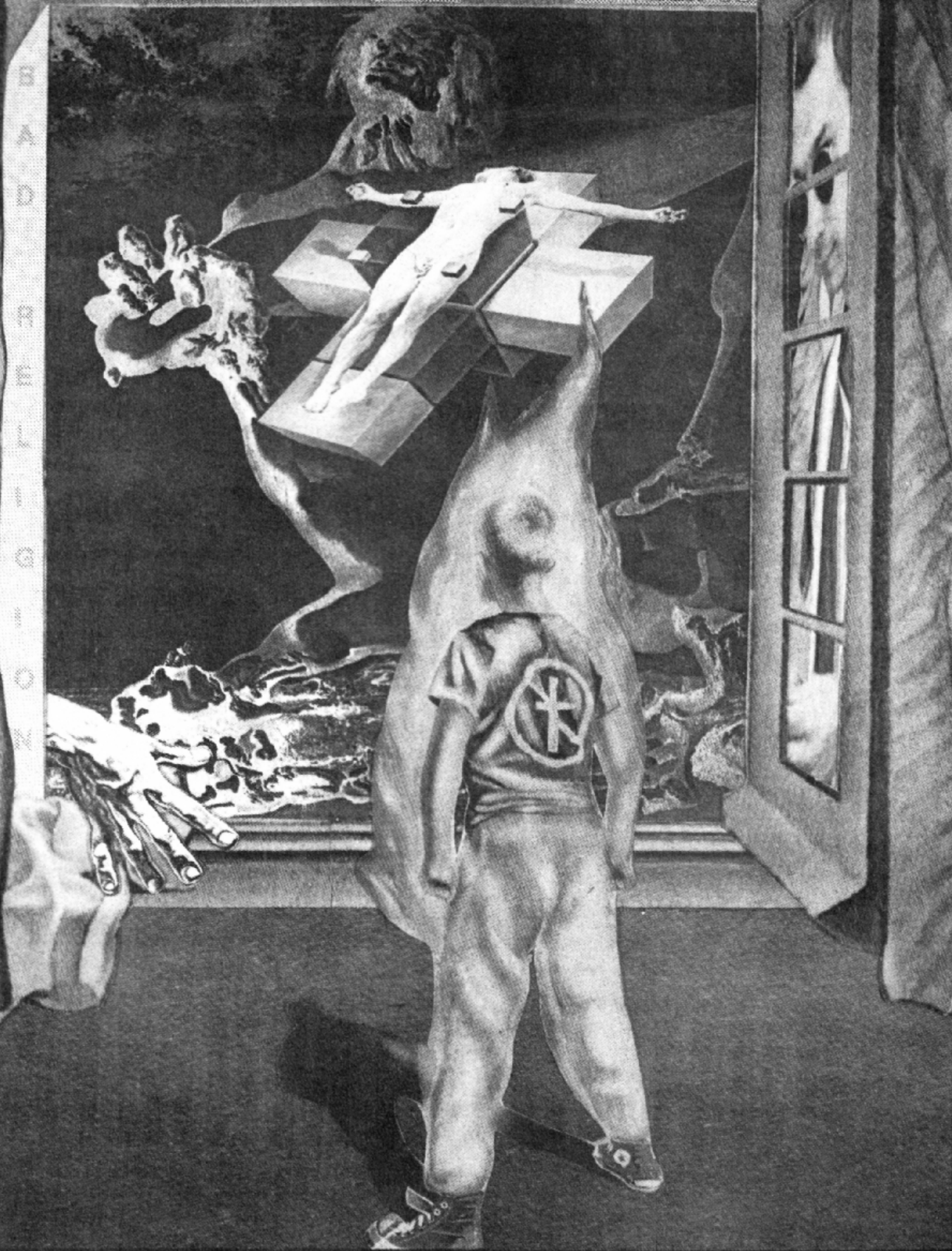


# MAXIMUM ROCK N ROLL

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# BAD RELIGION

*BAD RELIGION is a band, that in its existence of eight years and counting, has contributed to the underground/punk scene a number of recordings both valuable to collectors and inspiring to fans of the genre. The self-titled seven inch E.P. has been out of print for many years, and many consider the album How Could Hell be any Worse a definitive statement of the insightful intelligence, hidden amidst a collective mediated image portrayal of punks as uneducated, brainless anarchists. Through many years and many line-up changes, the current band consists of three members from the first single, namely singer Greg Graffin, guitarist Brett Gurewitz, and bass player Jay Bentley. Peter Finestone from the "How Could Hell..." era, and Greg Hetson, full time Circle Jerk, are also present and have been for many years. The new album, Suffer, was released recently on Epitaph Records and is a fine example of Bad Religion, and shows once again that old punks don't necessarily die, they just get older. If you don't believe me, buy the album, and decide for yourself. That's the way they would want it. Graffin and Bentley were interviewed by Ken shortly before their tour-ending show in S.F. on October 2, 1988. All photo credits go to Ms. Mouse, unless otherwise noted.*

**MRR:** Last time we talked, you spoke of a future album and tour plans. Both goals attained, how do you feel about them?  
**GG:** Didn't we tell you we'd do it?  
**MRR:** I had my doubts.  
**GG:** Well what do you think of the record?  
**MRR:** My opinion doesn't count, I'm too biased!  
**JB:** So are we, but everything worked out. The only thing was that the album came out during the tour and people didn't know any of the new songs. It was

kinda like playing in L.A., trying out new songs for people that have known you for eight years, and you go "This is a new one" and people kinda stand there and say "O.K., lets see what these assholes are gonna do now."

**MRR:** How are things as a five-piece?

**GG:** I was amazed at how much more powerful it sounds with the second guitar, I like it a lot better. You can really tell the difference.

**JB:** It works a lot better.

**GG:** This way when Brett screws up you don't notice it as much. (laughs)

**MRR:** Were there any places around the country that you found inspirational?

**JB:** Lincoln, Nebraska

**GG:** I wouldn't say inspirational...

**JB:** It was fun just being out there. Eight times out of ten I'd be sitting on a curb somewhere with Greg or Pete and say "What the fuck are we doing here?", but the other two times I'd say "This is fucken great!". Whether it was the club, someone cool we met in a bar, driving through a part of the country we've never seen before or whatever, everything seemed to work out. That was good, that was the inspiration.

**MRR:** Would you still consider Bad Religion a punk band?

**GG:** Sure.

**JB:** I was in the tattoo shop (next to the Stone) and a guy says "What kind of music do you play?" and I said basically, "Punk" and the guy says "Oh, I kinda like

punk music, are you a punk?" and I said "Yeah, I don't have a mohawk. This guys in the navy, right, and I said " Fuck man, I'm 24 years old. I had a mohawk when I was 16 and I don't need that shit anymore." For awhile it was funny and amusing and it had great shock-value...it scared the shit out of my parents, relatives and everyone I knew. It got me kicked out of school, so I guess at the time it served a purpose. Now there's no purpose, but the music...

**GG:** (with fake English accent) PUNKS NOT DEAD, OH NO! (laughter)

**GG:** I'd hesitate to call it punk just because so many people have negative opinions of punk music and it automatically eliminates a lot of what's possible.

**JB:** If people have a negative opinion of it because of the punk label then that's their problem.

**GG:** That's their problem.

**JB:** If someone was to label us they would have to say that we were a punk band in 81' and.....we're still a punk band in 88' (laughs)

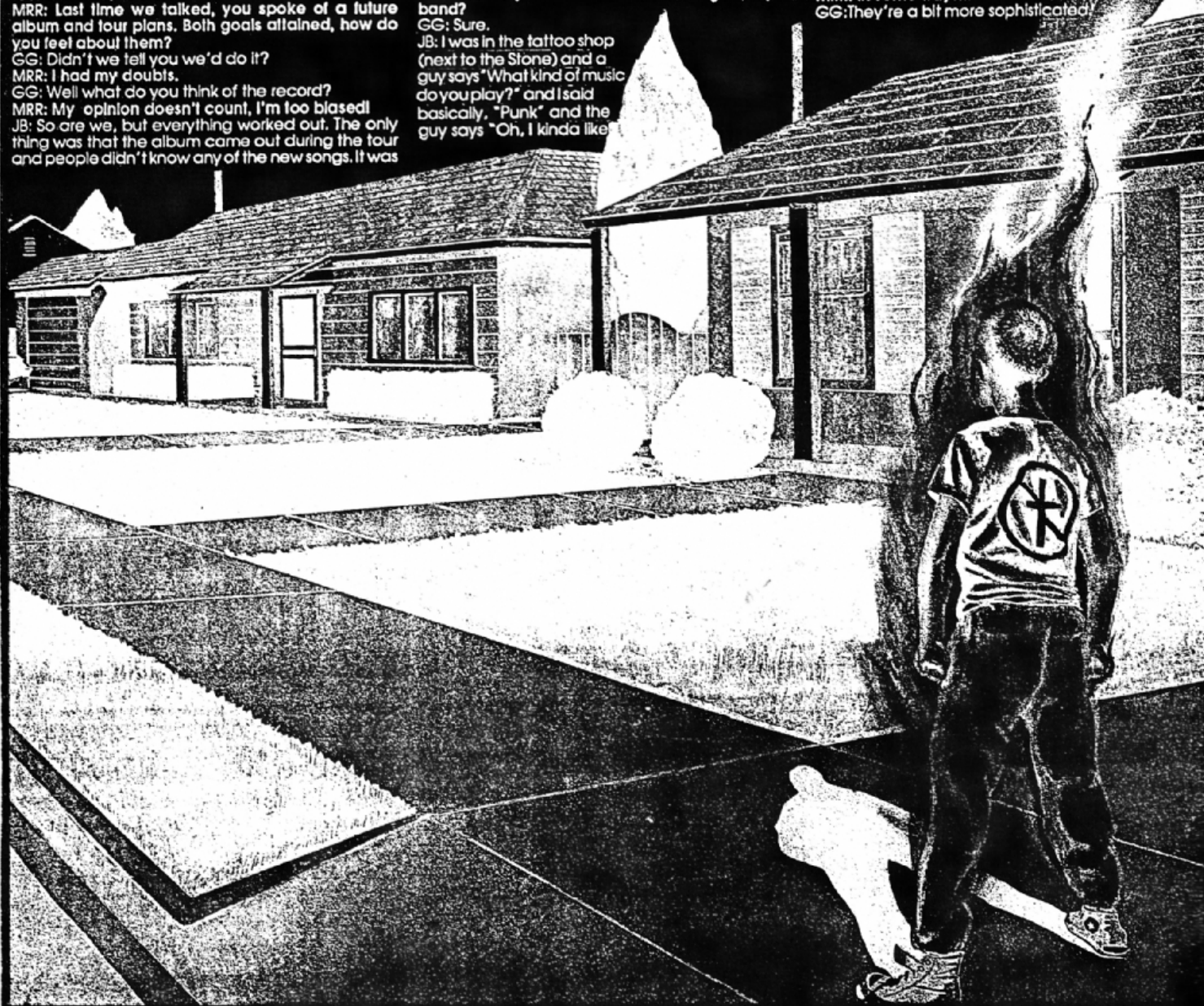
**GG:** That term doesn't seem to apply to anything anymore.

**MRR:** Tell me about the lyrics on the album.

**GG:** Aren't they like the old ones?

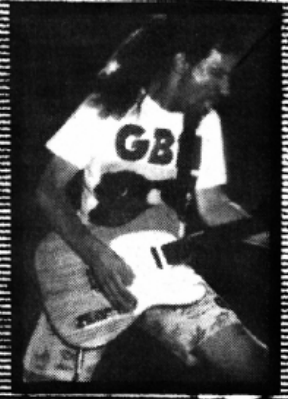
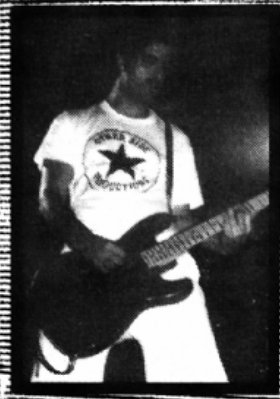
**MRR:** In some ways...

**GG:** They're a bit more sophisticated!





# INTERVIEWS



JB: When I got the lyric sheet, I didn't know what they were saying and I said to Greg that we should print up a little dictionary to go with the lyric sheet.

GG: I assumed that people listening would be able to look up any words they didn't understand themselves. When Brett hands me a song, I have to look up some words myself, and I know he just got them from some book he was reading! (more laughs)

MRR: So Brett writes all the words?

GG: He writes half and I write half.

MRR: Is the message still important to you?

JB: Sure.

GG: It's the same message, we're just taking it to a higher level of analysis. It's no longer society and America—it's still some of that—it's more like mankind and the species level. An inherent evil not just fixed in American society.

JB: It doesn't exist only at Orange Julius.

GG: That's right. It's not just the Valley.

MRR: Your answers to these problems of "inherent evil" would be...

JB: There are no answers. We just say "look" and then decide for yourself. If you think you want to do something about it because you want it to be different, then do something. If you think that everything is fine, then leave it the way it is.

GG: If you give answers you're preaching.

JB: I don't want to be a preacher!

GG: I feel, personally, that every human being has the same ability as I do, to reason things out, and they should be able to come up with their own ideas and answers. That's part of the little bit of beauty that's left in mankind, the fact that they can reason things out.

MRR: What is your opinion of the major label's interest in punk bands and disillusion within the scene towards bands who compromise sound for dollars?

JB: That's a personal band decision, ya know, they don't have to change. They don't have to say, "Well we're not gonna get signed" and change. If they want to change to make money, then they'll change and get money, but not if they have something viable to say.

GG: I think they usually change before they get signed.

JB: They make a conscious decision. They say "Well, we're going nowhere with this, so we'll go best, get

into something else." They look at what is happening now. The biggest "thing" right now is the glam-rock scene.

GG: How many punk bands have shifted over to that sound and are still hot? I don't think the big labels are interested in any old sound, there are still no punk bands on major labels.

JB: So...you've got a bunch of bands that at one time were doing something that you knew, and all of

a sudden you don't know em, and they're somewhere else, doing something else, different hair and all that. MRR: Would you say Bad Religion is an incorruptible band?

JB: We're not incorruptible by any means. If someone came up to me and said "Look, we'll give you 100,000 dollars for your next album", as long as we could do what we wanted on that album, hey, great. But if they said "We'll give you X amount of dollars but you kinda gotta change your sound a bit, we've got these chick back-up singers and this guy who will play horns" then it's no deal.

GG: It would have to be more than 100,000 dollars to sway me.

JB: It would have to be a substantial amount of money because right now (independent) we can have our cake and eat it too, so why change?

MRR: It might be worth it if you could get wider distribution.

JB: That's the thing. The only reason to sign would be distribution or tour support.

GG: There are a lot of constraints. I'm not willing to sacrifice my other life for Bad Religion and it would take a hell of a lot more than money for me to give that up. The thing about Bad Religion is that we're a bunch of guys that get together when we can, and we do music on our own terms. If we got signed to a major label, they would expect a lot of us as a band, like extensive touring or two albums a year and timewise, we can't afford to do that.

MRR: Will you be going back to school?

GG: I'm in graduate school now and I was in graduate school all last year. School starts for me tomorrow, that's why the tour ends tonight.

JB: I'll be going back to work at Orange Julius! Stop on by and I'll fix you up with an extra large, with an egg!

MRR: What's next for Bad Religion?

JB: Going home and going to sleep for a couple of days!

GG: Never seeing any money!

JB: And never seeing anybody in the band until our next show. We'll let you know. One day the phone will ring and it will be somebody from the band and he'll say this and this and this and we all meet up and it starts over again...

①

## SUFFER

DID YOU EVER SEE THE CONCRETE STAIRS OF EVERYDAY, THE LUNATIC, THE HYPOCRITE ARE ALL COAT IN THE TRAY, CAN'T YOU SEE THEIR LIVES ARE JUST LIKE YOURS? AN UNTURNED STONE NO USE - UNLOCKED DOOR LEADING TO ETERNITY FOR YOU THE MASSES OF HUMANITY HAVE ALWAYS HAD TO SUFFER. THE BUSINESS MAN WHO SE MASTER PLAN CONTROLS THE WORLD EACH DAY IS BOUND TO INDICATIONS OF HIS SPECIFIC SINS TO CAUSE PEOPLE BLOW THEIR MINDS (THEY CHOOSE TO RESIGN) THIS DEFERRED SOCIETY IS PART OF THE DESIGN IT'S NEVER GO AWAY, (IT'S IN THE CARDS THAT WAY) THE MASSES OF HUMANITY WILL ALWAYS HAVE TO SUFFER!

② DELIRIUM OF Disorder

LIFE IS THE SIEVE THROUGH WHICH

# Part 2--Mr Brett

Interview by Tim

**MRR: You've been in Bad Religion for how many years now?**

B: We started the band in 1980, so I guess you could say 8 years, but there was a period of about 3-4 years where I wasn't in the band. I was one of the original 4 members and we put out a few records, and then I developed a serious drug problem, became a junkie, drug addict, alcoholic, and kind of dropped out of everything. The band continued playing shows, got Greg Hetson of the Circle Jerks to play, and kept the band name alive by playing once in a while on the west coast and a few times elsewhere. Then about a year ago, actually here at Gilman Street, was my first show back with the band... before the album *Suffer*. And then we said, "Hey, this is fun again!" What happened was, about 20 months ago, I got clean and haven't taken any drugs or alcohol since then. We're all friends again and things are turning around. In spirit though, I guess I've always been a member of the band.

**MRR: What are you involved with now, besides the band?**

B: What I do for a living is produce records, mostly underground music, and I also engineer recordings in a studio, and also have a small record label called Epitaph Records.

**MRR: One of the things that I found really refreshing and exciting about the new album is that on one hand the music is just very basic classic and classy SoCal hardcore, which is a pleasure to hear these days with everybody going off into other realms, and that the lyrics are still really rebellious and still thought-provoking and you need a big vocabulary to understand them....**

B: ...I'm a walking thesaurus.

**MRR: ...and I'm really curious as to what makes you still feel that way? When most of the older bands put out records now, lyrically they don't mean anything anymore, whereas this one, *Suffer*, really slaps you, and it's right back to basics.**

B: As far as the rebelliousness in the lyrics, I think the main thing is to be honest, and I think there's a side of me that's still angry. Maybe some day I won't be angry anymore, and I try not to act angry all the time in my daily life, but the music and lyrics and creative aspect of writing songs and making a record is a good outlet for that. As I was saying before, there was a period of time where I experienced a great deal of adversity in my life because I was addicted to drugs and alcohol and suffered a lot of pain and humiliation, and because of that I had a lot of experiences to draw upon. It was almost like doing our first record again.

**MRR: It feels like that a lot.**

B: I'm older now, 26, and when I was writing the songs... Actually, I want to say here that Greg Graffin is my co-song-writer and he's really good. I don't want it to seem like I'm taking too much credit

for the records because I think it's an equal, 50/50 share. He writes half the music, and the songs he writes, he writes the words for. The songs I write, I write the words for. And everyone in the band contributes their ideas for the music as well when we present them to the band. But, I think the attitude and approach in all the lyrics on the new record is similar to *How Could Hell Be Any Worse*, which was the last thing that we did that I collaborated on. But there's been some development in the use of metaphor and the way of stating things more in the form of a question. I try to do that rather than giving some kind of answer, and Greg does the same thing, such as on songs like "How Much Is Enough?" If you're intelligent and you read it, it's saying something very obvious, but we're saying it in the form of a question. We don't end with an answer. There's a song on their called "When?". We try not to resolve the questions, though we might try to sneak the answers into the



where some- where cuz we re- ally do have a definite point of view. Maybe if we ask the question in the right way, then the answer will become apparent, whereas on the first record it was a little more in your face. But the passion and feeling, the honesty, is still there to the same degree, and I think it comes across.

**MRR: It's encouraging people to think for themselves, to not let themselves be pushed around, to challenge reality.**

B: I think punk rock should be challenging. To say Punk Rock nowadays, I don't even know what that means. It can mean so many different things, but it should be challenging and shouldn't be too comfortable. I hear a lot of new bands and our music is almost easy-listening compared to them. And I say, "god, what are we doing? We're a bunch of old men or something." But I think where our music is challenging is in the emotions, it still makes you feel something and makes you think something, hopefully. The only thing I have to judge it by is myself, and I'm pleased with the new record. When I turn it up I feel like I'm 16 again. Not that I'm an old man—26 isn't old—and in fact I think I have the emotional development of a

14-year old. What happened was that when I was 14 I started drinking and taking drugs on a daily basis, using it real addictively. I don't think you can grow emotionally when you do that cuz you're shutting out your feelings, and any type of coping mechanism you might need to deal with adversity. Pain and sorrow and suffering are the things that you must go through to experience growth. I anesthetized myself from feeling anything like that from the time I was 14, so now I've been sober for about a year-and-a-half and am about 15 1/2 emotionally. In terms of life experience and intellect, I've probably read more books than the average person who's 26, but I feel emotionally like a kid still.

**MRR: What made you pull yourself out of your slide?**

B: I overdosed several times and I gave myself brain seizures, and finally I just ended up in the hospital and thought I was going to die. At one point in my life I thought, "Well yeah, this is how I'm going to die" because I just can't stop. I used to try to stop every day, but I couldn't stop so I decided I was just going to die that way. Then one day I did almost die and had a moment where I saw I really didn't want to die and that I'd do just anything I had to do to stop. And I did.

**MRR: Do you feel like talking about how you did that?**

B: I'm not really supposed to talk about it.

**MRR: But it's a program of some type?**

B: Right, a 12-step program and I go to it every day and I'm sure everyone knows what it is anyway.

**MRR: Is there any religious aspect to getting clean?**

B: I was an atheist my whole life. Maybe there was a period for a while where I was agnostic (laughter), but I just used to read a lot of Nietzsche and was really into atheism and a card-carrying member of the Group for the Advancement of Atheism. I was really into it, you know? I was really bitter, and I think that was part of my drug addiction—the hopelessness and meaninglessness of the universe, etc. There's nothing inside me, and instead of having a soul that I was a shell, which I filled up with drugs. I won't say that now I'm a spiritual giant or anything, but I'm trying to come to terms with some sort of spirituality. I was not "born again"; I'm not that kind of person and never could be. I'm too much of a sceptic. But I think the reason that I reverted to militant atheism at a certain point was because at a younger age I was just such a seeker. I read all the books a teenager reads, "Siddharta", Spinoza, Immanuel Kant, Schopenhauer, seeking for everything and everything seemed unsatisfactory, so I finally said "Fuck it, it's all bullshit, it's an empty universe, it's a Godless universe, it came from nothing, it's going nowhere, everything is devoid of meaning." And I just went over the deep end with drugs and I just became this determinist, into materialism, everything is just face value, the universe is a machine. Now, it is different for me. I can't put it into words, but now I'm reading the teach-



## INTERVIEWS

ings of Buddha. I'm not a Buddhist, but there are little things, little clues that I try to look for. I guess I'm just as confused as I ever was (laughter), but the only difference is that now I don't have any drugs in my system so I'm not such an asshole. That's the major difference in my life: I never really was an asshole, it's just all the drugs made me into one. Now, I'm basically saying that I hope there's a God, but maybe there isn't a God, but even if there is one, I can't know what it is because if I knew what it was then I would be it. Know what I mean? The mind of God knows everything in the universe about everything, so I couldn't possibly understand it cuz then I would be it. So all I have to do is think, "Well, I don't have to know that then, then I can be happy." But I want to know it, if there's something to know or not, so I go around and around. It's all bullshit, it's all just about being comfortable within your own skin. That's what I'm trying to learn how to do. And getting back to Punk Rock (laughter), some of these ideas are expressed in our songs, or in the ones I've written on the new record, and it's basically a vent for all these feelings. See, a lot of my anger...I didn't grow up poor, and my parents never beat me, they were nice to see...there's no reason I should be so pissed off, but I am. Don't get me wrong, I'm not always pissed off, but a lot of the things I feel...I don't know where they come from. I don't know what I'm getting at....

**MRR: In one sense you're saying you didn't feel in any kind of harmony with reality, which had nothing to do with your material upbringing....**

B: Right, there was some kind of dischord that came from within me, something that said "Why is the world like this?", "Why am I here?"... I know this sounds really stupid, that only teenagers should think about this, about "Why am I in the universe?", "What is the universe?", "What is it for?", "Should I just kill myself and make a statement?". So a lot of the stuff stems from that. In the song "Suffer" it says, "Can't you see their lives are just like yours?/ An unturned stone, an undiscovered door/ Leading to the gift of hope renewed/ Eternity for you". That came from Thomas Wolfe's "Look Homeward Angel." It's like there's something and I don't know it yet. It's under some stone somewhere, if I'm gonna look. There's some door somewhere, and if I open it and look in that door, then I'll know! Maybe it never will happen, but that's the hope, that's what it's all about. At one point in my life I had given up on that hope. I had said, "No, it's all bullshit, this is like mental masturbation, there is no hope, it's a cold universe just like a clock, moving because it is and for nothing else." I don't think that anymore.

**MRR: One can be spiritual without being religious, right?**

B: Exactly. I'm not religious. The name of my band is Bad Religion. Religion is this belief system, this dogma which therefore shuts man off from spirituality because it causes schisms and separatism.

"If I'm right, how can you be right? This is the book that's right. You have to read this book." That's bad. Look, there's a material world and a spiritual world. The spiritual world, I'm not saying it's in heaven, but it's between your ears. It's at that level below thought, an intuitive level where if you can just sit there and be quiet for a second... And those two worlds are almost always out of sync with each other: I don't feel that my spiritual world and my material world are in harmony. They're in strife. They're saying, "I want there to be a meaning, I want to be here..." ... they're just not in sync, and that's the point, to get them in sync and then you can feel comfortable. There's a big difference between spirituality and religion. Personally, I think religion is bogus. A Christian or a Jew, they're happy because all the questions have been answered for them. I tried that shit and I said,



"Ok, I'll pretend I believe this", but I don't believe that. It's not good enough. So, now I'm reading "The Book On The Taboo On Knowing Who You Are" by Alan Watts....

**MRR: So you're still seeking?**

B: I'm still trying to be comfortable. But I'm most comfortable when I'm hearing really loud music blasting in my ears. That's when I feel the most spiritual. What happens is you don't have any sense of separation of yourself as a person in the universe. There's this loud stuff blasting in your ears and you're standing next to this person and there's loud stuff blasting into his ears, and you're both getting blasted and feeling the same thing and you can achieve this orgiastic trance—no separation, oneness. You get worked up into this frenzy and it's like masochistic symbolism. Just let yourself go into the music and let it take you over and all of a sudden there's no separateness or aloneness or me and you—there's just a "thing", this blaring, blasting noise....

**MRR: Technological tribal alienation....**

B: Exactly. So music is a way to achieve this state. And punk rock does it really well. Different societies use different things. Like gospel music, these guys achieve a hypnotic state where all they

all feel the spirit of Jesus, going nuts and dancing and sweating, speaking in tongues. They work themselves into this orgiastic state. It's the same thing in the pit at a punk rock show, or in African or primitive religions with different rituals. Some guys probably get the same thing at the Super Bowl, that basic human desire to feel not separate, not to feel part of a mob either, but not to feel yourself at all—to lose yourself. That's a spiritual experience, and can be achieved in microcosm through punk rock. And then you go back to work or go home and say "What did I just do?"

**MRR: It's pretty remarkable to me—given the young average age of people in the scene today—that there are any older people who are still spiritually or artistically stimulated by what's going on, yet you seem to be able to be able to both get something and give something.**

B: The age of punks is really young, but I was real young when I started, as was Greg and Jay and Peter, and I don't know if there's any fundamental difference between how I was then and they are now...I can't tell, and I was pretty out-of-it back then. But I love punk rock, it's in my blood, I'll probably keep doing this until I'm really old. I don't know, or until someone makes me stop (laughter). But I can probably get that feeling from sitting in my room and putting on a strobe light and stare at it. Not that I'd do that. But punk is one way I found to articulate and achieve an experience that is good and that can make everybody feel the same way. I can get the same thing from Percy Sledge. I crank that stuff up, but there's nothing quite like getting on stage and cranking our old Bad Religion tunes—it's fun, the guys in the band are my good friends that I've known for a long time. There are probably people in Bulgaria who get the same feeling from accordian music and work themselves up, go nuts over it, and it's really punk to them.

**MRR: Are there any books that you might recommend for people to check out?**

B: Well, everyone should just read a lot anyway, and just never watch TV. But I don't want to tell people what to read, but I will tell you what books I was reading that influenced the Suffer album. A lot of Dostoevski—"Suffer," the whole concept comes from how Dostoevski felt that sublimation and catharsis can be achieved through suffering, how one can't really come without the other. Almost all his books have that central theme. It's not that suffering is bad, it's like you suffer and come out the other side purified, purged. I'm not saying you have to be lashed or something, but whatever it is—If your girlfriend leaves you, you're suffering...it's emotional pain. In all those books he deals with that, like "Crime And Punishment," "Possessed," "Brothers Karamazov," "The Idiot"...all those are really great. I think my favorites are "The Brothers Karamazov" and "The Idiot", but probably the one to start with would be "Crime And Punishment." I think they're really punk!