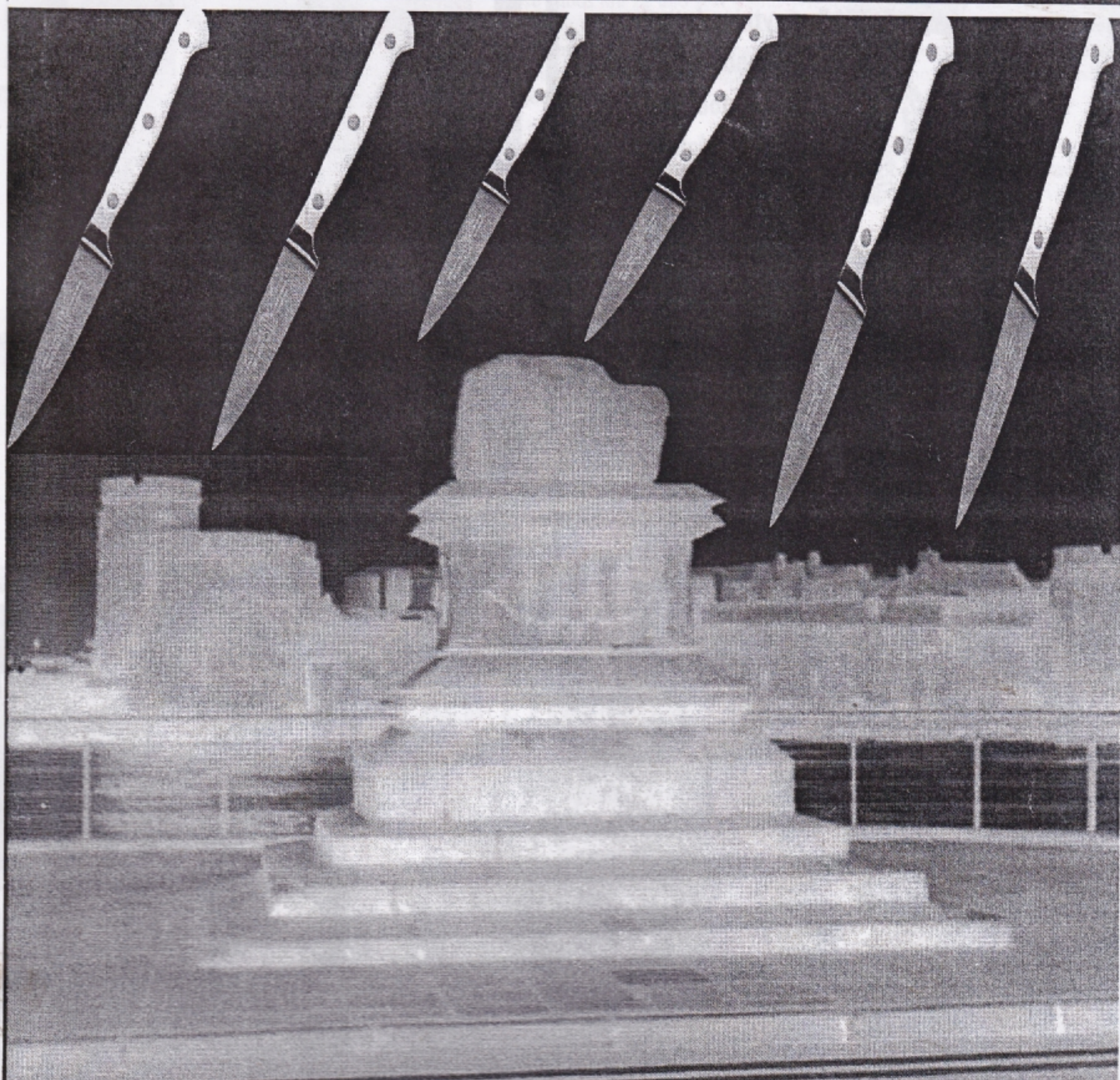


UNFIT FOR CONSUMPTION

ZINE ISSUE SIX



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OF THE USUAL RUBBISH YOU LOVE TO HATE!!



BAD RELIGION

INTERVIEW WITH BRIAN BAKER BY TREVOR MEEHAN



Trevor: Okay, first time in Ireland...any particular reason why its taken you so long to play here...

Brian: We tried to come in '94 but no one would book us as they didn't like the name, which was really stupid. We sniffed around again in '98 but at that point we were with a different record company who just didn't release our records up here so there was no point in coming. So now its finally that our record is here and there are people who are interested in having us play. So that's what took us so long to make it, which sucks, as I always wanted to make it here. We all have, cos every American loves to pretend that we're Irish... (adopts silly voice) "I'm Irish"...no you're not, you're American, you've nothing to do with Ireland... (adopts silly voice again) "No I went to a website that says I'm Irish!" You'd be amazed at the fuckin Irish mania over in the States. Its really cool to be Irish there.

Trevor: So how do I do an interview with Bad Religion that keeps it interesting for you and fresh for fans of the band?

Brian: Don't ask how the band started...don't ask if any of us are Christians...ahh...otherwise its pretty much open season. Its really an interview by interview basis. Mind you, I'm not here to be entertained...I'm here to entertain you!

Trevor: An obvious question but one I'm sure a lot of people would like to read an answer to...the return of Brett...how did it come about and what has the band as a whole gotten from that?

Brian: Well Brett finally stopped smoking crack and shooting heroin and got out of jail and got his life together where he was back to being a functioning human being. But through all of it he still managed to be an amazing songwriter and he's still an amazing person. The time was right where he felt he had gotten his shit together where he felt he could be a contributing member. You know...my favourite Bad Religion stuff is

where Greg and Brett have worked together...I mean he brings Graffins work up, it's a nice juxtaposition 'cos they write differently but within the same spectrum. My favourite Bad Religion records - which I can say as I was a fan before I replaced Brett - are ones that they wrote together. I was all for it especially when I learned they were keeping me! Its been a really great thing. Brett's come on tour with us when he could but he's running the biggest indie punk label on the globe and he can't really be out all the time. We thought he was gonna make it for this portion of the tour but something went wrong with the Pennywise artwork and he had to go deal with that.

Trevor: So he's not here then?

Brian: No, he's not here. But its cool...he's really hands on with the company so when he can come he will and if he cant...

Trevor: ...so that's the idea behind having the three guitarists?

Brian: Yeah. Brett never said he wanted to come on tour all the time. The important thing is the songwriting and recording because that's the lasting thing to me. He's already writing the next record and bar nothing horrible happening we can continue this partnership, which is great. This record is a great example. This record is far superior to the last few we released and I really believe Brett is a huge part of that, so I



encourage him to continue to do this as much as possible.

Trevor: So the return of Brett seems to be the kick in the arse the band needed?

Brian: Absolutely! It also coincided with the fact we finished with the other label and coincidentally...and truly coincidentally...when this all started to happen we had finished the contracts with the last label, other people wanted us but Brett said well why not come on Epitaph. We said "hmm, that's pretty smart...you see the guitar player in our band is the president...hmmm, I wonder will we get anything done?" So that's been real helpful too and that's why I'm sitting here in Ireland on tour.

Trevor: There was talk you were on the verge of splitting until Brett came back in the fold? How close did you get to actually finishing up?

Brian: Nah...but we were pretty shaky! Our drummer got hurt and had to leave. I don't think we were on the verge of splitting but we certainly weren't at the high point of our career...I'll say that much! I'm glad things worked out the way they did but I'm sure we would have soldiered on in any event.

Trevor: The new record...critics/ reviewers are calling it the best record you've done in a decade. Firstly what do you make of that? And secondly do you think that's offensive to the effort you put in on the previous few records?

Brian: No, because its better than the last few records. There are high points on the last few but as a consistent album I think "Process of Belief" is obviously stronger. I'm in no way offended by that. Everything you do isn't gonna be a winner and I've played on probably 70 records by now and some of them sure aren't as good as others. It doesn't bother me for some reason. Everybody got real excited about Brett's return...including reviewers. They want to like this because it's a good story so lets not forget that. You know... "guy triumphs over heroin...comes back....." It's a good story!

Trevor: I think its reminiscent of when the band stormed back into action with "Stranger Than Fiction"....

Brian: Yeah I would so say. The story was "indie success goes major label - hits to follow". That didn't work out quite the way they hoped.

Trevor: The website has a piece where it compares Bad Religion's harmonious and emotive vocal choruses to The Beatles or The Everly Brothers....who wrote that and do you agree with it?

Brian: What website is that? BadReligion.com? I doubt it! That's some press release. They gotta sell records and you know what...I don't! And that's awesome because it's a fuckin shit business. They don't tell me how to play guitar and I don't tell them how to write.

Trevor: Do you sell your records at gigs?

Brian: No. They're too heavy to carry. There's hassle with taxes to get them in and out of the country. Its never worth it. Its not practical for us to carry that stuff because the taxes are so different to the garment side of things. Long ago we learned not to do that.

Trevor: What about the merchandise, how much input do you have with that?

Brian: Yeah, we have entire control and input with that. That's still more of an artistic thing to me and the images portrayed are pretty important. We own all our own merchandise and do our own designs.

Trevor: You're all pushing on (if you don't mind me saying so)...

Brian: ...Not in the least...

Trevor: ...how do you find touring these days compared to say 15 years ago?

Brian: It's a lot better now because we're so old, they gotta make sure everything's nice. I'm more beat up now than I used to be. I don't really drink as much as I used to. That's the saddest part of this getting old thing is that when you hurt yourself or you fall down or something it hurts for two days instead of two minutes. If you get

really pissed you're hungover for two days. So what we do is we try not to fall down and we don't get fucked-up so everything's fine. That's pretty much it... you know when I was a kid touring, it was this magical big long party but it's not like that. I'm not gonna call it work, because I don't want it to sound like it's not fun – 'cos it really is – I just think we're a lot more serious about what we're trying to do. We're trying to travel in ways that basically means we're up for every show and good for every show. We got to Dublin last night and stayed over, which is a good example 'cos if we'd travelled all the way here like we would have ten years ago... you know... it just beats you up. And as it's the first time we've been here I want to play an awesome show. This should be the beginning of getting to come back here year after year. You just can't come up here and suck. I wouldn't have that. I can't do that.

Trevor: ...and after the gig...

Brian: Usually I hang out for about an hour and I sign stuff or do whatever you gotta do for the people that are hanging out. I'll go back up into the bus and play Grand Theft Auto 3, have a sandwich, read... it's really boring but that's what I do. Tonight however we have an early flight and we have to get up at 5, so we've agreed that we may as well stay up for that. So after the show we'll go out and have a few drinks... this is definitely the place to go drink something...

Trevor: ...I've got to get up at 6, get a 2 and a half hour train back to Limerick and go straight to work, so I've no pity for ye...

Brian: ...ha ha okay well then I gotta get up at 4, on a plane at 7 and I'm going to fuckin' Germany, Oberhausen Germany - the most boring place... lets just say I've spent a lot of time in Germany in the last ten years or so and I enjoy it sure but I'd certainly rather stay here. That's not to offend our fine Kraut friends!

the rubble. Eventually help came but the whole thing was horrible. You know this is supposed to be entertainment and when we're playing a show there's supposed to be fun. It isn't supposed to be like going to college or class. It's certainly not supposed to be a place to get hurt. That's the low point that I can think of right there.

Trevor: ...and the biggest challenge?

Brian: The greatest challenge is to remain relevant. With a career as long as we've had to be able to continue to write about things that are some what insightful and hit people in a certain way. To have a reason to be here. When you're as old as we are usually you've broken up and reformed and broken up and reformed and you're now doing the State circuit opening up for Uriah Heep. It's hard to not wind up being a caricature of yourself. You don't want to just write the same record over and over again and that's by far the hardest thing... to still have some importance.

Trevor: I've read some stuff about the Research fund on your website... can you tell me some more about that?

Brian: This is our fourth year doing the research fund. I don't necessarily know if it's limited only to the US... logically it shouldn't be and I hate to think it would be that exclusive. So far the

BAD RELIGION

Trevor: The band has been going for over 20 years what have been the highs and lows...

Brian: I can only speak for the decade or so I've been in the band and I managed to cruise in for the gravy – which if you've followed anything I've done in the past, I always manage to join a band just the second they get a tour bus so I don't have to do anything the hard way! The highs... there are so many of them but personally – and not just because this is the first time we've come to Ireland – but the first time in a new place is always really exciting to me. I was in the band the first time we went to Japan and the first time we went to South America. That's the great thing. I love culture, history and human experience. Before we came here I was ploughing through my James Joyce and just getting my Irish thing happening. That's the joy of being in a band – if you choose to take advantage of it – is that there's travelling all over the place and meeting new people. The low points are when people get hurt which happens way too much and we do everything we possibly can to avoid that but sometimes things are definitely out of our control. My experience of a low point in the band was San Sebastian, Spain in 1995. We were playing to 3,000 people and in the blink of an eye, 1,000 vanished. What happened was the floor broke and as it was above a car park the floor of the venue fell about 20 feet. No-one was killed, but people were fucked up... this was serious shit... San Sebastian's infrastructure ain't so strong and everybody's fuckin' drunk as it was a Saturday night. Even getting help to these people was hard because everyone was like (adopts drunken state...) "ehh? We're fuckin' Spanish man..." I was too wound up for that being from the East Coast of the States. Basically we tried to do as much as we could to the point where band members were pulling people out of

people who have won have been from the US. We provide grant money which is about \$3-5,000, just out of our own pockets to basically help supplement the funding of individuals who are doing field work in the natural sciences in universities. The reason for this obviously comes from Greg Graffins passion for this. His life's work besides being the singer for Bad Religion has been biology and palaeontology and that's what most of his education has been based in. There's an incredible lack of funding for non-laboratory scientific work in the US and Greg has lamented that and felt it himself when he's been on field work. He said to himself a few years ago if he could ever help anybody he would and we're at the point where we can afford to do that. We get about 500 applicants a year and Greg, being the scientist, gets these and breaks it down to about 30 that we in the band look over. Realistically I wouldn't have the patience to sit through 500 of these but Greg does because he's into it. God knows, I'd rather have a beer! Then the band as a collective talk about the applicants, anything we don't understand gets explained by Greg in layman's terms. We then decide who's got the best idea or the most potential in their research to yield

something interesting. This year we're trying to get some other people involved to get more money so we can either have a larger amount for the winner or fund 2 to 3 people. It's a good thing, I mean if I had graduated from high school I would have welcomed some help for my higher education.

Trevor: *Greg has wrote "Anger and violence are not punk traits"...yet I find people would argue that anger is a huge influence on punk and its spirit...well focused anger anyway....*

Brian: ...I dunno...I think theres a difference between anger and hostility. Anger to me seems to be more of a natural...something to do with rage more than emotion. Its not as easily controlled by a person whereas hostility or being a smart ass motherfucker is what I associate with being punk more so than anger. I don't think that punk necessarily needs to be qualified by blind rage. I think it needs to be a focused anger. Effectively hostility is the ability to turn it on and off.

Trevor: *How about a Bad Religion show where you come out on stage and the crowd shouts out songs on the spot and you've got to play them...could you manage that?*

Brian: That happens about every 3 shows. Unfortunately because we have our new drummer Brooks - whos wonderful - but hes only been in the band a short period of time so we don't have the ability to pull anything out. But Brooks to his credit...we play 28-30 songs a night...and Brooks probably knows another 20. When there may be a lull or somebody breaks a string or something we'll be like "so what do you want to hear?" If it's a song that everyone in the band doesn't know, the people in the band who do know it will just sort of blast through it. Jay's really good at that 'cos he knows all the songs. That would be a good idea though...kind of like the "Storytellers Bad Religion"!

Trevor: *...so you get through 28/30 songs a night...*

Brian: We usually play somewhere between that. Its about 1 hour 15 minutes. We don't really do encores unless we're in a country where they don't speak English or understand that we're not being offensive by not doing an encore. Like the Italians think we're telling them to fuck off if we don't come back out on stage. Basically I feel encores should be a genuine outpouring of emotion and it should be deserved. The fact that's its just a given in rock music...like you could see someone like Nickleback and the setlist will have a line where it says encore. Like what the fuck is that? That's not about spontaneity...that's just bullshit! So we play 1 hour 15, 1 hour 20, because that's about as long as you can take. The music, the energy and speed of it is just exhausting and its not fun to listen to after that. I know that from playing and of course from being in the audience. We pack as much in as we can I that time and just get the hell out of there.

Trevor: *... how do you go about selecting what goes on the set list? I'm sure you're very eager to play a lot of the new record?*

Brian: We have a basic frame that we look at because we know we can only play a certain amount of songs from the new record and we want to hit every other record in someway too. Of course another thing I hate is a band that's been around for 20 years saying "we're not going to play any of our old good songs that you like...we're going to force you to listen to the new crap that we think is good...that'll be \$30!". See I'm not into that. We always play songs from 1980 right the way through. The

decision is based on mood. If Greg's throat is thrashed we'll do the short faster stuff, if he's okay well do the slower songs. Each tour, you get the usual 20, they you're playing with the other 8.

Trevor: *Any of todays bands catch your eye?*

Brian: The Promise Ring is a great band. I like Hot Water Music a lot. We tried to bring them on this tour but they were doing the record ad couldn't come. They toured with us in the States. They're a great band. Its coincidental that they're both on Epitaph. As far as up and coming bands, they are my two favourites. I have to be honest I don't pay a whole of attention to whats happening in the punk rock music scene. Part of

that is the fact that I'm 37 years old and when not on tour I'm not at home playing the best of Discharge as loud as human possible and pissing off my neighbours if you know what I'm getting at. I listen to American mid 20's county music. Like Hank Williams, George Jones, Hank Snow, American roots music, Carter Family, Jimmy Rogers. That's fun for me to listen to at home. Unless of course I've a bunch of friends over and I'm drunk and then it'll be "Van Halen One" and "...And Out Come The Wolves"!

Trevor: *Just a few more...Did you see the parody cover of "Suffer" by NOFX on their "Surfer" record?*

Brian: Yep. Its amazing. Everything Fat Mike does is genius. He is a genius and I love him. We'll be touring with them all Summer and I'm so excited.

Trevor: *Whats the plan for the band from here...how many records are left in the band? Are there many more tours?*

Brian: I think theres two records. I dunno. One of the reasons the band has been around so long is because no ones really though beyond the next 6 months. I know we're going on the Warped Tour in the States and we've other countries to hit on the "Process of Belief" tour. Then we'll see about getting a record out and keep going as long as it isn't shite. As long as its fun and we can walk!

Trevor: *...did you just pick up "shite" over here?*

Brian: ...No. I've been saying it 4 or 5 years...ever since "Trainspotting" came out!

Trevor: *Last one. Everyone has the potential to be punk. True or False?*

Brian: False. Some people are just born pussies!!!

