at the time when 6131 was not too well known. They were still kind of growing and I appreciate that he took a chance on us, and I’m glad it’s done well because he deserves it. Joey Cahill is the best dude.

Scene Point Blank: Do you guys feel any pressure regarding subsequent releases?

Jeremy: [There’s] always pressure no matter what. Writing *Parting the Sea* was the hardest fucking thing in the world. I was having a real difficult time with writing a lot of the stuff on that record. But, now the third

record will be the worst to come because it's really hard. If you really think about it, to name hardcore bands that have survived the third record or A) even made it to their third record and; B) have their third record be good... You know what I'm saying? If you really think about it it's a fucking short ass list. It truthfully is, because you have to consider other things like your "audience" and your "following" (the word "fans" is fucking lame). They are growing with you and do they want to hear you do the same record a third time? You can get away with it the second time. You can still kind of generally write about the same things and kids will still be interested for the most part, I think. But, to do it a third time it's like, "Is this band going to grow?" Or what if you do grow in a way they're not interested in or if you grow in a way they're not ready for? The third record is a fucked situation. Which is why we we're like, "Let's not do it this year."

We've put out a lot of stuff, we've been on tour a lot since our band started, so let's let *Parting the Sea* simmer for a while. We feel it still has some legs on it so we will start writing towards the end of the year probably.

Scene Point Blank: Earlier this year, you started a label called Secret Voice. What was the driving force in doing so?

Jeremy: I've always wanted to do a label and obviously it's like the worst climate in the entire world to do that because blah blah music doesn't sell...all that bullshit. But with vinyl having such a resurgence it's a little easier these days. But I've always wanted to do it and I just needed to find the right bands to inspire me to do it and get off my ass. That band is Single Mothers and they're the best band, so after seeing them and playing with them and talking to them about it, it gave me the courage to bring it up with the Deathwish guys to let me start that subsidiary label.

I give them full credit: Deathwish is really making the whole thing possible. I handle certain things like finding the bands, dealing with the bands, artwork, and recording, but they handle manufacturing, distribution and all the sales and stuff like that. They're making it possible for me. I can't handle stuff like that on tour all the time, but I'm fucking stoked on it. The records actually will be to [Single Mothers] on the 12th and then were playing their 7" release show and last date in Canada in London [Ontario] and I'm so excited for that night. I have some fun things planned to come out.

Scene Point Blank: So you have some more stuff planned with different bands?

Jeremy: I have ideas...We played with a really cool band in Glasgow called Departures that I was really stoked on. I don't know what will end up happening. But if I come across a band that I think is fucking awesome, I'm going to want to talk to them. I don't know if I'm going to do something with them now, maybe I'll do something later. It's exciting to know that I could potentially help bands out. I think that's the coolest part.

Scene Point Blank: Would you mind mentioning how you first got in touch with Single Mothers?

Jeremy: We played with them. They were the local band opening the show when we played in Hamilton, Ontario in 2010 at the end of the Bane/Strike Anywhere tour. They were just on the show and I will openly admit a lot of times when there is a local band on the show you don't really pay a lot of attention and I can accept that. I've been the local band on shows, it's fine. It's just one of those things, you're setting up merch or kind of on the phone talking to a loved one at home, you're kind of all over the place. You're not really paying attention usually. I was setting up merch and they started playing and within like a minute of their first song I was like, "What the hell?" and turned around and watched the entire set like, "This is the best band I have fucking seen in so long." So when they were done, I let them know how much I appreciated what they did and had a good conversation with the singer. I got their demo loved it.

I went home from tour a couple months later and was like, "I wonder if they're still a band, what's up with them?" So I looked them up and found like an unchecked, un-updated myspace page and I was like, "Ahhhhhhh, they are probably broken up already or something."

And then last year we played in London [Ontario] with La Dispute, Balance and Composure, and Make do and Mend, and this random dude comes up to me and he's like, "Hey man, I don't know if you remember me but we played together once. I play in a band called Single Mothers."

And I was like, "Are you guys still a band?!"

"Yeah we have this new demo blah blah blah."

And I was like, "Can I have it?"

So he gave it to me and that's what the new 7" is. It's even better than the first demo. When we just did our headlining tour I got them on the shows in Toronto and Montreal. They're fucking awesome, so I'm excited to see what the future holds. It's been a long time since I've really, really, really believed in a band and the last band I believed in this much is Joyce Manor.

Scene Point Blank: What are you feelings on the relevance of straight edge to hardcore music?

Jeremy: Wow... okay. I mean, I have a whole slough of my own personal feelings of straight edge. I mean I'm the only straight edge guy in my band and I don't give a shit about that. Like I don't give a shit they do stuff it doesn't matter to me at all. It's never mattered to me, even when I was young and you're supposed to be all angsty about it like, "FUCK YOU, I'm different!" You should only ever be straight edge for yourself and not anyone else. Like don't push your politics on anybody or you're no better than a fucking Christian who pushes their religion on other people. You're no better than a vegan who pushes his or her politics on someone else. Nobody likes to be preached to so keep it to yourself, blah blah blah.

If my best friend who's straight edge breaks edge, I'm not saying I'm going to be proud but, at the same time, I'm not going to give them a hard time about it. That's their life. Do I get stoked when there are new straight edge bands that are good? Yeah. I think it's a cool thing to have, it's a part of punk and hardcore. Just as much as vegan straight edge bands are a part of punk and hardcore as much as Christian hardcore bands. There is a place for everything. I feel like it's been a while since I've heard a straight edge band I'm psyched on. Like when they come around it's exciting. It's like it's my team. But I've seen it - I'm a lot older than the other guys. I just turned 29. You see straight edge come in waves where it's like the really cool thing and it's always when there is a new, cool straight edge band. When Have Heart was at their highest everyone was so fucking psyched to be straight edge and then Have Heart broke up and all of a sudden you see all the kids throw in the towel on it and now it's cool to be a party kid. That's fine, though, you know...whatever.

There is this great straight edge band from San Diego called Over My Dead Body. It's dudes from Unbroken and they have the best lyric: "Those who scream the fucking loudest are the first to fucking go," which is totally true. When all of a sudden kids are like, "Fuck yeah! Straight edge!" and rubbing it in everyone's faces and being dickhead straight edge kids and getting tattoos and shit. Those are the kids who are going to break edge. All my straight edge friends at home, I can count at this point on probably one hand. Which is fucked up, because it used to be a point where I could probably say I had like 50 straight edge friends and now I probably have less than 10. It's fine, you know, but it's funny that all those straight edge

friends I still have are over 25. They're all like older friends. It's because we're all nerds, we don't know how to have fun.

Scene Point Blank: There was some controversy over the situation with Negative Approach at Fun Fun Fun Fest.

Jeremy: That situation that wasn't actually a situation.

Scene Point Blank: Yeah, I was going to ask you to break down your story and feelings on the messageboard backlash.

Jeremy: First off [Negative Approach] weren't there. Like, most importantly, they were not there, okay.

And secondly put yourself in this situation: you played earlier that day. You played at fucking 1pm or whatever. We're hanging out at the fest, our friends in Ceremony come up to us and say, "Do you dudes wanna play a bridge show tonight?" We've played plenty of bridge shows in Austin and we know exactly how it's going to go. There's a 50/50 chance it's going to get shut down by cops, or a lot of kids come out and it's super fun and awesome. So, of course, we're like, "Fuck yeah, we'll play a bridge show with Ceremony. That sounds awesome." So all of us start tweeting about it and we decide to bring drums and heads and Ceremony will bring cabs and the PA and a generator blah blah blah. Let's fucking do it. Meet at the bridge at 11 or something.

Everybody meets at 11 and we're all frantically setting up and we notice the clouds are starting to come over with a little bit of sprinkles, so we have to do this fast. So we get everything set up and the PA's not working. And I'm like, "We have to do this. Fuck it, I won't use a PA." So we played four songs. I didn't have a microphone. I made the best of it had a good time. Ceremony was like, "Okay, we're gonna hop on and play." Everyone gives each other their shit, Ceremony hops on and plays. It's awesome as hell, kids start dispersing - shows over - kids are fucking leaving, like walking off the bridge.

It went from being 200 kids to like 40 kids and, as people are leaving, the drums are literally in pieces, amps are taken apart, the generator is dismantled, and some random comes up and says, "Hey, Negative Approach said they will come down here and play." Everything's already taken apart and everyone's on their way home already. We're fucking beat. We don't know those guys. How truthful is this scenario even? Like,

“Hey fucking Metallica will come down the street and play right?” Yeah, that would be cool but it’s like, sorry, even the dudes in Ceremony were out of there. But that doesn’t get talked about. Everyone equally agreed, like, “No, we’re done, we’re out of here. I’m sorry.”

And just one kid overhears it and has to be the star of the messageboard and be like “Touché Amore wouldn’t let Negative Approach play.” It’s like, yeah, people think that we stood there with our fucking fists at our hips and were like, “No, we not only don’t like Negative Approach, we will not let anyone have fun.” Fuck you, that is not who we are. If everyone were right there we would say okay. Like, if the kids were all still there and everybody was psyched, it probably would have happened. But that’s how the internet works.

Joe Keller

The Ergs!

Loren Green, November 2008

News of The Ergs! breakup sent many a punk-lover reaching for the Kleenex. But thankfully the band decided to commit themselves to one final release and one final tour. Scene Point Blank spoke with bassist Joe Keller about their band's farewell and what we can expect from them in the near future.

Scene Point Blank: First off, a bunch of The Fest questions: How many have you played? What keeps you coming back?

Joe Keller: This year will be our fourth year playing The Fest. They kept asking us to play and hey, who are we not to oblige? I don't know anyone in a punk band who wouldn't want to play in front of a packed crowd of drunken idiots. Well, anyone minus some straightedge holdovers, at least. People are still sXe, right?

Scene Point Blank: What's more fun: playing The Fest or seeing other bands and hanging out?

Joe Keller: Well, it all sort of overlaps. You're hanging out with your friends while you are playing or watching other bands. Seeing everyone I know from across the country is probably my favorite part, but I wouldn't downplay the viewing of bands at all. The Fest always has the best lineup - I watch more good bands at The Fest than any other punk festival.

Scene Point Blank: Do you have any say in when or where you perform or do you just show up and let the organizers handle it?

Joe Keller: Nah, Tony (who runs the Fest) just tells us where and when and then I make travel arrangements.

Scene Point Blank: Do the bands get complimentary hotel rooms or anything like that?

Joe Keller: No, we don't at least.

Scene Point Blank: What other bands are you excited to see?

Joe Keller: I still have to sit down and go over the schedule with a highlighter like a nerd, but I know I am going to catch my usual Fest favorites like Dillinger Four, Vena Cava, Lemuria, The Measure [SA], Hot New Mexicans, Shark Pants, Paul Baribeau and The 'Waste. The three bands I plan on catching that I have never seen before are Leatherface, Future Virgins, and Gordon Gano's Army. I'm pretty excited overall.

Scene Point Blank: Leatherface is great. I saw them at a convergence of two tours that had Avail, Hot Water Music, D4, and a few others in maybe 2000 and had no idea who they were at the time. They totally won me over that night.

Joe Keller: My first exposure to them was their split with Hot Water Music. I'm a sucker for good lyrics and gravelly vocals.

Scene Point Blank: As a Fest veteran, do you hit the point where it feels okay to miss a show because you've seen the band the last two years? Last year was my first Fest and I'm still trying to figure out how to prioritize my schedule.

Joe Keller: I just try to maximize the number of good bands I can see. Of course bands I've never seen before get preference, but usually it's not too bad for me to come up with a schedule I can live with. Although, last year I had to make the choice between The Figgs and The Marked Men; that was a tough one.

Scene Point Blank: I've already done the nerd with a highlighter thing. You're up against Whiskey & Co and Tiltwheel, among others. Is there any friendly rivalry that goes on when there are eight stages sharing timeslots?

Joe Keller: No, it's mainly just a bummer when you're up against your friends because you know you'd like to be watching them and they'd like to be watching you. I am saddened by the fact that a probably shirtless Davey Tiltwheel will not be up front singing along during our set.

Scene Point Blank: I saw you with Hunchback a few months ago (in Minneapolis). Now both bands are calling it quits. Were things planned this way or is it just a coincidence?

Joe Keller: It's just a coincidence. Both bands have had good runs and both are breaking up for different reasons. Band break ups tend to be good for punk scenes, in general, in my opinion. The members go back into the general population and start new bands with different people. It keeps the tonal gene pool from getting too shallow and stale.

Scene Point Blank: Mike played in all three bands that night. Did he do that the whole tour?

Joe Keller: No, he only played drums in Hunchback for the last week of the tour. The Used Kids only played a couple of shows with us - Milwaukee and Minneapolis. So Mike only had to do a triathlon for two nights.

Scene Point Blank: Emotionally, how does it feel to be doing an official last tour? Is it draining to treat each city as a sendoff?

Joe Keller: To me, they just feel like regular shows only the audience is a little more attentive and amped. It's probably the last chance they're going to get to yell at us to play "Pool Pass." All of the shows we've done since announcing our impending dissolution do have sort of a bucket-list feel to them, but I just keep telling myself: this is the band's last run, not mine. This is not the last time I will see all these people (especially if I keep going to The Fest.) It's not the last time I'm going to see Portland or Baltimore.

Scene Point Blank: They'll probably still be yelling at your next band to play these songs too. Would you like to take an official stance on that prospect right now?

Joe Keller: There will probably be no "Pool Pass" at The Fest, but stranger things have come to pass so who knows.

Scene Point Blank: Have you had any embarrassing emotional moments on the tour?

Joe Keller: No, I try to keep things lighthearted. I suppose it's not really dark humor because, again, it's only our band that's moribund, not any of us personally, but I try to riff on our break up on the mic during our set and in the van in private. It is only a band, after all.

Scene Point Blank: How did you get involved in the Kid Dynamite tribute? How did you pick your song?

Joe Keller: The folks putting it together emailed us about it. Mike picked “Fuckuturn,” I believe. I think he picked it so he could do that sweet snare roll in the beginning of the song.

Scene Point Blank: Is anything planned after The Ergs!?

Joe Keller: I’m sure in time all three of us will be in new active bands again. Mike is already in The Measure [SA], Used Kids, and what was once only his side project, Psyched to Die. I’m holding out for a really sweet gig – hopefully Ted Leo or the Reigning Sound is looking for a new bass player in the next couple of months. Greg Cartwright, get in touch with me.

Scene Point Blank: Why the exclamation point? I think of Airplane! everytime I see the band’s name.

Joe Keller: Y’know, I was against the exclamation point, but after somebody gets a tattoo of it in reference to your band, what are you going to do? I don’t want to be responsible for any laser removal surgery.

Scene Point Blank: Where is this tattoo you speak of? It’s not anywhere unmentionable?

Joe Keller: A lot of people have one now. It’s usually a legs-or-arms sort of tattoo. I don’t know of any Ergs! neck tattoos thus far, but if Fid from The Measure ever gets the urge to go for Ergs! tat numero dos, you might see it happen.

Scene Point Blank: Thanks for your time and good luck.

Joe Keller: And the same to you, sir!

Jeffrey Eaton

Modern Life Is War

Scottie Blozie, June 2011

January of two thousand four: I'm weeks away from starting the spring semester of my sophomore year. By the end of February I must declare a major, thus signing a contract that will theoretically determine the rest of my life. Yes, I can change majors; I can even drop out altogether but with each decision comes its own stigma. I was born suburban middle class where it's common to become tracked into a life that leads from school to college to career, something I never wanted but couldn't find an exit from.

Hardcore was the only escape I had but even it couldn't quite articulate my feelings, though neither could I. It had its anger and energy but it was always general, never touching on the specific fears and troubles I had as an American youth.

Bane, the hardcore juggernauts of the time, had a date at the now defunct club CBGB's. As a fan of both the band and punk history I decided to go if only to temporarily forget all the growing up I'd have to do in the coming months. By the evening's midpoint I pace the club back and forth, restless from anticipation and from the responsibility I would have upon returning home. Close to 9:00 PM five gentlemen dressed in black took the stage, collected and humble, while their singer announced, "Hi, we're Modern Life is War."

From that evening I spent the next four years punching holes in walls, driving around rural back roads at 2:00 AM, drinking myself into a stupor, and a myriad of other activities that attempted to help me both hide from and understand the current state of my life. Modern Life is War, a band from rural Iowa, was the soundtrack to those nights. They were a band that said everything I ever felt. I told my friend that's Modern Life is War's sophomore album, *Witness*, was the album I'd been waiting my whole life to hear.

On April 6th at the Knitting Factory in New York City, Modern Life is War gave their final NYC performance on their final tour as a band. Just prior to the door time, I had dinner with vocalist Jeffrey Eaton, discussing everything that led up to their final days as a band.

Scene Point Blank: Okay so you've been out for about a week and half now?

Jeff Eaton: Yeah.

Scene Point Blank: How has it been so far?

Jeff Eaton: It's been really good thus far. I feel like the people who come out care, and the people that lost us somewhere along the way, the ones who decided we're not cool or not their thing or whatever, they didn't. And I want that. I mean there are exceptions but that's all I wanted out of this tour. I wish there was a way to deter people who didn't really care and came just because it's the final shows. There are people who want to see other bands, most of which we tried to hand pick. Some of them we've played with and some are friends of ours. The crowds have been anywhere from forty in Milwaukee to three-hundred-and-thirty tonight in New York. It's kind of all over the place, but it's fun and it's just really good to play without having anything else to worry about. We're not trying to become a bigger band and we're not worried about money or promoting a record and becoming a bigger band. It's just fun to play with nothing in the future; it just feels real pure compared to other tours.

Scene Point Blank: That's always a natural feeling, playing just to play, but there's other things to think about like paying back printing costs and gas and everything else that comes along with touring. I think a lot of fans never take that into consideration.

Jeff Eaton: Exactly, and that's a big part of the reason that we're not going to be a band anymore.

Scene Point Blank: What, thus far, has been a high point of these shows?

Jeff Eaton: The high point of the tour so far was in Detroit. We played refuge skate shop and the PA completely shit out right when we got on. That's the kind of thing that frustrated me because I don't have drums or a guitar or an amp. That's my instrument and that's part of our band and I generally get real pissed off when it happens. So I put the microphone down and yell out, "There's no PA and there's no microphones. Scream every word you know. We're Modern Life is War." All the lyrics were audible because so many people knew the words. It was just awesome. I

was circle pitting with people, running around and having fun. It was so free; it was an instance where we knew that this was the difference between Modern Life is War and so much of the other music out there. We can do something like that; there would be bands that would refuse to do it and there are crowds that would refuse to do it. It was just one of those times where we knew that we were something special like we should be. It was amazing.

Scene Point Blank: Bringing it back a little bit, you said that some shows had forty people and some had hundreds. That doesn't sound like it was too different from your normal touring pattern. Do you think kids were coming out specifically for the reason that it was your last tour?

Jeff Eaton: I think they are. I believe the crowds have been a little bigger than normal, maybe not by a long shot, but we definitely had a point where I felt like we were being taken for granted. I understand that because it's hard to get out to a show with money, work, or other obligations. I don't want to complain about that in any way, but at one point I felt like we were touring so much and we'd been around for five years that a lot of people were saying, "I'll see them next time." And if they're worn out or having a bad day maybe they will kind of hang out in the back or something. That didn't offend me but it's hard to deal with. The nice thing about this tour is that it seems like everyone who wants to be there is making an effort to come out. And when they're there, they are very present.

Scene Point Blank: Present in the sense that they're going off more so than other occasions?

Jeff Eaton: Yeah, and they're want to make sure they say hi and tell us the song they want to hear. They want to make sure they tell us what they wanted to tell us, the whole thing. And I like that; I like that sense that people feel like it's important or something. That's what this tour has been.

Scene Point Blank: Going back to the idea of the crowd: another Midwestern band, The Lawrence Arms, said that they may not have a large number of fans, but their crowd is deeply passionate about their band. You feel the same is true for Modern Life is War?

Jeff Eaton: Definitely. I think that's always been a thing with us. I think

there was time when I was starting to feel that the emotion was starting to get lost a little bit. I know certain nights will always lack, but I felt it happening more so than before. But I really do feel like that, we've become a band that people really don't care for or really really love.

Scene Point Blank: I noticed that about your band. People either got it or they didn't. They went ape shit or didn't give a shit.

Jeff Eaton: Right, and I understand why we're that kind of band and I love it. I love that about us. I know that all of us as individuals in the band would be really bothered if we were one of those bands who are casual and people would think, "Well they're on this label and they play this kind of music, let's go watch them I guess. They have cool t-shirts; we'll make an appearance." We couldn't have done that; we wouldn't have enjoyed ourselves. I think that as a band we couldn't have written music to do that. We polarized people while we were writing those songs, while we were writing those lyrics.

Scene Point Blank: In another interview you said, "I think there is something that is not quite right about the way Modern Life is War sounds. We weren't purely anything. Different ideas and emotions and identities were always playing tug of war." You can hear that if you listen close enough. You mentioned it frustrated you, perhaps not having a definitive "sound" but wouldn't that almost embody the band perfectly? Were you happy with that sound? It was almost unstable.

Jeff Eaton: That is what is either great or horrible about Modern Life is War. We're not quite right, the records we made and the way they sound. They way the lyrics are written and the way we are as people. Everything. Nothing was ever quite right and we were always trying to get it right. Everyone in the band is so stubborn and no one would give an inch while tugging. That thing in the middle was Modern Life is War and that's what it was.

Scene Point Blank: Were you happy with it?

Jeff Eaton: I'm really happy with it; that's what I love about it. All along I hated it and now I can look at it and appreciate it and say, "Yes, that's why people liked us. That's why we had success and that's why Modern Life is War was what it was."

Scene Point Blank: When *Witness* came out you almost wanted to quit the band because you were aiming for a more traditional punk sound: short, fast, loud. And it wasn't, it had its fast parts but it's mostly mid-tempo. Why didn't you?

Jeff Eaton: My big thing with *Witness* was when that was starting to be written - my time line might be a little messed up - we started to write it when I was finishing school and then I moved to Minneapolis, I was coming home every other weekend and the band was working every weekend and they would say okay we have this. Songs like "Marshalltown" and "Hair-raising Accounts of Restless Ghosts," and even to an extent "Young Man Blues," I just said, "Don't misunderstand me, I think you're making really cool music, but I can't sing to a five and half minute song that's slow and dramatic. My voice is horrible, I don't have a big metal scream nor can I hit notes. I'm out of my element, I'm sorry but I'll try." At one point I quit and I wrote a few lyrics, like the song I'm not ready I wrote because I thought the band was done. We had a Euro tour planned and I was going to do it and then be done and the guys would find another singer. Then we go into Europe and the first night the old bass player Chris and I went out drinking right away. We got super wasted and super lost and Chris convinced me to stay in the band saying, "We have to do this, we have to make this record. You're the singer of this band. That's the way it is." They had already practiced with another person once. I was frustrated all the way through, trying to write lyrics on the way to Salem [home of God City Studios where *Witness* was recorded]. I was trying to write lyrics while everyone else was doing the tracking; I was trying to write lyrics when I was doing my tracks. Stuff was just coming out of me. I wasn't sleeping or eating really, I felt like it was a disjointed mess and I was just trying to get through the process of the album that was going to ruin our band.

Scene Point Blank: So how would you compare that to *Midnight in America*? To me it seems like the most consistently fast Modern Life is War album. It's the most "punk" of the albums.

Jeff Eaton: The thing *Midnight in America* was that it was such a hard time during *Witness* for everyone, personally and band wise. We all said that we'd never do that again. No one was happy; no one got along. The process of writing the music, even for those guys without me around, was miserable. Making a record isn't worth a year of that, at all. Matt left and

we replaced him with Harm. Chris left and we got Tim.

That was the only record we wrote in the summer time. It was the record we got our own practice space for. I took my stereo and all my vinyl down there. It was in the factory district of Marshalltown, a warehouse with a little room. We had the whole thing to ourselves so we'd just hang out down there and drink beer. Having Harm in the band really lightened up the atmosphere; he isn't as heavy as a person as Matt is.

Scene Point Blank: You mean heavy as in serious?

Jeff Eaton: Yeah. The original lineup: Matt, John, Tyler, Chris and me; I love them all to death but we're all really stubborn and just inside our own minds a lot. We've all known each other forever, which was good, but also really tense. Adding Harm and Tim while also not writing a record in the winter for once really made the atmosphere lighter. We thought, "Let's just have fun and write a really kick ass record."

Scene Point Blank: Now I missed a lot of the press right at the release of the album, I actually got brain trauma, so I was out of it for a while, but I did get the album but couldn't listen to it until a month or two later. It seems like it's a punk rock summer album. Be young, stupid, and have fun.

Jeff Eaton: It's funny that you say that because that's what I told the band. "I don't want to write another record that you listen when your dog died and you're home on a snowy Tuesday night and you want to kill yourself. I want to write a record that you and your friends can pop in on Saturday night and just drive around in your car with nothing to do." I think a lot of people were surprised by that or resented the record for that reason.

Scene Point Blank: That was me. I wrote it off but recently I kept listening to it, and because I'm in that situation now, it's a good record for the summer. I don't have school so I work and have fun, drinking forties and being dumb.

Jeff Eaton: Another thing about it is that at point I felt like I said enough about the inner workings of my mind and the way I personally saw the world. I said I'm not doing that, and yes there is a little bit of that in there, it's an instinct, but it's not the focus. That's the thing I'm really proud about; I was able to write an album of lyrics that weren't steeped

in depression and mental conflict, which is something I really wanted to do. I got to write a song about my dad [Motorcycle Boy Reigns], one about Jean Seberg; I got to do Stagger Lee. I'm really proud of it.

Scene Point Blank: You're first show was in Tyler's basement right?

Jeff Eaton: Yeah.

Scene Point Blank: Okay, from that that show to the last show how do you think you've changed?

Jeff Eaton: Me personally, or the band as a whole?

Scene Point Blank: Both. Start with you personally.

Jeff Eaton: One thing is that I feel like I get just as excited.

Scene Point Blank: Playing a show or excited about the band in general, everything about it?

Jeff Eaton: About playing, about coming to New York, playing a skate shop or a new place. I don't feel like I've become jaded or bitter about anything. But I've also learned a lot; I was very naïve when we first started the band because I didn't know people talk to you because you were in a band. It sounds stupid to say because I wasn't that young. That wasn't in the picture for me. I didn't understand it.

Scene Point Blank: You didn't understand it or you just didn't think about it?

Jeff Eaton: I guess I just didn't think about it. I learned that there are people out there who are like leeches and there are people out there who don't want to talk to you. There are people who want to talk to you because they want to be seen talking to you. I learned a lot about the music industry, pretty much all bad things. There are some good people that we've been fortunate enough to work with. I learned a lot about what it's like to live in other places and what people's lives are like. I learned a lot about myself. My eyes have been opened to a lot of things but I didn't want to be this guy who felt like a veteran who's seen it all. I think it's a horrible attitude.

Scene Point Blank: What about the band?

Jeff Eaton: I think we went on a musical journey of some sort, as corny as it sounds. I think we discovered new ways to write songs and make new sounds, ways to improve ideas we have and then act on them. The lyrics, I think, have always been going in a direction where they're trying to get somewhere. Along the way it took on a life of its own where Modern Life is War was something unlike what the five of us were. Other than that I think the spirit of the band was the same from when we started.

Scene Point Blank: You played the last two Explosion shows; did you feel the atmosphere of the live setting changes when the band or the crowd understands this may never happen again? Do you give it a different kind of energy?

Jeff Eaton: I see this as being the ideal vibe. The best nights are where things click into place between the crowd and the band and everyone really needs that music. I think everyone almost forces themselves into that mindset when it's coming down to the end like this. In some ways you could say that it's not pure, but I think it is. I cannot wait to play as hard as I can for people and the kids think, "This is the last time, we gotta go off." I don't think it's a different situation but it's ideal.

Scene Point Blank: Over the last few years bands have made more of a practice of reuniting; Last night CIV did a reunion and Earth Crisis is on the road now doing another reunion. What are your thoughts on reunion shows? Do you think Marshalltown will really be the last show for Modern Life is War?

Jeff Eaton: I think it's situational. I can't speak for those people; maybe it's for the passion and the songs they miss so much. I can't say that is necessarily true. From my perspective it might be for the money, and that does cheapen the experience. Those bands belong in a time and a place and they should be left there. Holding On is playing our last show and when they played our first show they were a big inspirational factor for me to do this band. They're getting back together because they love us and they're proud of us. They're not going to make much money. I called them and asked them and I'm really glad they're doing this for us. Again it really depends on the situation.

I feel really strong that April 26th will be the last Modern Life is War show and I think everyone in the band feels the same. One reason I ended the band is that I felt like we did what we needed to do and we had a time and place which is no longer there. I don't see us ever playing again and I could easily eat my words, but right now I'm confident.

Scene Point Blank: You said you said what you have to say and did what you have to do; right before *Midnight in America* was released you switched from Deathwish to Equal Vision saying that you believed you could reach a larger audience with the switch. Do you think you did that? Do you think you accomplished what you wanted to do?

Jeff Eaton: I think so. I never felt too comfortable on Deathwish even though I was really excited moving to that label. It seemed that people felt it reflected back on us as a band more than we wanted it to.

Scene Point Blank: Your band mentality?

Jeff Eaton: Right, people were thinking, "You're a Deathwish band." I didn't want that to mean anything. I wanted it to mean they happened to put out our record and that's all. We got lumped in with all these other Deathwish bands and our target audience became assumed. I hated that. I wanted to say that our target audience is anyone who happens to hear us and likes what we do. Looking back on it, and I didn't think of this at the time, it's almost like a symbolic thing to me. We said, "Modern Life is War does not belong to anyone. It doesn't belong to hardcore or Deathwish or anything." We're just a band and we play music. The scene we came up in did everything for us. I love the scene we came up in for so many reasons. There are reasons I don't like it but the same is true for anything. I'm glad we made the move and I'm glad there are kids in the hardcore scene with a stick up their ass about it, thinking a label ruined our band. If that has anything to do with the way you think about us or how you feel about our music, then it's good you know that we don't care about those things. I want to make it clear that those things don't matter to us.

Scene Point Blank: It's interesting when you talk about label association because in the early nineties labels had sounds equated with them, there were Lookout sounding bands or Fat and Epitaph sounding bands, but if you think about one that endured, it was Jawbreaker. And they were

always on these obscure labels until their last album. It had nothing to do with their sound. What were some of things you didn't expect to happen but did as a result of *Modern Life is War*? Where did it take you that you didn't necessarily expect to go?

Jeff Eaton: If we're talking from the get go; I didn't expect anything. I thought that we going to go out on a first tour and people would take a look at us and think, "These guys don't belong here. They're not this enough or they're not that enough." We thought we'd tour and just go back home. I liked some of the music going on but I wasn't really aware of the scene. I'd never been to an actual hardcore show. I've been to shows in Iowa, but we didn't have a hardcore scene. There was never a show where the line-up was exclusively hardcore bands. I didn't know what to expect from that and thought we'd get shut down; I didn't anticipate everything going the way it did. It's still shocking to this day.

Scene Point Blank: I missed a lot of the initial press and impact of *Midnight in America* due to medical reasons but I remember you did some touring and I was going down to Florida to cover The Fest and the day of you cancelled the show. From there the rest of the tour was cancelled and things were quiet until the news broke that the band was breaking up. I recall at the time of The Fest, a family member had become ill; did that event have anything to do with the band's conclusion?

Jeff Eaton: Those tours did; it wasn't anything specific that happened on those tours. It was a point where money was becoming a real stress and we did a lot of touring right then. We didn't make it to The Fest because my grandmother became ill and had a few days to live. I had to get home right then. At that time Harm said, "I love you guys and I'm having a good time but I miss my friends and my girl; I miss my family and I don't know what's going on with the band right now so I going home." Tim was planning on going back to Jersey after that tour because he couldn't take living in Iowa anymore. At that point it was just John, Tyler, and I. The record had just come out and we toured all of America on it and we felt proud of it but didn't have any kind of vision as to what the next album would be. I don't want to say things fell apart, but we all had the feeling that this would be it.

Scene Point Blank: My friends asked me how I felt upon hearing the news

of your break up because I said *Witness* was the album I'd waited my entire life to hear. I told them I was glad and it marked the end of an era. They still don't understand. Do you think the nature of punk, maybe hardcore punk to be specific, has something to do with brevity; the idea of short, fast, loud?

Jeff Eaton: There is so much that goes into it: anger, desire, power, and energy. Every thing. It's a dense, heavy, moving thing that inevitably becomes watered down if it goes on too long. It's becomes a money thing or a ghost of itself. It becomes a job. I knew we were there and rather than doing a last Euro tour or a last Japan tour I said, "One more tour, three weeks long, last show in Marshalltown and we're done." I started to feel that really strongly.

Scene Point Blank: Do any of the other members have bands lined up?

Jeff Eaton: I know everyone is going to do more music, but I think they're still figuring out the sound.

Scene Point Blank: I'm just making this conclusion now but I read "On the Road" after my first year of college, after a drastic life change and it was something I needed to hear, but then you live that lifestyle and it seems romanticized. It's not that it sucks, but you see the hardships. It wasn't only the beats but they get the notoriety for it, them and Bukowski. Being in a band and having read those authors do you think they romanticized it or the reader romanticize it or perhaps the whole notion in general?

Jeff Eaton: I think the authors romanticized it.

Scene Point Blank: Did you ever read *Big Sur*?

Jeff Eaton: Yeah.

Scene Point Blank: You see Kerouac in those novels and he's drastically different. In the end there he is a fucking mess. Genius but damaged, which is something you touch on in your lyrics. You can appreciate it but to really understand their lives you have to get a whole new understanding of beauty.

Jeff Eaton: You have to understand that there is a huge price to pay. I

think the authors knew they were romanticizing but they also knew there was a heavy tag that comes along with creating that body of work. There is a book by William Gaddis called “The Recognitions” with a quote that’s amazing. “What’s left of a man after the work is done but human shambles that fell to the ground.” When I look back at the band sometimes I wish never did an interview. People will come to you wanting more. What’s there is there; you’re not going to get anything deeper or more meaningful out of me. You do the work and just a regular person caught up with just as much as everyone else who love the band. I don’t have a better way of how to cope with those things. I’m not any better than anyone who has the problem; the work is the work and I’m just as big of a mess. I’m just as much a hero or a piece of shit as everyone else. I don’t know how to put it into words, but don’t look to those people for anything more than what they already gave you. They have nothing more to offer you.

Scene Point Blank: The line I always think of when I think about Modern Life is War because it says something I feel constantly. “I’m all homesick for endless, broken white lines.” Do you think you’ll always be hungry for the road?

Jeff Eaton: That’s the scariest thing for me right now, ending this band. I don’t feel like I can hold down a job or advance within. I don’t even think I could compete for a good job.

Scene Point Blank: Don’t think you could or don’t care?

Jeff Eaton: I know I could do it, but I don’t care enough to do it. Even if I could convince myself, it’s only going to last so long. At some point I’m going to freak out. Right now I don’t have any money, I’m in the red. I have to get a job and figure out what to do with my life. Modern Life is War is my ticket to go around the world, without losing too much money and I’m throwing that in the garbage now. I’m scared to death because I know I’m not ready to live a normal life, whatever that means. I have to start scheming and planning because I can’t do that long-term life right now. I still feel that way exactly and it sucks.

§

Section three

The guest columns

Scene Point Blank isn't a closed shop: we welcome writing from a variety of guest contributors. Musicians, record label owners, filmmakers, photographers and other irregulars have offered up their thoughts on our world for the past ten years.

In this section, we include a brief highlight of the most interesting and amusing writing by a couple of our better-known contributors. We're very grateful to all of them for allowing us to use their contributions in this book.

Blag Dahlia (the Dwarves)

"Prohibition"

August 2012

You're drunk and you stink and you love me. Must you tell me with your frothy lips half an inch from my nose, though? It smells like you ate a bag of shit dipped in tequila. And because you're drunk I have to counteract the kindness and sincerity of your statement with the converse: I love you, ya fucking asshole! I love you, ya stupid faggot! I love you, but you guys suck donkey dick!

I haven't been drunk since the mid-'90s when I wandered into the New Orleans home of a young couple and puked on their living room rug on the way into their bedroom. Fortunately, they weren't armed and guided me back to the street. Eventually, my guitar player found me and when he was done laughing, put me to bed. I felt for weeks like I had been poisoned and never had any desire to drink again.

I didn't even remember the couple until years later when reading about Robert Downey, Jr. pulling a similar stunt in Los Angeles. It came back to me in a flood of revulsion. Now don't get me wrong, I love to get fucked up, always have. Marijuana is my personal fave, but coke, heroin, pills, ecstasy, LSD, DMT, PCP, I've done them all. And I doubt I've been too brilliant on any of them.

But nothing matches the raw stupidity of a drunk. People on acid make inane observations. People on heroin rifle through handbags and sofa cushions, looking for spare change. People on weed talk about how stoned they got this other time they got stoned. None of it really passes for genius level activity.

But drunks take the cake in the annoyance sweepstakes, hands down. Every idiot that ever wanted to fight me was drunk. Every swerving, passing, honking car accident waiting to happen had a drunk behind the wheel. Every jerk off in the late-night drive thru that took fifteen minutes to order fries and a root beer was drunk.

I make my living in nightclubs and nothing makes the end of the night go slower than a drunk who thinks they're amusing. They never are. And, usually, they own the nightclub so I have to pretend that they are until I get paid.

That's why I'm starting an online petition to reinstate the 18th

Amendment to the United States Constitution, commonly known as “Prohibition.” If this works, no longer will I be subjected to slobbering buffoons insulting my band and your intelligence. No longer will I endure the stupid observations, the obvious humor, the insufferable stench of alcohol as it courses through a moron’s bloated veins.

I’ll be free at last of the inebriated females who knock at the door of my hotel room at all hours of the night demanding three-way sex with me and their friends, I’ll be free of the...

Wait a minute, perhaps I’ve been a bit hasty here. It is summertime after all. Alcohol sales help boost the economy. Booze is one of our only exports. And doctors have found that wine has lots of anti-oxidants, beer assists in white blood cell maintenance, and a nice aperitif can aid in digestion.

Ladies, have a drink on me!

BLAG DAHLIA - Rock Legend

Blag Dahlia sings for the Dwarves (www.thedwarves.com)
and podcasts at RadioLikeYouWant.com

Eddie Spaghetti (Supersuckers)

"Remember That One Time...?"

A life lived and lessons learned by Eddie Spaghetti

June 2013

(Some names have been changed to protect the not-so-innocent)

This happened in the mid-nineties, 1995 to be exact. It was my birthday, so it was March and we were in Austin, TX working on our third record for Sub Pop Records, the ill-fated *Sacrilicious*. I say ill-fated not because it was a bad record but because it was the record that put us so far in the hole with Sub Pop, financially speaking, that we are still paying that debt back today.

Here's what happened...

We had finished our second record for them, *La Mano Cornuda* (Spanish for "The Horned Hand") and I remember going up to the offices and asking them what the plan was to get that record heard. It had a couple of really great—and what I considered to be radio friendly—tracks on it and I wanted to hear their plan for getting the maximum exposure out of it. They essentially told me that the record was dead and we better get to work on the next one. "Punk rock just isn't happening on the radio right now," was what they said.

And then along came this little band called Green Day and everything changed.

Their way of making up the huge dropped ball they on *La Mano* was to put an assload of money into our next record. We were a lock to become the next Green Day: we had the right attitude, the right songs, and the right sound. All we had to do was let the world know that we are here and, boom! just like that, another star is born. If it were only that easy. Although, at the time it certainly seemed possible, if not down right likely, that it would work. Sub Pop was enjoying a huge profit from Nirvana at the time and they definitely had the money to spend, so it stood to reason that if they just threw their money down the right pipes, everything would turn up rosy for them and for us.

The budget took us out of town to record for the first time and we were excited to work with a "real" producer too, (although, our choice for a "real" producer was the guitar player for the *Butthole Surfers*, so, there's

that...) and it was going to be fun spending close to a month in Austin, TX just to make a record.

It was fun, and productive too. That period saw some of the best songs of our career. "Doublewide," "Bad, Bad, Bad," and the "hit" single, "Born With A Tail" were all recorded during that session. We got to make a couple of expensive videos and see our record cover on the side of the Tower Records' building on Sunset Strip in Hollywood. We were put in a tour bus for the first time and it seemed as if things were really going to start happening for us. I'm getting ahead of myself though.

Our manager at the time, Mr. Danny Hand of American Handstand Productions, was simultaneously working with a big-shot producer in Houston. A real rich fella who worked with a lot of cool country artists. Guys like Waylon Jennings and Billy Joe Shaver who we totally loved and respected. They were putting together a compilation record called Twisted Willie, a tribute to the amazing Mr. Willie Nelson that totally stands the test of time as a great record today. Our contribution to it was a version of "Bloody Mary Morning" and the real coup was that Danny and this fella got Willie Nelson into the studio to record the song with us! We couldn't believe that that was really going to happen. Well, it did. It was on the last day of tracking, my birthday, March 16th and we were kind of using the studio for our own selfish benefit by recording this song that was never going to be put on the record we were making for Sub Pop. All was forgiven however when Willie walked in.

He came in with his guitar, the famous Trigger, in one hand and about four or five Lone Star cans of beer dangling in his other and an unlit joint in the corner of his mouth that didn't stay unlit for long. The hard and solid rule about "no smoking in the studio" was about to be put to rest for the evening. As soon as he'd get one lit and passed around, another seemed to magically appear. It was a never ending chain of joints! I'm surprised we got anything done at all because we were so ferociously stoned, but the track got recorded and it actually sounded pretty fantastic at the end of the day. He was only there for about an hour and-a-half, but it was the best hour and-a-half of my young life up to that moment.

We were so excited that we had just recorded with Willie fucking Nelson that we decided to go out and celebrate in downtown Austin. South by South West was going on at the time, so we all wanted to go down to our favorite nightclub, Emo's, to see who was playing (and maybe brag a little bit about what we had just done). So we grabbed some beers and headed on

down. For some reason we were under the impression that it was legal to walk around in Texas with an open container of alcohol. It seemed to us that we had seen it done and had done it ourselves numerous times, so it came as a bit of a shock when the cop stopped us in the parking lot.

"Whattaya got there, son?" He asked.

"It's called a beer. Ever heard of it? They're quite delicious," I smugly retorted.

"Smart ass, eh? Well, why don't you come with me?"

"Because I don't want to. We're just going around the corner to see some bands play."

"Not anymore, you're not. You're coming with me down to the station house."

"But it's my birthday and I just finished recording with Willie Nelson!!" I cried, panic starting to creep into my smug attitude as he took the beer from my hand, spun me around and cuffed me on the spot.

"Just how stupid do you think I am?" He replied. "I've been dealing with assholes like you all week long. You're just another punk out here pretending to be somebody." He then walked me a whole block and a half to the police station where I was put in a holding cell with a bunch of other quality individuals.

"It's my birthday! I just recorded with Willie Nelson!! You're ruining the greatest night of my life!!!" I was beyond livid and most of all, I was worried that I might actually have to spend the night in jail after having had the best day ever. A couple of the guys in the holding cell with me seemed a little bit too interested in my connection with Willie, which at that time amounted to about an hour and a half's worth—not nearly enough to claim any great friendship with the man, so I clammed up about my accomplishment and began to settle in to what was going to be a long night, I was sure.

Well, a couple of hours later I heard my name called and an officer appeared at the cell door telling me that I had some "good friends" out here and that I was being let loose. Turns out that one of the presidents of Sub Pop, Bruce Mavitt, was in town for SXSW and he heard about my predicament and bailed me out. Bruce was always our guy at the label. He was the one we would go to whenever we needed something and he was always there for us. He believed in us from the get-go and it was probably his idea to spend the ridiculous amount of money on Sacrilegious, although I'm pretty sure bail money wasn't in the projected budget. Nonetheless, it

turned out to be a recoupable expense that we are probably still paying for to this day.

So I got out and there was Bruce and Danny and Dan Colton all waiting for me.

"You happy now? You little smart-ass?" Danny said. I hugged them all and thanked them for getting me out of there.

"Let's go get a beer. Only this time, let's drink it inside," Colton said.

"Agreed! That's something I don't want to experience again anytime soon."

"How 'bout ever?" said Danny. He was right, I didn't want to be in that situation ever again. Lesson learned: no matter how great you think you are, you're still not above the law. Unless you're Willie Nelson. Then I bet you can do whatever you want.

Eddie Spaghetti

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Section four

The reviews

Our reviews are our bread and butter. Sure, the features may have more lasting power as time takes its course, but for a weekly analysis into what's going on—as well as a perfect stamp of our varying tastes across the staff—just look at our homepage any given week for the array of new material being covered.

Our current staff selected their a few of their favorite SPB pieces, whether it's because it was a great record, a great piece of writing, or a memorable period of his/her life. The reviews included sample all kinds of musical and writing styles, joke-y to serious, tongue-in-cheek to bizarre, and are assembled in alphabetical order. What we didn't include is a modern take on them: do we still feel the same way about our ratings? It doesn't matter. Once published, the score is there for the ages. Writing reviews is a game of no-backsies.

Altar Of Plagues

Mammal

Profound Lore, 2011

Cheryl Prime, June 2011 – 8.5 / 10

Ireland's Altar of Plagues play a style of black metal so atmospheric in nature, that you can't help but be completely taken in by the sounds you're hearing and the thoughts the music conjures in your mind. *Mammal* is only their second full length offering, and whilst *White Tomb* was unquestionably fantastic, this new record is on an entirely different level. Both musically and lyrically. It's been stated in many interviews given by the band and chief lyricist James Kelly that *Mammal* is primarily an album dealing with the concept of death and it's effects. And it's plain to hear that this concept is examined in an extremely personal manner.

First track "Neptune Is Dead" introduces itself with a noise so alien, you can't possibly place it or even recognize it. It's difficult to describe, but it sets up the album perfectly. After a minute or so, the drums kick in. And they certainly kick; the drum sound on this album is incredible, and a real driving force to the whole piece. Vocally, there's deep, gut wrenching agonized howls. You may think that most black metal features lyrics that you have no chance of making out, but when the line "...and still I feel nothing" is roared at you, you can feel every single emotion those words carry.

The most intriguing song on this album is "When The Sun Drowns In The Ocean." This track features a sample of an ancient Irish funerary custom known as a "keening." This practice is best explained on the band's official website (<http://altarofplagues.com/>) and the piece is almost hypnotic in effect, completely in keeping with the lyrical themes and overall tone of the record. The music itself is almost industrial in it's style, lending itself to repetition and again quite mesmerising. It fully captures the tone of the "keening," which makes a reappearance at the end of the song, enfolding the listener into the depths of the despair felt.

The album closer, "All Life Converges To Some Center" is a thirteen minute, unrelenting assault on the ears. Absolutely pounding drums and that Altar of Plagues signature guitar tone combine with vocals torn from the very depths of the soul to bring this album to it's ultimate end. The fading minutes are filled with feedback, white noise and a solitary drum. Beautiful.

Anthrax

Worship Music

Megaforce, 2011

Nathan O'Brien, October 2011 – 9 / 10

The story of how *Worship Music* came to be is longish and a bit complicated—dating back to 2009 in what was essentially a three-way dance for the vocalist spot. Some of the original material was adjusted accordingly or, in most cases, scrapped all together and rewritten, resulting in what is ultimately the best case scenario for long-time Anthrax fans: the return of the most prominent and beloved of former Anthrax lead singers, Joey Belladonna. It's this very reason that, like me, many people are more psyched about a new Anthrax release than they have been in twenty-plus years. Belladonna came back to Anthrax briefly for the outstanding *Spreading the Disease* reunion tour of '05-'07 and again for a series of shows with the Big Four last year, but this is the first time since 1990's *Persistence of Time* that he has actually gone into the studio as a full-time member. And the end result is every bit worth the wait. This may come as a surprise, considering bands that have been around as long as these guys tend to, well, suck. Of the Big Four, Metallica, Megadeth, and even to some extent—and I know this is blasphemous to admit—Slayer, have strayed far from their once former glory, at least in terms of recorded material. However, *Worship Music* sounds exactly like the record that should have happened right after *Persistence*, keeping intact the melodious and groove aspects of that album while packing the punch of its predecessors (*State of Euphoria*, *Among the Living*, and *Spreading the Disease*), all the while free of the paunchiness that often times haunt reunion albums.

The lead single “Fight ‘Em Til You Can’t” is so unmistakably Anthrax—complete with choppy thrash blast beats, shouted gang vocals, and Belladonna wailing about standing your ground amidst a zombie onslaught—it sounds like it could have been picked right off of *Euphoria* or the *I'm the Man* EP. And while the underlying theme of the entire album may or may not be the impending zombie apocalypse (at least in cryptic, metaphorical ways,) which I admit is comical, I wouldn't go grabbing your Jimmy's jam shorts and Judge Dredd t-shirts just yet. For the most part, *Worship Music* is more in line with the serious side of Anthrax first heard

on *Persistence*.

Albeit limited (thankfully), there are some moments of experimentation here as well. “In the End” is a near-seven minute journey through prog, sludge and—thanks to the impeccable vocal range of Belladonna—NWOBHM; thunderously pounding along the way until it reaches an epic power metal finale. And parts of “Crawl” sound oddly familiar to *Angel Dust*-era Faith No More. But at no point during either of these excursions do they grow annoying or any less worthy of a good headbang. Speaking of headbanging...

One of the high points of the album is “Judas Priest.” While it’s unclear if this is actually a tribute to Rob Halford and co., it most certainly is an ode to heavy metal, at least in terms of song-structure. Belladonna’s pitch shifts and howls perfectly match the ebbs and flows of the M-E-T-A-L laid down by the Scott Ian, Charlie Benante, and crew: “I’m bound to, bow down to/I am become Death, destroyer of worlds/A menial place in this infinite swirl...Unleashed is the beast, the worst of the least/From sheer depraved evil like some Judas Priest.” If while listening to this song you don’t plant one foot forward, bend at the knee until your back leg is straight, then proceed to bang your head and play air-guitar, I will personally come to your house, confiscate your Metal Card, and revoke your club membership on the spot.

The slightest drawback on *Worship Music*—just so happens to also be one of its greatest blessings—lies in the production. Don’t get me wrong, the production on this record is far beyond exceptional—allowing drummer Benante and bass-wielder Frank Bello to be properly recognized as very crucial ingredients in the Anthrax recipe. As well, you can hear the white-hot licks literally melting off of (producer) Rob Caggiano’s axe. All of which is mixed awesomely with the heavy chug created by rhythm guitarist Ian. However, at times would-be coarseness is smoothed over to a point well past perfection, leaving something a little less slick to be desired by those of us longing for the raw energy of the thrash records of yore. That is not to say I am disappointed in the least. In fact I played *Worship Music* alongside early albums by Flotsam and Jetsam, Testament, Nuclear Assault, and Death Angel, as well as Anthrax’s contemporaries the Big Four. Not only did it fit perfectly, it stood out as being better.

Baroness

Yellow & Green

Relapse, 2012

Cheryl Prime, July 2012 - 9 / 10

When a band decides (yes, the band, not you and your fanboy mates) to make a little change in their musical approach and try out something new, a couple of things happen. Aforementioned fanboys get up in arms and take to the internet in droves or have the same conversation with different people over and over and over again about how much they hate this new style and that it's not true to the band etc etc.... Or the older fans relish the fact their favourite band has taken a different route this time around and are challenging themselves and preconceptions of their music and will probably fight those who denounce this new path. Or, the new direction is embraced by new fans and the old guard alike and everyone lives happily ever after. Oh. Hang on. That hardly ever happens.

More often than not, there's a fairly even split between the two camps and generally those fanatics will soon see the error of their ways. There's a lot of entitlement in metal nowadays (well, ok, there always has been), but the information age has made it a lot easier for said people to shout about how awful things are without really delving into the reasons behind a shift or experiencing the new material as whole or realising that the band have made a record they wanted to make and not something that pleases you in particular. Bands don't owe you anything, and if they feel like their creative course has ran but they still enjoy making music together, then fuck, let them!

This brings us nicely to the newest **Baroness** record(s), *Yellow & Green*. New songs were premiered and lo and behold, the outcry began. "Oh, it's not what I want to hear, it's awful, it's shit, I can't believe they've done this to me!" Of course you're not going to please everybody but when you look at *Yellow & Green* for what they really are - the musical developments of a band that have already produced two genre defining records, then all will become clear. **Baroness** took quite a substantial amount of time to prepare and release *Yellow & Green* and of course the challenge of a double album is always one to be concerned about, but this band don't do things by halves and have constantly pushed for that extra something.

Here they've produced two astounding full lengths and whilst *Yellow* is a little stronger than *Green*, both hold within their hearts loss, despair, and a twinge of sadness coloured with the hazy warmth of remembrance and the beauty of renewed hope.

Yellow

"Yellow Theme" sets the tone for this particular piece, gentle sadness washes over a peacefully picked introduction and a hidden heartbreak threatens on the edges before a burst of energy and John Baizley's distinctly husky vocal breaks through on "Take My Bones Away." Divine melody colours *Yellow & Green* and the songwriting has truly come to the fore this time around. Baizley sure can sing and holy crap he does, at times it's almost as though he is singing for his very life and damn, it is euphoric. "Little Things" marches with a fiery bombast whilst "Twinkler" dances with beautifully plucked acoustic lines and a curious buzzing sound lays over all with a harmonic gloom. Baroness have clearly matured from the days of *Red Album* and *Blue Record*, the themes of colour giving each work an identity and it could be said that *Yellow* is (possibly) the sound of decay. Whether that's decaying friendships (take heed of the lyrics of "March to the Sea in particular), relationships, connections to people and places. On the flipside, *Green* could be seen as a rebirth and as growth. Clever eh?

"Back Where I Belong" showcases a tight rhythm; Allen Bickle's drums sound sublimely full and the bass crunches on just the right side of heavy with a sly and funky beat hidden behind some incredibly sorrow-filled guitar flourishes and a deeply affecting outro that leads perfectly into the punchy "Sea Lungs." An almost punky riff kicks throughout this track and dare it be said, it's a little Muse-like. If Muse were, y'know, good. Closing our time with *Yellow* is the sweetly melancholic "Eula." Laden with a consummate sadness this track sweeps with rolling drum lines and the vocal harmonies wielded by Baizley and fellow guitarist Peter Adams hit with a powerful force. Fizzing with a rumbling and ominous presence, "Eula" plays out on layers of feedback and distraught distortion.

Green

"Green Theme" is a tad more animated than the previous introductory piece. There's still a forlornness running through it but this serves to bring

a more uplifting tone to proceedings and the break is as wildly heartening as “Yellow Theme” was devastating. “Mtns. (The Crown & Anchor)” twangs with a subtle country vibe and the narrative strength that **Baroness** have grasped forcibly filters through this track with a fuzzy essence that holds a morose knowledge of the end yet somehow still feels as though there’s a redemption in sight.

“Collapse” revels in deep bass riffs and echoing touches of electronic strikes that imbue the track with a shadowy roughness before the stuttering catchiness of “Psalms Alive” rocks into aural pastures new. That country-esque edge pulses throughout the instrumental “Stretchmarker” giving it a bittersweet taste as all the best country and western does and Baroness swerve into new territory with headstrong confidence. It’s magnificent to hear and when “The Line Between” hits with a massive heaviness, the difference is so severe yet somehow completely perfect – summing up the two sides to *Yellow & Green* in one fell swoop.

Final track “If I Forget Thee, Lowcountry” is another instrumental piece that is full of hope and promise of new beginnings. Reflective and pure, the closing moments of *Yellow & Green* are blissful and envelope you in warmth and serenity. There is hope here, there is soul, and there is growth. **Baroness** are testament to the changes that one must go through in order to move forward. *Yellow & Green* is the soundtrack to life.

Botch

Unifying Themes Redux / American Nervoso / We are the Romans (Reissues)

Hydra Head, 2006

Michael Phillips, November 2007 - 9 / 10

How does one measure the influence and impact of a band on music? Sure, you could look at album sales, which in the case of The Beatles is a corollary that works, but then you could see how many albums a band like Godsmack or someone like Kenny Chesney has sold and just throw that idea out the window. Truly, the best way to gauge a band's importance in music is to take a look at the world of music before and after their existence? There are artists like Black Sabbath, The Ramones, and Black Flag, among others, that completely flipped the music world upside-down when they unleashed their sound on the unsuspecting masses. Then again, the first guy to "create" electronica music did the same. Nevertheless, this is how we should find Botch's place in music, something that would have been a hell of a lot harder to do so while the band was still alive and breathing. Though, I'm sure someone was listening to the first Ramones recording and screaming, "This is going to change everything," Oh, and before someone flips out and thinks I'm comparing the impact of The Ramones and Botch, I'm not. I am, however, putting into perspective how Botch changed music, the micro-niche that they called home - hardcore. Botch wasn't the first group to mess with song structures, but they were one of the first bands within hardcore to infuse these circus-like maneuvers on their instruments - fellow cohorts included Coalesce, Deadguy, and Converge. Over the years, as the band matured and its members became more experimental with their instruments, the band's sound began to reach beyond reasonable logic and became something that was awe-inspiring.

Unifying Themes Redux is the first of the Botch releases that was given the reissue treatment; the irony of it all, it's already a reissue. But given the surge in popularity and the availability of the release (or so I am told), its re-re-release makes sense. This release is a compilation of nearly all the early Botch material - what you have here is the band in its most primitive form leading up to their debut full-length, *American*

Nervoso. This compilation contains fan favorites like “God vs. Science,” “Ebb,” and “Frequenting Mass Transit,” an early version of a song that appeared on *We are the Romans*. The majority of these songs are rooted in dissonant hardcore with a slight metal flair. There are the occasional implementations of odd time signatures in the songs, a style that became synonymous with the name Botch over the years. One of my favorite cuts is “Third Part in a Tragedy,” guitarist Dave Knudson’s hammer-pull groove of riffs in the song are great - you can hear their influenced in the likes of bands like Every Time I Die these days.

The album also features two fantastic covers. The first, “The Opera Song” is a cover of “O Fortuna” from Carl Orff’s *Carmina Burana*. The second is “The Lobster Song,” a cover of The B-52’s classic, “Rock Lobster.” As brilliant as this song is recorded, live it was even zanier. As a whole, *Unifying Themes Redux* is a mostly hit but sometimes miss (the varying production levels) compilation of rarities. I wouldn’t suggest this album as starting point, but if you find the band’s other releases to be enjoyable, this can be nice addition to your collection.

After numerous releases in the form of 7”s and compilation appearances, Botch finally sat down and wrote a full-length. The result was *American Nervoso* and the end product showcased a huge progression in the band’s songwriting. Their sound still drew from the well of discordant metal-tinged hardcore, but the sound had been infused with more proficiency and technicality, as well as taking a little off - a sound we know as mathcore these days. “Hutton’s Great Heat Engine” kicks things off and is one of the best set-openers to date that I’ve ever heard. “John Woo” is absolutely crushing - the intensity of the music paired with vocalist Dave Verellen’s screams is music perfection. “Dead for a Minute” mixes in slower riffs and ambient passages, borrowing a page from *Neurosis*, and fuses that with their off-kilter sound. “Thank God for the Worker Bees” sees the band experimenting with electronic elements, foreshadowing the increased use one the band’s final full-length. “Hives” wraps up the album with typical Botch - fantastic guitar riffage, thundering basslines provided by Brian Cook, throaty vocals from Verellen, and pummeling drums of Tim Latona.

Tacked on, in addition to a re-mastering which is barely noticeable, is “Stupid Me,” a song that also appeared on *Unifying Themes Redux*. There is also an extended version of “Spitting Black” and then demo versions of three others songs. These bonuses are a nice treat for a Botch-nerd

like myself, but to others, they maybe seem slightly repetitive. *American Nervoso* may be overshadowed by what followed, but it is a spectacular full-length.

Which brings us to the masterpiece: *We are the Romans*. From start to finish, this album is brilliance. “To Our Friends in the Great White North” opens with its frantic riffings and Verellen’s trademark screams. But the song twists and turns its way through softer and restrained sections, drawing influence from someplace far away from the world of hardcore/metal. “Mondrian was a Liar” echoes back to *American Nervoso* with its thick baselines and truly powerful drums. This song makes me wish I had one of those booming soundsystems so I could just crank it to eleven. “Transitions from Persona to Object” features some of Knudon’s best guitar work. The breakdown in the first half is unreal and the feedback-fed solo toward the end is something I never heard in this style of music prior.

Botch further their experimentation with the subdued sounds of “Swimming the Channel vs. Driving the Chunnel.” The song highlights the bass playing of Cook; simplistic drumming and a basic guitar-line is played while Verellen speaks softly. It’s a whole other world, and yet it works so well. “C. Thomas Howell as the ‘Soul Man’” rips from the get-go; another punishing assault of previously unimaginable riffing; the drumming in the outro to the song is just as phenomenal.

The album serves up one fantastic song after another; going into detail really is almost pointless. So let’s just skip to the final cut, “Man the Ramparts,” which I still think is a great song title. The song is comprised of repetitive sequences of slow and brooding Neurosis-esque segments interspersed with more-typical Botch choruses. The Gregorian-inspired chants that close the album out seal the deal on what is one of the most musical diverse hardcore records. It’s doubtful I’ll ever hear an album as influential as this in my lifetime.

Included in this reissue is a second disc of goodies totaling eleven tracks. The first seven are demo versions of songs from *We are the Romans*. These songs showcase a less glossy version of the band, with the sound falling someplace between the end product and a really good live version. Some of the arrangements of the songs are also different in placement and length, and there is some in-between banter by the guys that makes for a good chuckle. The last four cuts are from a live recording; we get two songs from *We are the Romans*, one from the previous outing, and

“Vietnam” from the band’s posthumous EP, *An Anthology of Dead Ends*.

So there you have it, a trip through the career of Botch. I did my best, but honestly, my words do this band and their recordings little justice. Botch is a band that needs to be listened to. So purchase a copy of each of these recordings, as well as their EP. And you can also purchase their live CD/DVD, *061502*, which was a recording of their final show. No collection should be without Botch.

Unifying Themes Redux: 8.0

American Nervoso: 9.0

We are the Romans: 10.0

Broken Heroes

This Is Oi!

Skinflint, 2012

Nathan O'Brien, July 2012 - 4 / 10

I am not the most qualified reviewer when it comes to modern-day Oi! music. Yes, I am familiar with the genre in general—I still spin The 4 Skins, The Business, The Oppressed, Blitz, or Sham 69 from time to time, and Cock Sparrer is the one band that has never been deleted from any of my iPods—but for the most part, I've been largely dismissive of anything current. In the mid to late '90s—around the same time I sported a bomber jacket and a suedehead cut—I curated a series of mixtapes called *I Don't Know Anything About Punk...or Hardcore...or Ska...or Oi!*, so, yeah, I've been claiming to not know anything about the genre for a long time. But it couldn't be any truer today, as a quick audit of my music collection shows I dipped out on contemporary Oi! or streetpunk, as it were, sometime around The Dropkick Murphys' *Sing Loud, Sing Proud* album in '01. In the interest of full disclosure (and with all due respect to the late Bruce Roehrs, whose column in *Maximum Rock'N'Roll* was one of my favorites,) I find most present-day Oi! to be nauseating and imprudent. So with that being said, I'll ignore my savant-like urge to list every skinhead band that has "broken" or "heroes" in their name (137) and plow forward the best I can here with hopes that it doesn't result in a boot party on my cranium.

Having existed in one form or another since the early '90s, the New York/New Jersey-based skins in Broken Heroes want to make one thing crystal clear: they are not a streetpunk band—they are an Oi! band. The idea being the term "streetpunk" is for bands that are afraid to call themselves Oi! because of the skinhead stigma attached to it. Hence, they named their new album *This is Oi!* And to further my point, these are the first lyrics from the title track and album opener: "I remember those days when 'streetpunk' wasn't a word they used/We all knew we were crucified—stood up to the abuse/Don't need to sugar-coat it—this is music from the streets/This is Oi!—we play it loud—our style can't be beat/THIS IS OI!" The song, much like the rest of record is a testimony that nothing much, if anything at all, has changed when it comes to Oi! music. Familiar themes run throughout the eleven songs that make up *This is Oi!*: being a

skinhead, storming the streets, being crucified, having working class pride, being a heavy drinker, and screaming “OI!, OI!, OI!” a bunch of times.

Musically speaking, it’s pretty much exactly what you’d expect too: hard-driving and palatable punk-tinged rock-n-roll, with gruff-throated lead vocals that show the wear of years spent smoking cigarettes and/or pouring back bourbon, and topped off with melodic gang-style sing-alongs. The production value is on the cleaner side of things, allowing for some guitar intros and soloing reminiscent of late-period Social Distortion, or Lars Fredrickson and the Bastards—a comparison that would no-doubt infuriate the members the band, but isn’t any less accurate. I don’t really see myself listening to this many more times, but on the upside I am psyched to pull out my old Bruisers and Ducky Boys records and the *Caught in the Cyclone Oi!* and *I’ve Got My Friends: Boston/SanFran* comps again. And with that, I shall now cover up and take my beating.

Caïna

Hands That Pluck

Profound Lore, 2011

Cheryl Prime, July 2011 – 9.5 / 10

Hands That Pluck is uncompromising. The final album under the Caïna name for (one man) band leader Andy Curtis-Brignell is intense. Vocally, musically, and lyrically. This is an album dealing with the subject of finality – even more so because it will be the last Caïna release – with ideas of religion and will making numerous appearances.

“Profane Inheritors” gives you no chance to settle in, and this first track promptly demolishes without warning. It’s immediate, bringing to mind more recent Darkthrone output. Crusty, black metal with Caïna’s trademark vocals. And then, it all changes. A slow rumbling drum beat drives it forward, Curtis-Brignell growling as if life itself depended on the expulsion of the words. Again, the style and speed completely takes a turn. The guitars absolutely stunning and somewhat at odds with the vocal delivery, occasionally taking a more post-black metal/rock edge. It’s the mixing of styles that makes this album the monolith that it is. Being unafraid to bear influences is something that **Caïna** do, and damn, it’s done well.

Next track “Murrain” features guest vocals from Imperial of **Krieg**. For the first time, Caïna have not only one guest artist, but three. And it’s a tactic that’s certainly paid off. Imperial brings his own style to the song. One of immense presence, his vocals fitting quite flawlessly with the band’s sound. This piece has an incredible mid-section. The track slows down, the drums becoming an integral part of the instrumental aspects of the song. Again, fairly post-rock in style. And whilst you’re being lulled into a deep sense of quiet, Imperial’s vocals kick in, the guitar is fuzzy and fast, and you cannot stop yourself from banging your head furiously for the following two minutes.

“Hands That Pluck,” the title track, is for all intents and purposes, an instrumental track. It begins with a quote from the film **Cross of Iron**, and the remainder of the song is minimal, barely there. Beautiful sequences of noise and electronic soundscapes. There’s another use of a film quote later in the album, on “Haruspication”, utilising Lars Von Trier’s somewhat

controversial **Antichrist**. We have an interview coming up with Andy, in which he'll touch upon these two samples and his reasons for using them.

"The Sea Of Grief Has No Shores" starts with a gorgeous shimmering guitar and a sublime bass (Jon Curtis-Brignell) line. The drums are kept to a minimum, the cymbal doing a lot of the work. It's an understated composition and it evokes a sense of sadness and loss. An almost militaristic drum beat comes into the middle section driving the piece towards the conclusion. The guitar is quiet and there's hints of more of a post black metal style creeping in here. Especially in the closing minute, it's all fuzzy distortion and crashing cymbals. Quite exquisite.

You need this moment of quiet, because "Callus and Cicatrix" is next. A personal favourite, and featuring guest vocals from Rennie Resmini of **Starkweather**. It starts fairly slow, a mass of feedback and fat drum lines. It segues into a more stripped back affair quickly, a country twang in the guitar sound. Rennie's vocals are a perfect fit and this track features some glorious switching between sublime clean singing and the most filth laden performance this side of **Beherit**. Crashing cymbals and a wall of noise round this song out, and it's possibly the catchiest (in a sense) song Caïna have put to disc. Five and a half minutes in, and the vocals are deep, at the forefront of the track. The tempo has slowed to showcase the lyrics, always one of the most intriguing points of a Caïna album. The final minutes of the song are terrifying. The vocal is absolutely from the very depths of the soul. Snarls that no man should ever be able to produce close this song, which suddenly becomes quiet and once again there's beauty in the gently plucked guitar.

"Somnium Ignis" has several extraordinary moments. The moments of quiet jarring with the moments of complete intensity in a harmony that should not exist. The vocal performance could very well be the best Curtis-Brignell has produced with this project. There's a spoken interlude, faultless in its placement, distorted guitars underneath and talking of the subject of the mind of God. Then the guitar is back to its black metal best. The riff on display here is jaw dropping. Literally. Wailing and introducing that vocal that is instantly recognisable as belonging to Andy Curtis-Brignell; howls of "I dream of fire" ringing out and slowly leading into a bass heavy interim. The final few minutes are a little less intense. Classic black metal drum lines and some absolutely gorgeous electronic feedback soundtrack the end and bring us skillfully to the sample mentioned previously. The quote from **Antichrist**.

“Haruspication” is again, apart from the speech used, an instrumental. The utilisation of electronic noises, along with the quote, create a sense of claustrophobia, of darkness. If you’ve seen it, then this piece is only adds to the feeling of despair found in the film. If you haven’t, then it’s recommended, and you’ll see why this particular quote was employed. It ends with chattering birds, a dawn chorus, and “I Know Thee Of Old” begins.

The sounds of nature build for three minutes or so, along with shimmering guitar and a deep bass line. Steadily building up and involving more of the electronic feedback this album is manipulating to remarkable effect. This track features the final guest vocalist heard on *Hands That Pluck*, those of C.Ross of **Blood Revolt, Revenge** and **Axis Of Advance**. Our interview will go a little more into the reasons these particular artists were chosen for the songs that they feature on, and their involvement in the writing process. Abruptly, the whole style becomes different. The drum is insanely fast, having more in common with black metal than most other tracks on this album. Because although this is black metal, there’s so much more to it than what a basic genre definition can tell you. The vocal delivered by Ross is deep, guttural and at times it sounds genuinely pained. Six and half minutes in is a definite highlight. The drum rolls, the line “...these are the hands that pluck” emoting much in conjunction with the preceding intro of “Haruspication.” They are to be taken as one whole piece. The track ends on an almost post-punk-like drum outro. Once more, differing styles coming together to fully round out the song.

“Ninety-Three” is the final track. Beginning slowly, agonised growls combining with a prominent bass line and a guitar slightly progressive in nature in it’s flourishes. The drums kick in, quick and ushering in a sublime middle section. Absolute despair is heard in the lyrics, which talk again of ...”hands that pluck.” Words used often in this body of work, linking each track with a common thread. This album is one to be appreciated as a whole. The tracks put together in such a way as to tell a story. Around the five minute mark, the track seems to slow, the vocal suddenly becomes huge, the word “...desire” projected into the abyss. It’s glorious. The guitar speeds up, the drum militaristic, rolling into a massive electric guitar riff. Just as quickly, it changes again. The bass filling the air and the guitar shrieking as if there was no tomorrow. And then it ends, without warning it’s over. It’s a breathless finale. The entire last section leaves you feeling as

though you're trying your hardest to get to the end, to finish the story and for it to be complete. Andy Curtis-Brignell is bidding goodbye to Caïna with this album, and the closing moments of this song are fitting tribute.

This album is a little over seventy minutes long, it's complex and has so much to offer that you'll be pressing repeat immediately after your first listen. This is not an album to be consumed in one sitting. It's an album to take your time with. Each listen will bring something new; even after multiple plays, I still don't think I've really taken it all in. *Hands That Pluck* will stay with you long after the closing seconds. In your dreams, and in your reality.

Coheed and Cambria

In Keeping Secrets Of Silent Earth: 3

Equal Vision, 2004

Sean Thomas, February 2004 - 5.6 / 10

In Keeping Secrets Of Silent Earth 3: A one act play.

Cast

Sean Apartimus: our humble narrator

Claudio: our noble hero, leader of the clan Coheed

Will Writinpahsung: elven Coheedian clansman

King Concepticus: ruler of the kingdom Cambria, holder of the cherished concept album scroll

Bordalon Pretentious: brother of King Concepticus, but he smells of foul intentions!

Boran Structuron: the executioner, a dastardly fellow, and friend of Bordalon

Friar Tilont: a wise man, adviser of the king, and friend to the clan Coheed

Emotyus: once ruler of the kingdom Cambria, his dark kingdom was overthrown by Concepticus with the help of the clansmen Coheed, and he was banished to the Outlands.

§

Scene 1

Deep in the woods of the kingdom Cambria, Claudio and his ilk of the clan Coheed are having a merry time. At the camp of clan Coheed, the joyous fellows are drinking ale, singing melodies, having a gay time. Claudio and his good fellow Will, however, are not of the standard clansman variety. They are endowed with the powers of Merlin and the finest swordsmanship in all the land.

Claudio: Hehehe shabutie!

Will: Oh Claudio, what a day it is to be a clansman Coheed!

Claudio: Oh, but not is it? Perhaps we should advance further into the woods and eat of the berries!

Will: I agree!

Assorted clansmen in unison: Yay hey ho!

Suddenly, a boisterous boom echoes from the direction of Castle Cambria. A sound which Claudio, Will, and the clansmen simply can't ignore.

Will: That sound came from the castle!

Clansman 1: It appears as if the castle is in a flurry of flame and smoke!

Claudio: We must help! To town!

Claudio and his fellows mount their noble steeds and head into town, with only the best intentions.

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Scene 2

The clansman Coheed reach the town square, the peasants are in a panic and running from the city. Suddenly, Friar Tilont emerges from the church, calling out to Claudio.

Friar: Claudio, good sir! Claudio, good sir!

Claudio: Of what is this ruckus?!

Friar: They are going to kill the king and take the throne, I say!

Claudio: Who?

Friar: Why, Bordalon Pretentious and Boran Structuron! It is clear that the scoundrels two have been plotting against his lordship Concepticus for many days and many nights! Only you can stop them Claudio!

Claudio: Why do you say only I?

Friar: This is a matter for private speak!

Claudio looks towards Will Writinpahpsung, Will nods.

Will: Clansmen, ho!

Will and the clansmen scurry to the well to retrieve their rations of water, expecting a fierce battle to come. Claudio and Friar Tilont head towards the church.

§

Scene 3

Inside the church, the Friar drinks of some wine. He holds the grail towards Claudio, offering, but Claudio refuses.

Claudio: Now, what matter is so pressing we must speak away from listening ears?

Friar: I must tell you of your destiny. Every generation, one fellow is chosen as the hero that must quest for the concept album scroll. You are the hero of the scroll for this generation, Claudio. Through the ages, the heroes of the scroll have defended its power from evil forces, and then they read from the scroll. A light of accomplishment and knowledge follows that being for the rest of his days. You are now being called upon.

Claudio: Well, then, I must protect the scroll from the scoundrels two!

Claudio opens the church doors. Will and the clansmen Coheed are already outside waiting for him. Claudio mounts his steed, and the merry fellows ride towards the Castle Cambria.

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Scene 4

Claudio, Will, and the clansmen Coheed bursts through the castle doors. Bordalon Pretentious and Boran Structuron are awaiting their arrival.

Bordalon: Foolish Coheeds, you will now feel the wrath of Emotyus!

Before that statement is allowed to be given any thought, Bordalon and Boran retrieve their swords and kill the clansmen Coheed, all but Claudio and Will, with but a few swings of their swords. Claudio pulls out his sword and begins to fight with Bordalon, Will wields his weapon and respectively faces Boran. Boran Structuron casts a spell of the Crowing upon Will, and Will is sent into a deep sleep. Boran then turns to Claudio and Bordalon, and joins in, causing our hero to be outnumbered. Bordalon lifts his sword, brings it down with great might, severing Claudio's arm from his body.

At this time, Will manages to waken from his slumber, and casts a spell of Favor House Atlantic upon Boran. A peculiar field of blue light begins to emit from Structuron's bellows, and the fellow disintegrates. Will Writinpahpsung turns around in victory, only to be met with the sword of Bordalon Pretentious, removing much of his upper half, killing him. A one-armed Claudio reacts with anger, calling upon the spirits of the Blood Red Summer. A read dust appears and encircles Bordalon, it enters his body through his mouth and nose, and Pretentious begins to decay at a great rate, and he falls over, dead.

Claudio: I was told to quest for the scroll, and I have accomplished!

Claudio opens the doors to the throne room. He looks up to see King Concepticus frozen like a statute, the evil Emotyus standing before him. Emotyus stares at Claudio's missing arm.

Emotyus: It appears as if you've given up the ghost, my good friend!

Emotyus holds up the concept album scroll, Claudio eyes it anxiously. Emotyus raises his other hand, points at the scroll and it turns into mere ash. Claudio screams in anguish and charges at Emotyus. Right before he was to impale the evil sorcerer with his sword, Emotyus disappears and reappears a few feet away. He then points his destructive finger at the frozen King, and the sculpture that was once the ruler of the Kingdom Cambria explodes into small bits. Claudio, now realizing he has failed, begins to lose hope. Then, in one instant, he musters up enough courage and strength to hold his sword in the air, pull it back, then throw it with all his might towards Emotyus. Before Emotyus has time to react, the sword pierces his chest, and he explodes in a burst of red light.

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Epilogue

Sean Apartimus: Claudio leaves the battle a failure, but also a victor. Though he brought along his friend Will Writinpahpsung and his noble clansmen, only to have them slaughtered by Bordalon Pretentious and Boran Structuron, their presence was undeniably felt. He also was unable to complete his quest for the sacred concept album scroll, failing to acquire the knowledge it offered and also lost the life of King Concepticus.

However, Claudio still was able to vanquish Emotyus, and leave the battle alive. Much of the good was destroyed by the evil here, today, but we have learned that in these stories, the good and their intentions the same do not always achieve complete victory, and sometimes have to settle with the thought that they made it out alive.

Condominium

Warm Home

Independent, 2011

Nathan O'Brien, December 2011 - 8.9 / 10

The title of Twin Cities trio Condominium's latest is quite misleading. *Warm Home* is not the record you put on for an evening in front of the fireplace with hot chocolate and a novella. This is anything but comforting. Instead, imagine the following scenario: The clock strikes 2AM just as the pot cookie you ate between your first and second 40oz.—that latter of which is now entering the dreaded swill stage—is rapidly taking control of your mind, body, and for all intensive purposes, soul. (Those of you who like to keep your edges straight, can play along too: Take a minute to eat a carrot, slap yourself in the face a few times, do ten pushups; and join the rest of us when you're good and ready.) You've grown tired of worrying about the music being too loud for the neighbors, and quite frankly, in your current state of fucked-upness, you could care less. Plus you've been listening to old-school rap for the duration of eighty ounces of malt liquor, and now you're in the mood for something abrasive. It's time to rage up in this bitch! Drop the needle on *Warm Home*.

The first track, "Life is Amazing", finds Condominium bashing out clangy balls-to-the-walls hardcore punk, similar to early records like *Hello Tomorrow* and *Pupils*—thrash-tinged but not enough to label it solely as such. Continuing on into "Teeth," the race to the finish line ensues—the distorted riffage paused just long enough for a Black Flag-ish bass and drum crescendo-to-breakdown racket. This leads way to the first inclination of the weirdness to come. "Why Be Something You're Not?" is a noisy instrument-only affair, sounding oddly enough like an organic mash-up of Merzbow, DNA, and futurist classical compositions. The fairly straightforward Greg Ginn-like styling of "I Don't Hate Any Of You" rounds out side A nicely.

Side B starts with "Under Glass"—a continuance of the lengthier songs the band started exploring on their last two records, *Barricade* and *Gag*. Clocking in at just over five minutes, it's the longest one on here. The title track, "Warm Home" is a charged and pointed blast of punk that serves as an adequate interlude between experimental tones of "Under Glass" and

the final song. “An Arbitrary Choice Between Infinite Coexisting Realities” is the perfect closer, as they effortlessly incorporate all of the sub-genres tapped in the previous six songs. It’s an up-and-down ride of clamor and crunch.

Over the course of four impressive 7”s, Condominium has cross-checked a variety of influences—veering into garage, no wave, psych, and AmRep-esque noise—resulting in a sound that is not easily pigeonholed. I don’t necessarily like to talk about versatile bands in terms of progression, as more often than not it suggests an original aspect of their sound has been abandoned as they acquire a new one. That could not be farther from the truth with these guys. I am more inclined to look at *Warm Home*, (their first 12”) as inclusive rather than progressive. That is to say, this record is the perfect culmination of the band’s recorded output thus far—exemplifying their flexibility within the trad-core realm. I absolutely love the production (or perhaps lack of) on this record. It captures the essence of the Condominium live experience—dirt, distortion and jaw-grinding loudness.

You’ll find little to complain about here other than the whole thing is over too quickly—seven songs in roughly twenty minutes. But on the upside, you can always play it again and finish up the second half of that third 40oz. (Or do more pushups, if that’s your thing.)

Dan Padilla

As The Ox Plows

Razorcake, 2011

Loren Green, June 2011 - 8 / 10

It's been almost a year since *As the Ox Plows* popped up on the interwebs. Back then it boasted itself as a free digital version of the soon-to-be-released LP. Well, that time has finally come, with Razorcake Records, It's Alive, and Dirt Cult stepping up to deliver the San Diegans' second full-length.

The four-piece band shares members with **Tiltwheel** and **Madison Bloodbath** and, not surprisingly, they play gruff punk with pop sensibilities. It's catchy in the right places, but driving and energetic where it needs to be. Think socially conscious Lookout Records mixed with **Leatherface** and **Tiltwheel**. Songwriter and primary singer J. Wang's vocals are unpolished and somewhat muddled, but they keep a steady tone and enough *oomf* to carry over the driving guitars while emphasizing the whoa-oh singalong core. While some earlier Dan Padilla material had a touch of country beneath its surface, *As the Ox Plows* is forward-looking punk rock, more focused on energy than lament. *As the Ox Plows* goes quickly, covering twelve songs in under half an hour and, while the band doesn't stray very much musically from start to finish, the songs each sound fresh and varied. This is the kind of record that's short enough to keep circling on the turntable when the first listen is completed, rather than re-shelving it for another selection.

Lyrically, it's opinionated but not-quite preachy, largely by maintaining an honest tone. The group vocals on "Booker T Would Agree" are as anthemic and as direct as one can get ("Don't tell me about the Mexican border/ when you've never lived on it"), but the overall feel remains more singalong than pulpit. "Booker T," though, is something of an exception in its directness. Most of the lyricism focuses on an individual point-of-view, relying on emotional appeal and using descriptive imagery pointed toward a universal message. Wang namedrops geographic locations in his songs, referencing Pierre, Chattanooga, and Minneapolis, among others, as the record builds character through a sense of place. Despite the focus on negative issues, there's a hopeful tone that overrides

the cynicism. The album closer, “Something After,” is an end-of-the-night party ballad that drives home what the band is really about. To put it succinctly, Dan Padilla sounds like a group of friends playing music for fun. It’s a bonus for us listeners that the record sounds so good, because Dan Padilla would be sitting on their porch banging out the chords with a suitcase of PBR at their feet whether we like them or not.

Dead To A Dying World

Self Titled

Tofu Carnage, 2011

Sarah, September 2011 – 8.5 / 10

I went into this review fully intending to give this band the middle finger. I can't exactly explain my thoughts behind this, but I can say that it started with how the album was introduced to me:

"This self-titled, debut double-LP from Dead To A Dying World is for those who truly appreciate the aesthetic value of deluxe packaging and heavyweight color vinyl. The album is pressed on 200-gram, translucent green wax and features heavyweight jackets, metallic-silver printed innersleeves and gatefold graphic, and is neatly enclosed in a heavy-duty slipcase. Mastered at 45rpm for superior sound quality, this is an album that was truly meant for vinyl."

This description sent me, quite uncharacteristically, on the metaphorical war path. What band thinks they can come out of nowhere, write a three-track debut, and insist on the superior quality of not only its music but also its goddamn packaging and format? No band should ever have that much chutzpah. After downloading it from their Facebook page, I set up my media player and prepared myself to write the thrashing of a lifetime.

And that's where my tale of preemptive book-judging ends and my story of musical humility begins.

I had no idea an album could sound this fucking good. You can tell merely in the opening moments of "Concrete and Steel" that this album was recorded superbly. You can hear the bowing of the strings so clearly that you could count each stroke. In fact, every instrument is recorded with such sparkling clarity and at such a high quality that you'll never listen to other music in the same way again. The vocals in particular sound almost disturbingly well done; these are the best-sounding harsh vocalists you will likely hear, ever. The mixing is absolutely perfect as well; every instrument is perfectly audible, no matter how dense the recording gets. And believe you me, this album gets dense enough to put the likes of **Dirge** and **Godspeed You! Black Emperor** to shame. I happily admit: whatever snobbery these guys have towards inferior formatting of their music has

been painstakingly earned.

The biggest issue I had with this album, actually, was trying to accurately describe it without dropping too many names. *Dead to a Dying World* sounds like a combination of *Through Silver in Blood*-era **Neurosis** (namedrop count = 3) and recent works from **The Ocean Collective** (4), combining beautifully orchestrated string instruments and lightly strummed guitars alongside disarmingly weighty metal from a vast array of genres. “Concrete and Steel,” for example, starts out sounding like a rather macabre waltz, something that sounds like the **Diablo Swing Orchestra** (5) on downers. Then just three minutes later, the piece takes a sudden turn into heavy metal territory, complete with echoing, large vocals and enormous electric guitar à la **Devin Townsend** (6). “Stagnation” features crunching, overdubbed guitars reminiscent of **Boris’** *Feedbacker* (7) or even **Sunn O)))** (8), as well as some intriguing folk-inspired riffing that wouldn’t be far out of place in **Opeth’s** (9) catalogue. The final track even features some **Megadeth**-esque (10) thrash elements, just in case there wasn’t already enough going on.

What’s better, even the non-musical details on this album are beautifully constructed, right down to the song titles. My favourite is certainly “We Enter the Circle at Night... and Are Consumed by Fire,” a translation of the Latin palindrome *in girum imus nocte et consumimur igni*. Now that’s a title that would put anything from **Demilich** (11) to shame. In fact, the only thing about this album that I didn’t immediately love was the cover art, and even that began to grow on me after a while. Every time I look at it I can’t help but think of **Iron Maiden’s** (final count = 12) Eddie, for some odd reason.

I’ve only discovered one thing completely unforgivable with this album: the band seems to have no concept of tempo. Speeds are interchanged without reason or artistic merit, the playing is often asynchronous, and frankly, it sounds flat-out sloppy at times. It’s not noticeable enough to make the experience terribly worse, but to attentive ears, its presence is difficult to overlook. Okay, and the band’s logo is also pretty terrible, but that’s neither here nor there.

What it all boils down to is this: I was a preemptively judging ass, and in this case, it turned back against me with great ferocity. This album isn’t perfect, I grant you, but for a first-time showing from a fledgling act on a tiny label, this is stupefying. What’s more, the entire thing is still available for free on their Facebook page. Even if you’re not interested in vinyl, you have no excuse not to hear this album.

Devin Townsend Project

Deconstruction

HevyDevy, 2011

Sarah, August 2011 – 3.5 / 10

There should have been no way to fuck this up.

So imagine you've set out to write a progressive metal album, and your aim is to create a really light, jocular atmosphere while keeping the music heavy as all get out. Naturally, **Devin Townsend** is the number one choice for such a creation. Now imagine that you have a guest list a dozen or so names long, including big names like Joe Duplantier of **Gojira**, Michael Åkerfeldt of **Opeth**, Paul Masvidal of **Death** and **Cynic** and Fredrik Thordendal of Meshuggah. Already you're pretty well off for yourself. But throw in both a symphony and a choir for good measure and it should be clear that this potential album could not possibly suck without the artists actively trying to make it an unlistenable mess.

And yet, here we are.

Let's start with the basics. Devin Townsend is a fantastic musician and writer, and he has the ability to create music that is not only hilarious but doesn't sound forced. His album *Ziltoid the Omniscient* is a perfect example of this; the album is good, but it is so ridiculous that you can't help but have fun while listening to it. Even his really heavy albums such as the landmark *City* (with **Strapping Young Lad**) don't take themselves seriously. It's that exact casualness that makes him such a wonderfully enjoyable artist to listen to.

With *Deconstruction*, however, he seems almost entirely preoccupied with maintaining that image, to the point where it gets in the way of the music. If you'll pardon the phrasing, he's taking not taking himself seriously entirely too seriously. Even though Devin Townsend has stated that he was not trying to make this album humorous and that he takes the topics within it very seriously, it's hard to take him at his word when this album is trying to sound as ridiculous as it does. His music attempts to sound like it is silly and over-the-top, but it is trying so hard that the songwriting turns out strained and forced.

This is especially apparent in the longer pieces on the album. In earlier Townsend epics such as "Earth Day" (from *Terria*) or "Bastard"

(from *Ocean Machine: Biomech*), the pieces were long but still felt musically unified. They had a definite sense of cohesion that made listening to them enjoyable and fulfilling. The longer songs on *Deconstruction*, however, try to cram too many disconnected ideas into the same space. “The Mighty Masturbator” is definitely the worst offender here; the different sections feel so disconnected and irrelevant to each other that it’s hard to care about the full piece.

In other pieces like “Deconstruction,” the writing just degrades to the point where the music becomes emotionless and aimless noise, sacrificing enjoyability for speed and technicality. Even during the moments where the songwriting isn’t too chaotic to be listenable, the writing is extremely formulaic and predictable. There aren’t really any standout or memorable riffs to be found anywhere on this album.

The musical straining is often reflected in the lyrics as well. Though of course this is a concept album and some lyrical discomfort is the norm, the lyrics here often made me cringe rather than chortle. “Planet of the Apes” in particular sounds like a drawn-out commercial for Burger King with its refrain of “I say have it your way!” The piece “Deconstruction” is another big offender here: aimlessly repeating words like “beer” and “cheeseburger” is annoying to listen to, not amusing. This album is stuck with the misconception that talking about a man with seventeen testicles and listening to the sounds of a man struck with diarrhoea are funny and purposeful instead of just immature.

In fact, the best moments on the album are the times when it actually sounds like its taking the music as seriously as Townsend wants it to be. “Stand” in particular doesn’t try to do anything too out of the ordinary, and it actually is a lot better off for it. Even the straightforward slice of metal “Juular” is one of the stronger pieces on the album simply because the song structure doesn’t try to be overtly silly. I do admit I am being a little hard on him here; I was indeed laughing a few times throughout the album (especially with the special “saving the world boots”). However, those moments where I found myself actually enjoying the music were extremely sparse.

Finally, what’s up with the guest appearances? All of these huge names in metal make appearances on this album, and yet you could listen to the whole album and not realize there were any other performers. Almost all of the guest vocal performances are small and inconsequential, and they will likely go unnoticed by all except the most careful of listeners.

Additionally, the fact that Thordendal's excellent guitar playing is wasted on a songwriting mess like "Deconstruction" is inexcusable, especially since he doesn't get the chance to properly solo. It's not like Townsend is any stranger to working with other artists—the man has done highly successful work with artists like **Steve Vai** and **Ayreon**. The underwhelming quality of the guest work here is nothing short of baffling.

I really am being extremely hard on this album, but that's because Devin Townsend is established enough that we should be expecting higher-quality material from him. For everything that it has going for it, *Deconstruction Doesn't* live up to its potential. The songwriting ranges from passable to painful, the guest performances are boring, and the album itself is entirely too self-aware to be taken seriously. It's unfortunate, but the **Devin Townsend Project** tetralogy has turned out some of the worst music of his career. If you still enjoyed some of his weaker albums like *Physicist* or *Infinity*, then you'll still enjoy this album. If you're expecting top-grade writing like *Ziltoid the Omniscient* or *Accelerated Evolution*, then you'll be sorely disappointed.

Drivin' N Cryin'

Songs From The Laundromat

New!, 2012

Scott Wilkinson, June 2012 - 9 / 10

Drivin' N Cryin' formed in Atlanta back in 1985 have announced their plans to release four EPs over the next year. The first in the series showcases their Southern Rock style, each of the following EPs will focus on a different genre of the Drivin' N Cryin' sound.

The EP **Songs From The Laundromat** opens with the gritty rocker "Dirty" featuring a straight ahead guitar assault with solos derived from the southern rock bands these guys were born and bred on, new guitarist Sadler Vaden brings an amazing set of chops to this band and this song in particular.

"Ain't Waitin' On Tomorrow" is another one that has country roots that are kicked up a notch with a **Dusty Hill** bass line starting it all and the guitars building throughout the song. If you like the sound of **ZZ Top** with a pinch of **Drive By Truckers** you will love this one it has it all and the amps sound like they are turned up to eleven throughout the song.

From the first jangly notes of the song "REM" you are drenched in the sound that conjures up the eighties version of the revered Georgia band **R.E.M.** The band does a great job capturing their sound both musically and lyrically ending with the phrase "This Is A Public Service Announcement" which holds its place in **R.E.M.** folklore.

"Baloney" is a thirty-two second blast from the days of punk rock, with a cranking bass line, loud grungy guitars and vocals that are over before you know it. Overall the song may be a lead in teaser for the next EP in the series.

The final tune "Clean Up" is a breezy song with a different feel to it from the earlier ones on here while still southern in style it has a vocal shift that doesn't push the southern twang. It's a lyrical story about "Cleaning up the mess you made, here you are stuck on the ground" and "Lean against the problems you had" all sung with a beautiful lilting guitar line playing in the background making it sound like a song you would listen to on a sunny day cruising with the top down.

Overall the EP is a feast of the Drivin' N Cryin' style of country rock, it hits the best of the genre in the four full songs on the record and the band even throws in a slice of "Baloney" as well, how could you miss.

Earth

Hex: Or Printing in the Infernal Method

Southern Lord, 2005

Bob Morgan, October 2005 - 8.5 / 10

Opening with a sound not unlike some kind of spaghetti western death knell, *Hex: Or Printing in the Infernal Method*, the comeback album of noise mongers Earth, shocks the old time listeners of the band. Anyone who has heard *Earth 2* or *Sunn Amps and Smashed Guitars* will tell you that. But, the mastermind behind Earth, Dylan Carlson, is known for throwing people for a proverbial loop. It would be hard to say that he holed himself up somewhere listening to Ennio Morricone soundtracks or wrote this new album as a tribute to Morricone's work, but the comparison between *Hex...* and say the soundtrack to the Clint Eastwood movie *The Good, The Bad, and The Ugly* would not be far off. Earth offer up nine gloomy tracks of fantastic musical imagery. This is an album through and through as it is nigh impossible to not listen to the whole record from start to finish. It really is akin to watching a movie.

Having been a fan of their previous work and also being leery of bands attempting to reunite, I listened to the record in jaw dropping awe the first time. I mean, they have influenced more than a few of the current crop of doom/drone groups. So, I was kind of expecting them to try and bulldoze back to reclaim their crown. Instead, they expanded their repertoire and really outdid themselves by writing an album that subtly attacks the listener's subconscious. Using a surprisingly clean guitar tone on most of the record instead of suffocating with walls of feedback, Carlson truly draws an emotional response by using auxiliary instrumentation like trombones and pedal steel guitars to affect the music. In track six, 'An Inquest Concerning Teeth', I was mystified by their use of Asian sounding instrumentation leading into a rather hopeful sounding section that could be mistaken for a country western balladeer's solo. The absolutely ominous change in 'Raiford (The Felon Wind)' is breathtaking and serves as a bit of a climax for the record.

Quite honestly, I was only mildly interested in this new record because of my reservations regarding their getting back together. But, it must be said that I was blown away by how much it struck me, the extent

with which I connected with the album. Not only does it have a sound filled with a feeling mind numbingly gloom, but it throws in brief respites of stark beauty that keeps the listener on their toes and engrossed in the album.

Fleet Foxes

Helplessness Blues

Bella Union, 2011

Matt Andrews, May 2011 – 9 / 10

Three years in the making since their praised-to-the-heavens self-titled debut, *Helplessness Blues* is a masterpiece of a sophomore offering, consisting of everything that made *Fleet Foxes* a standout record for its generation – let alone year – and at the same time expanding upon the band’s signature sound.

Frontman Robin Pecknold’s painstaking adherence to songwriting during production of *Helplessness Blues* has been well documented and his persistence shows: at just under fifty minutes long, the record flows from choral folk to Southern Gothic ballad, right on through to free jazz and fingerpicked blues. Opener “Montezuma” features rolling electric guitar reverberating alongside Pecknold’s rich, definitive vocals. The perfectly-mixed backing chorus are less ubiquitous than on *Fleet Foxes*, perhaps wisely, as the band avoid being pigeonholed as “that band with the harmonies”. Followed up by the hook-laden “Bedouin Dress” with its cheeky fiddle trills and sidestick pops, it’s unfairly catchy and beautifully crafted.

Fleet Foxes was a record laden with imagery and storytelling, conjuring pastoral scenes of nature and solitude as though taken straight from Keats and Wordsworth. It’s fitting here that *Helplessness Blues* is a wider-ranging album, taking in a global surrounding even in its song titles (“Sim Sala Bim”, “Montezuma”, “The Plains / Bitter Dancer”, “Grown Ocean”). It occasionally feels odd to hear references to modernity among the often-nostalgic lyrics, but lines like “you would wait tables” ensure that proceedings don’t get quite too twee.

“Battery Kinzie”, perhaps the first song to begin “I woke up this morning” that isn’t a blues ballad, carries a kind of Enya-esque string accompaniment, reminiscent of her “Orinoco Flow” but retaining its dignity. “Lorelai” is a lush sequence of “Here Comes The Sun” era Harrison guitar laced with Brian Wilson choral overtones springing from every chorus.

“The Shrine / An Argument”, at eight minutes long, is the band’s most

explorative song to date, and features an impassioned vocal delivery from Pecknold that sees him snarl the unassuming-sounding “Sunlight over me no matter what I do” then immediately follow it up with the daintily-phrased “apples in the summer all cold and sweet”. Before the song can get too carried away with itself it takes an “El Condor Pasa”-esque Appalachian detour and concept (with a small C) album self-referencing lyrics to earlier tracks on the record. It’s challenging for the lazier fans who just want to hear some Beach Boys melodies, and hugely rewarding, particularly the lengthy free jazz saxophone (?) outro.

It’s easy to peg a band given this level of hype as overrated and undertalented, but in some cases this kind of praise is merited. Don’t write them off as a “genre band”, don’t drop them in the hipster bucket, but instead open your ears and listen to the sound of one of the most exciting, interesting, intelligent and beautiful records of the past few years.

Flobots

Survival Story

Universal, 2010

Kevin Fitzpatrick, March 2010 - 9 / 10

Once social change begins, it cannot be reversed. You cannot uneducate the person who has learned to read. You cannot humiliate the person who feels pride. You cannot oppress the people who are not afraid anymore. We have seen the future, and the future is ours. – César Estrada Chávez

Matter relates to all things. Matter is defined as “something that occupies space.” In relation to music, this can surely describe the majority of artists that are force fed to us whether we like it or not – like so much swill in the trough (are you listening Ke\$ha?). But matter can also be defined as “something of consequence; important or significant.” The latter can most certainly apply to Flobots, whose new album *Survival Story* is the latest manifesto from Denver’s proud sons and daughter. A rallying cry against apathy, *Survival Story* provides the perfect backdrop – a clear, concise soundtrack – for an unsure nation struggling to find it’s footing once again. Times have certainly changed since the band’s 2007 debut *Fight With Tools*, a strong album that managed to hold the mirror up to our crumbling visage without ever losing sight of the most important tool of all – hope.

Almost three years later the band once again reminds us that all is not lost. *Survival Story* is the key to a map we’ve been struggling to decipher for quite some time now. First single “White Flag Warrior” leads the charge into the fray with a refrain of “We’d rather make our children martyrs than murderers... this is love, not treason” with the help of Rise Against’s Tim McIlrath – himself no stranger to the anti-war sentiment. But that’s just the tip of the iceberg. The album turns out to be a virtually seamless hybrid of hip-hop and rock (but for god’s sake don’t cheapen it by calling it rap-rock). The band avoids any possible accusations of a sophomore slump by showing a notable progression in all ways possible without losing one iota of what made them so distinct on their debut. With the exception of two songs, *Survival Story* is produced by Mario Caldato Jr. (Beastie Boys, Jack Johnson). Caldato’s production suits the band’s aesthetic just fine, but the two self-produced tracks (“White Flag Warrior” and “Infatuation”)

sound huge and provide proof that DIY can still be the way to go. There's a passion on this album that you just don't hear nowadays and that passion comes through in each word uttered, the arco of the viola, and each crack of the snare. There's twelve songs in all – each one with it's own unique identity and perspective, each song a showcase for the no-small talent of the artists involved.

MC's Stephen Brackett (a.k.a. Brer Rabbitt) and Jamie Laurie (Jonny 5) once again take turns on vocal duties, slamming it out with tracks like "Cracks in the Surface" and "Whip\$ and Chain\$." Brackett shows a much softer side to great effect on album closer "Panacea for the Poison." But that's not to say these two are keeping the mic totally to themselves. Violist Mackenzie Roberts' warm voice is showcased on "Good Soldier" and "Defend Atlantis," which, in an album full of highlights, are both standouts, the latter having an epic quality to it both lyrically and musically.

But what is hip-hop or rock without a solid rhythm section? Bassist Jesse Walker and drummer Kenny Ortiz know the answer to that question, and they answer it with every song. Never so evident than on "By the Time You Get This Message...", a monster of a track that builds with all the tension of an argument that leaves no parties unscathed. And if "By the Time You Get This Message..." is the argument, then "Infatuation" is the make-up sex. Another surging crescendo of a track featuring some outstanding guitar work from Andy Guerrero and guest vocals from Matt Morris. But when all else is said and done, let's be honest, Flobots hasn't ever been about the argument, they'll always be about the dialogue.

Foetus

Love

Birdman, 2005

Kevin Fitzpatrick, September 2005 - 8.4 / 10

Fire extinguishing foam, cortisone and physostigmine. All highly relevant in today's society and all created by one man, a man you've never heard of. Clint Ruin, Baby Zizanie, Manorexia, Steroid Maximus, Scraping Foetus off the Wheel, Foetus Inc., The Foetus All-Nude Review and all derivations of Foetus' music are also the creations of another man you've probably never heard of. J. G. (Jim) Thirlwell.

Since the release of *Spite Your Face / O.K.F.M.* in 1981, this Australian expatriate has been responsible for some of the most innovative and just plain coolest music of the last quarter decade. And where have you been, you ignorant sons-of-bitches? Oh yeah, sitting in your room all disenfranchised and bitter, clutching the latest Nine Inch Nails or Ministry album in your pale, sweaty, black-nailed mitts not realizing that the very band you hold dear - the very band that's kept you from tossing yourself into the dark oblivion of either death or the food service industry - wouldn't even exist without Jim Thirlwell. That's Mr. Thirlwell to you, goddammit!

Yes, Foetus were the forefathers of what's commonly known as industrial music. Industrial being lots of sound loops over syncopated rhythms strong enough to lower your sperm count - or raise it, depending on your ethnic background. Gradually, over the last few years, Jim's - I said that's Mr. to you, not me, smartass - music has evolved from the dense soundscapes to sparser arrangements with Thirlwell seemingly taking on more the role of conductor as well as composer/performer. Like 2002's *Ectopia*, from his Steroid Maximus project, Thirlwell creates another album that unfolds like the soundtrack to the best film you've never seen. It's the orchestral sampling that takes center stage here - harpsichords, timpanis and other things I couldn't identify in a line-up.

Like any great artist, Thirlwell only surrounds himself with the best - in this case enlisting the talents of guest vocalist Jennifer Charles (Elysian Fields, Lovage) for the beautiful "Thrush" - a really bright spot on an album of nothing but bright spots, and thereminatrix-extrordinaire

Pamelia Kurstin for another opus, "Pareidolia". I'll save you some time.

Pareidolia: from Greek para - amiss, faulty, wrong + eidolon, diminutive of eidos appearance, form) is a psychological phenomenon involving a vague and random stimulus (usually an image) being mistakenly perceived as recognizable. Common examples include images of animals or faces in clouds, seeing the man in the moon, and hearing messages on records played in reverse.

There's cynical pricks in this world who'd like to say that Thirlwell gotten soft over the years. Mellowed out, sold out, etc. What those negative nellys fail to realize is that this called "growth," unless you're Metallica. Did you know they have ballads on their albums now? And short hair? Pussies.

Love also comes with a DVD that includes some live footage, trailers for the upcoming Thirlwell documentary film and Adult Swim's "Venture Bros," which Thirlwell scores, and videos for "Not Adam", the nine-minute "How To Vibrate" and "Blessed Evening", the latter of which was directed by The Yeah Yeah Yeah's Karen O.

There's a name for people like Thirlwell. Underappreciated. Remember the foam, cortisone, and physostigmine we were discussing earlier? The man responsible was Dr. Percy Lavon Julian. And have you sent either of them a thank-you note yet? I didn't think so. Fucking ingrates. Get a pen, get some nice stationary - maybe something with butterflies - get some stamps and let these two great gentlemen know you care. You'll feel better about yourself, your loved ones will thank you and several dogs will come up to you on the street and lick your hand. Godspeed, my child.

Guns N' Roses

Chinese Democracy

Geffen, 2008

Kevin Fitzpatrick, December 2008 - 4.2 / 10

It's been fifteen years since the last release from the "band" known as Guns N' Roses - seventeen years, that's not a typo *seventeen* years since the last batch of new material dropped as *Use Your Illusions* 1 and 2. With all the hype surrounding what has been in the works for an entire generation, *Chinese Democracy* **should** be the release of the year, if not the millennium. In no way, shape or form does it come close to achieving either status. Why? Because no amount of hype and buildup can hide the fact that your album just isn't very good.

Not so much recorded as assembled, *Chinese Democracy* answers the question, "Can a band stay relevant after so long of an absence?" In this case, the answer is no.

Despite its merits or lack thereof, an album so long in the making should at least have a track-by-track breakdown:

Chinese Democracy - We're off to a shaky start with what is possibly the most contrived 80's hair farmer *Are You Ready to Rock*-style riff the "band" has ever recorded, complete with the long pause for the imaginary crowd to yell *Waa-Hoooo!* when they take the stage two hours late on the tour canceled soon in a town near you.

Shackler's Revenge - The track was first heard by most on the Rock Band 2 setlist. At the time I remember thinking "It's okay, but if this is the best song on the album, they're fucked." I was wrong. It's the second best track.

Better - Opens with a brutal falsetto leading into one those wistful-type lost love tunes that has you reaching for the skip button.

Street of Dreams - Listen to Axl's inflections during his faux-earnest opening lines and *not* laugh at the worst Geoff Tate impression ever. I dare you.

Okay, let's pause for a moment for qualification. I did not enter this review to shit on this album. I went to Best Buy and shelled out \$11.99 of my own personal dollars expecting maybe not greatness, but at least a nostalgic trip back to the early 90's with a decent upgrade to the new

millennium. It's not often I regret a music purchase, but this has become one of those rare moments.

If the World - The best track on the album. The first of many self-indulgent crescendo-reaching epics on the album, but this is the only one that works. Axl sounds great here, but the cynic in me says that this can be credited more to Pro-Tools than herbal tea with honey.

There Was a Time - Another symphonic "epic". Shorter in length than "November Rain" but seemingly twice as long. Nice solo work from Buckethead.

Catcher in the Rye - *From the initial notes of the reviewer: "Jesus, this sounds like the bassline in Ozzy's "Tonight." Does Sharon know about this?"* A bridge of "Lana nana na na na" is all you need to know.

Scraped Opens with the single worst a cappella vocal in history. I want my goddamn money back.

Riad N' the Bedouins I could have sworn there was no such word as "Riad" (and there still isn't, according to Mr. Spellcheck), but I looked it up. You've won this round, W. Axl Rose. Minus points, however for the very lame usage of "N" in the title. The game is afoot.

Let's pause for another moment to discuss just how soulless this album truly is. The overproduction was a given - the overwrought embellishments were already clearly visible on the *Use Your Illusion* albums, but never in my life have I seen a credit for the "re-amping, engineering and editing" of not the song, but the *solos*. This is truly a discredit for those guitarists involved - Buckethead, Robin Finck and Ron "Bumblefoot" Thal - who all do great work upon listening, but still manage to provide not a single memorable riff on the entire album. It doesn't help that of the fourteen tracks, only three could be considered "rockers".

Sorry - *From the initial notes of the reviewer: He's doing those dumb inflections again. Too bad. This could be one of the keepers.* Again, more nice solo work from Buckethead. Restrained, for him.

I.R.S. - Rhyming "F.B.I." with "private eye"? Bravo, Mr. Rose.

Madagascar - Song #3 on the list of ones to download. A little contrived in the vein of "Civil War." Not as good, but more of a companion piece. Complete with more *Cool Hand Luke* samples.

This I Love - Syrupy, self-indulgent swirly-keyboard bullshit. This I Hate.

Prostitute - Piano-driven coda with not a single thing going for it except that it signifies the end of the album.

So there you have it: *Chinese Democracy*. Almost two decades in the making and it winds up being the single biggest waste of manpower and resources since FEMA. This is not the GNR you know. This is an Axl Rose solo album with *special guests*. It'll be interesting to see who's going to be on the tour - if it's any of the endless revolving door of talent (and make no mistake, these musicians are talented - they just backed the wrong horse) appearing on the album, or a whole new batch of dudes. Make no mistake - the failure of *Chinese Democracy* rests solely at the feet of Rose who once took something familiar in the minds of the social consciousness - 80's glam rock - and gave it a kick in the ass, elevating it to a whole other level in *collaboration* (the key word) with talented musicians like Slash, Izzy Stradlin and Duff McKagan, whose subsequent careers have proven that together with Rose was lightning in a bottle but separately will always be less than the sum of their parts.

Iceage

You're Nothing

Matador, 2013

Nathan O'Brien, April 2013 – 9.5 / 10

The fact that this record's release coincided with me preparing for and subsequently taking a vacation, and you know, having a life outside of writing record reviews, means you're likely reading this well after numerous other internet outlets have exhausted every possible way to dissect *You're Nothing*, the sophomore outing by Denmark's Iceage, and still come up with the same undeniable end result: it's really fucking good. On one hand, I realize no apology is needed, as SPB is a webzine, which going by purely terminology alone, implies an internet-based derivative of "magazine." Anyone old enough to recall a pre-internet period of time when magazines were the main source of information for finding out of about new music will also know that reviews were something you were lucky to read once a month. That is to say, it was not uncommon to hear about a record several months after its release date. Also, insofar as I can tell (having contributed for a few years now) SPB sustains its relevance online largely as a result of our collective labor of love rather than just being mindless competitors in promptness-driven, hit-generating rat race that is modern day rock journalism. Yes, we sell ad space, and yes we do pat ourselves on the back when someone takes notice of our hard work, but mostly we're here because of one very simple fact: we love the music. Besides that, I am of the belief that to truly get a feel for an album you need to spend a good chunk of time with it. Yet I feel compelled to apologize for the tardiness of this review. (I should actually be apologizing for taking up space that could be devoted to music that isn't already covered extensively elsewhere.) That being said, I feel obliged to write this for a couple reasons. First of all, I promised our editor I would, and secondly, I feel some strange urge to indulge the ugly, self-gratifying part of me that wants everyone that covered it before me to know that, "Hey guys, I like this record too."

But rather than reiterating what others have said about how *You're Nothing* is more aggressive than their critically acclaimed debut, *New Brigade* (which it is,) how Elias Rønnefelt's vocals are more present and

urgent than before (which they are,) how the apathetic, gothic tendencies are gone in favor of enthusiastic, thrashing punk (which is fairly accurate but not entirely true,) and how it will likely not only be one of the best punk albums of the year (which it undoubtedly will be) but one the best albums in all of music (which is entirely possible)—even though in saying so, I just did exactly that—I would instead like to provide the following anecdote...

One day last summer I was standing in the bedroom, looking out the window, when I saw what I thought was a dead leaf sitting in the window sill. I have a cat that likes to go outside and roll around on the ground. With her long, straggly hair it is not uncommon for her to be dragging debris like dead leaves back into the house. So, initially I thought it was another dead leaf - no big deal. However, when I reached down to pick it up; I was like, “Whoa, that IS NOT a dead leaf sitting in the window sill - that IS a freaking bat!” I could see it was still breathing. “Oh shit, that chiropteran motherfucker is still alive!” I thought to myself. Now, I’m not afraid of bats, but I know my girlfriend, who was sitting in the other room, is deathly horrified by them. I didn’t know how to tell her we have a bat in the house. I called out to her, “Ah honey, we have a situation here that we have to deal with.”

She’s cautiously replied, “Okay...what do you mean?”

So I decide to just come out with it because there was no way I was going to be able diffuse the situation without her realizing what was happening and then going nuts with anxiety about it. Bracing myself for the wrath of her impending terror, I calmly and blatantly stated, “Well, I hate to tell you this, but there is a living, breathing bat sitting right here in the window sill.”

As predicted, she fuh-reaked-the-fuck-out and started hyperventilating and shit. She gathered herself best she could and asked, “Are you going to kill it?”

I killed a bat once. It was against my better judgment. It was many years ago, when I lived by myself in an apartment, and long before I had learned how to remove unwanted bats from your home without ending their life. (At least not during the extraction process.) I dropped a brick on that bat’s head. And then I stepped on the brick...forcefully. “Shreeeeeeeeeeeeek!” Let’s just say its scream was enough to make me wish it was me that had been killed. Never again will I kill a bat.

I repeat, NEVER AGAIN WILL I KILL A BAT! (At least not on purpose.)

So she's wondering if I am going to murder this poor thing and sobbing in sheer terror. I was like, "Relax, I know a trick." I quietly grabbed a towel from the hamper, went to the kitchen and dampened it with water, and then calmly walked back into the bedroom and tossed it over the bat. Then I scooped it up and took it outside, where I gently shook the towel, assuming the bat would fly off.

It's a trick I learned one night at a club where there was a bat flying around the women's bathroom. Some intuitive female patron told the staff, very matter-of-factly, "Just throw a wet towel over it so it can't fly - duh." Better than a brick, I supposed.

As I said, I was hoping the bat would have just flown away, but it didn't. It just fell to the ground where it lay, panting hard as can be. I quickly realized that if my cat didn't get into this thing, surely one of the several others that roam the neighborhood would. (The neighborhood is lousy with cats.) So I used a shovel to gently scoop it up and set it on the roof of the garage. I hoped it would get its bearings back and fly away upon nightfall. I checked on it periodically throughout the day and evening but the dude wouldn't move. I could see that he was still breathing though, so I remained optimistic.

The cool thing is that through all this my girlfriend started pulling for the little fella too. She would intermittently ask me, "How's the bat doing?" Which she would follow up with, "I hope it lives." She was genuinely concerned for this poor chiropteran motherfucker. It reminded me of the time when we were first dating and I taught her to cuddle.

True story, she was not a cuddler. She had this tough exterior like, "I don't need dudes. I don't cuddle with nobody." She also didn't like cats. Now she acts like the cat's mom and shit. So not only did she learn to cuddle, and to learn to like cats, she was now feeling genuine concern for something that the mere thought of had previously caused her great pain and suffering.

So now we are both hoping this bat doesn't die. But...well, I'll just jump to the end here...

It died.

I found it the next morning on top of the garage right where it had been since I placed it there. Except now it wasn't breathing anymore. Honestly, I think I knew this was coming because one of the last times I had checked on it, I think I saw it take its final breath—it was a big exhale, and then its body sort of just collapsed. I didn't want to believe it when it

happened but I think that was it. The reality is that I probably gave the little thing a heart attack with my constant pestering. At least there was no scream like with the brick-to-the-dome bat that still haunts me. We were hoping the little creature would make it but he didn't.

On the upside, in the interest of science, I took some photos of it after it had passed on, as is my wont, and discovered something in the process that I never knew before: bats have penises. I don't know why this discovery was such an eye-opening experience to me. I mean, I realize they procreate and stuff. I guess I just didn't realize that the penis would such a prominent feature. In the interest of full disclosure, I will admit I used a stick to poke around the area just to make sure I was positive of what I was seeing. My girlfriend is concerned for her wellbeing now; she thinks I have some sort of psychotic disorder. But I think she just watches too much *Criminal Minds*.

So, in lieu of a proper record review, that was the story of the penis-having bat that was in my house before it eventually passed away despite my best intentions. If you've made it this far, I assume you're asking yourself what any of this has to do with the new Iceage album. And I have to agree - that's a pretty good question. While the answer may not be immediately apparent, you'll have to trust me, there's a correlation in there somewhere.

Iggy & The Stooges

Raw Power (Re-Issue)

Sony, 2010

Bob Morgan, November 2010 - 10 / 10

“Raw Power’s got a son named rock n’ roll”

Leave it to Iggy Pop to both boast about this record and succinctly describe what an album’s impact would be on music. Seriously, look at the cover to the album, and I mean REALLY look at it; get it out of your collection and look at it, and if it is not in your collection, there is something seriously wrong with you. Now, realize that *Raw Power* originally was released in 1973 in the same year as Led Zeppelin’s *Houses of the Holy* and Pink Floyd’s *Dark Side Of The Moon* amongst a slew of other more commercially viable acts; think about those album covers while looking at *Raw Power* (do not play the album yet). *Raw Power* looks vicious and dangerous and unseemly next to those records, almost the kind of record that one’s parents would scream for kids to knock off the noise (or even threaten them with obscene punishments for playing such filth in their house); scary people should like this record (the kind that walk down the streets with switchblades in their pockets leering at passer’s by waiting to assault anyone that dared look at them). *Raw Power* is one of the birthing places of the original waves of punk rock; the album truly is a complete original, which no one has been able to match nor come even close to the sheer animalistic fury that the original eight tracks unleash on people’s ears.

Now, put the record on your turntable or CD player or computer or MP3 player (what have you), and listen to *Raw Power* again. Be floored once again by the opening riff of “Search & Destroy” (courtesy of James Williamson) and Iggy Pop’s misanthropic poetry,

*“I’m a street walking cheetah with a heart full of napalm
I’m a runaway son of the nuclear a-bomb
I am the world’s forgotten boy
The one who searches and destroys”*

Henry Rollins (formerly of Black Flag, International Indie Icon, etc) emphatically comments on these lyrics (in the DVD documentary included

in the deluxe version of *Raw Power*) “You only wish you could write poetry like that; Will Shakespeare wishes he could write poetry like that!” Pop and Williamson literally deliver one for the ages (as evidenced by the numerous covers of this song by bands that wish they could be half as tough as the Stooges) by composing one of the more iconic rock and roll songs in existence (the #468th song of all time according to Rolling Stone and the 49th best rock song of all time according to VH-1). Forget about those accolades though, because as the song plays, anyone with half a brain can tell that this song cooks; you can feel it in your bones and in your gut.

As the slow, roiling atmosphere of “Gimme Danger” kicks in to gear, the rhythm section locks in like few others can, laying a brutish back bone for the snaking guitars and subtle menace of Pop’s words. The band conjures images and creates a mood not unlike walking down a dark alley by oneself full of fear, paranoia, and self-loathing while looking for a fix of some unmentionable indiscretion; the clanging piano certainly seals the deal in this aural portrayal of some seedy underbelly of a broken down metropolis full of unseemly temptations. Arresting in its delivery and the breathtaking beauty of the music will drag any listener headlong into the sense of doomed nihilism that oozes through this track and is the hook to pull you into the album’s cast of denizens and ne’re do wells with its sinewy melodic hook.

The cocked up, brazen attitude of Iggy and the Stooges ratchets even higher with the smarmy, arrogant swagger of “Your Pretty Face Is Going To Hell (Originally titled “Hard to Beat”), which is difficult to believe (quite possibly this is one of my favorite Iggy songs that he has recorded) considering the bevy of gems available on this seething slab. The main riff is a searing buzz saw that cuts right through, blasting you with everything its got while the Asheton brothers’ rock solid rhythm section sends the song into overdrive; Pop’s lyrical ode to fleeting beauty is not just catchy (if not slightly misogynistic) but is delivered in a nascent growl of youthful bravado that only drives home the gutter aesthetic and ambition of the Stooges.

This riff is up there with the Stones’ “Satisfaction” and most people probably have not even heard it, which is a crying shame because “Penetration” is right up there in terms of greatness (better in my opinion); but this riff (which is played for the whole length of the track) is one that every guitarist worth their salt should probably learn as part of their compulsory education (Steve Jones of the Sex Pistols supposedly learned to play the guitar to *Raw Power* and is just one of many such stories). Combine the riff with Iggy’s almost sinister sounding vocal performance and the

“woo ooh” backing vocals makes this sound like a stalker’s anthem or even theme music to a stalking scene in a movie, but in truth, “Penetration” is a masterpiece of brooding storytelling married with a dark and completely fitting musical bulwark.

Now, it is time to flip that black platter over to its B-Side so that the cycle can start again with the blistering guitar intro and monotone plinking of the piano can signal the title track’s unbridled raucous salvo of rock n roll fury (listen to those squeals of sadistic delight coming from Iggy’s vocal performance). Brutish, thick headed and thuggish, “Raw Power” is one of several songs that can easily be pointed to when speaking of punk rock ground zero. In all seriousness, on any other album, this get down and dirty song would be one of the best tracks to be heard; but here, “Raw Power” is but one of eight stars in this album’s constellation of songs.

The brooding masterpiece of the B-Side is “I Need Somebody”, and even though the song has been on this record for ages, I only recently discovered just how sweet a piece it is; I completely agree with Pop’s comments (in the DVD included here again) when he basically calls parts of the song a kind of bordello or bars version of the blues. Certainly, “I Need Somebody” is one of the more catchy songs here and might have the best vocal hook on the album in the chorus (“I need somebody baby/ I need somebody too/ I need somebody baby... just like you”, such a classic); in any case, the song has one of the strongest vocal performances you can ever hear from Iggy Pop, while being extremely tuneful and sophisticated.

“Shake Appeal” is such a gloriously dumb song that cannot be fully appreciated until you see the Stooges perform it (when I finally saw the Iggy and The Stooges, they played this sucker with a ton of people on the stage just shaking and getting down while the band played this; it was hilarious) because it has a mood that can only be felt when seeing someone in complete euphoric abandon that is rocking out to the song. The song reminds me of what the Stooges would come up with if they wrote “Twist and Shout”; you know, one of those moronic songs that is all about getting people off their asses and shaking their booty and screaming like idiots (in good fun of course).

The coup de grace of *Raw Power* would almost certainly have to be how Iggy and his Stooges basically explain just how doomed they are and how hopeless their situation is in the album’s closing track, “Death Trip”; a sonic mess with sound coming from all over the place, “Death Trip” is a depressingly noisy rumination of all the negative aspects of the drugs and

booze and more drugs that the band was consuming en masse. A plodding train of that is one of the first songs that you might call the soundtrack of self destruction, this track is simultaneously boastful and prophetic (“we’re going down in history” and “you can’t save me” are two parts of the lyrics from this beast); in hind sight, people should have seen the Stooges ultimate disintegration coming after listening to this.

The injustice of a lack of a follow up album to this monument to excess can only be assuaged through the numerous bootlegs and semi-official releases from the time period immediately surrounding the release of *Raw Power* (*More Power*, *Heavy Liquid*, *Penetration* and *Original Punks* are the best places to get a sense of what this lineup of the Stooges was cooking up at this time), and the Georgia Peaches live set included in this release of the album provides a brief glimpse of some of the new material that the band could have put on the next record. James Williamson relates the state of the union regarding this prolific writing period for the band in the liner notes to this release, “One of the characteristics of the Stooges was that we were always writing new material and always thought the new stuff to be the ‘latest and greatest’... there are many gems along the roadside to *Raw Power*,” he was not joking or boasting either because some of these tracks (“Cock In My Pocket”, “Open Up And Bleed”, and “Head On”) are more great songs in the Stooges tradition that are included here on the Georgia Peaches disc while the third disk contains even more (like the posthumous single “I Got A Right” as well as another live staple from the era, “I’m Sick Of You”) material well worth the price of admission here.

A record that is every bit as relevant today as it was when it was originally released in 1973, *Raw Power* demands to be listened to...loud. The sequencing of the songs is absolutely perfect (one of the few positives that Iggy’s involvement with Main Man management (David Bowie’s management company that also managed Lou Reed at this time to great effect) produced, besides this album) and is seemingly built to maximize sonic effect on anyone that might listen to the album; there is not a single stinker on the album, and the inability to pin the record to a time period only adds to its effect as a seminal album that still sounds completely fresh and absolutely exciting almost forty years after its initial release. No amount of hyperbole or exposition can do *Raw Power* any justice nor cannot it intimate just how important this album has been to musicians and music since its release; if there really was a school of rock n roll, this would be required listening amongst the handful of truly great albums.

J-Zone

Root for the Villain: Rap, Bullshit, and a Celebration of Failure

Old Maid Entertainment, 2011

Nathan O'Brien, February 2012 – 7 / 10

In his memoir *Root for the Villain: Rap, Bullshit, and a Celebration of Failure*, J-Zone, born Jay Mumford, chronicles a lifetime spent playing the lead role in an endless comedy of errors. The brunt of the stories are culled from a decade or so chasing fame and fortune in the rap game. J-Zone, an MC and producer, somehow managed to be too late and too early to party at the exact same time. By the time his records were coming out, the heyday of late '90s/early '00s hip-hop had gone increasingly underground and the Internet rap world, a place an artist like J-Zone would have made waves, was not yet the taste-making blogosphere it is now. *Root for the Villain*, in a twist of irony, successfully encapsulates what it's like to be considered (at least in terms of the music industry) a failure.

A semi-regular contributor at egotripland.com, the online extension of dearly departed *Ego Trip* magazine, it's easy to tell that J-Zone has spent some time in blog age, as he is quite comfortable talking about himself. And, well, this is an autobiography after all, so that shouldn't be surprising, yet its borderline annoying at times how much this is a poor-me story. The self-deprecating tone in which the majority of the book is written tends to lean a little more on the bitter rather than the comical. The author admits this in the introduction: "This collection of memoirs and rants is an extremely opinionated and niche based ride."

That is not to say there is a shortage of funny and/or entertaining material within' this book. J-Zone talks about his introduction to sex—or rather, wet dreams—via Darlene; Ice T's swimsuit clad, gun-toting girlfriend featured on the cover of *Power*. In another chapter he calls out all the rappers and DJs that owe him recompense for some of the ill-advised decisions he made in his youth. For example, the Afros and No Face owe him money to pay for the Miami Dolphins Starter cap that was ruined by a girl after he rapped some misogynistic lyrics to her that he had heard on their albums. And DJ Premier owes him a new chain because the thugs that tried to snatch his from his neck were reciting Gang Starr's

“Just to Get a Rep” lyrics while doing so.

J-Zone and I have a lot in common. We both immersed ourselves in hip-hop during the Golden Era. We warmly recall a time when gold chains made way for African medallions, Fab Five Freddy, Ed Lover, and Doctor Dre hosted Yo! MTV Raps, KRS-One attacked PM Dawn on stage, and Tim Dog said “Fuck Compton.” As well, both of us moonlight as high school basketball reporters, are annoyed by modern social networking, and are particularly fond of cassette mixtapes. Also, I’m one of the few people that bought his *Sick of Being Rich* CD. I mention this not simply to interject myself into the story, but rather to illustrate a point: If you don’t have a least some sort of previous familiarity with J-Zone or the era in which he came up in, you might not be immediately drawn to this.

That being said, J-Zone’s tale is a cautionary one that should be heard by any aspiring hip-hop and/or music industry person. Even though you’ve worked alongside Large Professor and Greg Nice, assisted on Grand Puba and Slick Rick projects, and were a paid recording engineer—all while still in high school—it doesn’t mean you won’t get sued by Dolemite over sample clearance or have Fat Beats offer you thousands of your unsold CDs for free before they are destroyed to make room for product by new artists. At the core, the bottom line of *Root for the Villain* is kind of disheartening: even if it’s something you really want, hard work and dedication doesn’t always pay off. Sans an occasional production credit, J-Zone has long since retired from the industry. Instead of rapping, he has shifted his focus to writing. If this book is any indication, he may have a better chance of success at the latter.

Janelle Monáe

The ArchAndroid

Wondaland Arts Society / Bad Boy, 2010

Matt Andrews, July 2011 - 9.5 / 10

When music historians look back on the first decade of the 21st century, they'll no doubt highlight the dazzling array of pop musicians daring to innovate. Those producing music which both reinvents and creates, challenging conventions and spinning concepts and long-term constructions around their work.

Except, of course, they won't. Pop has been sadly lacking of late, with depressingly little in the way of originality and edge. Lady GaGa won her plaudits, but her skills are revealed as style over substance upon the arrival of Janelle Monáe.

With one overblown and hyperambitious debut Monáe has invigorated pop music, issuing the kind of challenge Prince, Madonna, Grace Jones, Bowie and other greats once aimed at a turgid music industry. *The ArchAndroid* (Suites II and III, to give it its full title) is a bold and thrilling record.

It opens with orchestral flourishes and film score-esque overtures, setting the tone for more than an hour of experimental pop, hip-hop, jazz, rock, electro, funk and classical. Many acts claim the overused 'eclectic' as their badge of pride, but Monáe is too busy sampling (Saul Williams crops up on "Dance or Die"), caterwauling ("Come Alive (The War of the Roses)"), warbling ethereally ("Sir Greendown") and collaborating (indie stars Of Montreal guest on "Make The Bus") to care.

Songs segue together effortlessly. "Faster" boasts an Outkast-inspired funk guitar line and a Daft Punk-styled guitar solo stretching into the stratosphere. "Cold War" is almost a full-blown rock song, complete with robotic backing vocals and synths supporting Monáe's incredible voice.

Conceptually based on Fritz Lang's classic *Metropolis*, the songs tell a story of goddess-like androids and their home city and the people inhabiting it. The folky "Oh, Maker" borrows lyrics and backing vocals from Simon & Garfunkel and is followed up by the fuzz-laden "Come Alive" with its fantastically eerie bassline and mesmerising vocal performance. Monáe's vocal tics and genre-spanning range allow her to walk all over

tracks like this seemingly effortlessly, resulting in songs that tug at something inside you, while remaining firmly in your head for weeks.

The evidence of Big Boi's production work here is clear as tracks echo the ambitious and experimental work of Outkast's *Stankonia*. Also sprinkled throughout are links to Erykah Badu, Grace Jones, Lauryn Hill, as well as soul icons and big band performers. Don't confuse Monáe for a copycat, however. This is unlike anything else released this decade.

If a criticism had to be found for *The ArchAndroid*, it would be its length. Even fans of experimental pop begin to tire after the hour mark, and with the final two tracks clocking in at 6 and 8 minutes respectively, it can be a challenge to complete in one sitting. This is a record not intended for casual consumption, however. Think of the album as a soundtrack or dreamscape and you'll be somewhere closer to its range. Give it the attention it deserves and you'll find it captivating.

When the pop historians write up 2010, there's no question Monáe's name will figure. We can only hope for future generations' sake her efforts will inspire other (more frequently hyped) artists to raise their game and subvert an often tired genre in the way that she undeniably has with *The ArchAndroid*.

Jimmy Cliff

Sacred Fire EP

Collective Sounds, 2011

Loren Green, December 2011 – 7.3 / 10

Jimmy Cliff sounds pretty spry for a 63 year-old. The reggae legend is a Rock and Roll Hall of Famer (whatever that means) and holds England's esteemed Order of Merit in addition to releasing several notable albums. Cliff hasn't released a record since 2004's *Black Magic*, but this teaser EP for a forthcoming 2012 LP raises the bar. The CD consists of 5 tracks, 4 of which are covers, and one of which ("Guns of Brixton") has two different versions. In other words, there's one original song here.

Rancid's Tim Armstrong twists the knobs on *Sacred Fire*, and he knows what he's doing when it comes to reggae production (see Armstrong's own *A Poet's Life*). As a producer, he takes a backseat to the legend. You won't hear his trademark slur or any aggressive guitars—just old school roots reggae and Cliff's soft, falsetto voice. Well, that and a cover of "Ruby Soho" thrown in for good measure. The covers draw from **The Clash**, **Rancid**, and even **Bob Dylan**. The first two are obvious fits for the reggae treatment, with Cliff delivering Paul Simonon's lyrics about a character that Cliff himself played in *The Harder They Come* back in 1972. The covers hold true to the originals in terms of tone and intent, but the melody and emotion that Cliff conveys give something of a positive, sunny-behind-the-clouds tone. His voice sounds unblemished over the years, and there's a sense of heart and enthusiasm in his delivery that gives urgency to the songs that is counter to their laid back rhythms. In Dylan's "A Hard Rain's A-Gonna Fall," the change-up from the original carries a sadness and beauty that haunts. The repetitive reggae beats give an echo effect that resonates as the lyrics climax, replacing the dramatic feel of Dylan's version with something that—while definitely still a downer—suggests a little more hope.

While the production and backing band do an excellent job, and the throwback roots style is definitely Cliff's strong area, his voice is what carries *The Sacred Fire EP*. The songs here, with the exception of "Ship Is Sailing" aren't his originals, but Cliff takes ownership. I've heard The Clash's "Guns of Brixton" probably hundreds of times, but listening to the EP, I think only of Cliff. That alone expresses what Cliff has achieved with this record.

John Cate & The Van Gogh Brothers

X

American Music Partners, 2011

Scott Wilkinson, November 2011 - 9 / 10

The newest John Cate & The Van Gogh Brothers album **X** has been released and I am happy to say it does not disappoint. The album has twelve tunes on it that fit well with what you have come to expect from John and the band, great melodies, three part harmonies, and lyrics that make you think. I have been lucky to see these guys many times in a small local club and you can always count on them putting on an awesome show. At the CD release show they played X start to finish and you could feel the energy of the music and the crowd building throughout the night. Band members include John Cate (lyrics / vocals) on Acoustic guitar; Paul Candilore (vocals) on lead guitar; Clayton Young (vocals) on Bass and Steve Latt on Pedal Steel, Banjo, Mandolin and violin; and drum contributions from no less than four people, Dave Mattacks, Andy Plaisted, Anthony Resta and Taurus Biskis.

The opening tune California is a rocker that brings Tom Petty to mind from the start, solid lyrics and a tasty lead from Paul make it a great lead-in to the record. John has a knack of writing lyrics that aren't cluttered with wasted words. With the three part harmonies, evident in their live show and the excellent pedal steel, bass, and drums this song is one of my favorites.

In the song Doubt John sings about change and how the biggest thing holding people back is doubt. And as expected the pedal steel really fills in this beautifully and lyrically makes you think about where you want to go in life and why people tend to hold themselves back.

After the brief instrumental Affirmation, the album transitions into a great Americana song Piece of Me. This is the type of song these guys do very well, great duets, harmonies, banjo and the drummer (Dave Mattacks) playing brushes on his leg and using a cardboard kick. With lyrics like:

"Now the midday sun is behind my window

*I want you to know
There's a piece of me that still won't let you go
Looking back I see where we went wrong
Love is bitter when it gets so strong"*

Only Rain is another great Americana tune with lush harmonies, and the lonely wailing pedal steel playing. Throughout the album it seems as though the band has been through a lot and is using this opportunity to clear the memories and move on to the future.

*"It won't be long before the skies are blue
You won't remember much of me and you"*

Gone For Good is another guitar driven rocker with blistering leads, almost caustic lyrics saying:

*"A part of me I lost is finally gone
And it's gone for good
Down the memory chute
Gone for good
You'll get all of me, yeah"*

Georgia & Alfred is an older composition that never made it on to any of their earlier albums, one of the best of the bunch, Steve Latt plays the mandolin on this one really gives it some flavor while the songs intensity builds throughout. This song has lyrical references to Georgia O'Keeffe and Alfred Stieglitz, two great artists romantically linked in the past:

*"I wanna feel the mystery
I wanna feel you close to me
Make love until the night is through
Like Georgia and Alfred in Mexico"*

Another instrumental Dreamers kind of reminded me of something from the band Hotels, with a nice trippy sci-fi feel to it due to the pedal steel guitar, cello and the haunting guitar lines.

The next three songs seem to be a catharsis of when things in life go off in a different direction than what was hoped or planned. All I want is a stripped down soul baring acoustic number, Come To Know Me Well

where the full band backs John, really showcases their Americana flavor and All In Life Remains follows in the same vein both singing about change and moving on in life.

Closer American Night is another song that was written a while ago but it fits seamlessly with the rest of the songs on the album, with a steady drumbeat and a background mandolin John sings “Some things will change and some will pass by”.

Life is all about change and how well you adapt to it, great album that’s getting a lot of play on my iPod.

Jubilee Gardens

Star Struck

Independent, 2013

Scott Wilkinson, January 2012 - 9.1 / 10

Jubilee Gardens' new release titled *Star Struck* is one of those rare albums that come in like a breath of fresh air lyrically and musically. Jubilee and the band have proved over the years to be consistent in their musical growth and this one doesn't disappoint. The band is made up of Jubilee Connolly - vocals and guitars, Dan Hunt - guitar, Paul Provost - keyboards, Joe Zupan - drums and percussion, Luis Fraire - percussion and drums, Ed Melikian - Oud, Gail Hunt - bass and background vocals, Mary Milanic - cello, and Rainer Reichel - violin.

The album kicks off with the bouncy "If You Told Me"; this tune is a showcase where you can hear how well the band gels from Dan's lead guitar, to the Oud, to the percussion and keys everything just fits nicely.

The second song "Smiles (When You Come Around)" is another showcase moment on the album, a breezy dance tune with a great lyrical hook. This one also showcases Jubilee's vocals, when listening to the band you can't help but love his lyrics and voice, he is definitely unique and part of what makes the band's sound which is hard to classify, genre wise.

"Ebb & Flow" brings back memories of the 60's San Francisco band **It's a Beautiful Day** with the haunting cello and violin complimenting Jubilee's lyrics asking "Are we going to give into fear, when all we want is love and loves here". As I mentioned earlier the album is layered with sounds to the extent that as you listen you can pick out each instrument, nothing is buried. The percussion on this track is a key part that helps in bringing the message and power of the song together.

"Naked" starts off with a beautiful acoustic refrain and has a great chorus "And she smiles and I feel naked, naked as the day I was born", this one along the next track "Proverb" are powerful in their messages with the chorus in Proverb stating "Things don't seems so bad, things don't seem so sad" backed with a cheerful melody and you can't help but perk up when you listen to it.

The song "Test The Water" really show off the versatility of the band and their ability to fuse the Middle Eastern influences with American

Indie Folk and make it their own. Ed Melikian is a master of the Middle Eastern Oud, a eleven string fretless ancestor of the guitar and the way that the band plays the Oud off of the acoustic guitars will just amaze your ears.

The track “Ways Of Seeing” starts off with a building guitar riff followed by piano and drums, this one is a joy to hear live and slips back and forth from a pop song to a danceable jam tune with some tasty licks from the aforementioned Dan Hunt a great guitarist with a truly unique sound.

“The Other Shoe” starts off with a nice lilting piano intro and when the vocals begin you are immediately drawn into the story. Jubilee is singing about a time when love begins to fade in a relationship and most people can relate to his lament. As I have mentioned the lyrics in all of the songs Jubilee writes are from the heart and personal experiences, he has a way of telling moving stories without getting lost in words.

“Two or Three” is a restrained track featuring horns intertwined with the beautiful piano playing of Paul Provost who it should be noted handled the excellent job of mixing of the album.

The track “Lost in the Woods” sounds like something that could have been included on **Bruce Springsteen's** *The Seeger Sessions*. A rollicking story of a woman lost in the woods with no clothes on, starting with an excerpt of a news report of a woman who had just experienced it firsthand.

“Its About Time” is another contagious dance song with Jubilee proclaiming to be “stuck on you like the craziest of glues”. This is one of those songs where everyone in the band seems to be rolling with the flow. The song has a great building tempo with everyone adding their own personal touches in at various points. This is also one of their stronger live songs and if you have a chance to see the band you will not be disappointed.

The title track “Star Struck” is another one that brings the listener along on a lyrical journey; noticeable in this one is how well Jubilee and Gail’s background vocals mesh perfectly adding and filling out the sound rather than competing against it.

The melancholy “My Friend” about saying goodbye follows making the listener feel the pain and loss echoed in the lyrics “My friend don’t cry for me. I’ve cried enough for two”.

“Whole Wide World” starts with the lyrical advice “You can’t own the whole wide world, you can own the world you live in and that’s all you’ll ever notice anyway” advising you to not worry about what you can’t

control, great advice these days.

The album closes with “When The Angel Came” a soft acoustic number again featuring the beautiful harmonies between Jubilee and Gail Hunt. The album is a treat for fans and new listeners as well, this recording has been on my list of highly anticipated releases for a while and it was worth the wait.

Justin Bieber

Believe (deluxe version)

Island, 2013

Sarah, January 2013 – 0 / 10

Editor's Note: Sarah went mysteriously missing before she could complete her review of this album. However, her therapist provided Scene Point Blank with the complete transcripts of her discussions with him over this release, which we humbly present instead, with some minor edits to protect her privacy. We apologize for the inconvenience.

Sarah: Listen, you have to help me. I have no idea how to deal with this.

Therapist: This isn't about the [REDACTED] and the [REDACTED] again, is it?

Sarah: No, I had the [REDACTED] lanced, and the [REDACTED] migrated back south for the season. I mean, I'm having trouble with my job.

Therapist: How so?

Sarah: Well, honestly, I think I may have gotten in over my head.

Therapist: Oh? What makes you think that?

Sarah: Well, it all started a few weeks ago when we got an email from a PR company offering to send us a copy of the expanded version of the new... um...

(Sarah can be heard nervously shifting around)

Therapist: Go ahead and say it. It's not like anyone outside this room is going to hear it.

Sarah: ... Justin Bieber album.

Therapist: I thought you wrote for a webzine that focused on punk and hardcore?

Sarah: Yeah, though they let me write about prog, for some reason. To be quite honest, I thought this whole thing was a hoax to begin with. I just sort of signed up for it an assumed I'd be getting a prank package full of [REDACTED] in the mail instead.

Therapist: But it actually came?

Sarah: I'm still not sure that I wouldn't have preferred the [REDACTED], even with the lubricant.

Therapist: Well, have you listened to it?

(Sarah can be heard sighing deeply)

Sarah: ... Yes. Yes I did.

Therapist: And what did it sound like?

Sarah: It sounded like absolute crap. It's everything I hate about popular music rolled into one. It has the stupid catchy choruses, the incessant 4/4, the repetitive and uninspired songwriting, his stupid high-pitched squealing, the--

Therapist: Okay, I think I get the point.

Sarah: And the booklet! It's full of huge, glossy pages of everything the laziest stalker would ever need to track him down and relive his life moment by moment. *(pause)* Or at least [REDACTED] some of the pictures.

Therapist: I see.

Sarah: It's like listening to adolescence in audio form, everything from the intense discomfort with your own body to the creepy sexual fantasies involving [REDACTED].

Therapist: I think that may have just been you.

Sarah: It honestly creeped me out a little bit. I mean, are these the things people want to know about celebrities?

Therapist: It's possible.

Sarah: And it's not like I can just not review it.

Therapist: Why not?

Sarah: My boss wouldn't take it well.

Therapist: What makes you say that?

Sarah: Have you even seen him? Matt's real name has more consonants in it than I thought were humanly possible to pronounce. He once showed me photos of his vacation to R'lyeh. And I'm pretty sure he's hiding extra limbs under the hump on his back. *(pause, followed by whispering)* It keeps writhing at me...

Therapist: I think I get the idea.

Sarah: So? What do you make of the situation?

Therapist: Honestly?

Sarah: That's what I pay you for.

Therapist: I think you're full of it.

(There is silence for a few moments)

Sarah: ... What?

Therapist: I think that you're afraid to listen to something different. I think you've created this safe little bubble of music you can enjoy while still feeling superior to others, and I think the mere thought that you might actually enjoy something that's simple, that's catchy, that's mainstream, threatens your sense of identity. You're so scared of admitting that this part of you might exist that you'll go to any lengths to prevent it from coming out.

(There is another prolonged silence)

Sarah: ... Bullshit.

Therapist: I think the album surprised you. I think some of the songs were so catchy they were stuck in your head for days, to the point where you

started [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] with an egg whisk. In short, I think you may have actually enjoyed listening to some of the songs on this album.

Sarah: You can't prove that.

Therapist: What did you listen to when you were in second grade?

(Sarah can be heard fidgeting very loudly with her cell phone)

Therapist: Well?

Sarah: ... Led Zeppelin, of course. And ... and Pink Floyd! All of the good classic rock bands. Heh. Duh!

(A moderate silence follows)

Sarah: *(sighing)* ... The Backstreet Boys.

Therapist: And?

Sarah: ... and N*Sync, and 98 Degrees, and every single boy band ever oh god what is wrong with me!

(Prolonged sobbing can be heard)

Therapist: So what makes this music different now? If you enjoyed it then, why don't you enjoy it now?

Sarah: Well, people's tastes change, don't they? My sense of what's musically appealing has evolved over time, and based on everything I've listened to up to this point, I don't consider the majority of the music in that genre to be inventive, or challenging, or even creative. It all sounds so derivative and cookie-cutter to me.

Therapist: You can't think of anything at all about that kind of music that you enjoy?

Sarah: No, not anymore.

Therapist: Okay, what about when you're in a club? Surely you don't want to spend your night dancing to technical metal? You wouldn't be able to keep a pulse!

Sarah: I couldn't keep time while dancing anyway. I'm white.

Therapist: Well, we're still waiting on the results of the [REDACTED].

Sarah: Okay, okay.

Therapist: So you admit that it's still possible for you to enjoy music like this.

Sarah: Well, situationally, I guess.

Therapist: There you go. Go at it from that angle.

Sarah: But even then, that doesn't make it good. That just makes it...I dunno, functional? Is that the right word for that? And even if I did used to listen to music like this as a kid, that doesn't necessarily make it good either.

Therapist: But some people still do like this kind of music.

Sarah: And good for them! But that doesn't make it any better critically. From a musicality standpoint, it's still mind-numbingly boring, uncreative, mindless drivel.

Therapist: You really don't want to like this album, do you?

Sarah: I think it'd be more likely for me to [REDACTED] with a [REDACTED] and ninety feet of MFP.

Therapist: I see.

Sarah: You know what? Maybe I can get out of this whole thing if I just go missing for a few months.

Therapist: I highly doubt that will solve anything.

Sarah: Oh come on. You are such a negative nancy.

Therapist: Should I bother schedule another meeting with you?

Sarah: No, but if Matt calls you looking for me, tell him I'm in a coma or something. That should keep him off of my trail.

Kongh

Sole Creation

Agona, 2013

Steven Ivy, February 2013 – 9.3 / 10

As I begin writing this review, we have barely scratched the surface of the new year. Still, I somehow find myself compelled to proclaim that I have already heard the best album of 2013.

In 2009, Kongh released *Shadows of the Shapeless*. The album was an impressive example of the band's epic take on doom metal. Now, the Swedish trio have returned with an album that manages to make its predecessor seem feeble in comparison.

Sole Creation finds Kongh expanding on the best aspects of the previous album while smoothing out the rough edges. The heaviness is still intact, but the band have added an emphasis on melody that creates a more progressive version of their already massive sound. David Johansson still delivers a sinister growl, but has truly grown as a singer and fully embraces the melodic atmosphere of these songs. With a spacious production that allows the vocals to sit prominently in the mix and provides ample stomping room for the monstrous rhythm section, Kongh appear even more brutal than before.

The most noticeable improvement over the previous album is in the songwriting. While the songs on *Shadows* were full of amazing riffs, the band seemed to struggle with putting all the pieces together. On *Sole Creation* the arrangements are bordering on flawless. Comprised of only four tracks, the shortest of which is just over nine minutes in length, the album rarely loses momentum or lingers on any one idea longer than necessary. The title track kicks off the album with an ominous tone that looms like a merciless beast. Kongh bring out the big riffs almost immediately. And why not? They have them stockpiled and readily available. "Tamed Brute", the second track, displays the band's impressive combination of control and compulsion. This brute may be tamed, but he is still one vicious motherfucker. "The Portals" finds them at their most ferocious and evokes a sense of foreboding that continues into the final track.

"Skymning", which translates to "Twilight", begins with the album's

most subdued moment and slowly builds to a heavy brooding waltz. Johansson's vocals soar above the music and guides the album to a haunting conclusion. If this album has a flaw, its that it is so good that it feels like it deserves a grand finale. Instead, our brutish captor slowly loosens his grip and disappears into the darkness. It feels like this is Kongh's way of assuring us that the adventure is far from over.

Sole Creation could possibly stir up some **Mastodon** comparisons, which would definitely be warranted. Apart from sharing a similarly gargantuan namesake, Kongh have also proven themselves as a band that have the ability to truly transcend their genre. A year from now, it will be no surprise to see this album high on my "Best of 2013" list, if not sitting confidently at number one.

Last Lights

Last Lights

Mightier Than Sword, 2008

Michael Phillips, December 2008 - 9 / 10

Last week I completed a short review of this 7" from Last Lights to be posted on the site. It was short and to the point but just didn't emit what makes this record so good. And then over the weekend the band's vocalist, Dominic Mallary, passed away at the age of twenty-four after performing at a local show. The tragedy of his death is a hard pill to swallow; death is scary enough as it is, but when it's someone this young it's even harder to wrap your head around.

Over the past several months Dominic and I had corresponded in regards to happenings with Last Lights. By no means were we close friends, merely two individuals that crossed paths with a shared passion for music and a mutual respect for each other. He sent me their demo and after listening to it, I was instantly drawn to what Last Lights was offering, particularly the lyrics penned by Mallary. I was quite pleased when he offered to send a copy of their new 7" and even more enthused when I put it on my record player and read along as the sounds blared through my speakers... It didn't take long to compose a review; it never is when it's something that you instantly love... but in light of these recent events I felt it was important to emphasize my feelings on this record.

A five-song 7" that lasts about fifteen minutes - that includes flip-time - a review for this 7" shouldn't extend more than a few sentences. Normally you'd be right, but *Last Lights* is the best piece of wax to hit my mailbox in quite some time. "There's No One Good Enough to be Alone" kickstarts the record with its searing guitars provided by the tandem of Jesse Menard and Andrew Nordstrom. Meanwhile the intensity of Mallary's delivery adds further fuel to honesty told in his lyrics and the high-octane musical assault supplied by his bandmates. The mid-song breakdown is nostalgic of early 80's hardcore with the lonesome shouts of Mallary before the rhythm section of Rich Davis (bass) and Jesse Conway (drums) bring the song back in.

"Everybody's Working for the Weak End" is equally as heated in the modern Boston hardcore sounds of a Panic, but it also boasts the infusion

of the punk sound and attitude delivered by pioneers like Black Flag and even The Stooges. But the highlight is truly the words:

*“And I’m sick of feeling like I’m fucking dead: school, work, debt, dread /
Every cul de sac is another dead end / Every morning I wake up looking
down on a day so shallow that I can’t even drown / Tell me, is this all
there is? / Tell me, is this all there is?”*

Lines like these are as relatable as any I’ve ever read; it was as though we were sitting across from each other having a deep conversation with one another. “U.S. Out of New England” follows and reminds of the Ceremony demo with its anger and frustration with life spewed forth in every word uttered while the band just shreds. “The Dream Homes of Insomniacs” and “No Future (The Children’s Crusade) on the flip-side are more of the brilliant, dissonant, and noise-tinged hardcore heard on the previous side. While the music gnashes and bites, the lyrics send you into deep thought, “...I won’t buy the lower middle class lie / I won’t sign up for that slow suicide...”

I know this album isn’t perfect, but the music recorded and the lyrics penned are only part of what makes this album great. Sometimes an album just has an effect on you; sometimes an album just comes along at the right time in your life. I don’t expect everyone to take away the same feelings from this album as I do, but when I look back on my life some thirty years or so from now I know that I will be able to pinpoint the impact that this record had on me...and that’s a feeling that I know everyone understands, whether it is from a song heard, a book read, a conversation shared with another individual, a speech overheard, a painting viewed, etc.

Linkin Park

Minutes To Midnight

Warner Bros, 2007

Matt Andrews, May 2007 - 2 / 10

Like their peers Limp Bizkit, Korn and Slipknot, Linkin Park occupies the mysterious musical category of “Oh, they’re still around?” In 2007, with the nu-metal genre almost completely replaced by nu-emo, the lumbering rap-rock of these late 90s behemoths is missing and presumed dead. So where does that leave Linkin Park?

In the commercial musical world, it’s evolve or die, and the mighty Linkin Park are no creationists. Jumping onto passing bandwagons with skills that suggest hours spent honing their knee muscles in the gym, they display a talent for moving with the times. That talent has at least kept their heads above water in the sludgy tar pits of nu-metal radio rock, with its five-string bass and turntable scratch wankery.

And so we come to *Minutes to Midnight*, the band’s third record, and produced by nu-metal pioneer Rick Rubin. Straight away, we can interpret from the monochrome cover – featuring each band member engaged in, well, looking at something – that this time, shit’s gonna get serious. *Minutes to Midnight* is their *political album*.

We get the token ambient intro track, which lasts for around a minute and a half, feeling rather like a poor quality blowjob interrupted by her parents arriving home. Midway through, the drums begin to build to a climax that never really materializes, displaying a lack of insight rather than a teasing display of what’s to come. The track ends without actually doing anything, which does not bode well for the rest of the record.

Continuing the sexual imagery, track two, “Given Up” (it almost sounds like a Linkin Park parody already) is, well, “adult.” Not for nothing has *Minutes to Midnight* earned its Parental Advisory sticker, and this time we hear vocalist Chester Bennington yelp “Tell me what the fuck is wrong with me!” where years ago he might have just said “hell”. Aww, the kid’s grown up.

The song is a piece of Lostprophets-inspired radio hardcore-lite, complete with a comedic metalcore breakdown featuring the emotive “GOD! Put me out of my MISSSSSSERRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRYYYYYYYYYYY!”

screeching. Just to hammer home the “We’re adults now” line, Bennington adds “fucking” to the line for extra emphasis.

“Leave Out All the Rest” (I wish they had) sounds disturbingly like new A.F.I., although Davey Havok’s lyrics have never quite managed to evoke the depth reached with:

*“I dreamed I was missing
You were so scared
But no one would listen
‘Cause no one else cared.”*

Secondary vocalist Mike Shinoda gets to take the lead on “Bleed it Out” (the second song to feature handclaps) and MCs throughout the track with a slightly different style from previous offerings. It’s still crap, but perhaps the band’s work with Jay-Z has given them some idea of what real MC-ing is supposed to sound like. Despite a repeated demand for Bennington to “bring that chorus in,” the song never really leaves the starting gates.

“Shadow of the Day” sounds like Tom DeLonge imitating The Killers imitating U2. In case this comparison isn’t clear, the song sounds horrible. In terms of bad songs though, “Hands Held High” takes the cake. In fact, it not only takes the cake, but takes all the cakes, éclairs, meringues and indeed all the confectionary ever baked on the planet. It’s the “political” song designed to appeal to the everyman out there:

*“Like this war’s really just a different brand of war
Like it doesn’t cater to rich and abandon poor
Like they understand you, in the back of their jet
When you can’t put gas in your tank, these fuckers
Are laughing their way to the bank, and cashing their check.”*

Damn, until Linkin Park, I thought the Iraq war really *was* different. It turns out those pesky Presidents are really just doing it for the money! Those fuckers!

As if the song couldn’t get any better, the chorus is, incredibly, a male voice choir singing the word “Amen” five times. Again, it sounds like a joke, but this is really what happens.

I don’t even want to write anymore, and we’re only halfway through the record. In the e-bow laced “No More Sorrow”, Chester yells “Face

it, hypocrites!” with a blood-curdling howl that will really show their detractors who’s boss. “Valentine’s Day” is the teenage drama show soundtrack, with the incredible line “I never knew what it was like / To be alone / On a Valentine’s Day.”

Towards the album’s end we get some electronic elements, even a hint of ska with the upstrokes on “In Pieces”, and the obligatory ‘outro’ track extending to six minutes with the line “All you’ve ever wanted was someone to truly look up to you” repeated ad infinitum.

So what is this album? Who’s still listening to Linkin Park? Apparently quite a lot of people, judging from the sales. As long as there are teenagers, there will always be bands catering to their misunderstood needs and frustrations. What we are left to wonder, though, is how self-aware Linkin Park actually are. When Chester Bennington sings about being alone on Valentine’s Day, or writes songs called “Given Up” and “In Pieces”, is he slyly cashing in on the hormonal imbalance of America’s youth, or does he genuinely have the emotional range of a fourteen-year-old?

While the band have dropped most of their unpopular (in 2007) elements such as the turntablism of Joe Hahn and Mike Shinoda’s MC-ing, the guitars are still so produced you feel violated; the bass is so empty and hollow and the tracks feel so much like the aural equivalent of an airbrushed pin-up model that you’re itching (pardon the pun) for an unwaxed bikini line or unsightly stretch mark just to give proceedings some humanity and realism. With records like *Minutes to Midnight*, it’s hard to image the band, bright-eyed and genuine, when they could just as easily be the cynical tools of their record label in turning angst into dollar.

Locrian

The Crystal World

Utech, 2010

Bob Morgan, January 2011 - 8.5 / 10

Hauntingly beautiful, *The Crystal World* is precisely that; and I seriously cannot believe that this almost slipped beyond my notice because Locrian has just simply blown me away with this record of harrowing soundscapes and buried melodies that coax your subconscious into a dream like state. I sincerely mean it; this record is one of those have to hear records regardless of whether or not you are into noise, power electronics, ambient music, or any of the other hard to grasp genres (for pop music folks) which pass people by in a whisper.

Standing somewhere near the realm of Jodis and at times pushing near to the frightening boundary of Khanate, Locrian carves their own musical territory on *The Crystal World* with some mind blowing results; it is still difficult to put into words the effect of this record on my own psyche at this point because I feel so utterly compelled to listen to this record and eat with this record and sleep with this record and basically just leave it on everywhere I am all the time. The drones seem to simply wash over me with a strange mesmerizing pull that somehow feels faintly familiar while sounding completely alien at the same time, and in certain ways the ominous and uneasy feelings that come with a couple of the tracks even are welcome because not one part of the record feels out of place or lackluster. Check out “At Night’s End” for proof of the otherworldly quality of the record, and get lost in the vocal intoning and the soaring guitars that rise above the droning sounds; the bass and drums somehow keep this piece from taking off and leaving all convention behind while subtly moving the song along on a weird journey through the Locrian sonic territory.

I am not entirely sure that anything on *The Crystal World* could possibly prepare anyone for the unsettling screams and wails that introduce “Obsidian Facades”, but beneath that rough exterior shell is a seething morass of thick drones and almost completely hidden melodies that are tantalizing evasive and eventually give way to a gentle conclusion; quite possibly, “Obsidian Facades” contains some of my favorite moments

on *The Crystal World*. Maybe the arresting work that is “Elevations And Depths” that gives rise to a sense of triumph but at great cost can challenge any of the other songs here for the title of best song on the album, but what really matters is the swirling sounds, acoustic guitars, and screams create the swelling emotional pull of the piece that closes the record just about perfectly in every way imaginable.

A great album for sure, *The Crystal World* is one of those records that people will be slow to catch on but will talk about incessantly (whether you want to hear it or not) in the coming years; and the amount of people will be small, but will grow steadily as they brush up against the affecting compositions that make *The Crystal World*. Even at this point, I am finding Locrian three albums (and a plethora of splits and EPs) into their existence and feel in some ways, late to the game; so, get in now while the getting’s good, and join all of us weirdoes in enjoying a great album.

Maudlin Of The Well

Bath (reissue)

Antithetic, 2012

Sarah, June 2012 – 10 / 10

I think I can tell you the exact moment my perception of music changed. It was a complete Gestalt switch, an utter reconception of the possibilities that lay open to the artists I enjoyed so much. Several artists had widened my view and primed me for this change--hearing the pulverizing waves of **Isis**, the mathematical crunches of **Meshuggah**, the vast soundscapes of **Godspeed You! Black Emperor** for the first time had done a lot to jar my sense of contentment and present me with vastly new musical ideas. However, there is exactly one artist that has shaken my view of music so thoroughly, so completely that I knew upon finishing their masterpiece that no music I listened to after this would be the same.

In 2001, a little Bostonian band called Maudlin of the Well released a pair of companion albums, one titled simply *Bath* and the other *Leaving Your Body Map*. Together, each of these albums created a 122 minute piece of music so stunningly beautiful that I firmly believe it remains unparalleled today. If you asked me to name a piece of music that I found to be so perfect as to be beyond reasonable reproach, I would have to name these albums.

What primarily prevents them from being more widely known is how few copies of them actually exist. Though this problem has been somewhat alleviated thanks to online mp3 stores like iTunes and Amazon, finding a physical copy of these albums, on CD or on vinyl, is an expensive and near futile endeavour in itself. And just leave alone trying to find a copy that's new; though the pair of albums get reissued on different labels every once in a blue moon, the print runs are always small, and they are always sold out within a moment's notice. I actually had to kill a man to get both of these albums, new and on vinyl, when Antithetic and Blood Music reissued them in 2012.

At this point, you're either wondering what this masterpiece sounds like or asking yourself when I'm going to stop salivating all over my keyboard. If I could somehow evoke the entirety of these two albums in one word, it would be "contrast": everything about these albums is designed to

encompass as wide a variety of sounds and influences as possible, even when they appear to be completely opposite to one another. While most noticeable is the obvious juxtaposition of death metal and soft acoustic pieces, the albums hide in many more subtle contrasts, such as how the incredibly dark lyrics are sung in such soft and impassioned melodicism. Even the cover art of the two albums seems mismatched for their titles.

And the first piece on *Bath* exemplifies this paradigm, acting as an exemplar for the rest of the albums. “The Blue Ghost / Shedding Qliphoth” begins very unassumingly as with a soft acoustic guitar piece, so light and delicate you worry it will crumble under its own fragility. But it slowly begins to build itself up, with saxophones and other instruments eventually joining in and moving the piece forward through a relaxing jazzy ambiance. And as the piece finally reaches its crescendo, the full band now playing together, you can just hear the faint hints of the heaviness to follow.

All illusions of softness that may have remained are shattered as soon as the second track begins. “They Aren’t All Beautiful” is a nasty thrash-metal piece replete with bellowing guitars, blasting bass drums, and bellowing death growls, and as it goes on, the growls slowly become agonized screams, giving the entire song a sense of desperation and despair. “Heaven and Weak” provides an even sharper contrast with its incredibly soft melancholy, barely audible drumming dancing around it in the background.

The first of four interludes plays next. Each of the four interludes details a different facet of the band’s sound and, as opposed to the highly avant-garde construction of the pieces around them, are very straightforward and simply constructed. This one features the guitar in a light jazzy solo, providing a brief respite from the obtuseness around it.

“The Ferryman” jarringly returns to form with loud, crushing organs playing the introductory theme. Percussion then floats the piece forward, the doom metal vocals and screaming trading off with each other. The female vocals do eventually bring some melodic elements to the piece, but without resolving to any satisfactory tonality, and the disquieting unease is only exacerbated as the backing becomes hauntingly gothic-inspired. The piece ends as ominously as it began, with nothing but the dripping sounds of water and extremely frightening distant moaning that draws ever closer.

As the soulful moaning and screaming fades out, the bath sounds

play us into the next song, “Marid’s Gift of Art”. This is a very melodic and peaceful folk-inspired guitar and vocal piece, the strings and trumpet providing some moderate backing. The entire latter half is a tear-jerkingly beautiful acoustic guitar duet, one of the most moving parts on either album. This is followed by my personal favourite track, “Girl With a Watering Can”. That piece begins with a clarinet reprise of the theme from “The Blue Ghost / Shedding Qliphoth” before Fountoulakis’s vocals take over the leads again, beautifully stirring and moving with their delicacy. These lead us into the first actual guitar solo of the album and again my favourite, measured perfectly with one half technicality and one half moving melody.

The epic “Birth Pains of Astral Projection” comes next, starting off with soft acoustic doodles that form into a light, Latin-influenced passage, emphasized perfectly with a seductive saxophone solo. The piece slowly morphs into an organ-based passage before the harsh vocals are introduced, growls and screams playing off of each other. They eventually resolve after a post-metal like build up into the heaviest moment yet, sleigh bells chiming mockingly in the background. The piece finally softens up a little to let the more pensive vocals shine through, leading into another fantastic guitar solo to round out the piece, segueing directly into the second interlude. This one is the oddest of the bunch, featuring an acoustic guitar and piano jig over a percussive backing created by precisely timed water splashes, adding just a touch of innocence to the all-too-real darkness surrounding it.

“Geography” plays the album out, and in an album as immersed in its own desperate introspection as this, calling this the most melancholy moment on the album means something. The bittersweet melodic build and vocal delivery longing equally as the lyrics together create the most emotionally moving moment on the entire album, a fitting end to the first hour of this immense piece of music.

(This tractate continues in my review of *Leaving Your Body Map*)

Maudlin Of The Well

Leaving Your Body Map (reissue)

Antithetic, 2012

Sarah, June 2012 – 10 / 10

(This excessive treatise is continued from my review of *Bath*)

You can already tell the second album is going to be different from how it opens. Completely abandoning the soft, melodic introduction, “Stones of October’s Sobbing” instead begins with an almost dissonant combination of winds and acoustic guitar which begins to build into a massive doom-laden epic, the various brass instruments lending their warmer colours to the already dark song. The following song, “Gleam in Ranks”, is the only true song on either album that might be called remotely straightforward in its composition. It’s a mostly standard thrash metal piece, but with much more tension from the symphonic keyboards and recurring piano melody. Interestingly, the vocals, while still aggressive, very rarely become harsh, opting instead for a few precision-placed screams and guttural melodicism to underlie some of their darkest lyrics yet.

This album’s epic, “Bizarre Flowers / A Violent Mist”, begins with bright chiming bells accordingly melodic vocals, triumphal and epic yet retaining an unmistakable sense of sorrow. The song then becomes ambient and distant, with a black-metal based combination of moaning and screaming, slowly forming into a few loud chants, loud enough to shake the earth with their weight. The third interlude is more of a fully developed piece than the other two, a solo acoustic passage with some light percussive backing that slowly introduces sweet string, wind, and brass leads. It’s very pastoral and folksy, again acting as a small uplifting moment to keep the listener from being too far overcome with despair.

As if to drive the point home, “The Curve That to an Angle Turn’d” is as heavy as being trod upon by the combined military forces of a small European country, full of atonal melodies and dissonant blares. This is paired alongside an incredibly heartfelt vocal duet, immensely fragile and emotional. “Sleep is a Curse” is another mostly solo acoustic piece, uplifting musically and featuring one of the rare moments of uplifting lyrics on either album.

“Riseth He, The Numberless” occupies the centre of the album, announcing its own pompousness with a royal trumpet introduction. It sets the stage well, as the entire song is best described as regal, commanding your respect and attention at all times. Distant, torturous screams play in the background as an introduction to almost angelic, harp-based melodies that provide the most cruelly tormenting and cathartic moment yet. Finally reaching the last stretch, the fourth and longest interlude begins merely with sleigh bells and acoustic guitars, eventually developing to include the full band. This leads directly into the finale, “Monstrously Low Tide”, a fitting end to the preceding 122 minutes of intensity the deep choral backing ensuring that the piece will remain firmly in mind. If you’re me, you’re going to need a breather by this point; those last two hours have been the most intense you’re likely to ever listen to.

I can’t recall ever having heard these albums responded to with serious contempt or censure. The only somewhat legitimate musical complaint I’ve ever seen leveraged against these albums is that they lack cohesion or direction; while the individual pieces may be stunning or beautiful in their own individual ways, the whole product can seem aimless to some listeners. This is actually a valid observation, and in fact, the first time you listen to these two albums together, it may well seem like the songs are wandering without actually arriving anywhere. However, as you gain a deeper appreciation for the music, their overall momentum becomes much clearer. Granted, it’s incredibly subtle and still very difficult to detect, but the pieces on both albums do have a definite direction and purpose to them, and though it takes two hours to get there, the evolution from soft and pastoral to unbridled metal ferocity, when fully appreciated, is absolutely to die for.

These albums were composed for people with an appreciation for the wide spectrum and variety of musical possibilities; you must be broad-minded in order to fully appreciate what Maudlin of the Well have accomplished here. Fans of soft rock or doom metal alone will not be able to understand the ways in which each shift in tone complements the other, or the ways in which they all express different facets of the same core idea.

You’ll notice that I haven’t spoken at all about any changes to the reissued versions of these albums. That’s because there are exactly two changes, and only one of them is much to speak of. Firstly, each of the albums on Blood Music’s reissue contains a bonus demo track, different from the ones included in the 2005 Dark Symphonies reissue. It’s a nice

thought, but I'm I'm not a huge fan of demos in principle and the ones included here are no exception. They're just lower-quality versions of tracks we've just heard, and given the depth and complexity of the pieces, hearing them in anything less than crystal-clear quality won't do them justice, let alone effect the full breadth of musicality they've produced. Die-hard completionists will be thankful that there is at least some change from previous reissues, but almost all other listeners can safely ignore them.

The other reissue bonus is much better, however: Antithetic's version of the 4xLP comes a download for "The Secret Song", a single released by the band later in 2001 as an addendum to the duology. The fact that this song is on neither album itself is a crime; it's clearly one of the strongest individual songs in the entire two-album suite. Though an artistic balance in tracklisting and running time is maintained between the two halves by eliminating it, it's a shame that this wonderful song had to be excised, and its inclusion here is absolutely welcome.

If you take nothing else from my review, at least hear this request: please go find these albums, whether it be on YouTube, or your favourite .mp3 store, or Kayo Dot's bandcamp, or even from either of the record labels that have reissued it, and *listen* to them. If you're willing to give these albums the attention they deserve, I promise you nothing short of a musical experience I can only describe, completely without hyperbole or irony, as magical.

Minus the Bear

They Make Beer Commercials Like This

Arena Rock, 2004

Michael Phillips, June 2004 - 10 / 10

It was roughly a year and half ago at the South by South West Music Festival that I was able to witness one of the greatest shows of my life. After running amuck through the streets of Austin, I finally came to rest at the showcase I had been anticipating since its announcement. I was lucky enough to accidentally witnessed Hella, and that was a pleasant surprise. But the real reason I was there was to see Minus the Bear, or as I affectionately call them “Amazing” the Bear.

The first thing that I noticed when I popped *They Make Beer Commercials Like This* into my CD player was that the use of electronics was much more profound this time around. Matt Bayles, yes the super-producer god, has become a more intricate member of Minus the Bear. His work is no longer confined to interludes. Many might feel that messing with a working formula is a bad idea. But they haven’t heard this EP yet.

“Fine + 2 Pts” is a fun and dancey indie rock jam. The song is characteristic of what Minus the Bear has done in the past, but jazzed up. Combining David Knudson’s finger tapping skills and the use of Bayles’ synths creates a sound somewhat similar to that of The Faint. “Let’s Play Clowns!” is definitely my favorite track on this release. I especially love the drum work of Erin Tate on this song. Whether he is providing the core rhythm to the song or adding unique drum fills, Tate executes perfectly. The song ends in a perfect rock-out moment as Knudson’s guitars mesh with Tate’s drumming, evoking a feeling comparable to the best orgasm of your life. “Dog Park,” like the previous two tracks is a lot more rock oriented than the material found on *Highly Refined Pirates*. But despite the minor change in direction, the band performs brilliantly. “I’m Totally Not Down with Rob’s Alien” is a slight departure from previous Minus the Bear material. The music of the song is a lot more subtle than what we’re used to from the band. This time around there are no finger-tapping guitars or fast-paced drumming, everything is slowed down; think Karate or later Fugazi. Coupled with the beautifully written music are the reflective lyrics of vocalist Jake Snider: “I swim out as far as I can / and

float on my back / just waiting for nothing / it's a lot more fun alone." One thing that hasn't changed is that the band always has such witty titles. This time around the trophy goes to "Hey! Is That a Ninja up There?", which is another rocking tune in which Snider speaks of a glorious night of raging; "...the law says we should stop / so we break a couple more / with the windows all down / we just throw the cans out..." The EP rounds out with "Pony Up!," another toned down track that featuring Bayles sensual keyboards that are emphasized by Snider's knack for being poetic about "hooking up."

The production on this EP is dead on as Bayles continues his warpath of producing and mixing everything from Mastodon and Isis to The Blood Brothers and Roy. The man can conquer any genre, and does so with great skill.

Since releasing their first EP, *This is What I Know about Being Gigantic*, Minus the Bear has continued to grow by leaps and bounds. Each release creates greater expectations and yet they exceeded with the greatest of ease.

Murder By Death

Red of Tooth and Claw

Vagrant, 2008

Michael Phillips, March 2008 - 9 /10

With their fourth full-length album, *Murder by Death* has finally brought all their varying influences together. Each of the band's previous recordings focused on a general indie rock sound, but they also flirted with various musical styles: folk, country, Americana, classical, and post-punk, among others. But with *Red of Tooth and Claw* all the band's previous flirtations and even some new romances have come together into a sound that is truly unique and, dare I say, brilliant.

Red of Tooth and Claw begins with the "Comin' Home" and you are instantly surrounded by the bellowing vocals of Adam Turla. Low-lying basslines provided by Matt Armstrong hang off just before everything erupts with Dagan Thogerson's punching drums and Turla's jangly guitars. You've heard this before? How could I forget the element that makes *Murder by Death* so distinctive? Sarah Balliet's string arrangements add a sensual emotion to the band's music as the notes dance around the rest of the music. Here on the opener Balliet also contributes skills on what sounds like that of an old organ, given the music a vintage sound.

The album continues with "Ball and Chain," a song that is rather evocative of Nick Cave's catalog with its bouncing rhythms, playful pianos, lively guitars, and unique percussion. Though not an instrument per se, the emotive vocals and somber words of the song help unfold the visuals of a story. The stories continue with "Rum Brave," a song that is similar in structure, sound, and subject matter to the band's *Who Will Survive, And What Will Be Left of Them?* with its orchestral-meets-indie rock mixture. The guitars really drive the song and quicken the pace with even a few post-punk drawn riffs incorporated here and there. Listening to *Red of Tooth and Claw* one often references lyrical phrases and themes from previous recordings, something that suggests a deeper connection between the entirety that is the *Murder by Death* catalog.

"Fuego!" is the album's first single, and with good reason. The chorus is really infectious, maybe not in a Kelly Clarkson kind of way, but it's got a nice hook to it. The song is centered on Turla's vocal delivery, which has

a sensual swagger to it - something I never really thought of until I heard this song; then again the ladies did love Johnny Cash. On "Theme (For Ennio Morricone)" the band delivers exactly what you would expect based on the name. The song boasts a film score sound that could have easily been used on any number of spaghetti-westerns.

"A Second Opinion" tones things down and eases the pace. This is actually where the band seems to lose their focus on the album. On previous releases the band was capable of pushing the album forward even if the songs moved like molasses; here the slower-paced songs do seem to drag just a tad. This would be the minor blemish on what could have been a perfect album.

Fortunately the majority of *Red of Tooth and Claw* moves at a quickened, or at least an upbeat, pace. "Steal Away" picks things back up; I especially love the mixture of the acoustic guitars into the song. "Ash" is perhaps my favorite track on the entire album. The song balances the classical sound and melancholic attitude that is suggested through the cello as well as the swagger and rock and roll vibe of the guitars. Acting as the mediator between the two is Turla, who delivers a spectacular vocal performance.

"The Black Spot" is another of the more subdued songs on the album. "52 Ford" builds really well, starting from a mid-pace and ever increasing as the song unfolds. Unfortunately, just as it begins to rock, bam, it's over. It's kind of a disappointing end to what could have been an exceptional opportunity for the band to jam out.

Album-closer "Spring Break 1899" brings another influence under the Murder by Death banner. The song rounds out the album with a 1950's doo wop meets rock vibe - think Elvis. Following the song is a short piano outro, which those who pay close attention to detail may recognize from the band's sophomore release, *Who Will Survive, and What Will be Left of Them?* This only adds further fuel to a hidden cohesiveness to the band's catalog.

Red of Tooth and Claw is long enough to leave you satisfied, but at the same time it has you itching to hear more. There is no doubt in my mind that Murder by Death has delivered what will rate as one of the top albums of 2008 in *Red of Tooth and Claw*.

Muse

The 2nd Law

Warner / Helium 3, 2012

Matt Andrews, November 2012 – 4.5 / 10

The year is 2052. Society as we know it has completely changed. The laws of government and nation have crumbled into dust, trodden down firmly by the feet of innumerable footsoldiers of the new autocratic rulers of the world. Big Brother's voice rings from every speaker; CCTV cameras record every communication between state-fearing citizen and obedient lickspittle. Comrades huddle in the electronic glow of the always-on telescreen, longing for the freedom they barely remember as their government-rationed canned food goes uneaten. Will nobody rise up and unshackle us?

A lone figure appears on the horizon, his floor-length nylon cape almost blending in with the pollution-ridden skies. He carries a well-worn guitar, its gaudy silver hue glinting like a record executive's fake smile. He reaches the massing crowds and speaks his first words of wisdom:

"Wake to see your true emancipation is a fantasy", he intones operatically. Murmurs echo around the crowd. "Policies have risen up and overcome the brave", he adds, vaguely, to growing mutterings from his audience. "Embedded spies, brainwashing our children to be mean" he elaborates, to yells of support (I forgot to mention the plague of mean children in this dystopian future). "The time, it has come to destroy-", Matt Bellamy says (for it is he), " – your SOOOOOP-REMMA-SOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO" he wails, elocution his first victim. Apparently able to decipher this mysterious incantation, the downtrodden proles of the future rise up and headbang as the rest of Muse appear and begin earnestly ripping off the Mars Volta.

Just as the crowd is all fired up for an assault on the brutal dictatorship, though, our bold hero pauses to stutter his way through a kind of Queen-parodying bass-squelchfest of bizarre backing vocals and even poorer lyrics. In the *Bond* movie that is a Muse album, this is the token "wooing the female" song. But fuck that, we've got an oppressive regime to overthrow!

Wait a second, though. This revolution needsfunking up. Someone produces the filthiest slap bass this side of Chic. "Do what the fuck you

want to”, Bellamy informs the bemused crowd of rebels. “There’s no-one to appease”. Bellamy gyrates gruesomely to the porn-funk beat, explaining just why the song is called “Panic Station”. Sixteen people in the crowd immediately vow never to have sex again.

A cut-scene. John, a hard-working former hospital porter, had given his daughter Ruby up for dead when the totalitarian state police stormed her university and took all of the protesting students for interrogation in the secret prisons which litter midwestern America. Suddenly, unexpectedly, Ruby appears on the scene, her eyes searching the crowd for John. The old man’s grizzled head rises to the sound of “Prelude”, his milky eyes unable to confirm what they see. Is that-? No, it couldn’t be. But wait... that face, surely? It’s - It’s Ruby! Impossible! They said - Forget what they said! Dad, it’s me! I love you! Thank you, Muse!

After this diversion, Bellamy realises the crowd need inspiring again before they can smash the capitalist consumerist state. “Vengeance is mine!” he prattles. “I won’t give in!” he tells them. “Yeah, I’m gonna win!”. Somewhere in an unmarked grave, thousands of miles away, the ancient corpse of a performer called Freddy Mercury begins to rotate, generating an energy field briefly strong enough to power the sixteen effects pedal racks used by Bellamy. The song ends on a crescendo that crashes down like a tidal wave made of pure shit, with the crowd chanting “FIGHT! WIN!” over Bellamy’s vocal meltdown. We’re not even halfway through yet.

One of the rebels digs out a synthesiser from somewhere. He has funny-looking hair, a bit like someone drew a face on a floor mop. He presses the “Muse arpeggio” button, which starts the synth playing a sequence of notes which are actually used in every single Muse song to date. After a part where Bellamy teases the crowd, pretending to launch into Gloria Gaynor’s “I Will Survive” (1:06), the unthinkable happens. The crowd gasps, unable to comprehend what their ears are telling them. Time seems to cease. Birds pause their singing. The constantly-visible drones scudding across the sky halt their progress. Muse have “gone dubstep”.

The bass drop kicks in like a rip in the space/time continuum. Feverish now, the assembled throng raise their fists aloft as Bellamy follows up this one-two punch with the musical equivalent of a kick in the balls: a Bono impression. Evoking the spirits of their revolutionary ancestors U2, Muse march forward boldly in their quest to produce some of the least inspiring music it’s possible to make while still sounding like the entire world is

exploding. From this point onwards, all recorded music will be measured relative to this moment.

The crowd are approaching the citadel where Big Brother makes his evil rules and cunning plots to create mean children. “Analyse, advertise, expand”, Bellamy commands, passive-aggressively. “Analyse, franchise, spread out” he adds, possibly advising a prospective KFC owner. “Crush those who beg at your feet” he concludes, perhaps this time addressing a Starbucks manager. There’s just time to cram in another poor man’s Mars Volta breakdown before the crowd start fighting one another in their fury at being forced to listen to Muse.

The band confuse the crowd’s anger with excitement, assuming it was due to their brief U2 impression earlier, so they decide to improvise. “Big Freeze” hits the crowd like a fist gripping a RED iPod and a dodged tax bill. Bellamy performs his best Bono impression, to rapturous hatred.

Half of the original crowd who joined Bellamy on this quest are now dead, having succumbed to the ravages of time as the band drag themselves through yet another five minute long dirge. “Save Me!”, one cries, but the band respond by playing a song that seems to be a rejected B-side from David Bowie’s soundtrack to *Labyrinth*.

Eventually, after what seems like years, the ragged band of survivors reach the harsh metropolis where the ruling elite live. A British-sounding female voice echoes from somewhere and begins reading the Wikipedia definition of the second law of thermodynamics. A few fat dudes wearing floor-length leather jackets and neckbeards high-five one another, knowing they’re at the coolest party imaginable. A robotic voice, presumably Big Brother’s, cuts through the speech to announce “UNSUSTAINABLE”. On second thoughts it might be the short guy out of Daft Punk.

The dubstep is back. The crowd wavers, a sense of uncertainty in the air. The *wubwubwub* bass dips in and out, perhaps, ah, “unsustainable”? I’ll see myself out.

It’s the end. The final reckoning. “Isolated System”. The fat dudes nod knowingly to one another. See, that title, on first glance, sounds like it’s some technical term, probably referring to a computer network or maybe a collection of cells. But on *second* glance, if you’re intelligent enough, *then maybe it means, like, a person or something*. “Fuck, man”, says one neckbeard to the other. “Muse are so *deep*”.

Using a technique first pioneered by those anarchist rebels Simon and Garfunkel in the 1960s, Muse have cunningly spliced recordings

of people talking about things that sound a bit political on top of some poignant piano music with rising strings. The crowd around Bellamy and co. rapidly departs. They're alone against Big Brother just as the electronic drums kick back in. It's all for nothing though: the British woman's voice loops over and over about "isolated systems" and then suddenly, aeons later, it's over. Big Brother has won.

Or has it?

Yes, yes it has. Because everybody else has almost definitely lost: the victims are countless. A half-dozen bands whose signature styles were brutally sacrificed for this failed rebellion. Millions of fans who assumed that vague, everyman lyrics rambling weakly about "them" and "supremacy" might actually have some depth. An innocent wah-wah pedal.

As the remains of the crowd depart and look for tall buildings or convenient pits to throw themselves into, Muse stare determinedly off into the middle distance, refocusing their energies. "It's a race!" sings Bellamy, one more time. "And I'm gonna win!" he yells, triumphantly. "Yes, I'm gonna win!" he sings again as his bandmates bundle him up in his cape once more, shaking their heads slightly. "You won't pull ahead!" he insists, as they load him gently into the van. "I'll reveal my strength" he tells them as the bassist pats him on the head. "To the whole human race!" he yells, accepting the cup of tea from the guitar tech. "Yes, I'm gonna win!". Time for bed, Matt.

Pageninety-nine

Document #8 (Reissue)

Robotic Empire, 2005

Bob Morgan, January 2006 - 9 / 10

“Punk rock should mean freedom, liking and accepting everything that you like, playing whatever you want, as sloppy as you want as long as it’s good and has passion.” Leave it to a band that exuded and wore passion on its sleeves to open their album with a sampled quote of Kurt Cobain to emphasize this facet of their collective personality. Accurately describing Pg.99 according to genre would be a sleight to them. It would require a few dirty words that are misused to describe vapid boys horridly singing about girls. This band emotes anger, loss, pain, hope, etc. They run the gamut of human emotion in their music.

Document #8 sees Pg.99 at the top of their craft. The album is a powerful statement by a fiercely independent band that evokes their passionate live performance. “In Love With an Apparition” is a crash course in musical dynamicism that includes the most non-cliched hand clapping part ever in punk rock’s history. “Your Face is a Rape Scene” is an excellent example of how to use guitars as a percussive instrument rather than just a riff machine. The panning sound section ends the song in an apropos manner. “We Left as Skeletons” could be dangerous for the emotionally disturbed. As the song slows down, it becomes emotionally heavy and oppressive feeling, and as the music slowly gives up, one could mistake it as the soundtrack for the tragic slow death of a human being. Not only is “Punk Rock in the Wrong Hands” a lyrical indictment of the current consumer culture that has ensnared punk rock, but the music itself sounds like an aural shaming of those people who use punk for monetary gain and choking the freedom for which punk could stand. “The Hallowed out Chest of a Dead Horse” just might be my favorite song on the album. It’s a great song that sounds like a story being told and has the musical pacing of an amazing and epic movie.

Document #8 is not a new record. It is a much-needed reissue of an album that has been out of print for a while. This has been re-mastered with slight variations on the packaging and artwork as well. Musically, the album is gloriously unpolished mayhem. Pg.99 was and still is an

important touchstone in punk rock. Years from now, when most of us move on to horribly boring lives with meaningless existences, this record should stand as a poignant album that captured its time, but it probably won't because even great records go under appreciated.

Pallbearer

Sorrow And Extinction

Profound Lore, 2012

Cheryl Prime, March 2012 – 9.5 / 10

Arkansas residents **Pallbearer** have been a band to watch out for ever since the release of a fantastic three track demo in 2010. Featuring two original compositions (“Devoid of Redemption” and “The Legend” having been re-recorded for this release) and a cover track, this demo served to have many take note of this doom-laden quartet and the hopes for a full length were always at the forefront of minds. Through many a twist and turn, *Sorrow and Extinction* finally sees the light of day. **Pallbearer** are here, and oh, how they have arrived.

The slow burning opener “Foreigner” begins with a gentle acoustic sweetness, already astounding in it’s beauty whilst slowly a grand and heavy drum (Zach Stine behind the kit for these recordings) beat builds and sits gracefully behind the lightly struck notes. The fuzzy and distorted guitar (Devin Holt and Brett Campbell) tone cracks the stillness and the divinely soaring and sadness tinged vocal of Campbell bursts through, his voice holding an innate power to move. A voice drawn in pain and elemental despair, covering vast oceans of despondence with even the slightest of tonal inflections to hint at lyrical content. **Pallbearer** have never laid down explicitly what their songs could be about, although the deep sense of loss and melancholy is there for all to hear. Even the album’s title, *Sorrow and Extinction* explains everything and yet somehow nothing at all. This is a record of somber quality, almost unfathomable in the emotional depth held within. The tender soul and warm richness of the instrumentation serves to imbue this piece with genuine and intense lamentation. It is quite astounding in delivery and effect.

The absolutely crushing nature of this record resonates acutely through “Devoid of Redemption,” the extreme weight of sound echoes in the huge walls of jagged guitar and intensely thick reverb charged bass lines. Fantastically climbing solos punctuate the hefty and processional pace. This track along with “The Legend” are songs that appeared on the initial **Pallbearer** demo, and it’s testament to the significance poured into the words that these pieces of work have followed the band through time,

now being three plus years old, and still having a vast relevance to the **Pallbearer** of today. For this group, memories of the past still whisper and echo even now, and it's clear the songs found on *Sorrow and Extinction* have a far greater intimacy that as a listener, one could never dream of grasping. Quite astonishing.

Whilst being rooted firmly in the "traditional" spectrum of the doom genre, other musical influences are quite apparent. "An Offering Of Grief" has a light progressive and even psychedelic element to the undertones, tripped out guitar lines shimmering through the immensely bass (Joseph D.Rowland) heavy weight of the song. **Pallbearer** are a group to wear their influences proudly (the most obvious being Black Sabbath), yet they are completely able to break free of such comparisons and stand their ground as a fresh addition to the despair adorned halls of a magical genre. Funereal aspects seep through, most notably on "Given To The Grave," a slow sense of dread and foreboding creeping in during the mid-section. Gorgeously full solos sweep, conveying an immense gloom yet never losing sight of hope. The track also ushers in a suitably enthralling choral accompaniment; the swell of sublime voices building up a bittersweet anguish, carrying the closing moments of this song to a majestic conclusion and this debut to a heartrending finale.

It's incredible to see a band this early on in their career speak with such wisdom, and be able to wrench such emotion and touch quite so profoundly. It's genuinely remarkable to think that this is only their first full recording, and where the band go from here is certainly an exciting prospect. *Sorrow and Extinction* is a record to fall into, the themes held within are universal and immersive and such that **Pallbearer** have transcended all, and are able to break even the coldest of souls. Magnificent.

PJ Harvey

White Chalk

Island, 2007

Kevin Fitzpatrick, October 2007 - 8.9 / 10

Beginning with her 1992 debut album *Dry*, much has been made of Polly Jean Harvey seemingly reinventing herself with every release that followed. For anyone else, this would be a gimmick, a hook - thus making the work less than sincere. But the calculation ends with the realization that the music is more honest than most anything created by other artists. Each album is a fair representation of a specific period in the life of a woman called PJ. That is to say, each album represents how this particular woman was feeling at the time of writing the songs. It sounds simple doesn't it? Shouldn't it be?

Why is it then that Ms. Harvey is one of a very small handful of artists that write in this fashion? Think about it. Most every songwriter that you can think of may have different themes, tempos, and moods to their music and lyrics, but yet all their songs still sound similar - constrained within the frame of the artist's previous work.

PJ Harvey knows no such restraints. Each album has been a fully autonomous, organic entity all it's own. "Concept" albums, if you like - if the concept being referred to, is the artist's general mood at the time.

Dry - A celebration of a strong, self-assured yet still somewhat reticent woman with songs that were seemingly pent up inside her entire life and now given the opportunity to spew forth.

Rid of Me - The gloves are off with songs of rage, sexuality, and aggression that they almost seemed laced with testosterone rather than estrogen.

To Bring You My Love - An album of seduction with PJ drastically changing her look, and softening her touch to lure those poor bastards to the rocks.

Is This Desire? - Perhaps as an antidote to the misperceived strumpet of her previous album, *Is This Desire?* shows us her dark side. Scary sounds, electronically enhanced - an ugly, aural wall built up to shield us from the person underneath.

Stories From the City, Stories From the Sea - The wall comes crashing

down. PJ is apparently in love and all seems right with the world. Her most accessible and personal album yet. First person narrative has never been more prevalent in her work.

Uh Huh Her - But all good things must come to an end. PJ is pissed off and wants everyone to know it. From “The Life and Death of Mr. Badmouth” to “Who the Fuck” to “The Darker Days of Me and Him,” this is an angry album and as anger will always cloud judgment, this is also PJ’s most uneven work to date with only a handful of tracks that make a deposit in the memory banks.

Throughout PJ Harvey’s entire career, there has remained one common denominator, and that is strength. Even in the throes of love or hate, when most are at their weakest, there was strength.

White Chalk reveals a side to Polly not yet shown to the likes of us - vulnerability. And it’s in that vulnerability that Harvey has given us her strongest album yet. Gone is the chaos of the first two albums. Gone are the lush arrangements of each successive album. This is an album stripped to the bone of a woman stripped to the skin of all pretense and presentation. A sparse, thirty-six minute offering of quiet, introspection and reflection. This is the PJ Harvey of want and longing.

Forgoing the comfort zone of her guitar, the piano dominates every song. While not as skilled a player of the ivories, the sparse (there’s that word again) arrangements of the song lose nothing in their delivery. Re-recruiting producer Flood was a sound decision - the entire album sounds as if it were recorded in a Victorian mansion, furniture covered in sheets, sheets covered in dust. “Haunting” will most likely be the most commonly used word to describe this album when reviewed by my learned colleagues, and while it can be a term bandied around for the slightest of reasons, it is the only singular word that would best be used to summarize this work.

The ceiling is moving / Moving in time
Like a conveyor belt / Above my eyes

Every song has an ethereal quality to them that regardless of what you envision while listening, it will all be shrouded in mist. Put on “Silence” or the title track. You can almost smell the cool, damp air.

Vocally, the album is a departure as well - every whisper and falsetto wail almost has one thinking of someone other than Harvey delivering the prose. This is, after all, a strong, confident woman reduced to a woman of regret and atonement in “Before Departure” and regressed to a

frightened, lonely little girl in “To Talk To You,” her voice never sounding more fragile.

Being PJ Harvey, none of this can ever be mistaken for weakness, mind you. Just an all-too-brief glimpse into the mind of a spurned lover, a lonely granddaughter, and a frightened girl all trapped inside a very complex woman.

Planning For Burial

Leaving

Enemies List Home Recordings, 2010

Bob Morgan, November 2010 - 8.3 / 10

Are late passes allowed in the internet age where people get to hear the latest music from musicians as soon as two minutes (give or take due to their proficiency with certain computer skills) and almost always before the record is released anymore? Leaving sat in an envelope in my house for several months (while I feverishly searched for the package) due in part to my consistent Alzheimer moment or mental block concerning this particular album as well as the package being moved from my designated in box (yes I have one, the entire side of my desk in my office); when I finally found this package, I heaved a sigh of relief that I would not be buying a second copy (I had been mulling this eventuality over in my head for three weeks prior to finding it) and would at last get to hear this debut from Planning For Burial.

Essentially a one man project originating from the cesspit known as New Jersey (back off, I live here and am allowed to disparage this horrid den of corruption and general wickedness), Planning For Burial is a home recording outfit which eschews the slicker forms of high fidelity production (due to availability, convenience or aesthetic choice or none of these... take your pick); *Leaving* is the debut album from the one-piece.

The first couple of times that I spun *Leaving*, it refused to sink into my thick skull in the way that there was no immediate gratification; the album was certainly enjoyable (don't get me wrong), but there was something about it that the clicking or aural intuitiveness just decided to not exist as the initial experiences happened. Who wants instant gratification all the time though (sometimes the best things like records are ones that you come back to months after first listening to it and just not being overly impressed)? Several weeks after these initial brushes with Planning For Burial, the indescribable urge to put the album on again began to eat at my subconscious; giving in to such compulsions are dice-y propositions, but I threw caution to the wind and put the album on again.

Allow me to say, that there are sometimes those strange instances when a song will seem familiar when you flat out know that you are the

exact opposite in that regard and that feeling exists for me and this album, particularly the title track (its muffled drones sound otherworldly and disturbingly comforting at the exact same time) off of *Leaving*, which has literally played for entire afternoons on my headphones at work (yes, the whole afternoon, just that song, over and over again). What is the most arresting about the record is not that it is full of manageable and safe instrumentals (because it is not that in any shape or form) but rather that its variation and breadth is seamlessly interwoven into a cohesive whole; Planning For Burial becomes more distinct and intricate with each experience, and though you might think with a name like that and song titles such as “Memories You’ll Never Feel Again” and “Wearing Sadness And Regret Upon Our Faces”, *Leaving* is not overwhelmingly melancholic. The vocals tastefully augment the soaring drones and pleasant melodies, and the individual tracks always feel like they are just the right length and just the right placement.

The more that I listen to *Leaving*, the more that I want to listen to it and the more that I wish that there was able to hear more from Planning For Burial; it is the type of album that gets in you and makes you want to hear it without begging. A record certain to live on my stereo for quite a while, *Leaving* is an excellent work that should be heard; the question remains whether or not you will seek the album out and hear it.

Public Enemy

How You Sell Soul To A Soulless People Who Sold Their Soul???

Slam Jamz, 2007

Kevin Fitzpatrick, September 2007 – 8 / 10

Soul (noun) : A sense of ethnic pride among Black people and especially African Americans, expressed in areas such as language, social customs, religion, and music.

relevant (adjective) : Connected with or saying something important about what is being spoken about or discussed

It's been twenty years since the release of *Yo, Bum Rush the Show* and Public Enemy are still around despite everything the band has had to deal with, both positive and negative. The positive? Well, there's the undisputed success. The negative? Jesus, where to begin. How about today's musical climate? In 1987 when Public Enemy's first album was released, it was an anomaly. Rap music was still what "they" listened to over "there" and had yet to stretch out to the 'burbs. Twenty years later, rap music has permeated every facet of contemporary music with the sale of hip-hop music outselling every other genre (despite what the Disney company might tell you) by a margin of at least 2:1. Regardless of race, creed or national origin, your kids listen to it. Your nephews and nieces listen to it. From the little girl shopping with her mama at the Kannapolis, NC Wal-Mart to the little bastard that knocks over your garbage cans in Kapuskasing, Ontario, the hip-hop sounds and culture have permeated the farthest corners of our society.

The downside is that we're also an ADD-ridden society that tends to apotheosize only the very latest. The new artists shine bright in that charted bold typeface for only so long before they're martyred in a blaze of indifference, making way for another exalted hero-du-jour leaving the old-school veterans long forgotten in the shuffle. Sure if you're Ice-T or Ice Cube, you find other ways to earn a paycheck with movies and television, but Chuck D doesn't have an "Ice" in his name, so what's a man to do?

Charges of anti-Semitism have dogged the band since Professor Griff

accused Jews of being responsible for “all the wickedness in the world.” Now, I’m no expert – but it seems to me that this is a pretty good definition of a bad PR move. Initially fired or leaving of his own volition (depending on who you talk to) didn’t really matter as Griff appeared on later albums in some form or another. The anti-Semitic stance again reared its ugly head on 1999’s *There’s a Poison Goin’ On*’s final track, “Swindler’s Lust” – a most unfortunately titled song aimed at record company executives.

And then we have Flavor Flav, the “Best Hype-Man in the Business,” showing poor to downright brutal judgment with both his personal and professional life. The band has had to weather integrity attacks time after time after time as a result of his behavior, numerous arrests, and now numerous reality TV appearances that portray him as nothing more than a gold-toothed minstrel doing his shuck-and-jive routines for the coalition of plantation owners that is VH1. Through it all, MistaChuck has remained loyal – most likely winning his way through the process all the while dodging every guilt-by-association bullet shot his way.

So the question remains, given all the aforementioned detriments and handicaps – after twenty years, does Public Enemy still matter?

The answer is unequivocally *yes*. Public Enemy isn’t a band that’s good, it’s a band that is *integral*. We *need* this point of view in our lives. All our complacency and apathy can be washed away with a listen to a Public Enemy Album and *How You Sell Soul to a Soulless People Who Sold Their Soul???* is no exception. There’s a comfort in knowing that Chuck will always be there tell us what time it is, always holding up that mirror to our faces and reminding us exactly what we see, should we close our eyes in denial. As with every Public Enemy release, everything that’s wrong with the world is what’s right with the lyrics. There are artists just as earnest in their derision of life in America but nobody, and I mean NOBODY can convey it with the power and authority of Chuck D. From the opening title track to the ending refrain, *How You Sell Soul to a Soulless People Who Sold Their Soul???* is everything you’ve ever loved about the group set to the timeliness of the morning’s newspaper. Tracks like “Head Wide Shut” and “Frankenstar” are spat out with such conviction and force, you almost duck for fear of getting hit. Sadly, as always is Mr. Flav to pooch the proceedings with the ever-present throw away number, now substituting “Cold Lampin’” for the new-and-not-so-improved “Col-Leepin’.” An attempt to deepen the waters is made with “Bridge of Pain,” a passable shout-out to all the incarcerated brethren out there.

In an unexpected move, twenty years and coming full circle has also left Chuck feeling somewhat wistful with “The Long and Whining Road,” a slower-tempo track name-checking the entire Public Enemy catalogue. Also included on the album is “Black is Back,” a song long tied up in copyright infringement hell for the attempted use of a certain well-known guitar riff (guess who’s) and now appears completely reworked without said riff and with an original riff in its place.

If you’re a fan of Public Enemy, you’ll love this album. It’s nothing new or groundbreaking for the band, just a very effective topical ointment we all need to apply to the irritating rash of contemporary music.

Rome

Hell Money

Trisol, 2012

Cheryl Prime, December 2012 – 9.5 / 10

Jerome Reuter is becoming ever more prolific in recent times and you may remember last year's *Die Ästhetik Der Herrschaftsfreiheit* was a surprising addition to his catalogue in that it was a triple disc album that flowed with majestic coherence and innate boldness. *Hell Money* was quietly announced yet the shock that was felt by fans in the release of brand new material so soon after the massive undertaking that was *Die Ästhetik Der Herrschaftsfreiheit* was tangible in its anticipation for what was to come. The announcement was laden with promises of something new and unheard of from the Rome project, that Reuter was taking what we had all expected and turning it into something different and wildly out of reach.

Hell Money is most certainly a Rome record, yet it differs in its simplicity and the sparse use of instrumentation. Jerome Reuter's voice has always been the focal point of any Rome release and here he uses it to full and emotional affect. Again, this album is one that is based in concept but this time around it is one that is much closer to the heart and does not take it's significance from struggle and oppression and war. At least, not in the most literal sense. There is struggle and war and fight in *Hell Money* but it is much more personally rendered. There's always been a little and hidden hint that a lot of Rome work incorporates the ideals of love and it's subsequent breakdown and *Hell Money* is definitely an album filled with odes and laments to the desperation of relationships. Of course there's also throws to a broader subject and *Hell Money* itself could be an allusion to the corrupt world of modern life, the economy and the tribulations of the current global situation. However, the absolute despondence heard in "This Silver Coil" instantly evokes feelings of true and utter hopelessness and Reuter's vocal stance is one of cleanliness and purity and his words echo with melancholic gloom whilst pulling at those all-important heartstrings and heading deeper into the unknown and oblivion.

The confessional nature of *Hell Money* pours itself into each and every track, with the middle of the album much more stripped back in order

to allow these words of truth and reality to slip into the cracks left by the gentle strikes of acoustic guitar. Synths and drums and samples are noticeable by their absence in this release (except for the intrinsically neo-folk style of “Golden Boy” – a delicious high point) and whilst it may take a little getting used to, the moments of stark clarity that the near silence produces are beautifully gloomy. “Amsterdam, The Clearing” holds a stubborn and stuttering melody that leaves seconds of complete quiet in the latter stages of the song whilst “Tightrope Walker” comes in waves of subtle and sensual tones, it’s message one of festering spite below the gorgeous climbing harmonies. Reuter is a clever songwriter and his words are always cloaked in meaning, whether we pick up on them or not. This may be something that many find difficult about *Hell Money* as a whole, in that it’s not a deeply obvious narrative on a period of great movement, but isn’t life itself one of the greatest struggles?

It’s these questions that *Hell Money* opens up that makes it so sublimely resonant. It’s in the calm waves of sound that carry the heart to places that Rome has never quite travelled before and it’s in the acknowledgments of shame that Jerome Reuter becomes a man of merit (which is not to say that he wasn’t before, but this record is one that is affecting in its total truth). Before he spoke about others, today he speaks of himself. *Hell Money* is the most human record of Reuter’s short but expansive career and the most inherently sorrowful music he has produced. And for that we should thank him.

STNNNG

The Smoke Of My Will

Modern Radio, 2010

Loren Green, December 2010 – 8 / 10

It's been four long years since the last STNNNG album. In that time, though, the band hasn't wavered from their dynamic and aggressive style of confrontational rock. While original drummer Jeremy Ward may no longer play with them, Twin Cities veteran Ben Ivascu jumped in and, once the band felt comfortable as a unit, they finished up their third full-length: *The Smoke of My Will*.

While their first two records are solid, they never captured the energy that defines the band's live show. This time around, Dave Gardner and Neil Weir have mixed the guitars and vocals up front, capturing Chris Besinger's distressed and angry shout-yelps that overlay the meandering, forceful rhythms and the loud-soft dynamics that makes STNNNG sound like the musical equivalent of a being assaulted with a blunt object. Listening to the record, the adjectives that come to mind are loud and blistering—somehow even during the quiet parts. While I hate to make comparisons to legends, the Jesus Lizard comes to mind, although STNNNG is more calculated in their intensity.

The band's bread and butter comes from big, winding guitars with angry, forceful vocals. Additional complexity comes from a rhythm section that threads the different guitar parts into cohesive, yet meandering songs. The dynamic shifts seek to exploit that moment of turbulence just before an explosion. "The Ugly Show" and "Slow Water" are examples of the soft-loud shifts that give an extra punch to the aggression. In other songs, the band will slow things down, as in the plodding, rambling feel of "In the Hate Field" and the tempo-shifting "Ladies & Gentlemen... We've Been Infected," which ambles for four minutes of echoey, barren noodling before Besinger calls to his guitarist, "Take it, Burt," and the song transforms into a minefield.

As the songs waver on the brink of insanity, Besinger's lyrics tell a story in which the chaos ebbs and flows, decorated with emphatic cadences and head bobs. One of the record's best songs, "New Black Hole," is about the end of the Mayan calendar: the "cleansing fire" and how "the future's

history is put to sleep.” When Besinger delivers these lines, they don’t sound like mere description: they feel like a threat directed at anyone who will listen.

Sufjan Stevens

Illinois

Asthmatic Kitty, 2005

Matt Andrews, January 2006 – 9.4 / 10

What is the sign of a “great” record? What defines a classic? Is it a cult following? Musical virtuosity? Ambition and drive? Three chords and the truth? All these questions will be answered within this review. Maybe.

If you’re still unaware of the young and illustrious Sufjan Stevens, you’re either a My Chemical Romance fan who’s still not discovered “the scene” yet (although you think you have), or a bitter old punk who would be scared away from such a record with a single mention of the words “banjo” or “religious.” For those of you still with me, let’s proceed. In brief, Mr. Stevens has taken it upon himself to begin the “50 States Project” – an album-by-album tour of all of the states in the union. Here we are with *Illinois*, the second installment in the project.

Comprising 74 minutes (or, 22 tracks), Stevens has a lot to say; which is also evident in his song titles (for example, Track 2: “The Black Hawk War, or, How to Demolish an Entire Civilization and Still Feel Good About Yourself in the Morning, or, We Apologize for the Inconvenience But You’re Going to Have to Leave Now, or, I have fought the Big Knives and will continue to fight them until they are off our lands!”). As already detailed in his first venture, *Greetings From Michigan: The Great Lakes State*, Stevens shows a surprising level of knowledge regarding his chosen state, weaving lyrics involving state legends, famous citizens, landmarks and concepts around rambling banjos, a joyful wind orchestra, and wide-ranging set of vocalists. With so much going on, it’s fairly safe to say that there’s something here to appeal to everyone.

The record really kicks off on the third track, “Come on! Feel the Illinois!”, with an infectious piano/bass line and catchy rhythms. Stevens’ talent for arrangement is shown here as the various parts of the song evolve and conclude around one another. The atmosphere is quickly changed with the next track, “John Wayne Gacy, Jr.”, a sober and subdued ballad. As well as the astonishing range of musical instruments under his belt (not literally; I’d imagine several banjos and recorders would be uncomfortable, not to mention the church organ), Stevens’ vocals are

haunting and soothing, with some heartfelt lyrics to top it off.

As the record progresses it really feels like Stevens has taken you on a journey around Illinois, introducing you to its stories and people. With a personal edge leaking into the lyrics, the album has a warmth to it that many of Stevens' peers have lost, with their vapid sloganeering and empty sound bites. Despite Sufjan not bringing the rock as such (the closest we get is some distortion on "The Man of Metropolis Steals Our Hearts"), this record keeps your attention and forces you to listen if you're trying to use it as background ambience.

There's only so much I can say about this record in mere words. Once you listen to Sufjan Stevens you'll find yourself humming the infectious melodies, tapping out the rhythms, and unconsciously absorbing useless pieces of information about Illinois, quite without realizing it, and you can't say *that* for The Mars Volta, unless your daily conversation involves ecto-mimed bisons and mink handjobs. This is a record you could put on for your parents and still enjoy without feeling the guilty burn of dad-rock. Look, enough beating about the bush. This record will improve your life. You will become 25% more appealing to the opposite sex (or hey, the same sex if that's your thing) if you buy it; SPB guarantees it.* Buy this album.

* *Not a guarantee.*

The National Rifle

Wage Life

Independent, 2008

Loren Green, July 2008 - 7.2 / 10

What if Elvis Costello was still churning out upbeat, poppy numbers like his early work? What if you took away some of the crackle and rough edges, and replaced them with pristine production and a lot of “whoa-oh-oh’s”? What if, to spice things up, you threw in a dash of socialist rhetoric, a pinch of hand-held percussion, and a sprinkle of saxophone?

Wage Life is The National Rifle’s second self-release, their first being a 2006 self-titled EP. *Wage Life* carries a blatant theme of modern hard times with a call to action that we must re-examine the “work mythology.” This is paired up with a catchy indie pop that shows a variety of influences, the most obvious being Elvis Costello, Ted Leo, and Joe Jackson.

The National Rifle is an interesting mix of styles, as their brand of indie pop is incredibly radio friendly, with easily defined choruses and memorable hooks that could easily be used in commercials – in fact, I can almost swear that I’ve heard “Gaggers” in one – but the lyrical tone of the revolutionary will keep the band off the airwaves. If you secretly enjoy British pop but wish you could see performances in more intimate venues, The National Rifle might be perfect for you. The record’s final track, a live recording of “Tina,” seems a little out of place due to the difference in recording quality, but is a good song that sounds like a slightly less nasal Ted Leo fronting a Second Wave ska band.

If anything, the songs on *Wage Life* come across as too polished at times. For much of the record, the vocals are more “na na na” than firebrand. Only in “Gay Rock’n’Roll” does the singer really emote, albeit more subtly than most political outfits. Not coincidentally, this is my favorite track with its heavily Costello-influenced sound.

As for packaging, the CD is a collage of Socialist imagery not far from how I styled my dorm room when I was nineteen (including the very same 1984 “Big Brother is Watching You”). However, for a band as politically focused as The National Rifle, I would have appreciated if the lyrics were included. The recording quality is good overall, but when additional instrumentation such as the saxophone and harmonica are used, they

sound little tinny.

The pop sensibilities of the band contrast nicely with The (International) Noise Conspiracy-toned lyrics and the album comes across as a positive and fun romp instead of an expression of frustration and anger.

Tiltwheel

The Hiatus AKA The High Hate Us

ADD Records, 2010

Loren Green, October 2010 – 8.6 / 10

Tiltwheel have firmly established themselves as one of the least prolific bands out there. Formed in 1991, the band had released only two proper full-lengths up until *The Hiatus* (alternately listed as *The High Hate us*)—maybe three if you count re-recording old EPs and putting them together as a collection. Was *The Hiatus* years in the making, or did life get in the way of a proper recording and production session? Does it even matter what the excuse is? When all is said and done, putting that record on the turntable and hearing Davey Quinn’s signature, deprecatory voice is enough.

The band doesn’t waste any time reminding their listeners of their down-on-their-luck, fuck-everything tone, with one of the first lyrics on the record being a very clear “You stupid cunt.” The band has been compared with **Leatherface** and **Jawbreaker** in the past, and both comparisons are apt, with the songs stretching the three-to-four minute mark instead of punk’s typical two-to-three. Quinn’s voice is gravelly, yet emotive, and his lyrics are precise and literate, focused on personal introspection punctuated by a lifestyle of heavy drinking. Despite their numerous tales of alcoholic binges, the band shows extremely tight musicianship and timing as a band. While Quinn’s lyrics explore his inner demons, the music is driving, energetic, and singalong. His content may not seem well-suited to melody, but the songs feature a distinct and universal pleading and exasperation led by carefully crafted songs that swell with the emotional tide of the lyrics, offering energetic highpoints, drawn out lows, and a feeling that the music runs as much on adrenaline as anything else.

Among the album’s highlights are “I Spent My Summer Vacation in Vancouver, B.C.” and “Can’t Remember Shit,” both of which build around the fleeting joys of alcohol contrasted by heartbreak, frustration, and going nowhere. “I’m fat, fucked up, and beautiful,” Quinn sings in “Summer Vacation,” celebrating the misfit culture of the band. Similarly, “Can’t Remember Shit,” references “this heart, these hands, [and] these tall

cans.” In “Get Your Gentrification Out of my Aburquesamiento,” the band shifts gears toward more sociological themes. While the subject matter is still rather glum, there seems to be a more energetic feel without the first person approach.

Sometimes, the longer a band takes between albums, the harder it is to live up to expectations. In the case of *The Hiatus*, Tiltwheel delivers another incredibly solid record in line with the rest of their catalog.

Tomahawk

Oddfellows

Ipecac, 2013

Steven Ivy, January 2013 – 8.6 / 10

In the summer of 1992, my older brother drove me to Tower Records to buy the new album by a band called Faith No More. *Angel Dust* was quite a departure from their previous album due to the increased influence of vocalist Mike Patton. As a 14-year-old burgeoning music fanatic, I was fascinated by the idea that such aggressive and experimental music could also be oddly accessible. While I have remained a fan of Patton throughout his numerous projects over the years, they have never quite managed to ignite the same level of enthusiasm. If any of them could be considered a worthy contender, it would be *Tomahawk*.

Formed in 2000 as a collaboration between Mike Patton and guitarist Duane Denison from *The Jesus Lizard*, *Tomahawk* straddled a similar line between experimental and straightforward rock/metal. The addition of ex-Helmet drummer John Stanier and ex-Melvins bassist Kevin Rutmanis (now replaced by Trevor Dunn, ex-Mr. Bungle) transformed the project into a veritable supergroup. Their first two albums delivered solid batches of dark yet quirky alt-rock songs. Their third, *Anonymous*, was a surprising collection of Native American inspired songs that left much of the aggressive rock element behind. While it is an interesting and respectable album, it was a bit of a disappointment. Six years later, *Tomahawk* have returned with what is arguably their most cohesive album to date.

While Patton has become somewhat of an icon of experimental music, he is most successful when he is forced to fit his tempestuous ideas into a more controlled environment. Duane Denison's guitar work, while often angular and discordant, provides a uniquely dense framework that gives these songs their inherent charisma. In the end, *Oddfellows* is another album from a Mike Patton project and his grandiose presence will compel some to judge it as little else. He pulls out all the stops and clearly has no problem proving that he is still one of the most versatile rock vocalists. However, the diversity and overall quality of Denison's compositions are what truly make this the most satisfying Mike Patton album of this century.

For those who share my affinity for 90's-era Mike Patton, the album hits all the right marks. One of the most notable is "Stone Letter," which might be the catchiest and most barefaced rock song that Patton has ever touched. The fact that the song sits between the jagged guitar-driven title track and the crawling piano of "I.O.U." is a perfect example of the outright audacity of Oddfellows. A basic verse-chorus structure will be confidently embraced for one song, only to be turned on its ear for the next. Oddly enough, the deviations are what produce some of the weaker moments. Nevertheless, this presumptuous nature of the album is a welcome reminder of a time when rock bands were confident enough to throw you a curve ball or two.

All of my nostalgic drivel aside, Oddfellows is not only a gratifying return to form for Tomahawk, it is also one of the more enjoyable alt-rock albums in recent memory. I am not afraid to admit that I will never be completely satisfied until I am holding a new Faith No More album in my hands. But, Oddfellows is certainly a great example of why I became so captivated by Mike Patton in the first place.

Withdrawal

Unknown Misery

Wendigo, 2009

Michael Phillips, August 2009 - 9 / 10

Sometimes a band digs its claws into your very essence. This band refuses to let go, and only deepens its grip as times passes. Since hearing demo recordings from Canadian-based Withdrawal, I have been unwilling to separate myself from the connection I have to their music. *Unknown Misery* marks the band's first official release, a five-song 7" of 90's inspired hardcore - thematically and musically.

The a-side of *Unknown Misery* begins with "Pray as Lamb; Lamb as Prey." Chugging metal-tinged guitar riffs spearhead the song. A thick and rumbling rhythm section in the bass and drums further fuels this frenzied pace. Partnered with the guttural bark and apocalyptic theological-based lyrical ramblings of vocalist Adam Dyson, this song is an absolute delight to my ears. "Creation's Womb" is equally as destructive; its blistering pace brings to mind the fiery assault of Ringworm. This side of the 7" concludes with "The Hanneman King" - an obvious Slayer reference - that contains some of the best shredding this side of the mid-90's Victory catalog.

"Luminous Sanctuary" starts off the b-side. The song opens with show-churning guitars and the venomous vocal delivery of Dyson. The slower pace allows each and every riff to be thoroughly pounded into your skull - not normally an experience one welcomes but one that you'll make an exception for in this case. The 7" concludes with the title-track, and "Unknown Misery" has saved the best for last. The opening section is so fucking good. The galloping rhythms matched with a chugging riff and a harmonizing guitar line is perfection. It's interesting to hear layering like this in a hardcore song, something normally characterized in shoegaze, new wave, and post-hardcore.

Dyson's lyrics venture in multiple directions. There are the pessimistic views of society, where influence from the likes of Integrity and Catharsis are obvious. But also, there are significant portions that deal with self-analysis. Sprinkled here and there are pieces of prose, and even excerpts of poetry. Less notable influences comes from the world of philosophy and the visual arts. With lines like the following from "Creation's Womb,"

how can your interest not be piqued by these writings?

Only with weakness can you accept reality / There is no truth. There is only perception. / The fear that sinks in you is your vision's deception.

Pre-orders of the 7" also were accompanied by a short story penned by Dyson. This writing provides further insight into the psyche of Dyson and further explains his outlook on society. It's quite an interesting read and a nice bonus to the recording.

I can't find a single thing about *Unknown Misery* that I do not enjoy. This is dark and ominous metallic hardcore at its best. Withdrawal is a force on the rise and it's time you take notice.

§

Section five

The favorite records

Every year we rigorously assemble a list of the staff's favorite albums of the past twelve months. We're keen to keep things democratic, and so every writer submits a top album list which is then cumulatively added together to create an overall top 30 for the site. If there are ties we vote on the victor until we have a final list of what we feel are the best releases of the year - no editorialising.

Our tastes change over the years: look at the early dominance of bands like the Blood Brothers, or the gradual rise of metal, or the consistent presence of heavyweights like Converge, where all staff can agree on their abilities regardless of genre preference. We've included the last ten years of top 30s here for your enjoyment: if there's a record you've missed or an era that passed you by, use these charts as your starting point. Or just laugh at what we thought was cool in 2003. Your call.

2003

1. The Blood Brothers - Burn
Piano Island Burn
2. Ted Leo And The Pharmacists
- Hearts Of Oak
3. Cursive - The Ugly Organ
4. Broken Social Scene - You
Forgot It In People
5. Explosions In The Sky - The
Earth Is Not A Dead Cold
Place
6. Songs: Ohia - The Magnolia
Electric Co
7. The Rapture - Echoes
8. Radiohead - Hail to the Thief
9. Outkast - Speakerboxxx/The
Love Below
10. The Shins - Chutes to Narrow
11. The Plot To Blow Up The
Eiffel Tower - Dissertation,
Honey
12. The Microphones - Mt. Eerie
13. Prefuse 73 - One Word
Extinguisher
14. Xiu Xiu - A Promise
15. The Decemberists - Her
Majesty, The Decemberists
16. The Mars Volta - De-loused In
The Comatorium
17. The Wrens - Meadowlands
18. Ten Grand - This is the Way
to Rule
19. Lightning Bolt - Wonderful
Rainbow
20. Mogwai - Happy Songs For
Happy People
21. Grandaddy - Sumday
22. Stephen Malkmus and the
Jicks - Pig Lib
23. The Locust - Plague
Landscapes
24. Benton Falls - Guilt Beats
Hate
25. Black Eyes - S/T
26. Thunderbirds Are Now -
Doctor, Lawyer, Indian Chief
27. The Rum Diary - Poisons That
Save Lives
28. Belle and Sebastian - Dear
Catastrophe Waitress
29. Pelican - Australasia
30. Daughters - Canada Songs

2004

1. Xiu Xiu - Fabulous Muscles
2. Isis - Panopticon
3. Kanye West - College Dropout
4. Madvillain - Madvillainy
5. Interpol - Antics
6. The Velvet Teen - Elysium
7. Joanna Newsom - The Milk-Eyed Mender
8. Converge - You Fail Me
9. Sufjan Stevens - Seven Swans
10. The Arcade Fire - Funeral
11. Björk - Medúlla
12. Mono - Walking Cloud and Deep Red Sky, Flag Fluttered and the Sun Shined
13. Old Man Gloom - Christmas
14. The Cure - S/T
15. The Honorary Title - Anything Else but the Truth
16. Minus the Bear - They Make Beer Commercials Like This
17. Animal Collective - Sung Tongs
18. Brian Wilson - SMiLE
19. Air - Talkie Walkie
20. Owen - I Do Perceive
21. Elliott Smith - From a Basement on the Hill
22. Modest Mouse - Good News for People Who Love Bad News
23. Mastodon - Leviathan
24. The Faint - Wet From Birth
25. Circle Takes The Square - As The Roots Undo
26. The Blood Brothers - Crimes
27. Franz Ferdinand - S/T
28. Morrissey - You Are the Quarry
29. Life Long Tragedy - Destined for Anything
30. Ted Leo and The Pharmacists - Shake the Sheets

2005

1. Jesu - Jesu
2. Sufjan Stevens - Illinois
3. Modern Life Is War - Witness
4. Red Sparowes - At The Soundless Dawn
5. Pelican - The Fire In Our Throats Will Beckon The Thaw
6. Antony & the Johnsons - I am a Bird Now
7. Cursed - II
8. Broken Social Scene - Broken Social Scene
9. Kanye West - Late Registration
10. Gospel - The Moon Is A Dead World
11. Propagandhi - Potemkin City Limits
12. SunnO))) - Black One
13. Lightning Bolt - Hypermagic Mountain
14. Decemberists - Picaresque
15. Bane - The Note
16. Against Me! - Searching For A Former Clarity
17. Minus The Bear - Menos El Oso
18. Bright Eyes - I'm Wide Awake, It's Morning
19. Animal Collective - Feels
20. Akron Family - Akron Family
21. A Silver Mt. Zion Memorial Orchestra & Tra-La-La Band With Choir - Horses in the Sky
22. Sharon Jones and the Dap-Kings - Naturally
23. Sigur Rós - Takk
24. Earth - Hex(Or Printing in the Infernal Method)
25. Death Cab For Cutie - Plans
26. M83 - Before the Dawn Heals Us
27. XiuXiu - La Forêt
28. CaveIn - Perfect Pitch Black
29. Meneguar - I Was Born At Night
30. The Mars Volta - Frances the Mute

2006

1. Converge - No Heroes
2. Fucked Up - Hidden World
3. Red Sparowes - Every Red Heart Shines Towards the Sun
4. Mogwai - Mr. Beast
5. The Loved Ones - Keep Your Heart
6. Jesu - Silver
7. None More Black - This is Satire
8. Ignite - Our Darkest Days
9. Ghostface Killah - Fish Scale
10. Envy - Insomniac Doze
11. Johnny Cash - American V: A Hundred Highways
12. Crime in Stereo - The Troubled Stateside
13. Mastodon - Blood Mountain
14. A.F.I. - Decemberunderground
15. The Lawrence Arms - Oh! Calcutta!
16. Isis - In the Absence of Truth
17. Tom Waits - Orphans: Brawlers, Bawlers, and Bastards
18. Belle and Sebastian - The Life Pursuit
19. Murder by Death - In Bocca Al Lupo
20. Send More Paramedics - The Awakening
21. Shook Ones - Facetious Folly Feat
22. Set Your Goals - Mutiny!
23. Thom Yorke - The Eraser
24. End of a Year - Sincerely
25. Russian Circles - Enter
26. Defiance, Ohio - The Great Depression
27. Morrissey - Ringleader of the Tormentors
28. Hank III - Straight to Hell
29. These Arms are Snakes - Easter
30. Tragedy - Nerve Damage

2007

1. Radiohead - In Rainbows
2. Lifetime - Lifetime
3. Modest Mouse - We Were Dead Before the Ship Even Sank
4. Minus the Bear - Planet of Ice
5. Jesu - Conqueror
6. Neurosis - Given to the Rising
7. Animal Collective - Strawberry Jam
8. Bright Eyes - Cassadaga
9. Electric Wizard - Witchcult Today
10. Okkervil River - The Stage Names
11. Cloak/Dagger - We Are
12. The Arcade Fire - Neon Bible
13. Crime In Stereo - ...Is Dead
14. Ted Leo & The Pharmacists - Living with the Living
15. 108 - A New Beat from a Dead Heart
16. Panda Bear - Person Pitch
17. Wolves in the Throne Room - Two Hunters
18. The Shins - Wincing the Night Away
19. Explosions in the Sky - All of a Sudden I Miss Everyone
20. Ben Weasel and His Iron String Quartet - These Ones are Bitter
21. Pelican - City of Echoes
22. Do Make Say Think - You, You're a History in Rust
23. Jesu - Sundown/Sunrise
24. The Weakerthans - Reunion Tour
25. Allegiance - Desperation
26. Iron and Wine - The Shepherd's Dog
27. Andrew Bird - Armchair Apocrypha
28. The White Stripes - Icky Thump
29. Pygmy Lush - Bitter River
30. Sundowner - Four One Five Two

2008

1. The Gaslight Anthem - The '59 Sound
2. Blacklisted - Heavier than Heaven, Lonelier than God
3. Dillinger Four - C I V I L W A R
4. Polar Bear Club - Sometimes Things Just Disappear
5. Young Widows - Old Wounds
6. Paint it Black - New Lexicon
7. Fucked Up - The Chemistry of Common Life
8. Able Baker Fox - Voices
9. The Hold Steady - Stay Positive
10. Cursed - III
11. Ceremony - Still Nothing Moves You
12. Earth - The Bees Made Honey in the Lion's Skull
13. Death Cab for Cutie - Narrow Stairs
14. Killing the Dream - Fractures
15. Leviathan - Massive Conspiracy Against All Life
16. Skin Like Iron - Skin Like Iron
17. Lemuria - Get Better
18. Beck - Modern Guilt
19. Teenage Bottlerocket - Warning Device
20. LaGrecia - On Parallels
21. Murder by Death - Red of Tooth and Claw
22. The Night Marchers - See You in Magic
23. The Loved Ones - Build & Burn
24. Mogwai - The Hawk is Howling
25. Off With Their Heads - From the Bottom
26. Cult of Luna - Eternal Kingdom
27. This is Hell - Misfortunes
28. The Black Keys - Attack & Release
29. Sunn O))) - Dømkirke
30. Gnarl Barkley - The Odd Couple

2009

1. Blacklisted - No One Deserves To Be Here More Than Me
2. Converge - Axe to Fall
3. Polar Bear Club - Chasing Hamburg
4. Banner Pilot - Collapser
5. Coalesce - Ox
6. Dear Landlord - Dream Homes
7. Frank Turner - Poetry of the Deed
8. Mastodon - Crack the Skye
9. Propagandhi - Supporting Caste
10. Lucero - 1372 Overton Park
11. Narrows - New Distances
12. Baroness - Blue Record
13. Dälek - Gutter Tactics
14. P.O.S. - Never Better
15. Morrissey - Years of Refusal
16. Dinosaur Jr. - Farm
17. Gallows - Grey Britain
18. Chuck Ragan - Gold Country
19. Mother of Mercy - III
20. Strike Anywhere - Iron Front
21. The Mountain Goats - The Life And The World To Come
22. Sunn 0))) - Monoliths & Dimensions
23. DOOM - Born Like This
24. Shook Ones - The Unquotable A.M.H.
25. Khanate - Clean Hands Go Foul
26. Isis - Wavering Radiant
27. Ghostlimb/Fischer - Split
28. All Teeth - I am Losing
29. Mos Def - The Ecstatic
30. Silversun Pickups - Swoon

2010

1. Swans - My Father Will Guide Us Up A Rope To The Sky
2. Dillinger Escape Plan - Option Paralysis
3. Ted Leo and the Pharmacists - The Brutalist Bricks
4. Minus the Bear - OMNI
5. Arcade Fire - The Suburbs
6. The Gaslight Anthem - American Slang
7. Crime in Stereo - I Was Trying to Describe You to Someone
8. Johnny Cash - American VI: Ain't No Grave
9. Nails - Unsilent Death
10. Murder by Death - Good Morning, Magpie
11. Janelle Monáe - The ArchAndroid
12. Make Do and Mend - End Measured Mile
13. Alkaline Trio - This Addiction
14. Daughters - Daughters
15. The Gamits - Parts
16. Integrity - The Blackest Curse
17. 108 - 18:61
18. Off With Their Heads - In Desolation
19. Sage Francis - Li(f)e
20. Elliott Smith - An Introduction To...
21. Crucified - Coldest Winters; Darkest Reaches Of The Mind
22. Jimmy Eat World - Invented
23. Agalloch - Marrow of the Spirit
24. Flying Lotus - Cosmogramma
25. Young Livers - Of Misery & Toil

2011

- | | |
|---|--|
| 1. Sutekh Hexen - Luciform | 14. True Widow - As High As
The Highest Heavens And
From The Center To The
Circumference Of The Earth |
| 2. Bright Eyes - The People's Key | |
| 3. Rome - Die Ästhetik der
Herrschaftsfreiheit | 15. High Tension Wires -
Welcome New Machine |
| 4. Craft - Void | |
| 5. Street Eaters - Rusty Eyes and
Hydrocarbons | 16. Fireworks - Gospel |
| 6. Tom Waits - Bad As Me | 17. PJ Harvey - Let England Shake |
| 7. Random Axe - Self Titled | 18. Condominium - Warm Home |
| 8. The Dwarves - Born Again | 19. Mamiffer - Mare Descendrii |
| 9. Mournful Congregation - The
Book Of Kings | 20. Vildhjarta - mässtaden |
| 10. Sims - Bad Time Zoo | 21. Des Ark - Don't Rock The
Boat, Sink The Fucker |
| 11. Circle Of Ouroboros - Eleven
Fingers | 22. Night Birds - The Other Side
Of Darkness |
| 12. William Elliott Whitmore -
Field Songs | 23. Battles - Gloss Drop |
| 13. Altar Of Plagues - Mammal | 24. Fleet Foxes - Helplessness
Blues |
| | 25. Iceage - New Brigade |

2012

1. Converge - All We Love We Leave Behind
2. Pallbearer - Sorrow And Extinction
3. The Tallest Man On Earth - There's No Leaving Now
4. El-P - Cancer 4 Cure
5. Propagandhi - Failed States
6. Anathema - Weather Systems
7. Evoken - Atra Mors
8. The Menzingers - On The Impossible Past
9. Off! - Self Titled
10. Ian Anderson - Thick as a Brick 2
11. Murder By Death - Bitter Drink, Bitter Moon
12. Black Breath - Sentenced To Life
13. Godspeed You! Black Emperor - Allelujah! Don't Bend! Ascend!
14. Diablo Swing Orchestra - Pandora's Piñata
15. Killer Mike - R.A.P. Music
16. Soundgarden - King Animal
17. Kendrick Lamar - good kid, m.A.A.d city
18. Bell Witch - Longing
19. Crystal Castles - III
20. Rush - Clockwork Angels
21. Roc Marciano - Reloaded
22. Bison B.C. - Lovelessness
23. Toys That Kill - Fambly 42
24. Mission Of Burma - Unsound
25. Cheap Girls - Giant Orange
26. Rome - Hell Money
27. Gojira - L'Enfant Sauvage
28. Classics Of Love - Self Titled
29. Japandroids - Celebration Rock
30. fun. - Some Nights

