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# BAD RELIGION

## Multisyllabic Bubblepunk In Hyper Overdrive by Tim Stegall



LISA JOHNSON

“We’re like a bubblepunk band with too many syllables,” believes Bad Religion Stratshredder Brett Gurewitz.

“**W**e’re like a bubblegum punk band,” a m e n d s four-string demon Jay Bentley, “but instead of sugar, it’s salt! Chew it for a long time and go, ‘Aw, fuck! What the

hell’s that?!”

“We’re like a bubblepunk band with Nutrasweet,” revises Gurewitz, author of such Bad hymns as “Automatic Man” and “You.” “You can keep ingesting it, but you’ll never get a sugar rush! We’re Carefree, baby!”

These Mohican choirboys emphasize the Trident nature of their peculiar brand of speedboogie a bit much. There’s a little more to the Bad Religion phenomenon than 1910 Fruitgum Co. revisionism via Marshall stacks. It takes a lot more than that to etch a timewarped bit of ‘81 L.A. hardcore wax and make it one of the most candy-dippin’ records of the new decade. After all, the idea of hardcore revisionism in this day and age is akin to those old flicks you occasionally catch on the tube at 4:00 am, where some poor Mr. Moto look-a-like is still manning his desert island machine gun post because Hirohito neglected to radio word that WWI’s over and he can come home,

you know what I mean?

Still, Bad Religion have never really been anyone’s idea of top form hardcore — at least the current *Maximum Rock And Roll* version: Thrashrant which still screams “Screw Reagan! Nuclear war!! Eat yer veggies!! Blah blah blah!!” Nah, both Bad Religion and *NO CONTROL*, their latest testament, recall a time when Core still meant sped-up Seventy-seven punk/rock, and still mindful of terms which never entered the thrash mob’s collective vocabulary (i.e., “songs,” “melodies,” “hooks,” etc.). If nothing else, the Bad Religion gospel is the sound of the Buzzcocks as your pet hamster after you slipped loads of caffeine into his Purina Hamster Chow, and he started racing on his little wheel until he generated enough voltage to power Lower Peoria.

Bentley nods, explaining his and — presumably, Bad Religion’s — Arthurian quest to decipher the deathgrip that bands like the Sex Pistols, early Clash, the Weirdos, and Fear have on them.

“Y’know, their melodies were so good. A lotta bands these days, they’re punk, but they’re just fast punk and there’s nothin’ to ‘em. And for me, it was really important to wonder why some bands sounded good. Like Fear. People just go, ‘Fear?!’ But they were a great band! They really meshed so well together. And that was really important to me, and still is.”

This layout was designed by Paul Chuckalovchak as part of a magazine design contest at the Art Institute of Pittsburgh.



Factor in Gurewitz' admitted fondness for such tunesmiths as Elvis Costello and Nick Lowe (not surprising to anyone who grew up durin' punk's frothin' early daze, when such dildos used to get mentioned in the same breath as the Damned) and their bizarre penchant for droppin' fifty buck words like "fecundity" and "pylogenetically" into their songs, and you realize quickly the Bad Religion corporate anthem would have to be "I'm Not Like Everybody Else." Bentley claims the Bad Religion's hymnal's wordiness has negated his thirst for other literature: "When Brett writes a song, I always ask, 'What does that mean? What does that mean?' So, my vocabulary has increased! I talk to people and they don't know what I'm saying! Y'know, I say 'fecundity' a lot and they go, 'Wow!'"

Blame it on those Thomas Wolfe books Gurewitz has had tattooed on the inside of his eyelids...

Bad Religion began as the extracurricular activity of a bunch of teenage Angelinos in 1980. Gurewitz and Bentley played Townshend and Entwistle, respectively, Greg Graffin stood in for

Daltrey, and one Jay Ziskraut did the Keith Moon. This lasted through one self-titled EP released later that year, before Ziskraut did a quick fade and Pete Finestone snatched the vacant drum throne. When he wasn't Circle Jerkin' his Gibson gherkin, Greg Hetson could be found flexin' his Ernie Balls as a guest minister at Bad Religion gigs.

"I just got up and played," shrugs Hetson between slugs at his Nintendo machine, "and if I didn't know the songs, I'd just turn down."

Eventually, the Gurewitz-Hetson tag team dueled for a few cuts on Bad Religion's classic '81 debut, *HOW COULD HELL BE ANY WORSE?* Sometime later, they found out they couldn't get rid of Hetson, no matter how hard they tried. They even recorded a Pink Floyd soundalike LP as *HELL's* followup, *INTO THE UNKNOWN*. I don't know if it worked or not, as you can still see that rubbery Hetson mug in Bad Religion promo shots.

"I really don't know why it happened," cringed Gurewitz at the

thought of that dreaded second LP. "At the time Greg Graffin was 16 and I was 18, and we were the ones who wrote those lame songs. I mean, what were you doin' when you were 16? Sometimes, you just do stupid things, and you don't know why you did 'em when you look back five years later. Why did we blow up toilets in my high school?"

After the guffaws die down from the last observation, Gurewitz brings it all back home with, "Just say we were young and inexperienced and just did it, and we really don't know why."

After the second album, Bad Religion's psychic glue melted. Gurewitz sank into junkie morass, Bentley and Finestone went jah knows where, and a Graffin/Hetson/New Rhythm Section lineup went *BACK TO THE KNOWN*. The name was kept on a respirator through small tours and occasional L.A. gigs before the real Bad Religion arose phoenix-like from *UNKNOWN* ashes to make us all *SUFFER* in '87. Suddenly, Bad Religion were official: many records sold, cross-country sell-out tours, European blitzes, laurels such as "Album of the Year" and "Best Band" thrown at them by the readers of *Flipside* and *Maximum Rock 'n' Roll*. It was as if they'd been plunked into a colorized print of *A Hard Day's Night*. Is it any wonder *NO CONTROL's* advanced orders totalled 25,000 units.

Unfortunately, being in the Bad Religion clergy soon can become a part-time gig. "Greg Graffin already graduated (from UCLA)," Gurewitz announced, "and now he's gonna get his PhD. He's gonna be Dr. Graffin now."

"All that means for us is that we, unlike other bands who tour three months out of the year, or four months out of the year, all we can do is tour one month out of the year. So it limits our visibility to a certain extent. But I think we can still put out an LP a year."

"We're at the point," he continues, "in California where we're big enough where it's worth the promoter's while to fly Greg out for a show. We did that recently when we opened for the Buzzcocks. He was visiting his family for Thanksgiving, and the promoter flew him out, and we were able to play the show."

"Yeah," Gurewitz sighs, "we work around [Graffin's schedule]. It's kind of a drag."

So, what's Graffin's plan of study at Cornell University, Brett?

"He's a biology major, but I think it's anthropology or paleontology. Y'know, he goes on digs."

*Thanks!* You're a real fount of information, man!

"He has a BA in evolutionary biology. So, it's all tied in with evolution and rocks and digging. Very interesting. Put it this way: he's either gonna hafta be a teacher or a museum curator or a punk rock singer, or if he's lucky — and I hope it happens for him cause it'll be the funnest — he'll be able to do some research. But that's not easy to get."

Apparently, neither is an education, if you're in Bad Religion. Pete managed to pull it off, but Brett and Jay packed it in back in high school. Greg, meanwhile, proudly proclaims himself an "eight-time college dropout." "I have 15 units in 10 years of going to junior college. I gave it up, finally. Just gonna be a magician. I mean, musician!"

I often wonder how Hetson pulled some of those those riffs out of his sleeve....

With *AP's* well-deserved reputation as a paragon of journalistic excellence, it's always assumed that its swank readership wants to know about things like inspiration. Suffice to say, Gurewitz can derive inspiration from virtually anything, from reading matter to real life events. "Automatic Man" turns out *not* to be a member of the Fantastic Four as I originally thought, but a side effect of Brett's takin' a wrong turn going home which led him back to his job! "Hm," deducted the Gurewitz, "we're all pre-programmed, we're all automatons..."

Then, there's "I Want to Conquer the World," a Gurewitzitorial on what he calls "designer protest."

"Well, y'know, I don't think we should, y'know, eat animals," he mocks, sounding much like a girl I met in Cleveland, "and animals have rights. Y'know, animal rights are fine, but what about the black people who get beat up in Long Beach every day? Don't they have rights?"

They sure do, Brett. Glad you brought it up, because trendy social consciousness really eats my spleen, too. Then again, I'm the sorta bean who worries more about what box of cereal Bad Religion would like to have a record attached to.

"*Cap'n Crunch!*" pronounces a loud and proud Brett.

"Awright!" hoots Mr. Bentley. "And mine would be Quisp!"

"*Quisp isn't still around!!!*" protesteth Der Gurewitz. I assure him the rules of this question allow classic cereal reincarnation. Bass Pandora Kim Shattuck even chose Quisp at the birth of The Cereal Question.

"Well," Brett fumes, "if he can have Quisp, I can have Quake."

Greg Hetson votes for Müselix by proxy. Which is unfair. Healthy cereals aren't allowed. They have to be 75% *sugar to qualify!*

"Nah," insists Bentley, "it'd be perfect! 'Cause then all the healthy people would get sick when they heard our record!"

"I still like Cap'n Crunch better," insists Gurewitz. "We'll call the song, 'Cap'n Crunch,' too! We may even start a group called Cap'n Crunch."

"Cap'n Crunch and the Crunchberries!" beams Bentley.

Which takes us right back to the bubblepunk question, which takes us, in turn, back to this article's intro. Which means we should exit, stage right... ■



LISA JOHNSON