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In the company of wolves



**PLUS** DEVIL SOLD HIS SOUL ◉ MINUS THE BEAR ◉ DROWNING POOL  
MURDER BY DEATH ◉ TOOTS & THE MAYTALS ◉ 36 CRAZYFISTS

*With Blackpool's punk rock mecca Rebellion Festival bearing down upon us, we brought together punk's snarling upstarts and inspirational legends the **THE KING BLUES**, **GALLOWES** and **BAD RELIGION** for a roundtable discussion on punk past, present and future...*

# RENE

IT'S BEEN OVER THIRTY-ODD YEARS since the screaming, snotty brat that was punk rock was launched at a horrified world stage, but how have such factors as time and sub genres changed the face of it? As they limber up to play this August's Rebellion Festival, we caught up with Itch from London's genre smashers The King Blues, Stu Gili-Ross from Watford hardcore livewires Gallows and Brett Gurewitz of melodic punk legends Bad Religion to find out their thoughts...

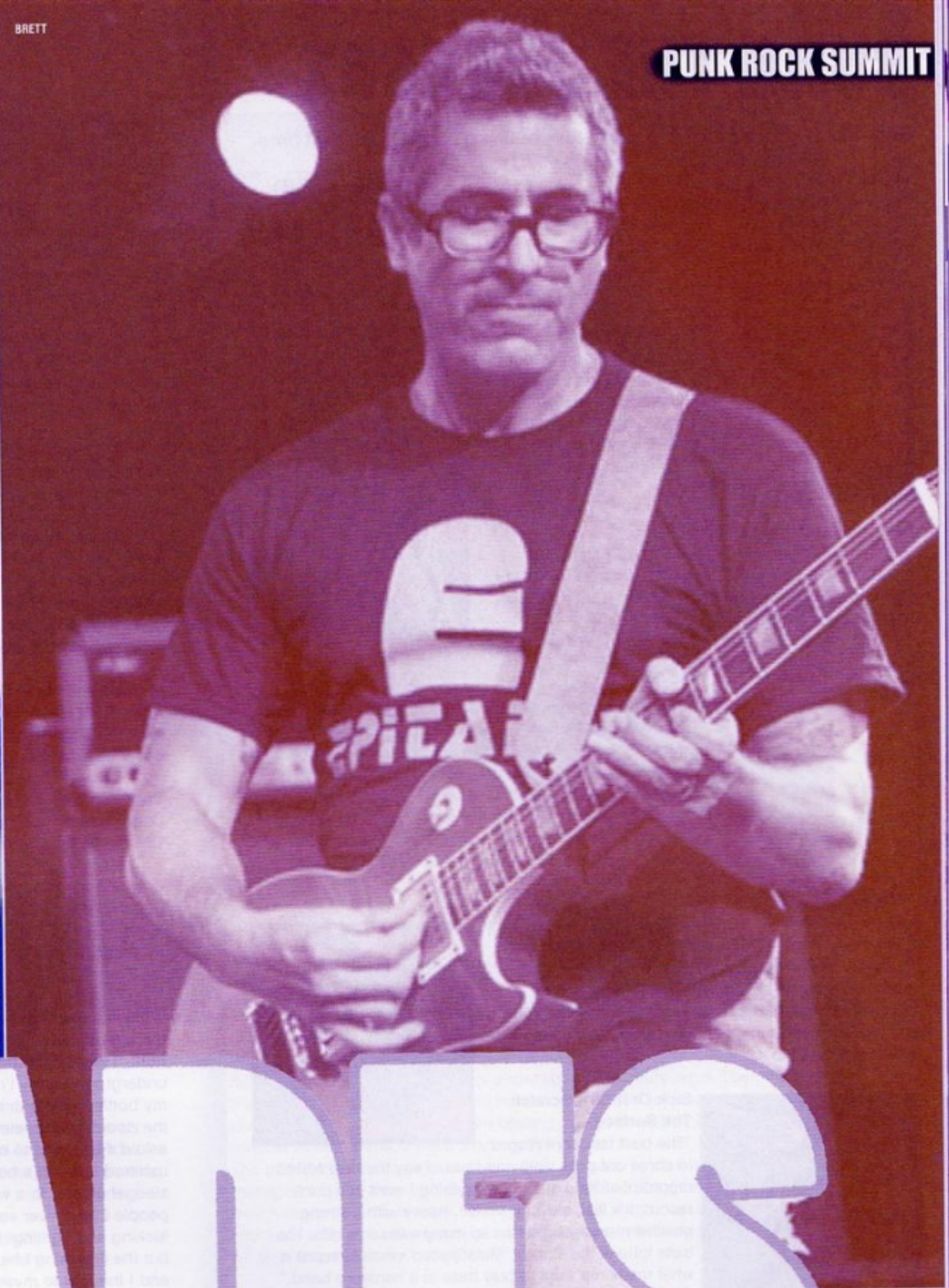
**Punk rock in 2010: does the term 'punk' mean anything anymore?**

**Itch:** "Of course, but it means a lot of different things to different people, which can be destructive when one person's definition clashes with another. It's a non-conformist lifestyle that too many people conform to. It's about unity, being whoever you want to be and elevating yourself, not some style of music."

**Stu:** "Punk rock is probably more important in 2010 than it has ever been as far as I'm concerned. It's just nowadays you have to wade through more shit to find the real gems. There are so many bands and shows all

the time now but my favourite things like handmade 'zines and dangerous shows in sketchy parts of town are few and far between. The underground is still very much alive and the scene is thriving in terms of productivity, I'd just like to see more unity I guess. There is no real cohesion like there used to be in the various scenes. You used to be able to tell when a band was from London or Southend or Leeds or Wales just from listening to the styles they played. I'd like to see more bands looking out for each other and being supportive, rather than treating everything as a competition."

**Brett:** "It means something very different. What punk means to me and I think to many people who 'were punk' in 1980 or late '70s, early '80s, may be different than what it means to anyone hence. I was this unhappy misfit outsider teenager who didn't fit in anywhere and when I decided to become a punk, that made me even more ostracised. But in the process of that, I found other punks and that was like finding my tribe and that was genuinely transformative experience. It was the first time in my life that I felt I belonged



# GALLAWS

somewhere. It was such a profound transformation for me on a personal level that it really transcends music. I think a kid who's fourteen and buys a Green Day record today, I think that's just catchy rock music. I don't think it means anything. I could be wrong - it's hard for me to guess what a teenager's feeling right now."

**How would you personally define the term 'punk' and how do you apply that outlook in day-to-day life, both in music and in your personal life?**

**Itch:** "To me, punk rock is about downtrodden kids, society's outcasts coming together and building our own community, supporting each other and trying to build something of worth. I've been a punk since I was thirteen - I really don't know anything else. I've learnt through the punk scene that if you want something you have to go out and build it yourself. You have to get involved and make it happen. There's nothing punk at all about sitting on the sidelines criticising everyone else, that's never what it was about, it's about not listening to anyone who tries to hold you back and creating something wonderful out of nothing."

**Stu:** "It's very simply defined to me and is therefore simply adhered to in my daily life. Punk rock is about doing whatever you want to do the way you want to do it. As a Satanist, that's how I live my life anyway and as a musician I've always been like that. The entire ethos behind Gallows from the start was 'We are not playing what is cool and fashionable right now but fuck everyone' and we just did our own thing. We stuck out like a sore thumb and the hardcore scene, punk rock and metal scenes didn't really know what to do with us but we just stayed true to the music we wanted to play the way we wanted it played. You can't ever really fail at anything if you just concentrate on doing the things that make you happy. It's like that in my personal life. I surround myself with the people who make me happiest and immerse myself in the work and hobbies that I get a kick out of. If you don't do that, you might as well kill yourself. I hate hearing people telling me how much they hate their jobs or being in an unhappy relationship. Change the situation then!"

**Brett:** "I try not to over think it. To me, punk is punk rock music. It was a youth movement from a generation of teenagers and young people in the late '70s,

# BURN THE JUKEBOX

*Itch, Stu and Brett pick their greatest punk rock records of all time.*

## ITCH

**The Sex Pistols - Never Mind The Bollocks**

"People were listening to ELO before this came out! True anger and originality, they mean it maaaaaan."

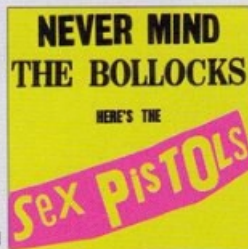


**The Clash - London Calling**

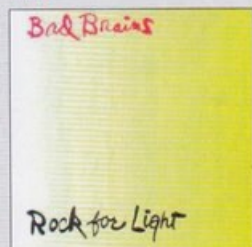
"It showed punk was about forward thinking, about doing whatever you wanted and about a spirit rather than playing the same three chords someone else has already done."

**Last Resort - A Way Of Life**

"A controversial choice for sure but this record really made me feel like I suddenly wasn't alone in a world of Soundgarden, Oasis and house music. A truly classic, working class oil record."



## STU



**Bad Brains - Rock For Light**

"Rastafarians from DC playing warp speed hardcore (most of the time). What's not to love? The songs on this record are amazing and it achieved so much for racial awareness in a scene that had a lot of right wing tendencies at the time. This record just shreds and today it still sounds like an innovative record. Every hardcore punk band wants to sound like Bad Brains or Black Flag."

**Black Flag - Damaged**

"Probably one of my favourite bands of all time. This record sounds like shit, but that's the beauty of it. Incredible songs, it makes me want to smash everything and everyone and run around like a very silly young man whenever I listen to it."



**Sick Of It All - Scratch The Surface**

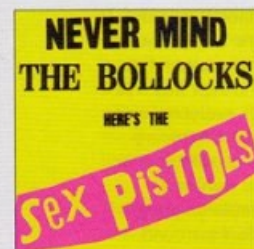
"The best hardcore record to come out post 1990 and I would say the best NYHC record of all time. It's got everything I want in a punk record. It's fast, cleverly written, heavy with a strong positive message and has so many awesome riffs. The bass tone at the start of 'Maladjusted' on this record is what made me want to play bass in a hardcore band."



## BRETT

**The Ramones - Leave Home**

"It's my favourite Ramones record and I think the Ramones are the most influential punk band. So that's the reason they're in there. That's my favourite record in terms of songs and production. I think it's the quintessential Ramones album."

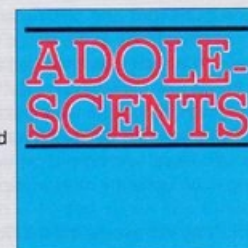


**The Sex Pistols - Never Mind The Bollocks**

"Just because it's one of the greatest albums of all time, punk album or rock album. It has more attitude than possible any record ever made and it's catchy."

**The Adolescents - Blue Album**

"Because to me that's the quintessential Southern Californian punk album. It has all the catchiest songs and is probably one of the most influential albums on me."



early '80s. It was very successful and it's persevered to today because first of all, the music is catchy and second of all, teenagers are always going to feel the same way I guess. Human nature, that's what it is."

**What was life like for you before you discovered punk rock?**

**Itch:** "Definitely confusing, I had a pretty shit time growing up, family didn't exist, I didn't fit in at school, I didn't fit in on the estate, I was a total reject, living on the streets, hopeless. There was nothing to look forward to, nothing that excited me or spoke to me, I felt totally alone and misunderstood. Punk rock gave me a reason to live. It became apparent that if all the rejects stuck together then suddenly we were powerful - suddenly we could build something. There's strength in numbers and there's strength in anger and we had it in bucketloads. Punk rock gave me friends, answers and self worth."

**Stu:** "I can't really remember! I don't think I had a grasp on my own identity at all before I discovered punk rock and then I guess things started making sense and clicked in to place when I heard Nirvana."

**Brett:** "I was picked on and made fun of. I was not a popular kid. I started punk very young don't forget. I was only sixteen or seventeen, Greg [Hetson] was fifteen, so we were precocious teenagers starting our band and doing everything we did at such a young age but I can remember being very fearful and very lonely and wanting acceptance from my peers and never having it before punk."

**Is there one individual who, for you, embodies the spirit of punk rock?**

**Itch:** "Rosa Parks. She realised she was worth more than others tried to have her believe and she stuck to her guns and was ballsy. The same could be said of Emma Goldman."

**Stu:** "Kurt Cobain. I'll fight anyone who wants to try and argue that Kurt Cobain wasn't punk as fuck. Collectively as a band, Fucked Up and Trash Talk are both managing to do great things in the true spirit of punk rock."

**Brett:** "In terms of people who were actual punk rockers, I guess maybe Darby Crash. But among people who were not punk rockers, I think maybe Charles Darwin. I'm not trying to put Darby in a class with Charles Darwin, nobody's in a class with him, but they both had extreme irreverence."

**What was the first punk band you saw and where was it? What was the atmosphere like?**

**Itch:** "I was taken to this squat in Elephant and Castle - it was the first underground party I'd been to. My friends told me it'd be fine to take my bottle of cider in but I was sceptical. I eventually walked through the door to be greeted by a donations tin, I threw in 50p and was then asked if I wanted to buy 'anything' by the guy on the door. I was ushered through a hole in the wall (someone had just taken a sledgehammer to a wall to create a 'door') and the most colourful people I have ever seen were rolling round on the floor, dancing, fucking and fighting. I can't remember who the band were on stage but the first thing I heard was 'This song's called 'Drowning In Shit'' and I thought to myself, I have arrived, these are my people! I've never looked back."

**Stu:** "I think it was Sick Of It All at the Garage in Highbury around 1993 or whenever 'Scratch The Surface' came out. I was thirteen years old or so and it was frightening enough going into the city on my own let alone to a show with all these massive tattooed blokes beating the living shit out of each other in the pit. I was just in awe the entire evening of the whole spectacle. I was stoked on everything from just how heavy it sounded live, to how the opening bands were then just walking around out front after their set, talking to people and selling their own shirts. The atmosphere was electric and some of this was probably due to half being intimidating and the other half just natural excitement. I'm really pleased to be playing on some of the same bills as Sick Of It All this year. Funny how shit works out sometimes!"

**Brett:** "It was the Ramones at the Hollywood Palladium. It was thrilling. I was very young. It felt a little bit dangerous. It was very fun, out of control. I was one of the youngest people there so it seemed that a lot of older kids were there and I was little bit afraid of getting beat up. One thing I can recall is when the Ramones started playing, the whole of the audience started pogoing. The Hollywood Palladium was an old ballroom from the '40s so it has a wooden dance floor, which is mounted on springs and there were 1,000 people jumping in the air and the floor literally shook. It was one of the most cathartic experiences ever, you just lost yourself in the crowd completely and for me, I never wanted to turn back."

**"It was one of the most cathartic experiences ever. You just lost yourself in the crowd completely and for me, I never wanted to turn back."**

**Brett,  
Bad Religion**

**Would you say you were drawn to the British or American punk scene?**

**Itch:** "Initially to British punk. I was obsessed with bands like The Exploited, 4-Skins, Last Resort and Blitz. The street punk and oi! bands who were around before I was born, they spoke to me in a way bands of my generation like Nirvana never did. I could really relate to these working class kids who saw no future for themselves."

**What was the first punk rock record you ever bought?**

**Itch:** "Sex Pistols' 'Never Mind The Bollocks', the original and still the best."

**Stu:** "'Nevermind' by Nirvana. Either that or an early Therapy? album."

**Brett:** "I guess the first record I heard was 'The Ramones' But then I liked it so much that shortly thereafter I got Buzzcocks records and I got into the Sex Pistols. Basically the first four punk groups I got into were The Dickies, the Ramones, the Buzzcocks and the Sex Pistols. So it was fairly even and those groups were all influencing each other at the time."

**Which punk band inspires you to push yourself musically?**

**Itch:** "The King Blues inspires itself musically to push things forward. As much as I love The Ramones, we're the anti that. We want to be constantly progressive in the way only a handful of punk bands have been, namely the Pistols, the Clash, Refused, Green Day..."

**Stu:** "Gallows! My playing has come on so much since Gallows has started. I'm more of a fan of riffs and rhythms than any real technical prowess, so I really just like bands who can write heavy riffs and groove like a bastard. It's why I am known as a 'Swedophile' as the Swedish hardcore scene in the '90s and early '00s was all about this kind of stripped down, rhythmic hardcore. Readers should check also out an American band called Mother Of Mercy for examples of this."

**Brett:** "NoMeansNo was a group in the old days that were doing really interesting, weird time signatures and aggressive jangly sounds. They were almost like the North American Gang of Four or something but from the early '80s hardcore scene."

**What's the craziest punk show you've ever been to?**

**Itch:** "We played this squatted car showroom in Highbury once. The police tried to shut it down so there were hundreds of armed riot cops outside and us playing inside. We could see them beating people through the car showroom window while we inside were chanting 'No justice, no peace, fuck the police'. The police were trying to force their way in the party to shut it down but we managed to keep them out as people were climbing along fences and walking over walls to get in and away from the police. We shut down the whole of Highbury and the local papers had a field day but eventually the police backed off and we got to party."

**Stu:** "Gallows, Watford Railway Inn, around 2005. If you were there you would know. It's been quite well documented in the press since then too. Let's just say it was the incident where a gang of local youths thought they could smash the doors in, rush the kids at the show, break some noses and leave unscathed. They didn't."

**Brett:** "'The craziest gigs back in the old days were ones where there would be riots. The Black Flag riot at Baces Hall was probably the craziest. Two thousand punks squaring off against a riot squad, throwing bottles and getting firehosed."

**What got you into punk in the first place?**

**Itch:** "When I was homeless a group of Spanish punks let me stay at their squat and they'd play these punk records over and over until it all started making sense. I discovered this entire culture that was saying everything I'd been feeling but was too alienated to express. I found my people as it were."

**Brett:** "In the first place, it was really nothing more than a love of music. I was in a local record store and the salesman there talked me into trying a Ramones record and I bought it and I loved it and that's what really got me into it. It was like a switch went off."

**With so many different sub genres of punk, be it hardcore or ska punk, do you feel that this has diluted the music or rather invigorated it?**

**Itch:** "It'd be pretty boring if thirty years on all punk bands were still sounding like '77 bands! I love how wide a genre it is. It was never about sticking to rules anyway."

**"I felt totally alone  
and misunderstood.  
Punk rock gave me a  
reason to live."  
Itch, King Blues**



**Stu:** "Variety is the spice of life so they say and I'm not too much of a purist to say that I think it can only be a healthy thing for there to be some diversity in the scene. That said, I would be happy if ska punk had never been invented and if ska punk bands would just fuck off and die. It should have stopped with The Specials and Madness."

**Brett:** "I think that diversity is a positive thing. I think that maybe certain things have been diluted, like the unity and sense of community that used to exist when everyone was listening to the same thing but the more diversity there is, the more innovation there is and the more chance something great and new is going to come from it so I think it's a positive thing. It may very well have diluted something. At least in terms of music, I think choice and diversity are positive."

**What punk bands that are still going do you rate as being truly iconic?**

**Itch:** "Sick Of It All."

**Stu:** "Bad Religion, Napalm Death and NOFX are all still going and are truly iconic to me personally. I think Henry Rollins is quite the icon himself, as is HR from Bad Brains who still tours from time to time."

**Brett:** "I think Rancid are truly iconic. Social Distortion, GBH, I guess he may not be punk but Elvis Costello is truly iconic. He's gone beyond punk of course but to me he's still truly going in the sense that he's still very vibrant and interesting artistically. He's trying new stuff all the time. He's an incredible

instrumentalist. He's probably got a thousand songs by now."

**What are you looking forward to at this year's Rebellion Festival?**

**Itch:** "Same as every year, hooking up with loads of mates from all over. I went to the first ever Rebellion back when it was called Holidays In The sun and have been to every one since, it's like a big punk rock reunion every year."

**Stu:** "It's going to be cool to catch up with the Bad Religion guys again who we haven't hung out with since last summer on warped tour. Also Civet are playing so I might get to see my fiancée play, although we are on different days. I have some family not far from Blackpool so hopefully they will make it out and take me for fish and chips and rollercoasters on the pleasure beach!"

**Brett:** "I won't be there as I'm a non-touring member of band. Stiff Little Fingers are playing - they're my favourites. Gallows are awesome live. The Rezillos are playing? That's crazy. Fucked Up are awesome, I love Fucked Up, go check them out. I can't believe 999 are still playing - check them out."

**King Blues, Gallows and Bad Religion play the Rebellion festival at Blackpool's Winter Gardens August 5th-8th. For more information visit [Rebellionfestivals.com](http://Rebellionfestivals.com)**

**Words: Eugene Big Cheese/Paul Hagen/Jim Sharples  
Photos: King Blues and Frank Gallows by Dod Morrison/Stu Gallows by Jazzchandler.com**