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Bad Religion: Good Science

DEFINITION OF SOUND
Guitar Work: n: A skilled musician whose guitar-playing technique is more interesting than actual musical output. Spends considerable time tapping the frets and strings instead of strumming or picking the way the good Lord intended. Guitar wonks always make better music in a band, but can't fight the urge to do solo records which flop, forcing them to become guest columnists in guitar magazines. Generally named Steve (e.g. Hackett, Howe, Morse, Vai, Lukather).

Greg Graffin is the singer/frontman for Bad Religion, one of the most popular, influential punk bands of all time. He's also a Ph.D. candidate in biology at Cornell University, studying the evolution of bone tissue.

Graffin (far right in the picture above) swears juggling academia and a high-profile musical career is easier than it sounds because the two are interrelated. "Music is similar to teaching in one respect. As a teacher, [I'm] able to share ideas with people, and get their feedback on whether it was good or bad. Same with music—each of my songs is a survey of some aspect of life, and I'm able to share that with people...and then I get feedback through interviews and seeing people backstage." He agrees with a laugh that it must be weird for his students, admitting that they sometimes ask about the band. "But big deal," he says bluntly. "They're here to learn, and I'm here to give them a lecture. We can talk all you want about my songs, but it's not going to get you a better grade."

The no-nonsense tone of his detailed explanation of the "physical and metabolic evolutionary changes" in vertebrates' bone tissue summons up those unsettling science class oh-my-God-I'm-in-over-my-head memories. In fact, his intelligence and keen perception seem more out-of-place in the often mindless world of rock 'n' roll than the singer does in the classroom. "What you're talking about here is what separates Bad Religion from virtually all other bands, and that is our insistence on writing relevant and provocative music. We wouldn't release a record if, for some reason, we stopped doing that."

"I can't handle the music business, and I can't handle devoting my entire life to nothing but music. My mind is too active for that, and so I need another outlet. I need some other goal in my life," he says firmly. "When my music career is over—and Bad Religion will someday be over—there's going to be a lot more time for me to do other things. And research is one of the greatest things you can do in life."

—Katherine Yeske



BLACK 47'S LATEST CD IS HOME OF THE BRAVE.

LOSIN' IT

An excerpt from *Life In America ('47 Books)* by Larry Kirwan of Black 47 (second from left). Kirwan's latest book documents the inspiration, spirit and genesis of many of Black 47's socio-political songs. Kirwan is also the author of *Mad Angels*, a collection of plays.

"I returned to New York as I left it—penniless.' How many times have I echoed Henry Miller upon arrival at Kennedy, LaGuardia or Forty-Deuce! And yet, I've never experienced his disgust or disorientation. Oh, I've been apprehensive on occasion, but when all is said and done, I love this city to distraction. I adore the very stones of the streets, its constantly shifting population of scum bags and its manic energy.

"Unlike Henry, I never leave without a fistful of money or some functioning plastic. I just wouldn't risk getting stranded in London, Des Moines or Dingle. And although I have rarely been solvent in New York, it seldom fazes me. I automatically switch into overdrive and prowls this jungle, keen as a tiger.

"Nor have I ever had a creative block here. If I need music, I stand on Broadway—the scream of traffic and the motion of the mob electrify me. If I need poetry, the multilingual babel of Canal Street is invariably inspiring.

"And yet, like many New Yorkers, I am mere seconds away from hysteria. I explode into expletives at the smallest of provocations, both real and imagined. Along with 10 million other nut cases, I teeter precariously on the brink of psychosis. Like Chuckie R. Law, [I am a walkin' time bomb when it comes to significant others. Dump me and I'm liable to be found dancing naked in the rain outside CBGB's, crashing a wedding in Bensonhurst or passing out in Manhattan and waking up in Haiti.

"I suppose that's why I live here. Taxis and mailboxes may want to sleep with me; you may have left me for a cab driver who looks like a cross between Jesus and Yul Brynner; and the ladies at Victoria's Secret may tremble when I appear in their doorway brandishing a blowtorch. Still and all, tomorrow I'll wake up, pop a couple of Tylenol and go about my business. No one will even raise an eyebrow. They all know I was just losin' it."