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INTERVIEW WITH

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BAD RELIGION

INTERVIEW WITH JAY BENTLEY

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BAD RELIGION
NEW MAPS OF HELL

NEW ALBUM

APPEARING:



JULY 19, 2007
REYNOLDS PARK YACHT CENTER,
JACKSONVILLE

JULY 21, 2007
BICENTENNIAL PARK,
MIAMI

JULY 20, 2007
VINDY PARK,
ST. PETERSBURG

JULY 22, 2007
TINKER FIELD,
ORLANDO

Bad Religion was formed in 1980 by four teenage friends who shared a common dream of changing the world through music. Their journey began in a series of garages around southern California and would go on to revive a punk rock scene that lost considerable steam at the end of the 80s, ultimately becoming one of the most important punk bands of all time. With influences that range from Black Flag to Elvis Costello, and the rapier wit of front man and lyricist Greg Graffin, Bad Religion quickly added a cerebral element that wasn't always prevalent in earlier punk days. With 14 full-length albums, underground and mainstream success, and countless breathtaking live performances under their belt, it's difficult to argue that they are not only pioneers in the punk world, but in all of music in general. This summer, they will be the headlining act of the annual punk rock day camp known as the Warped Tour in support of their upcoming album, *New Maps Of Hell*. A lot has changed in the 27 years since they began, but one constant remains the presence of bass player Jay Bentley, who aside from a brief absence in the mid 80s has been an integral part of the band. Bentley is revered as one of the most influential musicians in punk and hardcore. REAX was fortunate enough to have a conversation with him about the old days, what the future holds, his views on punk, music, politics, and the strains that a relationship lasting three decades can place on a band.

REAX: *Bad Religion has been a band, in some form or another, for nearly 30 years. Can you explain or recall what the scene was like back then, and why you, Greg (Graffin), and Brett (Gurewitz) decided to form what would go on to become one of the most influential and listened to bands in punk rock's history?*

Jay Bentley: For Greg and I, we were both in high school together. We were the only kids in school with short black hair who listened to the Sex Pistols and Black Flag. Brett had dropped out of the same school but Greg and Brett had met at a party and discussed putting a band together. Realistically, in the San Fernando Valley at the time there were probably 10 million people that lived there, and out of that 10 million there were literally only about 20 punk rock people who actually listened to this type of music. The idea of starting a band had two parts. It seemed like the right thing to do and it kept us from hanging out at the mall and getting our asses kicked all the time. So, we went to Graffin's garage and started writing music and playing songs. Initially, we had the idea that eventually we could go and play in front of like-minded individuals in Hollywood, because that's where everybody cool was.

REAX: *This is a bit obscure, but what was the deal with "Into the Unknown" (the band's second album)? I believe you left the band shortly before its release or sometime thereafter. It's become kind of a cult legend amongst long time Bad Religion fans, and I've wondered what went into the decision to make that record. What are your thoughts on why it was received so poorly originally?*

JB: At the time in Los Angeles, punk rock was no longer acceptable. No venues would let a punk rock band play. Every time a punk rock band did play somewhere, it was just a big fight and a riot would break out. No one was really interested in the music, they were just interested in this neat idea of destruction. It pretty much sucked in L.A., and it was just a bad time for punk rock music. So a lot of bands turned to speed metal. Speed metal spawned from the inability of the bands to play punk rock in the clubs; you just add a guitar solo and grow your hair out and nobody cares. Bad Religion did not want to be a speed metal band. If you look down the line of influences, nowhere in there will you find Kiss or Judas Priest, but rather Todd Rundgren or Emerson Lake and Palmer. Brett and Greg thought, 'Well, we can't really play punk rock anymore because according to us, it's just dead, and this is what we want to do as a musical entity.' When they started writing progressive rock songs, I wasn't that into it and decided that wasn't something I wanted to do. The real problem with that record was, those of us in Bad Religion didn't have an understanding of how popular we were outside of Los Angeles, or what the impact would have outside L.A. We put out *How Could Hell Be Any Worse* when we were 16 years old. The popularity of that record didn't really have an impact on us. We didn't really get it, we were like, 'Holy shit we sold 10,000 copies, let's make another record, and this is fun.' So, when *Into the Unknown* came out, no one in Hollywood gave a shit, but the death threats started pouring in from around the planet.

REAX: *How did playing in other So-Cal punk bands during the 80s, most notably T.S.O.L. and the Circle Jerks, affect or influence the styles you would bring to later incarnations of your band?*

JB: I don't think it had that much of an impact on how I felt about Bad Religion. In all of the roles in all of the other bands I played in, (since there had already been another bass player, and because the band had existed before I got there), I always felt like I was just filling in. Always. With Bad Religion, I felt like this was my band and my influences like The Jam could be brought in. Whereas with all the other bands, I was just replicating someone else's stuff.

REAX: *Are there any influences from any of today's artists?*

JB: My favorite new band, that has gotten more popular than people could have imagined, is the Arctic Monkeys. That's a band that I listen to a lot right now, but I wouldn't say that they're a huge influence on what I'm playing, because to me, they sound a lot like The Jam who were a much bigger influence. The idea of wanting to play what I hear now doesn't really happen, since most of the stuff I play now is in my head if that makes sense.

REAX: *Bad Religion has always maintained a very blatant approach towards voicing opinions about politics and religion through punk music. In your eyes, what has led to this approach?*

JB: In those days, half the time was spent building practice places in garages and just talking about what we wanted to be. Then we would play, but we talked a lot about not wanting to be a band that just screamed, 'Fuck the cops!' and 'Anarchy' - it was like we wanted to have something that had a little more substance. It's kind of like how the word 'Epitaph' went on to be used as the name of our record label. We wanted to have something that years from now we wouldn't be embarrassed by. Obviously, at 15 we did write some stuff that you could look at and say, 'Man, that's pretty bad (but not too bad).' So for us, those things were established early on. We wanted to talk about things that meant something to us. Bands in England would talk about stuff that had great meaning to them. We really liked that they were pissed off about aspects of their lives, but we couldn't always relate. So we tried to correlate that with our Wonder Bread life styles in southern California. We realized that we were really pissed off about how sterile and boring things were there at the time. Then we began looking deeper into why the people around us were so fucked up, and we realized there was something to talk about every day.

REAX: *"Recipe for Hate" (the band's seventh album) was the soundtrack for a better part of my adolescence. This album was also your leap into the major label fray. What was the experience like back then?*

JB: Because it went hand in hand with us signing to Atlantic and doing *Stranger Than Fiction*, it was all part of the same contract. When we walked into the studio for the album, we were on Epitaph. There was never a thought that we were anything other than an Epitaph artist, so I can tell you that making that record was enjoyable, and totally fun. We did a lot of experimental stuff that we had never done before and had a blast doing it. Brett and I were still working at Epitaph, and we were getting all the pre-orders for the album and it was just retarded. It was like 120,000 units were pre-ordered and we're just two guys in a warehouse. We didn't know how the fuck we were going to do it. Somehow, we got it done, and then we thought that maybe we should go out and find what we're worth in the world. It was truly a burden on Epitaph Records at the time. So Brett and I started getting calls from major labels, and we would go out to get a free lunch, make fun of them and leave. It wasn't until we met Danny Goldberg at Atlantic that we met a guy who got it. Brett and I couldn't make fun of him, because here was a guy who actually understood us. When we made the whole deal, Danny thought Atlantic could do a great job with the album. Brett agreed, and since we had already gotten 120,000 copies out, we were like, 'Sure, why not?'

REAX: *Are there side projects going on with any other Bad Religion members aside from Greg Graffin?*

JB: Well, Brett's got 10,000 things happening every minute of the day and Hetson's in at least five bands right now. Bad Religion has become our hobby; it's hockey, it's poker, etc. The bat phone

rings and we just go, because that's what we do. Last year, we played maybe 20 shows. But this year, we're putting a record out, we're going on Warped Tour, we're going to do five tours after that... so we're looking at 25 months of touring. So now it's back to work, then we'll take some time off and do it again. Maybe.

REAX: *What encouraged Mr. Brett's return to Bad Religion? Can you tell us a little bit about why he left in the first place?*

JB: When we signed on to Warner/Atlantic, we didn't realize the backlash. I think for Brett, there was a giant dichotomy between running this indie label, proclaiming indie to be the best in the world, and being on a major label with his own band. It just seemed too hypocritical. Personality wise, we were all fighting and kind of not getting along. It was that moment in time where the band's success was being fought over. Everyone seemed to think that the popularity we were getting was because of them. It got really shitty and it didn't just fall apart; it fucking blew up. So, when he left it wasn't on good terms. It wasn't like, 'OK, see ya fellas.' It was more like fuck you all the way around. It was tough, but for him it was what he needed to do. He needed to get into Epitaph and he needed to just kind of stand firm. I remember him saying, 'Bad Religion has been a big part of my life, but right now I'm running a record label and the Offspring are selling 16 million records, and I don't need this fucking headache.' I thought that was absolutely correct. It's not like winning the lottery where you just get free money. He has to make sure that he's running this label. Overall, it was just a giant patch of immaturity that led us to that point of not being able to talk about how we could get around it and just saying, 'Fuck it. Let's blow it up.' Lots of drugs, lots of attitude, lots of ego and it all added up to that. Brett kind of came back into the fold writing a song with us on *New America*, so doors were opening with Brett around the same time doors were closing with Atlantic. They thought we were next in line after Green Day and the Offspring to sell a million records, and because we never did they got really bitter. Their whole attitude towards us had changed, to the point where they were way more interested in Matchbox 20, because we weren't doing the numbers. So we just asked to be let go, and it was a very organic process of getting back involved with Epitaph from there. So Greg just asked Brett why he didn't just come back to the band and write songs and help out again, and Brett was like, 'Well, why don't you guys just come back to Epitaph?' We all said ok, let's get back to work.

REAX: *What advice can you give to aspiring young punk rockers that may not completely grasp the magnitude of this genre's rich history?*

JB: Listen to the collective and find out where influences come from. If you like a band, find out who they like and why they like them. The problem with punk is most of the documentation has been hyped and glorified. All the things that I've ever read or seen about it have been not so great and not so realistic. Its history is kind of dirty and dark, like the New Orleans blues with voodoo and shit. These guys were just all playing in front of 80 people, and no one gave a shit. But that's why it was so great. Once people started to say this is what punk is and this is what it isn't, that just fucked everything up. By its own nature it's supposed to defy definition. When you are starting out, just think about what you want out of your life. Don't worry about whether or not your friends at school are going to make fun of you. My friends at school, my friends, people I grew up with for years beat the shit out of me when I showed up with spiky black hair. You have to take it on the chin and just be yourself.

DISCOGRAPHY

1982: *How Could Hell Be Any Worse?*

These songs exemplify their originality and heavy influence that is still carried into today's music.



1991: *80-85*

Although this album wasn't released until 1991, it captures all their music before 1985 including the songs found on their first album titled *How Could Hell Be Any Worse?*



1998: *No Substance*

Another two years pass providing us with a new album surrendering a different side of Bad Religion. This album seems to mark a transient shift in sound with a gentler array of songs less pleasing to the typical Bad Religion fan. Still an album worth picking up for sure!

1983: *Into The Unknown*

Your average Bad Religion fan rarely hears a seemingly unpopular album. With its release in 1983 and few copies in circulation, it's safe to assume this isn't one of their better albums. In fact, it's rumored to have been released by accident.



1992: *Generator*

With various bootlegs and a massive underground following, this was the last album to be recorded before gaining mainstream exposure with their following album.



2000: *The New America*

As time continued so did the shift in Bad Religion's style, leading us to this least favored and most out of character album to date. Although it's too hard to choose which album may be the best, I feel this one is easily the worst despite a few good songs.

1988: *Suffer*

Bad Religion's first album since the reunion of the original band and undoubtedly the first sign of a signature sound: powerful.



1993: *Recipe for Hate*

To this day, the album marks the center in their collection of albums recorded, catapulting Bad Religion into an honorable beam of widespread recognition.



2002: *The Process Of Belief*

With a sigh of relief and a new outlook on the future of Bad Religion's music, this album comes out with a new sense of heart pumping agility suggesting the band has reverted back to what they do best.

1989: *No Control*

An overflow of superior sounds synonymous to Bad Religion's previous album continued with a new sense of aggression and inquiry into the blatant madness endlessly saturating life's totality.



1994: *Stranger Than Fiction*

In response to Bad Religion's heightened success, this album was recorded a year later, maintaining a punk rock style with a developed maturity highlighting a slightly calmer yet equally powerful string of pleasingly addictive songs.



2004: *The Empire Strikes First*

The most recent release audibly presents a well-oiled and somewhat reinvented machine. Bad Religion continues to capture the essence of music that's made them such an ongoing success, emitting a feel of rejuvenation in their new album.

1990: *Against The Grain*

With paramount lyrical insight and unrivaled melody and composure, this album solidifies Bad Religion as a heavyweight, praiseworthy outfit with relentless talent and stamina.



1996: *The Gray Race*

Two years later, Bad Religion outdid themselves again with a more abrasively urgent feel lending much excitement, insight and emotion to the gray areas of the not so black and white aspects of reality.