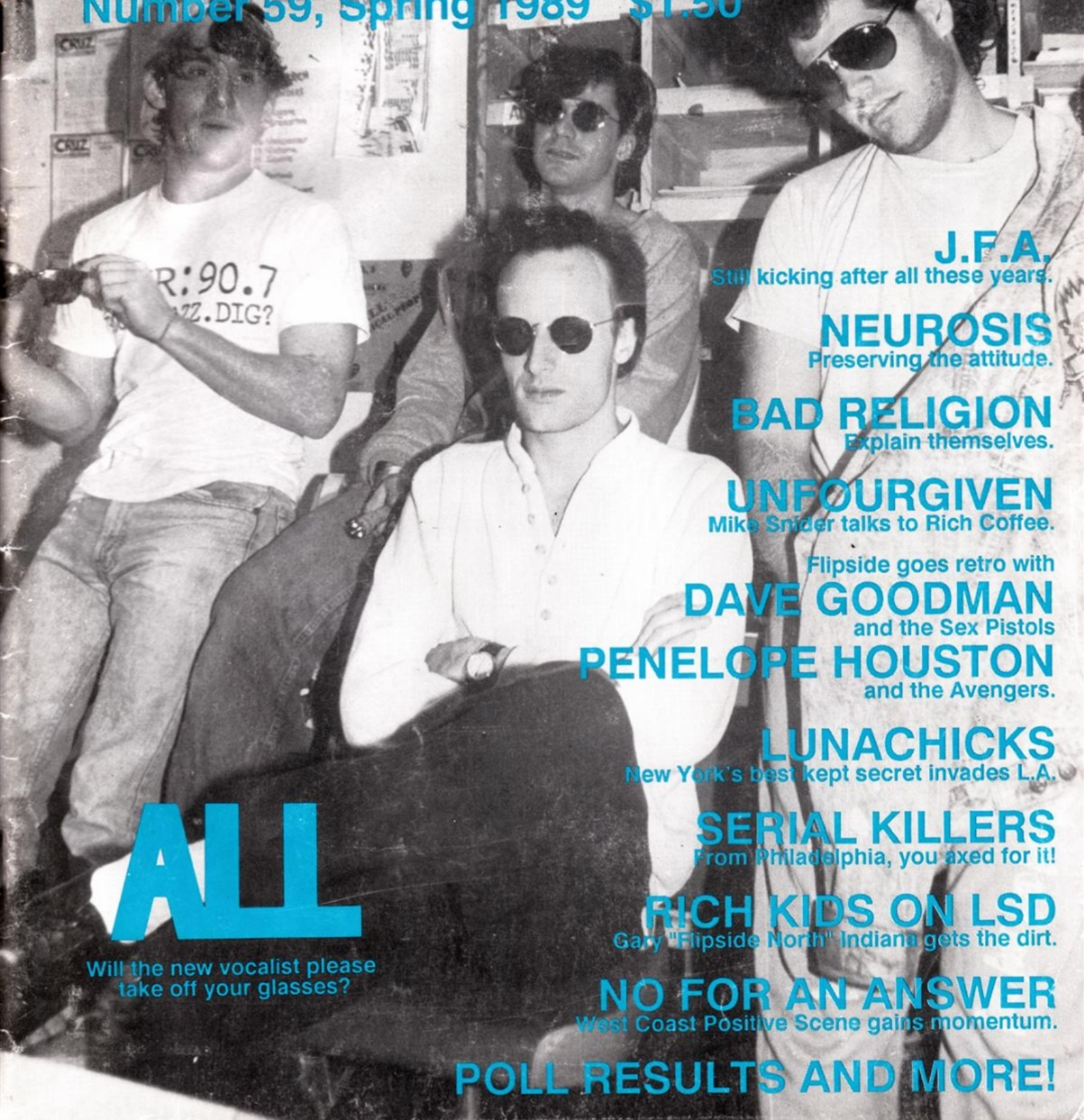


FLIP SIDE

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Preserving the attitude.

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Explain themselves.

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POLL RESULTS AND MORE!

ALL

Will the new vocalist please
take off your glasses?

Bad Religion's eight-year existence had birthed one of the best punk albums of the decade, one of the big disappointments of the same and here in 1989, blame the comeback trail with my wholehearted vote for the best album of year in their third album, "Suffer". With the addition of Greg Hetson's mighty guitar, all original members are participating and we were able to gab with some of them before their sold-out Country Club show. Present for this veteran-rap session were Greg Graffin (vocals), Jay Bentley (bass), Brett (guitar) and Pete Finestone (drums) in one corner and Al and Joy in the other corner, with cameo appearances by Tony Adolescent, Frank Agnew, Eddie Egan and of course, Mouse.

Brett: ...Don't even start on "it"...

Al: We covered it last time we interviewed you, so we don't need to say anything more about "it", right?

Greg: You interviewed me on that video AND printed it so we have said enough about "it".

Frank Agnew: So about that second album, "Into The Unknown"...

(laughter)

Greg/ Brett: Nooo!!! Ugh!!!

Al: Ok, so maybe we should move things up a little and talk about the new LP and band. How did you end up with the all original line-up again?

Greg: Well, you know for the last three or four years Greg Hetson has been playing with us, probably even longer. He happened to be out with his other band (Circle Jerks) and we had a show lined up and we needed a guitar player. Brett expressed an interest to start playing again....

Brett: Wait. Hold on a minute. If you want to be historically correct, Jay Bentley and me always bumped into each other a lot because we both lived in Hollywood. He would always say "Hey, you should play with us, it'd be fun". I was always like, "Yeah, maybe I would but I don't know..." One day they had a show and needed a guitarist so I said why don't I just rehearse once and just play. I finally said ok. And that was it.

Greg: That was the day we started writing new songs for the record. That rehearsal we got together and said, "Whoa!".

Joy: What happened to the "Greg Greg" thing?

Greg: I don't know, we just put it on hold for awhile. Greg quit, so now it's just Greg- but I use electronic doubling so it is still Greg Greg.

Al: "Suffer" seems to take off from where the first LP ended...

Greg: It's a lot better, I think.

Brett: I don't think it's a lot better, I think it's a lot more consistent. I think the brightest points of "How Could Hell Be Any Worse" are maybe a little brighter than "Suffer" and the dimmest points are a little dimmer than "Suffer", too, you know? On "Suffer" the song writing is more consistent, I don't know if that makes it a better album....

Greg: I'm talking about the product, I think it's better produced, better arranged... It's just what happens when you play music for 6 years, you get a little better at it.

Brett: You know what I did, when we said ok, we're gonna do a new record... I hadn't listened to "How Could Hell Be Any Worse" for like 3 years and I got a cassette of it and I listened to it whenever I was in my car- that's all I would listen to until I could kinda understand what I was thinking when I wrote those songs and what it sounded like and stuff. That's all I listened to for about a month, then we started working on "Suffer". It's not like we were copying our own style, but that's how we write...

Greg: How do you copy your own style???

Brett: All the new songs, all the reference points are from old songs, like that break is just like the one in "Pity" and this chorus is just like the one in another song...

Greg: And that slow-mo part is just like "Damned to Be Free"...

Brett: Everything fits a part from another song, even though it might not be anything like the other song- it's just that that's how you reference it for Pete (laughter!). It's an easy drum beat so give him something that he already knows! I'll teach a song to Jay and Greg and we'll all hum it along a little while. Then we'll go, ok Pete, play "Damned to Be Free" and we'll play the new song over that drum beat and then it will work out and he'll figure out where the fills go! We point at him when we want a fill and we've got a Bad Religion song!

Greg: Anybody who writes a lot of music, they're gonna tell you this bullshit about how "this thing just came to me" and how it was such a motivational moment in their life, but if you really get down to it each songwriter has their own style, and each time they write a new song they build upon that. It's a new thought that motivates the song, but it's the same old style.

Brett: And everyone is different. You usually have an idea that crystallizes into a song, sometimes the idea will be a chorus. So you write the chorus down, then you know what the song is about and you write the verse. As far as music, there's two ways it could happen, you could hear the music in your head before you write the song- you come up with an idea and hear the melody and then you figure it out on guitar. That's very rare. Sometimes you go, "God, we've got this new record, we need four more songs". So you get the guitar and you start playing chord progressions until one sounds good. Until one sounds like Bad Religion, and that's more common.

Greg: I write most of my songs on acoustic guitar or on piano.

Brett: Yeah, I write my stuff on piano also...

Frank: And then they call me up and say "Hey Frank, we need some songs..." (Laughter)

Brett: Yeah, he sells them to us for \$5 a song, on "Suffer" he made \$50!

Greg: He sells them by the measure!

Brett: But I'm really happy with "Suffer" and I hope the new record turns out as good, and it is.

Frank: New record!? I haven't heard it yet!

Al: They didn't send you one either! Mouse was just complaining that she didn't get one.

Brett: Mouse get on! She's gotten in free to every show we've ever played! Not only every show we've ever played, but every show any band has ever played! Starting with Herman's Hermits!(riot of laughter!)

Greg: She was three years old sliding in the back door with her Kodak Instamatic!

Brett: "I'm on this list, ga ga!" We should have a song about people who get in free all the time.

Jay: We DO have a song about people who get in free, its called, "Damned To Get In Free!" (laughter)

Al: As far as new lyrics, Greg and Brett are still doing the writing?

Brett: He (Greg) writes half the songs and I write half of the songs, and there were two songs on the album that we collaborated.

Al: Who's thesaurus did you use?

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Greg: His! No, Brett know the words. 9 times out of 10 he'll give me a song and I've never seen this damn word before in my life...

Brett: I'm a walking thesaurus, man! I'm a high school drop out. What I do is I read a lot, I read a lot of classic literature. When I come to a word that I don't know, instead of just going by it like a lot of people would because they can kinda get the meaning from the context, if I don't know the word I look it up and I write down the simplest definition of it in a little notebook that I have. I got like a hundred words and I know what they all mean.

Greg: There are certain words that are functionally not important, most of the words you see in my songs are words that most common people can understand.

Brett: Like "Surrey", who knows what a surrey is?

Greg: Who knows what "index fossils" are?

Brett: Yeah, no one knows what an index fossil is, you're just as guilty as I am!

Greg: I don't keep a list at home! I don't know what "inchoate" is...

Brett: You know the reason why I think it's good is because our songs go by very fast and there's no room for a small amount of words, but we want to say a lot. So a lot of big words have big meanings as well. You can squeeze more meaning into something by saying "phantasmal myriads" instead of saying "shadowy bunches"...

Greg: But that goes for every word in the English language, "word" means a lot more...

I get Phil Collins and he has this 5 minute synthesizer solo, man, I fucking turn the channel! I've got two minutes to listen to a song! That is the attention span that I have! We're squeezing in a lot of music and a lot of meaning into a short period of time. Our songs have two verses, two choruses and a bridge- but they only last a minute. So the words, a three syllable word might have more content than three one syllable words.

Al: When you are just listening to your songs, you think "What is he saying there?", so you look at the lyric sheet, and you still say "What he saying there?".

Brett: You look it up, they all make sense, we are not just using them arbitrarily.

Al: Of course, but they stick out like sore thumbs.

Brett: They do, I know...

Joy: Where is that wall that was your lyric sheet?

Jay: That's at my house. My bedroom.

Greg: We alternated writing that whole thing! Oh, and we want to publish this, there's a misspelled word on that wall, "ensconsed" is misspelled....

Jay: There's a lot of misspelled words, "DeBoner" (debonair) is not spelled right...

Greg: That's right, that was my problem, I did the Bugs Bunny spelling of it - De Boner!

Brett: I think the next LP won't have as many poly-syllabic words. My songs will have less.

Al: As far as the general "pessimistic" tone of the lyrics...

Greg: My "Pessimistic Lines"?

Brett: It's not pessimistic, it cynical!

Al: It's pessimistic, it's cynical, it's great, I like that kind of stuff...

Greg: That's why I wrote the song "Pessimistic Lines", the last song on the album, you can't hide it...

Al: But you guys don't seem like it.

Greg: No, we're not...

Brett: No, we are! Everything we wrote we believe, but what's the point in walking around your whole life going, "Fuck that table (the one I'm sitting on) is fucked, don't you realize that the people that made that work in a sweat shop and are unhappy!" You'd go insane, you have to have a filter in your brain to filter out some negative shit...

Greg: The whole reason for writing pessimistic shit is to make people.

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to hope it will make things more clear for them. People are intent on looking at things on the sunny side. If you talk to someone and start telling them bad news, they go "Hey, I don't want to hear about it, don't bum my life out". That's fine if they want to ignore what's going on, but if you force people into listening to it by taking that point of view for a minute then that's the only way you're going to get anything good out of it or force some kind of a change.

Brett: It goes along with the music. When I hear punk rock, I get pissed off. I don't know which came first the chicken or the egg...

Greg: I think people were mad before punk rock (laughter)!

Brett: A chicken is just an egg's way of getting another egg... I get pissed off you know! So when I get pissed off I put on a record, and it doesn't have to be a Bad Religion record, just so it's loud and fast and screaming about how everything is fucked up, and I just crank it up and it hits me in the face and I have like a little temper tantrum and I feel better. That's what it does for me... I guess that's all for me...(Get's up to leave)

Al: Stick around, you just got pissed off!

Greg: That's what Brett always does, "Ok you've got a few paragraphs, I'll go now".

Brett: No, I'll talk the whole time but after the interview Jay will yell at me: "You fucking hogged the whole interview, you're trying to take over the band!" (Laughter).

Jay: No, I can't argue with you Brett, you have that thing in your



Greg Graffin - photo Al.

of wits with an unarmed person"...

Greg: I just want to say on tape, you guys really should stop smoking!

Brett: Hey, I'm a drug addict, and I got sober, so if I can get sober- anybody can!

Al: There's at least one anti-drug song on "Suffer".

Brett: Yeah, that song "Forbidden Beat" is kinda auto-biographical actually, the first verse is anyway.

Greg: The second verse I wrote, for Brett, it was biographical! (Laughter)

Brett: "How Much Is Enough" could be considered an anti-drug song also. It works on several levels, like "how much is enough to kill yourself?"

Greg: As a species and as an individual.

Al: I think too many people write anti-drug songs from the non-autobiographical point of view.

Brett: Yeah, my songs are strictly auto-biographical, but most of our songs are allegorical, they work on more than one level. It's not supposed to be taken at face value. Like the new Batman comics that just came out, it's all comics and Batman in Gotham City, but what it's really talking about is America and the Reagan Administration. Like a lot of those underground comics of the 60's were allegorical.

Al: So "Suffer" is a pissed off punk rock record, what if you fall in love or something... will the next record change...?

Brett: I am in love.

Greg: I got married.

Brett: We're all, all three of us in love.

Greg: You can fall in love if you're pissed off. Look, punk rock is as much a musical for as anything else, I love music and I love playing punk music too- so it doesn't have to portray what the band feels inside. Like I said, we're not walking around with our heads hanging low yelling about how much we hate the world. We look at Bad Religion as an outlet for those feelings.

Brett: I think the music is cynical, I don't think it is pessimistic. I think it is cynical, and I think cynicism is healthy- if not cynicism, skepticism. Skepticism verses cynicism or pessimism. I think that is healthy. The words are very skeptical or cynical at times...

Al: At times? Always.

Brett: Ok, always. But the music isn't gloom rock, if you listen to it I think it almost has a triumphant feel.

Greg: More motivational- get up off you ass and do something.

Brett: It's supposed to move you some way, on some emotional level- not get you depressed, it's not supposed to make you feel gloomy. It can make you feel angry- anger is excitement, anger is motivational. Anger can lead to productivity, but it probably won't- a lot of times when I feel angry I just kick a hole in the wall- but that's fine too, ya know.

Al: I guess what I was asking was, when are we gonna see a Bad Religion love song?

Greg: There is one! On the next record- but it's more like a hate song...

Brett: But I am in love and I am getting married.

Greg: Let's be honest, nobody want's to hear a Bad Religion love song. That's not really our style.

Brett: When we write a record, we're Bad Religion. And we try to write a Bad Religion record- we made the mistake of doing other than that once, ok? But we're not going to do that anymore. When we write



All photos by Kirk except this . . . by Al





a record we write a Bad Religion record because that is what we do best, that's what we excel at as a group. "How Could Hell Be Any Worse" defined what a Bad Religion record was, so that's why "Suffer" sounds the way it does. And that is what we'll do, put out Bad Religion records.

Al: Do you feel pigeonholed into that?

Brett: No. It's fun. I like Bad Religion.

Al: Well you took a vacation for a few years.

Brett: Well I was a drug addict. I was a junkie for like 5 years. I was non-functional. I was not a part of society. I was practically dead. Seriously, this is not melodrama.

Brett: Greg writes songs for his own enjoyment that have nothing to do with punk rock and I do too. Just for fun, to play on acoustic guitar, or play for our girlfriends whatever, but if we're gonna do a Bad Religion record we're gonna do a Bad Religion record, otherwise we shouldn't call it Bad Religion.

Mouse: (enters the room) I was trying to figure out who in your band isn't married yet, I guess Peter...?

Brett: I'm not married yet, but I'm deeply and profoundly in love and I will be married shortly.

Peter: (Walks in) Hello.... goodbye (leaves).

Brett: Oh, there goes Peter! I'll be Peter- ask me what I like to do when I'm not playing in Bad Religion.

Al: Hey Peter, what do you like to do when you're not playing in Bad Religion?

Brett: (Peter impersonation) I like to toss the stick! (Laughter then silence).

Greg: Yeah, everyone laughs because it sounds so absurd but we used to play football on tour. We'd call it tossing the rock when we tossed the football around. We did an interview on the road once and the guy goes "What do you like to do when you're not playing in Bad Religion?" and Peter goes "Oh, I like to toss the, uh...stick." (Laughter).

Al: I guess you had to be there... (Greg and Brett leave and Peter comes back) Now that they have left, you can answer all the same questions again, ok?

Peter: Alright, can I just say "Ditto", Same as above?

Joy: So what do you like to do when you're not playing in Bad Religion?

Peter: I like to think about them. I play with them, I think out them and I think of us in another 10 years with grey hair. Greg's is already grey. I can't wait until I'm 35 and I have a kid and he can be a roadie, the whole family can be in Bad Religion.

Tony Adolescent: You can be like Jerry Garcia, a big old beard and you kids out there!

Peter: Besides Bad Religion I play in some other bands, different genre, one is called Wires and Woods. I just graduated from school as a poly-sci major.

Al: Did you ever want to contribute lyrically to Bad Religion?

Peter: It's kind of monopolized, well I shouldn't say monopolized... I've contemplated that but that's why I'm in another band, where I write some stuff. I tend to leave that to Brett and Greg because they are great writers- I'm satiated just by playing with them and I have other endeavors to write in. I think Jay does the same thing. I could write for Bad Religion but I can't write any better, I'm happy with what they write...

Al: Hey Mouse, have you ever seen Herman's Hermits?

Mouse: No...why?

Al: Oh...never mind, just read the interview when it comes out...