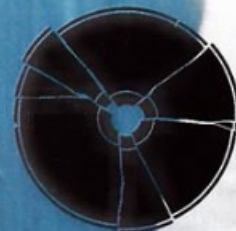


SURVIVING THE MUSIC INDUSTRY WITH BAD RELIGION'S BRETT GUREWITZ

WORDS: Paul Raggity / PHOTOS: Sean Murphy

Bad Religion have seen trends come and go, and then return again. Now with the release of their latest album 'The Empire Strikes First' Brett Gurewitz, BR guitarist and owner of Epitaph Records tells rock sound how it's done.



"NEVER LISTEN TO YOUR MOTHER EITHER BECAUSE SHE'LL JUST TELL YOU THAT YOU'RE GREAT!" BRETT GUREWITZ

L-R Greg Graffin, Jay Bentley, Greg Hetson, Brett Gurewitz, Brooks Wakerman, Brian Baker

SO YOU WANNA BE A ROCK 'N ROLL STAR?

It's more difficult now, but that depends on your goals. Don't join a band unless your reward is being in that band. If you're doing it for fame and money I would say, 'Fuck off' and I have no advice for you. I'm not talking Britney and Aguilera here, that's a whole different discussion. Being in a band should be about the sheer thrill of what it feels like to play a song. To be part of something with other people. To make someone cry, shake their ass, angry, or just reflective. It's powerful magic.



AND THEN WHAT?

As well as writing your own songs, start by playing lots of covers too. Or even have a separate covers band. That way you can feel what it's like to play a great song that you love. Nobody can be expected to write a great song at 14. Play together a lot and gig locally until you become good enough to take it further. Keep a connection to the DIY scene because to be a band you have to be IN a band. It's all about creating something greater than the sum of its parts.

FROM DEMOS TO RECORD DEALS

The days of demo tapes are gone. Anyone can make a professional-sounding demo now. It's a trip! But personally I'm not interested in a band that made something on a computer. I don't give a fuck about that. There's so many records released now, and many sell zero copies. Build up a following and spread your name further and further. But don't be impatient. For us it was a long time before we had a national tour. But you have to love it. I get goosebumps from a great song. It's beyond rewarding and the closest I get to spiritual.

IMAGE IS EVERYTHING?

I hate that side of it! That's completely the wrong reason for being in a band. I was once working with a band we were gonna sign to Epitaph. We were in the studio working on a demo but all they talked about was their image and discussing what they should wear for their photo shoot. What make of shoes and style of T-shirts. I thought, 'Well, it isn't gonna happen with me'. It should be about your music. It's the most phenomenal of all forms of art, more so than film, poetry or painting.

BRAND NAMES AND SPONSORSHIP

That doesn't mean anything to me at all. Today's culture worships greed and vulgar materialism. I don't get it and it really blows my mind. I live off the Sunset Strip and every Friday I see stretch limos, bling-bling, greed and shallow fucking worship of material wealth. That's not very rebellious. The music is the important thing. The punks and hippies may have hated each other but they did share the anti-establishment/anti-materialism ethos. For me the love comes from writing a song and bringing it to life, not what you are wearing.

MANAGERS AND PROMOTION

I don't think a band needs a manager. Especially when you are just starting out. You need to make your own decisions and learn for yourself. And never listen to your mother either because she'll just tell you that you're great! Promote yourself locally until everybody in your town knows the name of your band. I'm not a businessman. I'm a creative guy that got lucky. Everything I did was through necessity, and I never thought our band would be a success or that I would own a record company!

SELL OUT?

Music purely for commerce sake is terribly boring, but there has to be a balance. People bitch if a musician goes on a TV show or lets their song be used in a commercial. But at the same time they complain if they can't download it for free. They don't wanna pay, but if a musician tries to make a living they bitch. When did it become okay for fans to have a hostile relationship towards a band? Do they want them to starve? It's our culture that has sold out, and I don't see the complainers running off to live in a Zen monastery.

EPITAPH VS THE MAJORS

What Ben & Jerrys is to ice cream, we are to rock 'n' roll. We're a good-sized indie, but we have a social conscience. We won't sign long term contracts. If I had a three record deal with a band and they wanted to then join a major I'd do that. It's up to them. But the majors are running scared and merging like crazy. As they shrink they join together. We have a joint venture with Warners, but the label is owned by me, so even though the industry is in a historic slump we feel the pain less because we're smaller.

AN INDUSTRY IN DECLINE?

It's not just the fault of the internet and CD burning, it's the whole industry. They just don't make records interesting anymore, and they've done a bad job of making CDs have any value to people. People don't bat an eyelash paying \$3.99 for a latte in Starbucks, but they think 99 cents is too much for a song. A latte cannot enrich your life. It'll continue unless there's a shake-up. I have a strong feeling the record industry will turn a corner soon and it'll be a new renaissance. It needs a kick in the ass. **ES**

'The Empire Strikes First' is out now on Epitaph.
Website: www.badreligion.com