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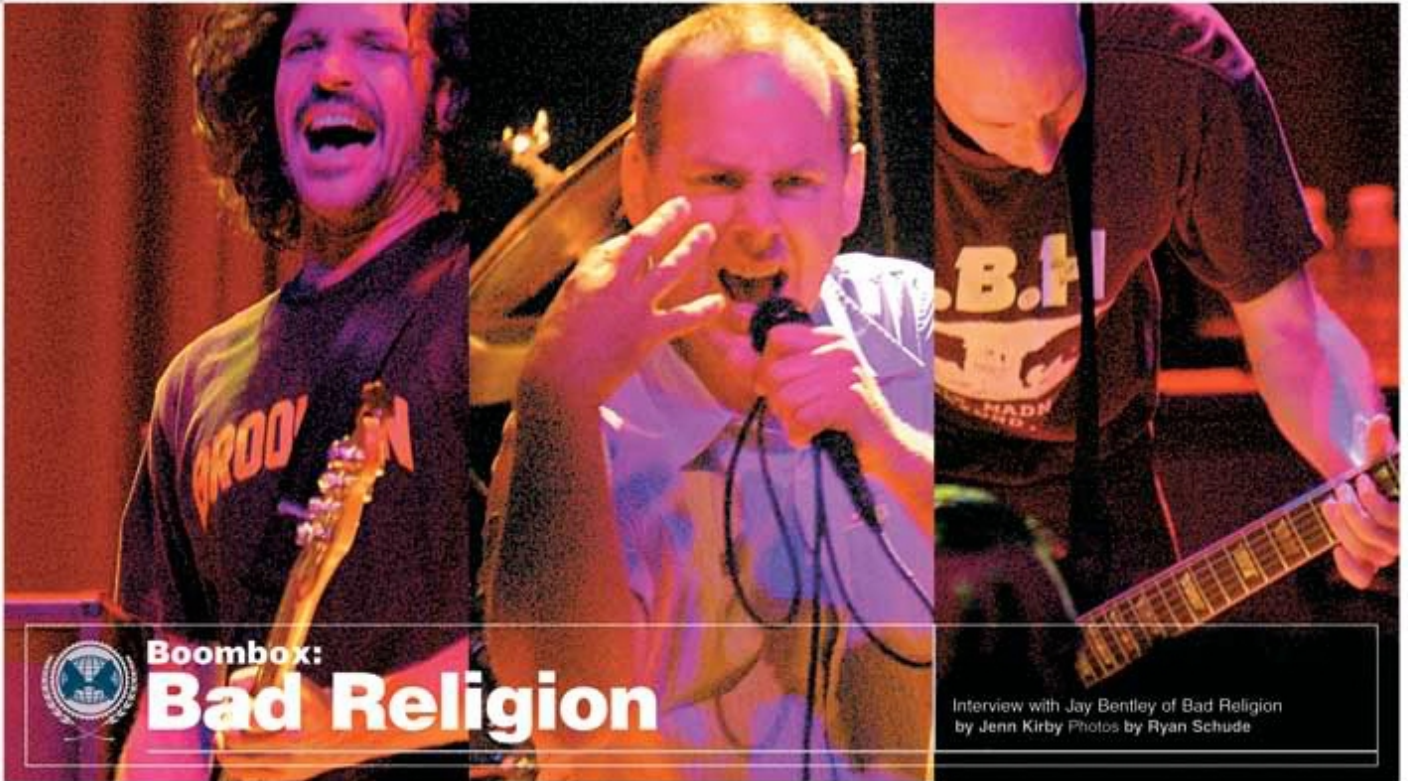
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Boombox: Bad Religion

Interview with Jay Bentley of Bad Religion
by Jenn Kirby Photos by Ryan Schude

DBM: For our readers who may not know, can you try to describe the circumstances surrounding the early days of Bad Religion?

JB: Well, Greg and I were 10th grade students at El Camino High School in Woodland Hills, Ca. That was 1979 and as far as I could tell we were the only people that looked the way we did, so there was an immediate bonding at that level. Brett and Jay Ziskrout had just broken up from a group called The Quarks, and were looking to start a harder band, more in The Ramones vein, and through a mutual friend of Greg and Brett they were introduced. They worked without a bass player (me) for a while, writing three songs, and that was when Greg asked me to join. We practiced at first in Greg's mom's living room, but soon bounced around from house to house, until ending up in Greg's mom's garage. Somewhat sound-proofed, in the summer the temps would get to 120 degrees easily, so we affectionately named it "the hellhole." It was in that garage that we practiced after school, wrote the first EP, and the majority of the first LP, "How could hell be any worse?"

We were just kids, going to shows, making flyers, hanging out. We drove around in Brett's Vanagon and ate Spam; we dyed our hair and spiked it with everything from Jell-o to spray paint. In retrospect, we only really discussed the direction of the band once, and we concluded that we "didn't want to be stupid, and hoped to write material that would stand the test of time."

DBM: How about plunging ahead into making your own label? Did that process change anything about the band, or the music?

JB: Nope. That was out of necessity. We tried to get other labels interested, but they all thought we sucked. Well, maybe we did, but we believed in what we were doing enough to borrow money from Brett's dad to make that first EP. I guess the fact that Richard (Brett's dad) believed in us was just as good as getting signed. Someone other than one of us was willing to invest in it. Brett did an amazing job at researching the manufacturing process - the artwork, that dual gatefold 7" that spun at 33 1/3...genius. It led to some problems down the road, but in the beginning it was very pure and naïve.

DBM: You guys have been around for more than twenty years, and I'm sure you have had your ups and downs as a band. Has it been hard to make it last?

JB: Ummmm, yeah, we've all had our moments, but it hasn't really been that hard to make it last. I believe we all really enjoy being in the band, writing and playing. It's the outside influences that have had more of an impact on the flow of the band. For instance, it's fun to tour...but it's not fun to tour for six months straight. Some bands can do it, but I think as a hobby that we like to do outside our "real" lives it can become a bit challenging. We all know that the band is not going to make our lives full and meaningful, so keeping it in perspective has probably been key in our longevity

"...this style of music withstood the test of time, became mainstream, influenced a generation, and continues to be a source of entertainment..."

DBM: Looking back at where you've come from and where you are now, do you think the band has matured musically? Do you think the young versions of yourselves from the 80's would be satisfied with the current state of Bad Religion or punk rock in general?

JB: Have we matured? Musically, I suppose. Our songs have grown in time and structure, and I think the depth of meaning has certainly matured from "the First Lady is a f**kin lez." I honestly don't believe that our selves from the 80's could have ever envisioned where we are now, or the sense of satisfaction from the "success" of punk rock. Much like the success of skateboarding, this style of music withstood the test of time, became mainstream, influenced a generation, and continues to be thought of as a viable source of entertainment, as well as offering up a few bands that actually have meaning. Not bad for a bunch of shitters who everyone hated (and I am talking about everyone from 1978-82).

DBM: It seems like the newer "punk" bands are lyrically shallow or even contrived in comparison to the punk bands from fifteen or twenty years ago. Are there any punk bands out today that you guys like?

JB: There are, but you have to dig pretty deep to find 'em. A lot of the great bands keep breaking up, so it's impossible to say you like someone without knowing if they still exist! I can say that Anti-Flag and The Casualties are definitely not f**king around.

DBM: Do you think the subject matter or message of your songs has changed at all over the years?

JB: Let's see, politics? Check. Religion? Check. The difficulty one is presented upon birth into this mortal coil? Check. That suffering, like water, will always find its way into the heart of man? Check. Ummmmm, seems pretty much the same to me...

DBM: Having a pretty deep collection of albums and songs, are there any tracks that you wish you'd never done?

JB: No. I only wish that some of the tracks could have had more time to stew. Sometimes after a song is recorded, you keep playing them live and they really start to bloom into something totally new...

DBM: How many days a year are you on the road?

JB: Last year we were on the road for about two hundred days.

DBM: When you guys were getting started as a band, who or what inspired you?

JB: Everything inspired us: school, news, bands, food, girls...everything. I know that there was never just one thing that we wanted to be.

DBM: Where do you see punk rock music and its lifestyle ten years from now?

JB: Same place...everywhere from the gutter to Beverly Hills, and everywhere in between!

DBM: Can you articulate the way the American punk scene has changed in the time between releasing the Bad Religion EP in 1981 and "The Empire Strikes First?"

JB: No. It's far too expansive to even try and fit it into any definition. Simply trying to define it leads to defiance of that definition; that's why I love it.