

PRINCE TOUR DATES

CLUB FOR ZEROES:
80 reasons to forget
the '80s



NEW MUSICAL EXPRESS

NEW ORDER ★ DODGY
THE CRANBERRIES
HUMAN LEAGUE
BAD RELIGION
MENSWEAR
NEIL JORDAN
SPIRITUALIZED
THE BLUETONES

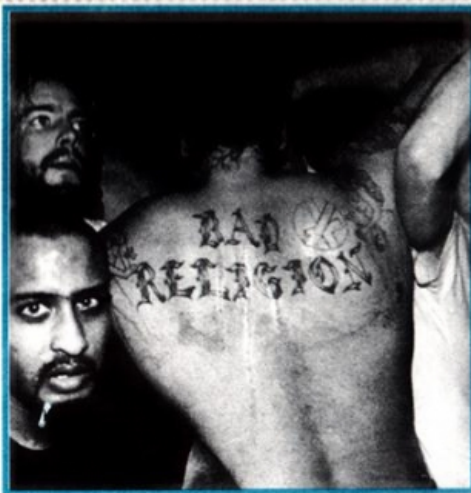


BLOOM! SHAKE
THE WOMB!
BELLY flower again

Germany Dm 5.30 Spain Ptas 200

Belly's Tanya Donnelly photographed by Steve Double





He's got Religion, and he's got it Baaaad...

difficult situation for him to be in, signed to a major as an artist while promoting the independent ethic as a label manager, and as a result he hadn't been happy in the band for a while. He was very withdrawn on the road and clearly wasn't enjoying it. The only thing I didn't like about him leaving was the timing."

Greg sounds sincere enough, but his words don't fit with Brett's view of things. Rumours surfaced, initially in US punk bible *Maximum Rock 'n' Roll*, that he had always opposed signing to Sony and that, once he'd seen corporate whoredom at first hand, found he had no option but to quit. Gurewitz doesn't like to talk about it (he's currently declining to do any interviews) but, at a press conference to launch Epitaph's new European office last year, he claimed he left after an argument with bassist Jay Bentley about backstage passes. "Of course, that wasn't the only factor," he was quoted as

And the music is one thing the seismic shift in attitude has done wonders for. After years as dour, one-dimensional thrash merchants, 'Stranger Than Fiction' sees Bad Religion finally discover the joys of choon-drenched pogo-tastic punk-pop. It sure sounds like it could sell three million copies in America, even if it's actually refusing stubbornly to do any such thing. Greg ponders darkly why his band, pioneers of US punk, have yet to follow young upstarts like Green Day into Crossover City, USA.

"America's idea of punk rock right now has very little to do with the original British idea of it," he points out. "It's not really political, it's just about bored suburban kids trying to assert their own identity. We're a lot more inaccessible than either Green Day or Offspring, and we have more of a message so we could never sell as many records as them, whatever

style of music was dead." In truth, while Green Day and Offspring undoubtedly operate from Bad Religion's initial blueprint, they're actually much better at implementing it; sharpening the focus, dropping the po-faced polemic and – most importantly – writing better songs. But, as you may have gathered, Mr Graffin is not

look like a slacker. Today at the beach with his wife and two young children, he's just another doting Dad relaxing in the sunshine. And while he firmly believes that "80 per cent of our crowd nowadays are complete f—ing idiots" he'll gladly chat and sign autographs for the endless stream of jocks and rock chicks who accost him backstage.

"Eighty per cent of our crowd nowadays are complete f—ing idiots" – Greg Graffin

exactly backwards in coming forwards to make grand claims for his band. As well as inventing punk rock, he's also keen to point out BR's influence on metal, grunge and one Kurt Cobain. But one title he's definitely entitled to lay claim to is Most Intriguing Man In American Rock. The rest of the band (the

And, while he comes on like a Luddite on BR's FIRST EVER UK single '21st Century Digital Boy' (and even refused point-blank to lip-sync on the video), he wholeheartedly embraces technology in his research. Yes, RESEARCH. Because Graffin, now 30, has not just spent the second half of his life as lead singer with Bad Religion. He has also used it to gain a Masters degree in geology, almost complete a PhD in zoology and become "one of the top five bone tissue researchers in the western world". That's quite a double life you've got there, Greg.

SONY SEEMS TO BE THE HARDEST WORD

● While other Yank punks whored for the corporate rock dollar, BAD RELIGION spent 15 years being more 'core than a half-eaten apple. But now, amid splits, the rise of Offspring and Green Day, and bitchin' in the media, The Religion finally signed to Sony. But is it too late for them to, uh, sell out, maan? MARK SUTHERLAND investigates. Picture man: MARTYN GOODACRE

Like a serious drinker, Bad Religion do not do things by halves. When they formed amidst the initial punk fall-out, they deliberately spurned the prototype snotty, Bud-spraying US poonk model to become the most uptight, self-righteously independent hardcore band on the planet. And stayed that way for a whopping 15 years.

So it should come as no surprise that, when the time finally came to compromise that fiercely upheld DIY ethic, they didn't just tinker with the set-up. They went the whole corporate hog.

See, if hardcore was football, Bad Religion would be Blackburn Rovers: a well-respected outfit with shedloads of history but little modern success, suddenly transformed by a new, moneyed backer (for Jack Walker read Sony Records), given a flash new manager (Kenny Dalglish equals Soul Asylum's handler Danny Heaps) and a commercial appeal facelift (the equivalent of those snazzy new strips being hotshot Nirvana producer Andy Wallace). Hell, even the initials are the same.

THE ONLY trouble is, just like Jack Walker, Mr Sony expects success in return for his investment – and Bad Religion show a Rovers-esque inability to actually get some silverware in the trophy cabinet. The Granddaddies of US punk might be

selling out, but in comparison to their three-million-units-shifting Offspring (hat!), they still aren't selling owt.

True, their latest spruced-up LP, the phenomenally-ace-honest 'Stranger Than Fiction', is effortlessly out-performing their previous seven releases. The band trot out an impressive roll call of statistics on demand: all 30-plus dates on their latest jaunt around America's 3,000 capacity arenas were sold out. They are hay-uge in Germany. 'Stranger Than Fiction' is selling five times as many copies per week as their last LP 'Recipe For Hate' did at the same point in its commercial cycle. Et bloodycetera. But it all adds up to nish 'cos they're still stuck at the 250,000 sales mark in that all-important US market. Not bad – but nowhere near enough to keep Mr Sony happy.

Plus, of course, every revolution has its casualties and Bad Religion's independence wasn't the only thing put to the sword in last year's revamp. The band also parted company with guitarist/songwriter Brett Gurewitz. Officially he left to concentrate on running indie label Epitaph (home to all BR releases prior to 'Stranger Than Fiction') but that's just the punk rock equivalent of Tory MPs resigning to "spend more time with the family". Rumours of bad blood between him and his former bandmates are, to say the least, rife.

Sat in 80 degree heat at a beachfront cafe in Del Mar village, California, with musak Christmas carols surreally tinkling in the background, singer Greg Graffin struggles, not entirely convincingly, to kill those rumours.

"I saw his departure coming from years ago," he claims. "And I totally respect what he did as a business decision. It was a very

saying in UK metal mag *Kerrang!* "But he said 'F— you and f— your label'. He may as well have said: 'F— your songwriting, f— your production work and f— your future help!'."

Greg Graffin is having none of it.

"Since he left, Brett has tried to claim that he never wanted us to sign to a major," he eventually concedes. "But he told me several years ago that his goal was to get Bad Religion off Epitaph so he could develop some new acts and make it less of a boutique label for our band. That's why he voted – with EVERYONE ELSE in the band – to sign to Sony."

Why would he lie? Graffin shrugs. "It's important that he looks good to *Maximum Rock 'n' Roll* and those kind of people 'cos Epitaph needs that credibility. We don't."

Ah, but you do. The US punk scene is totally obsessed with the "sell out" concept and Bad Religion, who once controlled their every action themselves, now find themselves produced, managed, marketed, OWNED by The Man. They can not, like Offspring, point out that they're still on an indie label. They can not, like Green Day, shrug and say "Hey, we never cared about all that ethics stuff and, anyway, we're not a punk rock band". The situation was further exacerbated by the fact that, mere minutes after Bad Religion left the label, Epitaph proved its commercial muscle by transforming hardcore upstarts Offspring into *Billboard* Top 5 megastars, a situation Gurewitz has described as "the dictionary definition of ironic". Even away from the hysterical tone of *Max R'n'R* editorials, it looks pretty cut and dried: Bad Religion HAVE sold out. Haven't they?

"Making all these changes was not a decision we took lightly," Greg stresses. "We thought long and hard about it if it was a sell out and that it might be a let-down for our fans. But we figured that if people only listen to us 'cos of the label we're on, then they're not really listening to us at all. Real fans don't like us 'cos of what company promotes us, they like us for our integrity and our music."

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So they're not clever, but you're not big. Jealous much?

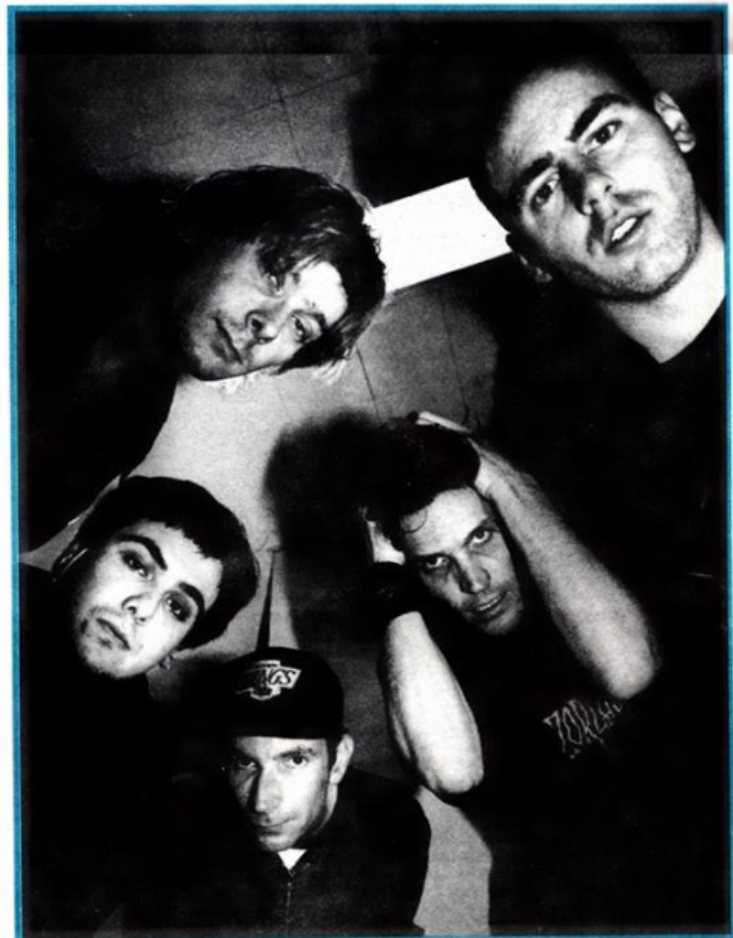
"Not at all," he laughs (yes, laughs!). "In fact, I feel kinda proud. Those bands are very open about being fans of ours. I mean, I don't want to take sole credit for the current popularity of punk rock, 'cos we aren't the only reason, but it IS strongly a result of the fact that Bad Religion continued to show vitality when many people declared that this

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ON STAGE In San Diego last night, he was a hyperwired ball of tension to make Henry Rollins

"Yeah, but I'm glad I've got it. I like the idea that, on the one hand, no-one can look at me on stage playing this frenzied music and realise that I'm a qualified palaeontologist and, on the other, no-one can see me giving a university lecture and realise I'm the singer with a hardcore band. I'm unpredictable. I don't fit in with anyone's preconceptions. Surely that's the very definition of punk?"

Not 'all!



Losing their religion? BR peer into the future to check out life with Mr Sony