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MIXDOWN MONTHLY

ISSUE 212
DEC 2011
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BAD RELIGION

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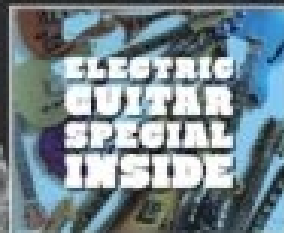
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BAD RELIGION

HOW COULD HELL BE ANY WORSE?

From moshpits in California to the halls of Cornell University - Bad Religion have changed lives. As one of the most celebrated punk-rock bands of all time, they have drawn fans from all over the world, whether they sport the famed Crossbuster band logo or not. We caught up with bassist Jay Bentley to chat about the legacy of the band, recording in a non-linear fashion and life in a band that has been rocking out for 31 years and counting.

It looks like Soundwave 2012 is the only thing on your tour calendar at the moment! Are you excited about coming back to Australia?

Yeah I am! It was kind of sad when Soundwave Revolution fell apart. It was a shame, because on tour, it's rare that you get to go to places that are lots of fun and in the sun. And y'know... there's shrimp on the barbie [laughs].

Has Bad Religion seen it fit to shelve many recordings over the years?

Not an entire album but certainly songs. Usually, they couldn't develop past a certain stage and we'd play them and it would become obvious that the song wasn't fitting with the rest of the album, so we'd put it away.

Do you think it's important to be ruthless when editing your work for presentation?

There's two parts of that. It's important to be able to self-edit, but as a band, it's important to not take that process as a personal attack. Sometimes a song doesn't make sense with the rest of the project. How a band relates to each other through the creative process can set the tone for how they interact in all facets of being in a band, so it's really important.

Over the years, members have come and gone from Bad Religion, including yourself. How are the interpersonal relationships in Bad Religion nowadays?

Most bands say things like, "The band is like my girlfriend" or "We're like brothers man". I feel we're so far beyond that, we've been together 31 years. This six-piece line-up of the band has been together now 11 years. We're like family - times ten [laughs].

Do you hang out when you're not on tour?

I only live about a mile away from Brooks [Wackerman, drums] - I see him the most socially. Greg [Graffin, vocals] moved upstate to New York, he rarely gets to see people. Brett [Gurewitz, guitar] lives in Hollywood and so does Greg [Hetson, guitar] so we see them from time to time, but most of my social contact mainly comes from Brooks right now. We have coffee and talk about kids [laughs].

How many kids do you have?

I've got two, aged twenty and eighteen. My oldest son works for Hurley, he does marketing and that kind of stuff. He's coming down to work on some Hurley stuff in Australia next year. My youngest son, he's just exactly like me when I was eighteen [laughs]. He's awesome, he's really talented. He's still figuring things out. Plus we have another one on the way.

How exciting! Will your third child be a boy or a girl?

We decided we want it to be a surprise. Surprises come far and few in life these days, so you may as well take the one's you can get. My wife is due in April!

What was it like recording Bad Religion's latest album, *The Dissent Of Man*?

We were doing a lot of things at once, playing a lot of shows. It was late hours and we were pretty strapped for time. It was really weird how things started to gel into an album and vastly different to past records where we had just gone into the studio and fired it out almost immediately.

For me, I'm a fan of spontaneity. I believe if you over-rehearse a song, you can sometimes lose the original feeling, that spark. It can start to sound like you are mimicking your original interpretation of the song, without the same sense of urgency. I wouldn't know what Brooks was playing on the record until I had sat down in the studio, which was nice.

Did working in a non-linear fashion influence other things within your bass playing?

We've always felt about punk rock played at high volume and high tempo is, things go by so fast, that you don't really know if that chord was a G# or an A minor - it just happens to be a power chord that went flying by. Brett and I were discussing how to try and give our music a different dynamic.

Normally, bass is the thing that goes after the drums, so everyone has a bass to lay tracks down on. Now, after the vocals are done, I come back and re-do the bass - with a different take on how the song works to try and tie everything together.

What kind of basses and amps do you use on stage?

I'm using an Epiphone Jack Casady Signature Bass, it's like a Les Paul copy. Since 1994, I've been playing a 1984 Schechter Tele, like Pete Townsend used to play, except it's a bass. I've never seen another one like it and it weighs like 16 pounds. I didn't have a back up for it, so our guitar tech at the time built me one. I played it to death but after all these years, 16 pounds of mahogany can be tough on your back.

My on-stage amps, I use an Ampeg SVT with one of those new Heritage heads. We were on tour with Rise Against and their bass player had two of these Ampeg Heritage heads and I thought they were awesome. I rang my guy at Ampeg and said, "I will give back every piece of Ampeg I have, just for one head" [laughs]. As far as the studio goes, everything I've done since 1988's *Suffer* was done with a 1978 P-Bass and a Hi Watt 8x12.

Left of field, there's been a lot of heat about the collaboration between Lou Reed and Metallica. What are your thoughts on bands collaborating with acts that are left-field of their musical style?

I've heard about it, but I haven't heard any of the material. I don't understand why somebody who is a fan of a band working with someone they look up to would be upset. It's similar to when we worked with Ric Ocasek [The Cars] on *The Gray Race*. I mean, it's fucking Ric Ocasek from The Cars! If he had sat down with us and said, "I want to co-write all these songs with you", of course we would have said yes. I think it's great when bands step out and work with other artists they are fans of. Recently, we recorded a song for *Chimes of Freedom: Songs Of Bob Dylan Honoring 50 Years of AMNESTY International*. Someone put out a press release for it, listing the artists with the songs they were doing. But they mustn't have known what song we were doing, so it read "Bad Religion, Lucinda Williams" and then it said the song she was doing, 'Tryin' To Get to Heaven'. Because there was a comma between Bad Religion and Lucinda Williams, people automatically assumed that we were working with her. You could see it going through all of the little punk rock circles, fans flaming all over the internet, "What the fuck are Bad Religion thinking, working with Lucinda Williams?". Sometimes people hear about something and they don't want it to happen, they don't even know why. Their first reaction is "Fuck that." It's weird.

Are there any records that you love and have puzzled you over the years?

I'm puzzled by 1996's *The Gray Race*. There were dramas surrounding the band at the time, leaving Epitaph, Brett was out of the band and people are really going to scrutinise this record, but we were prepared for that. But everything in my mind about the record was perfect. To this day, I believe it's one of the greatest Bad Religion records, but when it came out to little to no fanfare, I turned to Greg and said, "No matter what anyone else thinks, it's a sleeper and it's a great record." Greg wrote some phenomenally personal lyrics on that record and to this day, I don't know whether or not it got the recognition I thought it deserved.

Don't forget Bad Religion's venture into prog-rock, 1983's *Into The Unknown*, mauld by fans and ignored by the band. Has the band's opinion of the record changed over time?

Umm...no [laughs]. Brett's opinion has probably changed from the record - from the moment it was released until now [laughs]. I'm sure he was thinking, "This... is... awesome!" during the making of it. Greg's opinion has never changed because he stands behind the idea that, they were 17 year old kids, doing what they wanted to do.

I was listening to it before our chat and I thought 'The Dichotomy' was a really cool track. Of course, one of my best friends, who is a fanatical Bad Religion fan, hates *Into The Unknown*.

Bad Religion's catalogue without that album, conceptually, is really something special. I know in my mind, when we get together and play, it's something really special. But going into a genre of prog-rock, lorded over by a band like Emerson, Lake And Palmer - it's like taking a tentative stab at something you're a fan of. I'm a big fan of walking on the moon but they're not going to let me just take off in the spaceship!

By Matt Petherbridge

Bad Religion will be appearing alongside System Of A Down, Slipknot, Mastodon and many, many more at Soundwave 2012, taking place on the following dates:

February 25 - RNA Showgrounds, Brisbane QLD
February 26 - Olympic Park, Sydney NSW
March 2 - Showgrounds, Melbourne VIC
March 3 - Bonython Park, Adelaide SA
March 5 - Claremont Showgrounds, Perth WA