A CHAT WITH JUSTIN HAYWARD OF MOODY BLUES

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ADDICTED TO THE OPIATE OF THE MASSES?

BAD RELIGION

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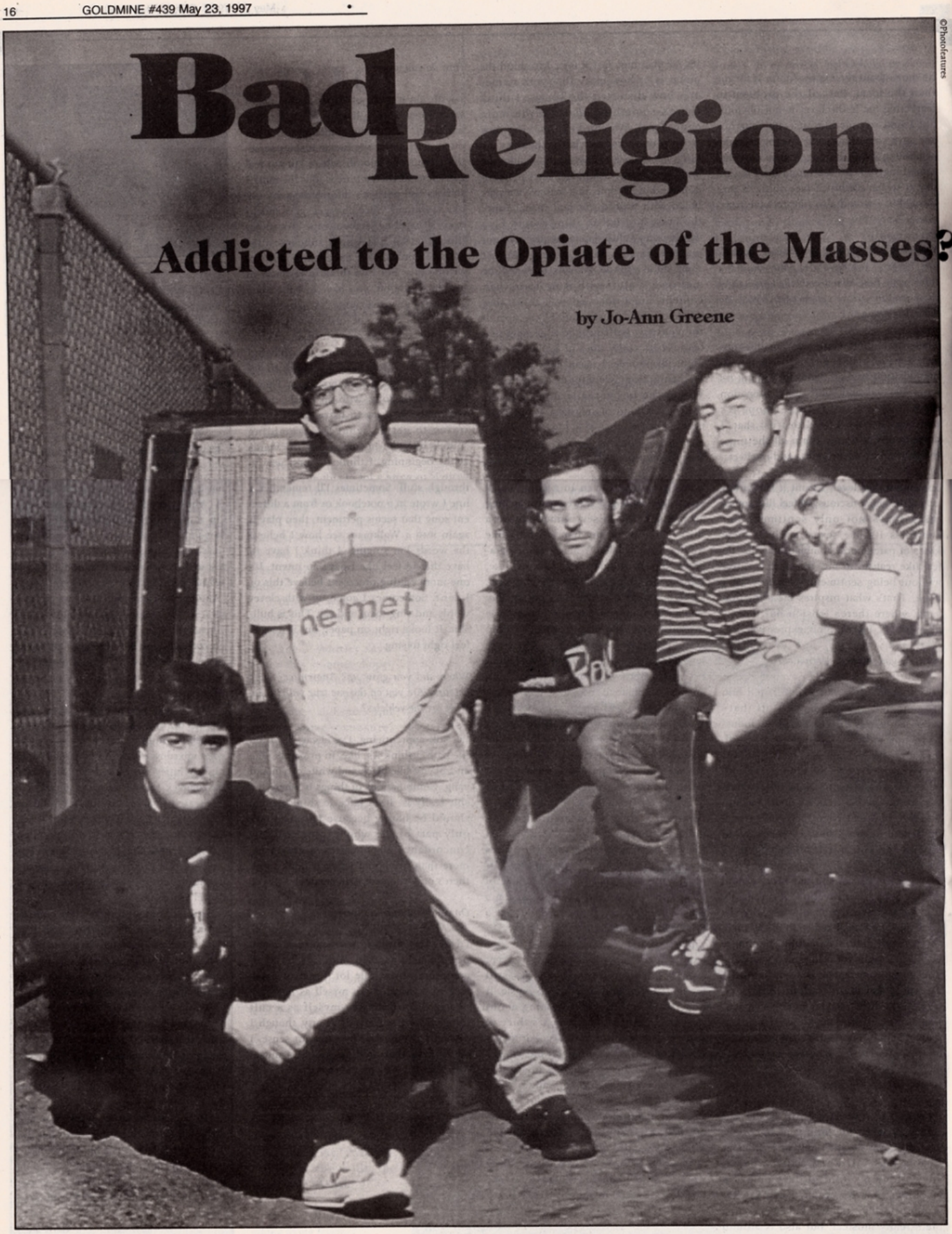
Bad Religion

Addicted to the Opiate of the Masses?

by Jo-Ann Greene



"The press in England hate us. When we were there earlier this year, they thought we were a new band!"

Bad Religion drummer Bobby Schayer is incredulous. "They said that Green Day and the Offspring should sue us! 'It's so obvious that this band is ripping them off, blah, blah, blah. If I was Green Day or the Offspring I'd sue them because they're totally ripping off their style.'"

Schayer bursts into laughter, shaking his head in disbelief. "I thought maybe they were being ironic at first, but no, they were serious!" He laughs harder.

With 17 years and 11 albums under their belts, how could there be anybody out there who believes that Bad Religion are new-school punk-bandwagon jumpers? The truth is obviously just a bit different. While the band can't take credit, nor would they want to, for kicking off the punk movement in the States, they've not only remained the scene's guiding light, but helped bring about today's current punk sound.

And while Green Day and The Offspring may have sold more albums, it was Bad Religion that made those platinum offerings possible. In fact, it was guitarist Brett Gurewitz's label, Epitaph, that was behind The Offspring's success in the first place.

Back in 1980, punk was for the moment, fans believed it would change the world, and in California's San Fernando Valley, the music spoke directly to 15 year old Greg Graffin. He'd only moved to the valley three years before, from Milwaukee, and was finding it virtually impossible to feel comfortable with the Southern California lifestyle.

"I was in 10th grade," Graffin recalls, "when I started listening to punk, and found that other people felt as I did. It was so different from now in punk rock; the people were not trying to look like they fit in, they were weird, but authentic people. I remember feeling like, who cares, I don't have enough money to buy Levis, I'm just going to wear my truskins. I had a couple of t-shirts that I tried to make punk by writing FUCK on them." His grandmother provided the requisite leather jacket, and Graffin was ready to enter the punk world.

At school, there were quite a few other kids interested in the blossoming scene, but few musicians. One of the latter was Jay Ziskrout, a budding drummer, and as Graffin had already done his time in the school chorus back in Wisconsin, all the pair needed was a guitarist. Through a friend, they were introduced to Brett Gurewitz, who already played in a band, The Quarks. Problem was, The Quarks were New Wave, and the guitarist much preferred punk. That complication was quickly solved, especially as Gurewitz had an amp and a van. Bad Religion was now officially formed.

It took a couple of weeks before the trio noticed there was something a little odd about their sound, something missing.

"At first, we didn't care," Graffin laughs, "it actually sounded pretty good, it was very melodic, very loud guitar and drums, and I sang to it. Our first few songs, 'Sensory Overload,' 'World War III' and 'Politics' were first ironed out in that strange format. But we had to admit to ourselves that it probably would sound better with some low end on it. That's when we rounded up Jay (bassist Bentley), mostly because he was one of three possible people."

Bentley picks up the tale, "I remember Greg coming up to me in school and saying, 'Hey, do you want to be in a band?' Yeah, I can play guitar. 'We've got a guitarist, we need a bass player.' So, I told him that I didn't play bass. 'Well, it's a four string thing.' Well, I *know* what it is! But, I don't have a bass, I don't play bass. But I want to be in a band, so OK.

"I went to Sears, bought a bass, and it took minutes to learn to play. Hey, these four strings are the top four strings on a guitar, cool. No chords, I get to play one string at a time; I can do this easy, all you've got to do is follow the guitar player. It was pretty much what I knew how to do on a guitar anyway, play 'Smoke On The Water' on one string," he says, bursting into laughter.

And so Bad Religion was a real band. Their official rehearsal space was Graffin's garage, affectionately nicknamed the Hellhole. The group practiced while the singer's mother was at work, upsetting all the neighbors. But that didn't stop local kids from driving by, hearing the group play, and stopping to ask if they could hang out and watch. It seems Bad Religion had an audience almost from the very start.

It wasn't long before the teens entered Studio 4 and recorded a demo. The resulting tape was handed around to friends, including Lucky Lehrer, drummer with the Circle Jerks. The Jerks were already well known in Southern California, as singer Keith Morris had previously been with Black Flag, while guitarist Greg Hetson had formed Red Kross. So it's not really surprising that DJ Rodney Bingenheimer invited Lehrer onto his show on KROQ. The drummer, a stout supporter of the embryonic Valley scene, took the opportunity to introduce the listening public to Bad Religion. The tape would get quite a few airings on KROQ in the ensuing weeks.

A fortnight afterwards, the Bad boys turned up at Joey's Kills, in Burbank, for their debut live show. But it wasn't to be. Even though a group of around 40 fans turned up, the club's manager didn't. By 11 p.m. it was apparent that no one would be playing that night.

"Maybe we should've gotten the hint," Bentley quips.

Nah, Lady Luck had something much better planned. Instead of debuting at that long forgotten club, Bad Religion's first live appearance was opening for Social Distortion, certainly a more memorable event, even if it was only Distortion's second or third show!

Things moved swiftly back then in the SoCal punk scene, bands formed, rehearsed, and recorded within a matter of months. Bad Religion was now set on making a real record, their eponymous EP. It would be released on their own label, Epitaph.

"Brett and I were joking about an old Emerson, Lake and Palmer [actually King Crimson] song, 'Confusion will be my epitaph,'" Graffin explains. "Epitaph, what a great idea! Because epitaph is in a sense a record of a lifetime; these grooves in the vinyl will be our epitaph. Brett and I were both into art, so we both drew logos for the original Epitaph. He was a better artist (at drawing) than I was, but I had good ideas. I drew the original tombstone, but it didn't say E, it was a gravestone that had a record in the middle of it, I made it all 3-D with a split down it. Brett thought to make slits in it so it makes an E, which was even better, and that stuck."

The quartet recorded at a small studio in Westlake, run by Ziskrout's drum teacher, out of his garage. But when it came to mastering their vinyl debut, the band decided to go to the best, Goldstar Recorders in Hollywood.

Back then the receptionist at the front desk was a fellow punk, a young woman with dyed purple hair, Johnette Napolitano. The band handed her a copy of their new record, and she was immediately impressed, so impressed in fact, that she asked them, "Why don't you have my boyfriend produce the next album, he can totally get you studio time, it could be really cool."

Back in '81, Napolitano was no more than a singer wannabe—eventually she'd became famous in her own project, Concrete Blonde. Her boyfriend was Jim Mankey, future guitarist for Concrete, and a founding member of Sparks. Yes, of course, Bad Religion were interested in working with him.

This was assuming they could afford to do an album—first they had to sell their EP. Initially, the band pressed 500 copies, only to find that the snare drum was mastered too high, and with each snare hit, the record skipped. However, no one else seemed to notice this fault, and JEM Records, who knew a good thing when they heard it, was happily distributing them to all the mom and pop record shops in the area.

Regardless, when Bad Religion came to press up another batch, this time of 1,500, they had the flaw fixed, only for a new one to appear. As was typical for the day, the band had a message scratched on the run-off groove; on one side was written, "We're not Bad Religion..." on the other "... you are." The group called down to make sure that the message would be etched into the second pressing, but to their horror, the records came back with "We're not Bad Religion..." "ellipsis you are."

With only 2,000 pressed, the EP remains Bad Religion's most collectable release, and with only 500 copies correctly inscribed, the first pressing will inevitably fetch even higher prices.

One of the band's many fans, the young Bobby Schayer, of course, couldn't have cared less about any of that. It was the music that spoke to him.

"The EP was phenomenal! I liked it because of the fact that at that time, every band in L.A. didn't sound the same, and the record was unique. What separated the band was that Greg had a really unique voice, that made a big impression on me. They were from the Valley, and so was I (he's from Encino), it was inspiring to know that if these guys could do it, anyone could." Little did he realize that years later, he'd get to do it with them.

With the success of the EP, the band were able to pay back the money they'd borrowed for the pressing, and still have enough left over to record their debut album, *How Could Hell Be Any Worse*. In 1982, Mankey took them into a friend's studio, Track Records, in Hollywood. Over the course of four or five nights, working from midnight to nine or 10 in the morning, Bad Religion recorded. And then, without warning, Ziskrout quit.

"It was for some really stupid reason," Graffin explains, "like 'You guys don't listen to me enough, fuck you, I quit.' He walked out of the rehearsal studio, and left his drums and everything. We're halfway finished with *How Could Hell be Any Worse*, and Bad Religion was without a drummer.

"That's when Peter (Finestone) came over, he was a fellow Valley punk kid, but from a different high school, and he basically forced himself on the band. He knocked on my door and said, 'Hey, I hear you need a drummer.' I asked if he could play drums, and he said, 'sure.' So I didn't even audition him, I just said, 'Okay, we've got a drummer.' We started rehearsing again in the Hellhole; it was bad, summer in the San Fernando Valley is miserably hot, and the garage cooked, because it was all wood."

After some quick practices, Bad Religion returned to the studio and finished recording over a weekend. Besides two drummers, the album also featured a second guitarist—Greg Hetson provided a solo on one track.

It was during the making of that album, that Bad Religion contributed the first of many songs to compilations. They handed "Drastic Actions," "Slaves" and "Bad Religion" to the *Public Service* compilation. The latter song would reappear on Bomp's *Buried Alive* compilation in 1995, while "Slaves" would appear on the follow-up album from the same label in '96. "In the Night," meanwhile, went to BYO and their *Someone Got Their Head Kicked In* compilation.

How Could Hell eventually sold around 12,000 copies, but initially the band pressed up 6,000, which still ensured that the Epitaph office spread from Graffin's living room into Gurewitz's home as well. Not only did the band stuff all the albums by hand, incidentally, but to relieve the tedium, they sometimes wrote little notes on the sleeve or autographed copies.

Everything seemed to be going great, but in actuality, there was a major problem within the group.

"What we'd done with Epitaph, because we were a partnership, was pick an outside party as a co-signer on every check," Bentley says. "And the one person I trusted more than anyone else I knew was Brett's dad, because he was a successful business man, and I'd spent many nights talking to him about what we were doing, what we were trying to accomplish, so I trusted him.

"But I didn't realize that Brett would say, 'Here sign this check, I've got to get money to this guy,' and his dad would do it, and then Brett would go out and get drugs with it. So essentially all the money from *How Could Hell* was gone.

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Bad Religion from left to right: Jay Bentley, Bobby Schayer, Greg Graffin, Greg Hetson and Brett Gurewitz.

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'What the hell happened?' Well it was all gone. It's just the music, you don't want to fight about it, you don't want to get legal about it, you just kind of go, 'Whatever.'"

By this time, Gurewitz was working at the Chameleon label, and to make matters worse, had done another pressing of How Could Hell, without the rest of the band's knowledge, had sold them to Chameleon, and never accounted for the money.

"That was a little bit of controversy in the band," Graffin says. "Brett always felt guilty about it, felt terrible that at that time in his life, he started getting into drugs and selling Bad Religion albums which none of us knew about. Part of what he wanted to do when he started Epitaph up again in 1987 was to make it up to us."

It would take four years to get the album back from Chameleon, to whom Gurewitz had licensed it, at which point, the guitarist/ label head placed it on the *1980-85* anthology, which included *How Could Hell*, the band's two EPs and some odd compilation tracks. *How Could Hell* itself was also reissued as a vinyl only release in 1988. The only difference between the original and later edition is the Epitaph address (the original lists a post office box on Ventura Boulevard).

But at the time, things just seemed to be falling apart.

"So much was happening at that stage," Graffin explains. "I was getting ready to go to college. The punk scene was sort of...we were getting disillusioned. When we started in 1980, it was so much more accepting, so much more open, so much more liberal. People didn't care what you looked like, there was no affiliations, no factions. Then for some reason, around late '82, it started to get this gang mentality, they all thought they should band together and fight each other.

"So, since the scene kind of let us down, we in turn, not knowingly, but now in retrospect, let the scene down too, by going into the studio and doing a record we just wanted to do, without worrying about the constraints of our styles, and not worrying about the marketing."

The end result was *Into The Unknown*, and the meltdown of the band.

"It sounds like a band progressing musically," Bentley explains, "but it also sounds like a band doing something and not understanding the values of it."

The bassist walked out of the studio while recording the first song, and quit the band.

"The only problem I had with the album musically, was at that time Greg had gotten a Roland Juno 6 keyboard," Bentley says. "It served its purpose, and that was something for Greg to write songs on. Previously, he had a pretty cheesy piano in his house, a real old time bar upright that was always out of tune. He'd write songs on that, and we'd listen going, 'Uhhh, what are you playing?' This keyboard actually brought him into the new age, but on the album he just used one polyrhythm, so it was just kind of monotonous. There was a lot of keyboard and monotony in there, he didn't change anything.

"I don't think it was the song so much as the attitude, the whole process of making the record was kind of backwards to me, it didn't seem right. We did one song where I thought, 'OK, let's go on to the next song,' but we spent the next eight hours doing overdubs, putting little bits and pieces on it. And I thought, 'Why are we doing this?'"

"In terms of the sentiments of the songs and the content, the album was very Bad Religion, it was very similar to what had been done lyrically. The sentiment of the band hadn't changed, the only thing that had changed was the sonics, because there was nothing to do. Every punk rock band in L.A. was gone, there was no place to play anymore, it had basically run its course, and everybody just went, 'This is bullshit.' You'd go and play shows, and people would be fighting...this is not fun anymore.

"Strangely enough, at the time that album came out, another band, coincidentally, put out a very similar album, which was TSOL's *Beneath The Shadows*. I know that TSOL and Bad Religion had absolutely NO contact with each other, it wasn't like we sat down in a coffee shop and said, 'Hey, let's do these kinds of albums.'"

"I think that it's absolutely critical that you put it into a proper context," Graffin agrees. "What was going on at the time was the dissolution of something that seemed so promising, and also the opportunity that comes in any young person's life to make some big changes, be it college or whatever. I was going to college, so I was willing to say goodbye to my high school years, but not Bad Religion. I just didn't take it as seriously as I did in high school, and from that point on I started treating the band as a hobby.

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"I think *Unknown* is like early REM, if it had come a couple of years later it probably would have been as popular as REM," he says with a chuckle. "That's the irony there. The keyboards were very straightforward, distorted sounding that mocked what the guitar was playing. There was still good song sensibility, but there was some ridiculous parts to the album too. All in all, because it's such a secret, people expect it to be an embarrassment, but it's not."

Into The Unknown remains the great lost Bad Religion album, although half the band didn't even play on it. Bentley was replaced by Paul Dedona; Finestone had left to attend school in England, with another Valley musician, Davey Goldman, filling in.

We'll leave the final word to Schayer: "If you like Todd Rundgrun, you'll love this album; it's very Utopia. Considering at the time it came out, I don't think it was that bad a record, it's just not. They could have called it the Greg Graffin solo album. It's a great attempt. It's the thought that counts," he says before dissolving into laughter.

"The album basically shipped 10,000 copies and returned 10,001," Bentley quips. "Somebody made a bootleg, then returned it and we actually gave them their money back. Where do you put 10,000 albums? Well, you put them at the warehouse at Bomp, because at the time Brett was going out with Susie Shaw. And what happened was, the relationship between Brett and Susie soured, but the albums were still there. Then we found out that Bomp had actually been selling the albums. Brett and I went running into Bomp one day to get them back, and there was like 300 left, and we're yelling, 'Nooooo!!!!!' I really never will know how many they sold."

By that time, Bad Religion had not only folded, but was on the way to reforming as well. Graffin had left for Madison, Wisconsin to attend college, Gurewitz was now concentrating on his job at Chameleon, having been forced to disband Epitaph, as the label was now bankrupt.

Bentley, however, continued playing. Even during the end of his time with Bad Religion, he'd been performing with another local punk band, Wasted Youth. Just after he quit Religion, the bassist was asked to join TSOL, which led to the bizarre occurrence of opening for himself in Santa Barbara. That was because Bad Religion had one final show booked, which Bentley agreed to play, opening for TSOL. At this point, he was actually in three bands at the same time.

However, when original bassist Mike Roche returned to TSOL, Bentley departed and joined the band's singer, Jack Greggors (a man of many last names, today he is Jack Grisham of The Joykiller), in the shortlived Cathedral of Tears. Then Wasted Youth underwent a line-up change, at which point Bentley quit, and suddenly found himself totally bandless.

And Graffin was tuitionless. His plans of getting in-state tuition in Wisconsin had failed, and he was forced to return to California, where he enrolled at UCLA. Greg Hetson, in contrast, was on vacation, as the Circle Jerks were taking a year off. The guitarist contacted Graffin, and convinced him to reform Bad Religion, as the punk scene in Hollywood was still going strong. With Finestone back on drums and Tim Galegos (another Wasted Youth-er) on bass, the newish looking Bad Religion began playing shows.

In '85, the band released the *Back To The Known* EP, and as Schayer bluntly puts it, "Welcome back. It was a good start, a return to form." The EP has not been reissued, but the songs can also be found on the *80-85* comp.

It was during this period, between '84 and '86, that for the first time, Bad Religion started branching out of Southern California. Phoenix, Tuscon, Las Vegas, Reno, San Francisco, Santa Cruz, and San Bernadino all became part of the band's touring circuit. In truth though, the tours were short and far between, as Graffin spent his summers in Wisconsin, as he'd done since moving to California, and the school year in the classroom.

During this time, Bentley had sold his gear and settled into a well paid job as a machinist, making precision parts for airplanes and space shuttles.

"It was cool," he says. "Some of the jobs were ones where you couldn't talk to the guy making another part, because you might figure out what it was. 'What do you think it is?' 'Looks like a hand grenade, man.'

"I thought it was hilarious. My pay was pretty good, and I was dating the boss' daughter, so that helped. But everybody who'd been doing it for years was missing fingers! I kept saying, 'I've got to get out of here.' I wasn't playing in a band, but I knew I wanted to play music again, and I wanted to have all my fingers."

And he'd need them soon enough. In 1986, Graffin called and asked if he'd like to rejoin the band. Initially, Bentley said no; mostly because he wasn't sure where Bad Religion's music now was, and he'd no desire to play in front of fighting crowds. Graffin insisted that things had changed, and further reassured Bentley that their set consisted of songs from *How Could Hell*. Not quite convinced, Bentley agreed to play one show, and had so much fun that he stayed.

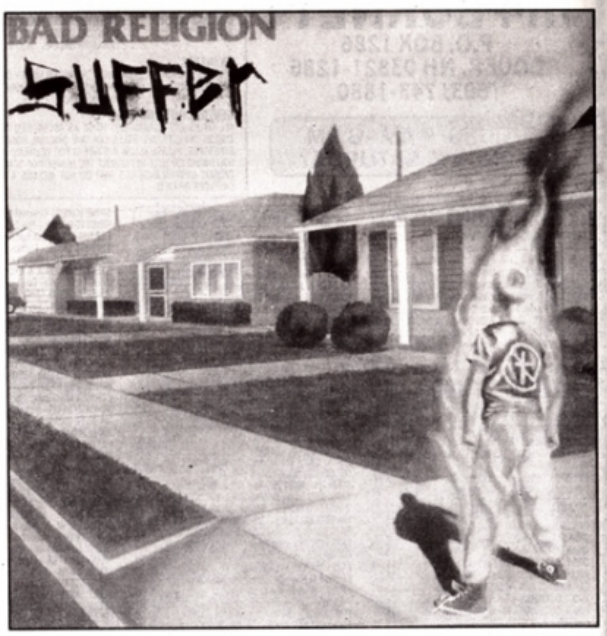
Later that year, Bad Religion went off to play the East Coast for the first time, on a 10-date tour.

"It was freezing," Bentley's recollects. "We were driving around in a VW van with broken windows, it was really bad."

Finestone missed this historic roadtrip entirely, as he was back in England. Instead, Lucky Lehrer proved to be less fortuitous than his name, filled in and froze with the rest of the band.

As the new year dawned, Graffin and Bentley continued bumping into Gurewitz in L.A.. By now, the guitarist had put his drug problems behind him, and both members of Bad Religion kept asking him to return to the band. But Gurewitz was unsure, and understandably so. The *Unknown* album was perceived by many to be responsible for the destruction of the SoCal punk scene, and the group was a pariah because of it. But time had passed and the band were no longer considered traitors.

Then circumstances forced Gurewitz's hand. Bad Religion had a show lined up in San Francisco, but Hetson wasn't able to play, as he was off touring with the Circle Jerks. Gurewitz agreed to stand in for this one show, and like Bentley, had such a fabulous time he ended up staying on.



"It really motivated Brett, and me too, that's why *Suffer* (the reunited band's first album) has so much life to it," Graffin explains. "Here was a bunch of guys that hadn't been together for a while, and then we find out not only do we have a better outlook on life and understand more about the world so we can write a little more lucidly, but we both sound better than ever."

Gurewitz had been working as a studio engineer and, with partner Donnell Cameron, set up his own studio, Westbeach Recorders (or West Beach, the studio is spelled both ways). It would also become the early home of Gurewitz's revived Epitaph label. Bad Religion would record their next five albums at Westbeach, all of which were released by Epitaph.

Initially, Gurewitz and Bentley (who was now working for Epitaph) had been signing bands, then immediately licensing them to Chameleon. The label's debut unlicensed release was by L7, but it was the label's second record, Bad Religion's *Suffer*, which was the first Epitaph distributed itself.

Compared to their previous records, *Suffer* was much more melodic, although it still retained the band's aggressive edge. The songs were fast and filled with insightful lyrics about the state of the world.

"At that time," Graffin recalls, "I wasn't trying to be punk anymore, I wanted to deliver a more honest representation of the lyrics, I had these ideas that I wanted to communicate. I guess I was concentrating more on communication, than trying to define our sound or fit into a genre."

"I think you just get better at what you're doing," Bentley adds. "A lot of the early songs, when people say you're a three chord punk band, they're absolutely right. However, on *Suffer* there were songs that really were songs; verse, chorus, bridge, these are not three chord songs at all.

"I think that simply has to do with trying not to write the same material over and over again, so you have to write different kinds of music. It's not different styles, but just expanding on what you're playing, so they became more song like. And in terms of that style, if there was one band or musical person Bad Religion agreed on, it was Elvis Costello. After that, Brett really liked the Ramones, Greg really liked Todd Rundgren, and I really liked the Jam."

"*Suffer* is what punk rock is about," Schayer insists. "I just think that over time you progress as a songwriter and all that, but for me *Suffer* was the rebirth, that was where *How Could Hell* left off."

The following year, 1989, Bad Religion released *No*

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Control, and it was obvious that something was beginning to happen. *Suffer* had sold around 4,000 copies, an excellent run for a tiny label, but 12,000 copies *No Control* were shipped.

"At the time you had two heavies, Alternative Tentacles (run by Dead Kennedy's Jello Biafra) and SST (Black Flag's label)," Bentley explains, "but they'd been around so long that they had a catalogue of like 900 records, so they could pretty much run their thing of being what they were. Then all of a sudden, there was Dischord (Ian MacKay's, of Fugazi, label) and Epitaph that were out there selling their records. Fugazi would put out a record and sell 50,000 out the door, and we'd be, 'Wow!' Then we put out *No Control* and sold around 60,000. It was funny, because even with no contact, we were playing this game from East and West Coast, 'How big can this get? How many can we really do? How far can we push this before something happens?'"

Actually a lot further, but who was to know that back then? Besides, the success of *No Control* only made up for the fact that Bad Religion had lost $2000 on their first American tour. There again, that might have been through their own ignorance, a point that a show at the Country Club in Rosita, California drove home.

Bad Religion were playing with the newly reformed Adolescents, and in true punk style, each band assumed the other was headlining, and modestly offered to play for a mere $500. It was only afterwards that both groups realized that's exactly how much each had been paid; the promotor walked off with the rest.

"We did the math—1,000 people times $10 a head, and between us we made $1000," Bentley fumes. "So we said, 'Well this is fucked, we're getting the shitty end of the stick here,' and then we became the assholes we are now," he says, bursting into laughter. "But in 1989, we still all had jobs, this was just a hobby gone haywire. You have to learn things, but the only way is to go out and get ripped off for six years. You have to know a little bit about the economics, or you're eating shit every night."

So it wasn't surprising that when a promoter called and asked Bentley if Bad Religion would like come play in Germany, his response was, "'Are you fucking kidding me, man? We just lost money in America, do you think we're going to fly halfway round the world to get our asses kicked, and not even speak the language?' But we went, and it was amazing. It was truly phenomenal how well the band was accepted there."

And so Bad Religion focused on Europe, playing there in 1989, '90, and '91. They'd still do some West coast shows, but there'd be no more American tours for a few years.

Meanwhile, *No Control* continued to sell.

"That's my favorite album," Schayer declares. "I just like the pace of the record, the songs on the album, it's very in your face. I find it exciting, because it gives you the same excitement as when I heard the first Ramones album. It makes me want to play music again. It's a little rawer than *Suffer*, and I like the production and material better."

He's right, the album has a more polished sound to it, the songwriting is extremely strong, the melodies exquisite. It's instantly identifiable as Bad Religion, even to late in the day fans, although the multi-part harmonies are still missing.

The following year, the band released *80-85*, allowing newer fans to catch up on Religion's earlier material. And for the record, no, the band didn't actually release anything in 1980, as Bentley admitted to one fan who'd asked that question to the band's web site.

"I thought about it, and looked at all the records, and said, 'According to the records, no.' *Back To The Known* says '84 on the record, but it came out in '85. But I'm fuzzy about those dates, so I said, 'Look at it this way, it's close, '84, '85 who cares? Or else you'd have to call it *1980-84*.'"

Well, actually *1981-'84*.

Bentley laughs. "'Which makes NO sense at all. Just don't worry about it.'"

The album remains the only Bad Religion record not to carry song lyrics on its sleeve. Instead, Hetson wrote the liner notes, a potted, and in places incorrect, history of the band and recordings.

"I'm sure he did that deliberately," both Graffin and Bentley laugh.

Even the date on the back of the record is confusing, it claims 1991, while *Back To The Grain* is dated 1990, yet the former came out first.

As Bentley said, "Don't worry about it." The dates are irrelevant, the music's what matters, and *Grain* was to prove just how important Bad Religion was. It was the band's first 100,000 seller, and showed how quickly they were growing.

"That was where the harmonies really started to take off," Schayer explains. "It was a good album, more experimental, and showed the potential the band had songwriting wise. It brought out a lot of Greg and Brett's own sound and style."

For the first time, Bad Religion began using the three part harmonies that are now their signature sound.

"At the time, a band that did harmonies better than anyone was The Adolescents, they used three part harmonies all over the place," Bentley explains. "Seeing The Adolescents live, it was so brilliant. So, in a way, the Adolescents influenced us into saying we can do it too, because look, they're doing it.

"Musically speaking, once you get out of punk rock you find out that the members of Bad Religion are listening to the Beach Boys' 17-part harmonies, bands like Elvis Costello and Nick Lowe, bands that did background vocals. So it wasn't that hard to conceive, why not use it for what we're doing? We always tried not to do anything in the studio that we could not do live, you don't go completely off the wall. Doing three part harmonies in the studio wasn't so absurd, because we could do them live.

"It almost became a trademark sound. It wasn't anything I ever noticed people doing, until one time I heard a band and thought, 'That sounds like us, but it's NOT us.' And I realized that it mostly had to do with the background vocals."

It was no wonder that people were now starting to refer to Bad Religion as a crossover act. And after several years, the band decided to take a chance and do an American tour. This time it was a success. At Epitaph, the phone just kept ringing and the oddest people kept walking in the door.

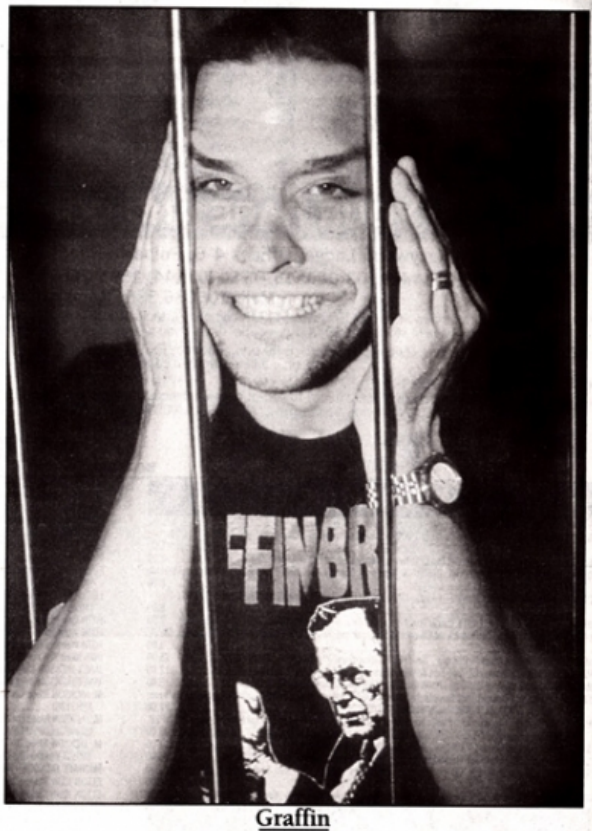
"People were coming around and saying things that were absolutely hilarious, I loved it," Bentley relates. "The keyboard player from Bruce Springsteen's E Street Band came in one day, and said he wanted us to rerecord *Against The Grain* with HIM producing it, and HIM rewriting the songs. That was the funniest thing I'd ever seen. He brought this guy with him that had a bag full of money, he was the moneybag guy, I'm dead serious!

"Brett and I were sitting there, I was cracking up, and Brett goes, 'You handle this.' I just said, 'You have to leave now, you're out of your mind.' I was peeing my pants! We had to go rerecord this album that I love, that people were buying and everybody loved, and he was saying rerecord it with MY production and let ME rewrite the songs. This guy had the audacity to walk in and say this! Here's Brett and me, we're both in Bad Religion, we're running the label, and he's basically telling us that we suck!"

Well they obviously didn't suck enough that he didn't want to work with them.

"No, no, he thinks we have potential. No, no, we're not doing it. He'll finance the whole thing, and I'm looking at this guy going, 'Nooo, this is not going to happen!'"

Bad Religion had arrived—which is when Graffin moved from California to Ithica, New York. Having completed his master's degree at UCLA, he was about to enter the doctoral program in evolutionary biology at Cornell.



Graffin

"Greg Hetson thought that the band was going to break up, and I assured him that it would be no different than when I was going to UCLA.," Graffin says. "During my masters, I didn't see those guys that much, I was very busy, we only toured a couple of times, we made a record at Easter break. In fact, things only got better when I moved to Ithica.

"Getting out of L.A., I was able to write more clearly, focus on both academics and Bad Religion more."

As Graffin was planning to move cross country, Finestone was about to go fishing, and so quit the band.

"Yeah, why WAS that?" Bentley demands. "I still don't know to this day. I understand where he was at, but I still think he was crazy."

Part of the answer is simple. Finestone was drumming with a side project, The Fishermen, who were offered a major label deal. The label insisted he couldn't play in two bands simultaneously, and so he was bullied into dropping out of Bad Religion.

"The thing about Epitaph, Bad Religion, and us, is we never told anyone that they were going to be successful," Bentley continues. "We never told anyone, 'Stick with me kid, and I'll make you a star.' I wasn't privy to the meetings that Pete had, but maybe that guy was there."

The Fishermen were a totally different proposition from Bad Religion in every possible way, but especially musically.

"The Fisherman were very...uh...I'm trying to remember," Bentley says, trying to be diplomatic. "I heard a tape...Jackson Browne. That's the word that comes to mind, and I don't know why. I remember it being very AOR, adult rock, that's very adult."

The sick thing was, the band broke up before their debut album was even released. (Finestone has recently reappeared with a new punk band, Fifi, on his own label, Low Blow Records.) Meanwhile, Bad Religion were about to break into the big time.

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As must be obvious by now, the band found a replacement for Finestone from within the punk scene.

"Bobby (Schayer) was just hanging around L.A. playing in various bands," Graffin recalls. "He was wasting away in this terribly abusive band called Two Free Stooges, it was a shame. He knew Bad Religion from the very earliest days, he was a fan, and he's such a great drummer, he was a lot more versatile (than Finestone)."

Younger than the rest of Religion, Schayer grew up on a diet of glam rock: Bowie, Sweet, Slade and the Bay City Rollers. Then one weekend, he caught the Ramones on Don Kirshner's *Rock Concert*. Soon after, for his twelfth birthday, his sister bought him the Ramone's eponymous debut album and *Rocket To Russia*, and his fate was sealed. He began playing drums in 1980, but that was after he'd learned guitar and bass.

Schayer's first band was The Questions, which he joined in 1988. Not long after he hooked up with what could've been considered a supergroup—The Two Free Stooges—by membership alone. Most of the group had ties to Alex Cox (the director of such movies as *Repo Man* and *Sid and Nancy*), and the band sported former members of the Red Hot Chili Peppers, Porno For Pyros, the Circle Jerks, the Dead Kennedys, Thelonius Monster, etc. The only problem was their material.

"We did cover songs—Cream, Zeppelin, Clash—and did them loungy and weird, with these two lounge guys fronting the band," Schayer explains, laughing. "They'd do jokes; a lot of racist jokes, silly jokes, say anything to make people laugh, and half the time people would get offended. We went to San Francisco, and you know what topic that they did. It was a vile lounge act, most people got the joke, but some didn't. I think the biggest joke was that some people took it seriously."

Schayer stayed with the Stooges for about a year total, quitting and going back several times, as the line-up constantly shifted.

"For a band that never put a record out, well, we did three tours! We knew people in the right places. The Smithereens were recording in L.A., and stayed at the hotel behind the Central (now the Viper room), they came in for a drink, and we were playing. They loved us, so that's how we ended up opening for them.

"The Peppers took us on tour, too, in '89. Then we did a tour with the Dead Milkmen. If I hadn't done that, I'd never have gotten this (gig with Bad Religion)."

However, from Graffin's tone, it sounded as if he got the job not because of, but in spite of, the Two Free Stooges.

In a roundabout way, Schayer already had a connection to Bad Religion. When he had first started playing drums, it was the Circle Jerks' Lucky Lehrer who taught him. And so it was appropriate that it was another Circle Jerk that left the following message on Schayer's answering machine: "Hey Bobby, it's Greg Hetson calling to see what's up, and requiring your services as drummer for Bad Religion. If you're interested, give me a call." Schayer did.

"The day I tried out for the band, Nicky Beat, who'd played with the Germs and every band that ever existed, was there; Colin Sears from Dag Nasty was there too, but I got it because I knew everything. I had two days to learn songs, and I learned 25. I walked in, and they asked me what songs did I know, and I said everything. And they said, 'Bullshit!' I just went out and did it, and they said, 'OK, you're in the band.' Actually, they said, 'Come back tomorrow, because we want Brett to hear you.' The next day, after three songs he said, 'OK, you're in the band.' Then, he asked if I played chess, and I said, 'Yeah, kind of.' And THEN he said, 'OK you're in the band.'"

Chess was important to Gurewitz, and his small travel set actually almost got him arrested in London. Bad Religion's 1991 European tour took them to the English capital on July 4, and onto Amsterdam the following night. The band would be flying to the Netherlands, and it was only after Gurewitz reached the airport, that he realized that he'd left his passport on the tour bus, which was already on its way to the cross Channel ferry.

Initially, the guitarist assumed he'd just be able to get on the plane, or that the rest of the band would stay behind with him. He was wrong on both counts, instead he remained in London with whatever English money the rest of the group had in their pockets. To make matters worse, the American Embassy was closed for the Fourth, so Gurewitz had to wait to the next day to purchase a new passport.

The only problem was, he'd brought a bag along, and because of the concern over terrorism, he wasn't allowed to bring it in to the Embassy. Across the street, however, there's a small park, and at a loss for better options, Gurewitz tucked the bag under a bush, and returned to the Embassy.

He came out with passport in hand, only to discover the park closed off by the police. "Anyone know who's bag this is?" they kept asking. Actually it's mine, Gurewitz told them. A bobby grabbed him infuriated, "Do you realize how much you've cost the British taxpayer?"

The guitarist was totally confused.

"You could have a bomb in this bag—open it," the exasperated cop demanded. And there was the timer for Gurewitz's chess set. Loud pleas of innocence ensued from the guitarist, before the bobby was finally convinced it wasn't a timer for a bomb, and only then was Gurewitz was allowed to go on his way.

Later that year, Bad Religion began work on their next record, *Generator*. Things were done much differently during the recording of this album than previous ones. Gurewitz had moved Westbeach to larger premises, and for the first time, the entire band could play in the studio at the same time. It enabled them to give the record a greater spontaneity than some of their earlier ones. The songs themselves were increasing in complexity, while the harmonies were becoming more integral to the group's sound.

"The songs themselves were becoming more intricate, because Greg and Brett were both phenomenal songwriters. I've been in a lot of bands, so it's not just because I'm in Bad Religion," Bentley insists. "Greg does his vocals in one take, then goes in and does the background vocals, and the song's done.

"With the talent that Brett and Greg both had, it made for a healthy competition of songwriting against each other; if Greg wrote two songs, well Brett would write five. Greg would write one great song, and you'd just go 'Wow!' And then Brett would go try to do one better. I thought this was great, I just sit back and let everyone else do all the work."

Well almost. Bentley has written or co-written several Bad Religion songs, including "Voice Of God Is Government" (on *How Could Hell*), "Part III" (*How Could Hell*), "The Positive Aspect of Negative Thinking" (*Grain*), "Unacceptable" (*Grain*), "Self" (*Recipe For Hate*).

However, he admits that last one is a bit in dispute.

"It's not actually a song," Bentley laughs, "But a sort of...I don't know what to call that. I call it a song, because somehow or other, I get mechanicals from it.

"It's funny, I always thought I could write songs, I always wanted to, and I CAN write songs, but when I'm done with them, I know they don't belong with Bad Religion."

Is it time for a solo album?

"I'm not interested in a solo album; my songs are maybe too much Elvis Costello."

Generator was written during the lead-up to the Gulf War, and the band were actually in the studio when the bombs started dropping on Baghdad. They received the news from Tim Yohanon, of Maximum Rock' n' Roll. The band were as appalled as he was, so when Yohanon asked if they had anything he could release on a projected protest EP, the band immediately recorded two songs; "Fertile Crescent" and "Heaven Is Falling." Both would appear on *Generator*, but now would also be released as "The New World Order #1" split 7-inch, whose B-side featured a spoken word piece by Noam Chomsky.

Generator became the first Bad Religion album to for which 100,000 copies were shipped—the band and the label

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were growing by leaps and bounds. In fact, with this record, the group actually signed a 60-page record contract with Epitaph, similar to the ones that the majors' supply. But Epitaph wasn't a major, so just how were they managing to cope with these kinds of shipments?

"Brett and I would take pre-orders," Bentley explains, "because we didn't know how albums many to press, and we didn't want to press too many. We called distributors two months in advance, send them a demo tape, and then got the orders, so we knew how much to press.

"It was the game of balance. We'd give the distributors 60 days to pay us, and made sure the pressing plant gave us 90 days. We had to work it this way. If it was costing us $1.10 to make the CD, and we were pressing 60,000. Well, we didn't have the money. Every year the pre-orders would match whatever the year's total was for that album, and then chop on another 5,000 or 6,000. Even though these numbers are worldwide, I was just amazed."

Amazement would soon turn to incredulity with the release of *Recipe For Hate*, the album Schayer succinctly sums up as Bad Religion's *Sgt. Pepper*. Had the band really attained such massive new heights, or had the rest of the world simply caught up with them? Even now, it's hard to tell. Certainly *Recipe* was an outstanding album, but what had really changed?

Once again, Bad Religion produced the record themselves at Westbeach Recorders, yet the sound was somehow cleaner, without losing the band's aggressive edge. The songs were as strong as anything on *Generator*, yet just a bit catchier, and the harmonies even more prominent. This was Bad Religion entering the big time.

"It's possibly more easy to digest," Graffin said at the time, "but that's a sign of the times more than a sound on the record. I think it's more likely to be played on the radio, even two years ago, it wouldn't have had much of a chance to get played. I think our whole catalog is now more likely to get played. The fact that the albums might have hits is time dependent."

"I think it is more accessible," Gurewitz agreed, "but I wouldn't say it was premeditated, I think the sound was a natural extension of *Generator*. I think this was partially a result of me and Greg trying to do slightly different things, while staying in the context of *Generator*; experimenting with chord structures, modes and tempos. We explore things, things that maybe we explored very subtly in the past, and just got the courage to do it a little bit more, but hopefully not alienate people who like what we've done in the past."

As Graffin and Gurewitz write separately, it's interesting that both came up with more accessible, melodic material at the same time. Had they discussed deliberately trying to compose this type of music?

"Greg and I really don't discuss what we're going to write before we write," Gurewitz insisted. "We don't even map it out in a general way. We don't say for next year's songs let's try to write in this general direction. We write the songs, then we listen to them and say, 'Hmmm, I wonder if we should play this in Bad Religion? It doesn't sound like anything we've ever written before.' Having written it, it's what the fuck? Yeah, I am going to use it for Bad Religion, because I have no desire to do a solo project right now, and I'm certainly not going to write 10 more songs striving to make them sound like something I've written before. Then again, I don't think anything is totally out of context, and if you like any previous Bad Religion album, chances are this will appeal to you also."

And the chances were increased further by *Recipe* boasting a host of guest stars; Johnette Napolitano, Clawhammer's Jon Wahl and Chris Bagarazzi, Greg Leisz from k.d. Lang's band, and most surprisingly, Eddie Vedder.

"Eddie used to live in San Diego, and he always came to our shows," Bentley explains, "then all of a sudden he's a huge man. Right when *Ten* came out, we went to Europe and played some shows with Pearl Jam in Germany. We hung out and were all getting goofy. You know how when you sit down with someone, and your jokes are all the same, you have the same sense of humor, you do things that are similar? You just kind of connect.

"At the second show we played with them, he and I decided to go onstage, and see who could punk out the most. But I told him, 'You can't climb up anything, because I can't when I'm playing bass, so you have to do it at ground level.' He goes out there and does his thing, and I think, 'Whooo, it's going to be hard to top that one.'

"Then I go out, and during the first song I'm swinging my bass around and my strap breaks. My guitar had such momentum that it went flying to the other side of the stage, landed on the ground and went 'Whhhhooooooo.' I just stared at it for a moment, stared at the audience, then looked at Ed. He just shouted, 'You win!'"

Indeed Bentley had won—there's no way to outpunk a true punk. Meanwhile, *Recipe* swiftly surpassed *Generator*'s sales, and the numbers kept climbing and climbing. And the workload kept growing and growing, and the tension kept building and building until, finally, Bad Religion left Epitaph for Atlantic Records. It was a decision that the band is still defending to this day.

"I wouldn't say that moving to Atlantic was the right move, but moving off Epitaph was," Bentley says. "Not just for the label, but for ourselves as well. For the personality of the band to exist, I think that it had to happen. I think we got to the point where we were choking ourselves, the time for the band had to be less and less, because the time devoted to Epitaph had to become more and more.

"It became difficult for Brett and I to be out on the road, because while there we'd have to have meetings with distributors and record store people. You're out on a tour and having all these business meetings, and you're going, 'This sucks.'

"Personalities started to evolve, because that's what success does to people. Success makes people have to kind of put their hand up and say, 'I did that.' And all of a sudden, you start running into conflicts of saying look we can accomplish this, and it gets a lot more difficult when certain people begin to believe that they're the reason for everything good happening. I'm not going to say any one person, because we were all doing it.

"A lot of that had to do with being on our own label, we were responsible for this. Instead of we being the we, we were all kind of 'I did this, I did that.' And it got to the point of saying maybe we need to have someone else doing this, so we can go back to being Bad Religion a band, and not necessarily be responsible for whatever the version of success was for the individual.

"There were other things as well. When the band was on Epitaph, it was Bad Religion ALL the time. Even (Fat) Mike (of NOFX) would come up and say, 'Why can't we do the numbers you're doing?' And I'd say, 'I don't know.' I think other bands actually believed that Brett and I were spending more time pushing Bad Religion because we were in the band, than the other acts.

"But no, that's not the case, for every 10 phone calls, eight of them were for Bad Religion. I'm not calling these people, but when they call me, I'm asking them if they've heard about this other new album coming out, 'Let me send you a copy, I think you'll really like it,' but all they want to talk about is Bad Religion. Brett and I said, 'If we get Bad Religion off the label, the other bands can thrive.'"

For any doubters, this writer witnessed a similar situation at the Epitaph offices when The Offspring's *Smash* took off. The phones rang continuously, and no matter how hard the label publicist, Jeff Abarta, attempted to guide the caller to other Epitaph bands as well, he was constantly rebuffed. It was no different during *Recipe*'s day, and inevitably led to a certain amount of resentment.

As for The Offspring, Bentley refuses to accept credit for meteoric rise of *Smash*.

"I won't say that because Bad Religion left it allowed The Offspring to take off, because that's taking responsibility for something way beyond something that I ever would."

No, but Bad Religion's departure did give the rest of the bands the opportunity to shine. In the early days, Bad Religion could be seen as a tall, nurturing tree, overlooking the sprouting Epitaph stable. But eventually the sprouts grew, and living in Bad Religion's shade began to stunt their own growth.

"In some ways we were helpful because it provided strength for the label, if you had a label with 10 acts all struggling along...they could only get so big before all of a sudden it's too much," Benley says. "Our leaving put the label in a whole new framework, because all of a sudden there was a big hole where Bad Religion was. If you take The Offspring out, all the bands kind of filled that hole, all of them jumped from doing 50,000 to 150,000. And that was great."

Bad Religion's label negotiations themselves were grueling, according to Bentley.

"There were meetings where people were saying, 'Come on babe, I know exactly what you're talking about, CREDIBILITY, and I've got it.' What they're really saying is, 'We need you guys here at this label, because we suck, and if we had Bad Religion on our label we'd have a feather in our cap and credibility.' Shut up!"

At least the contract talks were simple. The band presented interested suitors with their Epitaph contracts from their last two albums, and demanded an advance equal to what *Recipe* had already sold. When they signed to Atlantic, that was 180,000 records in the States alone. But what shocked Bentley was that Gurewitz didn't license Bad Religion, but sold them outright.

"I couldn't believe it, I was stunned. Why would you do that? What we had to believe, because we're realistic people,

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was that Epitaph could never do the job that Atlantic and WEA (Warner, Elektra, Asylum) could do.

"We had to believe it, because we've never proved otherwise," he says. "We'd taken it up to 180,000 and just about killed ourselves. Brett and I would ask each other, 'Could you imagine if *Recipe* was selling 280,000, another 100,000?' How radical that would have been? We had a forklift and warehouses full of records, and we were working 24 hours a day to get this thing out. We'd say, 'Think about another 100,000, what would happen?' We'd be dead!

"It wasn't an easy thing to say that we're leaving our label, it's like leaving your house. But you do come to a point where you say you've got to go get your own lives. We can't sit here in bed with ourselves and jerk off for nothing, because it's not accomplishing anything, it's just saying how cool you are.

"We started Epitaph, we took it to its fruition as far as Bad Religion was concerned," Bentley continues. "We've done all these things because we wanted to. Never once in my lifetime did I think I was cool for doing that. Every person on the outside wanted to keep handing us this DIY flag, 'How cool you guys are, how indie.' I don't want this fucking flag, I'm not going to fly this thing, I don't care about that shit, I'm doing this because I have to. As a concept it's fine, but it's not why I was doing it, and it's not why anyone in the band was doing it.

"Basically, it even wasn't true, we're total geeks; losers, that's us. We had no problem burying ourselves in a garage or our office, because who cares? It became cool to do that, but I didn't want that. You didn't think I was cool before, why am I cool now? My favorite line from this decade is from (designer) Paul Gaultier: 'I've never been mainstream, mainstream turned into me.' I love that. It doesn't have anything to do with what we did, it has everything to do with what everyone else did."

As for Gurewitz's vision of Epitaph at the time: "I want to do the best job I can, and go as far as I can with it. I want to have a model company with good benefits, health care, parental leave, sick pay, where the lowest paid and highest paid are very close in their salaries, and everyone has freedom of expression and opinion. My goal is to show what can be done within the confines of our system, and be an example.

"The label is at the service of the bands. We try to create an environment where they can be creative and make records, and reach as many people as possible."

This attitude and view of bettering the world is shared by the entire band, and has, since the earliest days, permeated Bad Religion's lyrics.

"I wouldn't say I'm extremely politically aware," Graffin insists, "but I'm aware of our culture. What we've always strived to do in the band is address issues that make people think. To me the punk movement was about sharing ideas, sharing feelings with people regardless of their affiliations.

"As we got older, it was just natural for us to raise relevant issues and ask a lot of questions. The older I get, the more questions there are, and the fewer answers there are. That's the one thing about academics, too, as you delve deeper into your science you find more questions, less answers. The more you know, the less you realize you know."

And in many ways, Bad Religion's inability to offer simple solutions to large problems illustrates the difference between the early British punk scene and its American counterpart. While English punks suggested white riots and destruction as the answer, on these shores, few bands felt able to provide such pat solutions.

"We need more rioting, pretty much I think that urban terrorism is the way to go," Gurewitz jokes. "Actually, I'm against violence in almost all cases, but as a last resort, I'm not against it. I think there's some groups who need to stand up for themselves, let's put it that way, get noticed by whatever means necessary.

"I think Bad Religion has definitely had a positive effect on people, if nothing else as a role model. Somebody can have a certain amount of freedom in their life, can pursue an alternative lifestyle, be vocal and cynical of their community and their country, overcome adversity, and be moderately comfortable in their own skin."

But can the band offer more of an answer to young people searching for solutions than just themselves as role models?

"I think it's great for people to be active politically, active in their communities and in humanitarian pursuits," Gurewitz says. "But there's no actual solution within the system, nothing on a grand scale can be achieved."

Graffin refuses even to entertain the question.

"That assumes I have a concept of a perfect world, which I think is a flawed supposition. That's a burden, if I have to create one. I believe the idea of perfection is fascist. I'd have to control people's behavior, but ideally people should treat each other better. And even with that knowledge, I don't treat people as well as I should. It's difficult to treat people with dignity and compassion, but I try to as much as I can.

"But really, you're encouraging me to do something that's not in my nature, it would be so easy to rattle off some bullshit, but if I really want to share something insightful, then it's tough," Graffin says. "We use the negatives for a positive outcome, that is to provoke people to think about some things themselves, which ultimately makes them feel better about yourselves. When you can figure something out on your own, it empowers you.

"The perfect world would be where we've reached all the people and made them feel better about themselves, and in the meantime made us the richest band on the planet. But seriously, most of the problems that I sing about can be distilled down to close mindedness and unwillingness to see the shades of gray."

Both Graffin and Gurewitz's questioning and noting of societal concerns are the core of Bad Religion's lyrics, extending all the way back to their first EP. Certainly they're not the only punk group to have done this, but what sets the band apart is that neither writes down to their audience. Bad Religion's lyrics have remained the most thoughtful, and thought provoking, of any band one could name.

And Graffin is absolutely right, the result of their songs is an encouragement to think, to wonder, to seek one's own solutions. This simple truth is the basis of the band's continuing popularity, and why their fan base not only continues to grow, but why their audience has never outgrown them.

However, sometimes the solutions are staring you in the face, as was the case for Bad Religion leaving Epitaph. With the decision to leave made, and the contracts with Atlantic signed, Graffin announced he'd take a semester off from university so the group could concentrate on touring. It would be the first time in the band's history that they'd be on the road for more than two months in a year.

One of those ensuing tour dates, at a festival in Milan, Italy, topped Schayer's list of weirdest shows of all time.

"This bill was just horrifying, like Hendrix and The Monkees. It was Neil Young, Booker T and the MGs, Bad Religion, 4 Non Blondes and James. It was a mellow gig, then here comes Bad Religion; no one clapped, no one booed, no one did anything, they just looked. They were in shock; they were like, 'Oh my God, what the fuck is this?' It was like when The Ramones opened for Sabbath; this is wrong. You just laugh about it, what else can you do?"

But Bad Religion seems to be condemned to inappropriate shows. How's this for an oddball bill: The Pixies, Danzig, Stiff Little Fingers, The Alarm, Bad Religion, 999 and Ride (1991, German festival)? In this case, it was either Ride or Danzig that wished they were playing elsewhere.

While the tour wound its way across Europe and America, Gurewitz and Bentley were still trying to run Epitaph from the road. It was too much for anyone to handle. Bentley admitted defeat first, and announced he was quitting Epitaph.

"It wasn't fair for me to be working there and be away. Logically, train someone else to do my job, and I'll just be in Bad Religion. We did the tour for *Recipe*, and it was hard for everybody, because all of a sudden we were out there a lot longer. It was harder for Brett, because he was away from the office and things were happening quickly. Obviously The Offspring was just starting to take off, things were happening

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at Epitaph that were really good for him."

Gurewitz held on for one final album, 1994's *Stranger Than Fiction*, a fitting epitaph for his career with the band. Schayer calls the record Bad Religion's *Rubber Soul*, an obvious, if inverted, successor to *Recipe*'s *Sgt. Pepper* label.

For the first time since *How Coul Hell*, the band brought in an outsider to produce their record, Andy Wallace (who mixed Nirvana's *Nevermind* album). The group also rehearsed much more than they had for any previous recording, and that helped give the album a very polished sound. It was an obvious successor to *Recipe*, with songs that were short, sharp, and acerbic.

Once again Bad Religion brought in some friends to join in the fun. Wayne Kramer, the '60's counter-culture hero of the MC5, who'd recently signed to Epitaph, contributed guitar on two tracks. And Rancid's Tim "Lint" Armstrong's gravely growl features on the song "Television."

Fiction more than solidified the band's standing in America, and in Europe. And it was in Europe, bizarrely, that Green Day opened for Bad Religion on the band's next tour; even stranger, perhaps was having Pearl Jam support them in Europe in '95, but then again, Bad Religion opened for them in the States.

It was somewhere on that American tour that Bad Religion decided to mix up their show format one night. Normally, the band played four songs in a block, paused for breath and a little stage patter, than launched into another four-song block. But one night, the group decided they were tired of this routine, and left it up to Greg to decide when to pause.

"We didn't stop!" Bentley exclaims. "We played 37 songs straight through, and were done in about 45 minutes. We didn't have any more songs, so what could we do? We started taking requests, then played new songs that we only had half done. After that show I said to Greg, 'Don't ever do that again!'"

But even that wasn't as bad as a show in Phoenix, where the audience literally wouldn't let them leave.

"They wouldn't let us off the stage until we played every song we've ever done," Bentley moans, "And then we had to start making songs up there and then." As the backstage was not behind the stage at all, but at the front of the club, the band were literally trapped with no route of escape.

It was only after the tour was completed that Gurewitz announced his departure.

"It looked like all these devastating things from the outside," Bentley laughs. "If I take a step out and look at it, it looked like, 'God, that band just got beaten by an ugly stick.' If I'm a fan, I don't want things to change because I like a specific style or person, the idea of it, so I understand when people say Bad Religion is not the same. I say, 'You're right, it's *not* the same, because there's been big, big changes. It's not just the label, but when a person like Brett goes, well songwriting, ideas flowing, you don't lose a direction, but an idea."

At the time, the split was announced as an amicable parting of the ways, with Gurewitz choosing to concentrate his time solely on Epitaph. Apparently, that was not the whole truth, as the guitarist/label head told a very different tale an interview earlier last year.

"I didn't quit because I didn't have enough time, I quit because it was becoming unbearable for me to stay. We were fighting like cats and dogs. It's all personal shit, we just got on each others nerves, we just weren't getting along real well. For me, a band has to be a band. A band is a group of guys who are tight, love each other, have camaraderie, and that's why they go traveling around with each other, because they want to, there's a genuine bond, a genuine affinity. For me, I was going through the motions. It's supposed to be artistic, supposed to be about the art, how do you make something genuine and from the heart, when the whole thing feels like a charade.

"You stick with the same group of guys for 14 years, and it's possible for someone to start getting on your nerves. I'm only human, and I believe that I got on their nerves as well. So, I believe it was for the best. I definitely wish them no ill will, but I think we're all happier being apart."

Much of the punk scene couldn't imagine Bad Religion continuing without their beloved Mr. Brett. But the band has always been bigger than just Gurewitz and Graffin, and continue they would.

In the interim period, Epitaph released *All Ages* in 1995. This compilation album contained tracks culled from their pre-*Recipe* days, as well as a bumper crop of previously unreleased live material.

Meanwhile, the group were coming to a decision on Gurewitz's replacement. Their choice was Brian Baker, who'd begun his career back in the early '80s in the DC hardcore band, Minor Threat (which would become Fugazi). In the mid-'80s, the guitarist jammed with Glen Danzig, in a nameless band that the singer evolved first into Sam Hain, and then into Danzig. From there, Baker went on to the seminal Meatmen, before leaving to form Dag Nasty. The latter had close ties to Fugazi's Ian MacKay, who co-produced the group's first three records, eventually, however, Dag Nasty would move to Epitaph for one album. Baker's next step was into the majors with Junkyard, who released two albums on Geffen, before finally joining Careless.

"He had a name, he was exactly our age, with the same history, except in a different scene, and is an awesome guitar player," Graffin explains. "He was working in a pool hall, and the very same week we called him, he was also asked to fill in for Peter Holsapple of REM. So he was asked to join what he thought was one of the biggest bands in the world, and one of the biggest punk bands in the world, and he joined the punk band. Or as he says [paraphrasing one of REM's own greatest hits], 'That's me in the corner, choosing Bad Religion.'"

Ironically, while Baker chose Bad Religion, a former Careless bandmate chose REM! Another ex-Careless player can now be found in the Goo Goo Dolls. Baker's final band before Bad Religion really was out of keeping of his true love of punk.

"Brian's a lot better guitarist, he can do anything," Graffin continues. "Brett self-acknowledges he wasn't as proficient, he had a style, a very sloppy style. What really helps is that Brian can bring my ideas to the surface a lot quicker. Brett I'd have to fight to see if it was a possibility, or am I just going down a blind alley? Because the sound I hear in my head, Brian, with his ability to be very precise about the tone of his guitar and make different sounding chords, can really facilitate my ideas."

Even so, Graffin admits that this was a nerve wracking period. For the first time in Bad Religion's long history, the singer would be solely responsible for songwriting. In an interview done just before *The Gray Race*'s release, he managed not to sound nervous at all.

"It was really a releasing experience in a sense, I was able to release some stored creativity that I'd built up over the years. Because when you write with someone else, you know that they're going to be filling in certain parts of the album, and you don't really want to cross into their territory. So, it's really a lot more altruistic than people would think. With Brett gone, it was a lot freer.

"That doesn't mean it wasn't somewhat worrisome, there's been a lot of pressure involved. But the pressure is balanced mostly by the freedom of creativity."

But the truth was plainer to see in a more recent interview, when the expectation bled through his voice as he asked for an opinion of the album. Truthfully, how could he not be nervous, now that much of Bad Religion's fortunes were lying on his shoulders alone?

And although Graffin can't replace Gurewitz's own song writing talents, *The Gray Race* proved that the band would not only survive, but grow stronger with the addition of new blood.

(Please see **Bad Religion** page 58)

BAD RELIGION
Tested
Dragnet/Sony (Germany DRASAMPCO 3952)

Bizarrely, Bad Religion's U.S. label, Atlantic, passed on this album; however, the band's German label felt differently, and happily for US fans, *Tested* will not only receive wide distribution Stateside, but be priced the same as a normal domestic release.

This is Bad Religion's first live record, and they are rightfully proud of it. So proud, in fact, that the album was accompanied by a two page press release explaining just how different it was from normal, run of the mill live albums. And an explanation is needed, because *Tested* doesn't sound like ANY live record you've ever heard. The first thing you notice is just how little crowd noise there is. What happened, was the audience gagged? For there's virtually no screaming fans, few sing along with the band choruses (the most evident, and hilarious, is a German crowd stumbling over the words on "Generator"), not even wild applause after the big hits.

But, if you've ever had the good fortune to stand backstage at a show, then you'll instantly recognize the sonics of *Tested*. This is what the group actually sounds like onstage, before the music begins echoing across the auditorium, bouncing off walls, and drowned out by the shouting fans down front. Thus, what Bad Religion have produced isn't a record which brings the concert experience into your bedroom, but you into their milieu instead. The audience is not omnipresent because the album was recorded directly off the band's mikes, and while that kept crowd noise to a minimum, it also means that any missed notes and vocal errors WERE picked up, and there they remain.

And that's how it should be. For *Tested* is the true sound of Bad Religion live. It was recorded across 57 cities, here and in Europe; afterwards the group sifted through hundreds of hours of tapes, and chose the most electrifying performances of 27 of their songs. The setlist spans their entire career, pulling songs from all of their albums (bar *Into The Unknown*, of course), with only a slight emphasis given to material from *Recipe For Hate* and their last album, *The Gray Race*.

Ever. if you caught any of the shows on Bad Religion's last tour, it's unlikely you saw the set presented here. Several of the songs included were not part of the band's usual repertoire, thus the listener gets to revel in live takes of the likes of "Portrait Of Authority" and "God Song."

Three previously unreleased songs sweeten the already honey drenched pot. The first, "Dream Of Unity" is a slow, simmering number where Bobby Schayer's drum tattoo is matched by Greg Graffin's stirring vocals. "It's Reciprocal" slams across the dancefloor, and the title track steams and features some phenomenal guitar work from Brian Baker.

And, in fact, it's Baker's contribution that shines throughout *Tested*. While Schayer and bassist Jay Bentley drive the songs with their tight rhythms, and guitarist Greg Hetson provides the melody's backbone, Baker soars, swoops, and dazzles. His guitar leads give the older material not just a whole new lease on life, but a whole new twist. Still, Graffin inevitably remains the focus, and his vociferous performances sets the songs alight.

The last few years have been a true test for Bad Religion, and this album proves that the band have not only passed with flying colors, but been strengthened in the process.

JoAnn Greene

(Bad Religion *from page 56*)

The record contains a clutch of classic Bad Religion tunes, while the addition of Baker's guitar work, which truthfully is far superior to his predecessor's, gives the band an added excitement.

Schayer sums up the situation best.

"I always said, 'You know we're going to get flack for it,' but then again, whatever, it's Bad Religion.' We kind of stripped it back down and went back to the nitty gritty again. It's probably less experimental, but to me it was still the most challenging, because there was so much pressure put on us."

He's right on all counts, and the album does have a grittier feel than either *Recipe* or *Fiction*. This time around they recorded in an entirely new way; rather than returning to Gurewitz's Westbeach studio, they opted to record at Electric Lady Studios, in New York city, over a two-month period, and brought in Ric Ocasek, formerly of the Cars, to produce.

Bad Religion also created their own imprint, Unplayable Records, on which the "Punk Rock Song" single was released through Atlantic. Or as Bentley puts it, "We did it, and made Atlantic do all the work."

The band began touring in late '95, and have been on the road for most of the year since. Inevitably, Bad Religion found themselves on another peculiar bill in Europe. At a large festival in Loreli, Germany, they discovered themselves second to the top of the bill after David Bowie, but before Iggy Pop, Pulp, and a host of other Britpoppers. The line-up appeared obviously wrong; surely Bad Religion would be playing after Iggy, but no, they were second slot.

"It was a weird show for us, for sure," Bentley chuckles, "but we don't really care. At festival sites, they have these little stalls for bands to set up their gear in. You walk down this row of stalls, seeing all these bands' gear with their techs polishing their stuff, and then you get to the one that says Bad Religion, and there's like three amps and a crappy drumkit, and some guy just sitting there going, 'What?' That's us."

Yet even this wasn't the most bizarre outing they were forced to endure; that awaited them in Denmark, when they played with Bob Dylan. So much for a mellow day out with the family!

Having performed across the States and Europe for nine months, opening the first show on the Sex Pistols tour (and played the closing show on November 30, in Sao Paulo, Brazil) along the way, the band continued onto Japan, Brazil, New Zealand, and Australia, before finally receiving a well deserved break at the end of February.

In their downtime, Bad Religion have been readying a new live record, *Tested*.

"Making this album was very much like making *Suffer*, there was no pressure for it to be anything," Bentley states. "We were just having fun, it was right back to where we were eight years ago, because we're doing it because we want to, not because we have some contractual obligation."

It's a philosophy and attitude that has seen Bad Religion through 17 years, 11 albums, and a career second to none. The questioning continues, the music keeps improving, and the arrival of Brian Baker heralds a new age of Bad Religion. Here's to the future.

Bad Religion Selected Discography

7" Singles

Label	Catalog #	Title	Year
Maximum Rock'n'Roll	MRR006	New World Order #1 (Fertile Crescent and Heaven Is Falling) split single w/Noam Chomsky	1992
Sympathy for the Record Industry	SFTRI?	Atomic Garden	1992
Sympathy for the Record Industry	SFTRI?	American Jesus/Stealth	1993
Sympathy for the Record Industry	SFTRI326	Stranger Than Fiction/Markovian Process	1994
Unplayable Records/Atlantic 7--8079		Punk Rock Song/Universal Cynic/The Dodo	1996

Vinyl EPs

Label	Catalog #	Title	Year
Epitaph	(no cat #)	Bad Religion	1981
Epitaph	(no cat #)	Back To The Known	1985

Vinyl Albums

Label	Catalog #	Title	Year
Epitaph	(original no cat #, reissue 86407)	How Could Hell Be Any Worse	1982
Epitaph	(no cat #)	Into The Unknown	1983

Cassette Albums

Label	Catalog #	Title	Year
Epitaph	86407	How Could Hell Be Any Worse	1988

CD Albums

Label	Catalog #	Title	Year
Epitaph	E-86404	Suffer	1988
Epitaph	E-86406	No Control	1989
Epitaph	E-86407	80—85	1991
Epitaph	E-86409	Against The Grain	1990
Epitaph	E-86416	Generator	1992
Epitaph	E-86420	Recipe For Hate	1993
Atlantic	82546	Recipe For Hate	1993
Atlantic	82568	Stranger Than Fiction	1994
Epitaph	86443	All Ages	1995
Atlantic	82870	The Gray Race	1996

CD Compilation Albums

Label	Catalog #	Title	Year
Epitaph	86402	More Songs About Anger, Fear, Sex and Death (Atomic Garden, No Control...)	1993
Epitaph	86448	Punk-O-Rama (Do What You Want)	1994
Chaos/Columbia	OK 66660	Music From The Motion Picture Clerks ("Leaders And Followers")	1994
Bomp	BCD4052	Buried Alive Smoke Seven 1981—1983 (Bad Religion)	1995
Bomp	BCD 4058	Buried Alive 2 (Slaves)	1996