

BAM

California's Music Magazine

BAD RELIGION'S
Man of Substance
GREG GRAFFIN

Plus
BLACK EYED PEAS,
RAJI'S REVISTED
and more



Lust for Life
RANCID
FIND SALVATION

EXPANDED MUSICIAN SERVICES: GEAR CANDY AND NEW MUSICIANS' MARKETPLACE

ONE OF THE LAST SURVIVING BANDS FROM

LA's original punk scene, Bad Religion helped give punk its intellectual edge. After all, lead singer Greg Graffin is the kind of guy who, when tired, explains the high metabolic demand talking takes on you. Though schooled in the sciences, Graffin has spent most of his intellectual energy contemplating the state of society. The resulting populist social criticisms pervaded the band's 13 albums, including their latest, *No Substance*, which summarizes Bad Religion's nearly two-decade career. From the first song, "Hear It," there's a strong sense of the band's early hardcore sound, as well as a nod to such then-compatriots as the UK Subs and Orange County's Adolescents.

Pay homage to those early days they might, but Bad Religion is an LA band no longer—New York (voted the most enlightened city in America by the *Utne Reader*) is Graffin's home now (as well as the band's recording base). Graffin, who taught for four years at UCLA while completing a masters program in biology, relocated to Ithaca to pursue a Ph.D. program in zoology at Cornell University (he's put his studies and teaching on hiatus, though, to concentrate on the band). Only one member of Bad Religion (guitarist Greg Hetson) remains in Los Angeles, whereas the rest are scattered across the continent: Bobby Schayer in Seattle, bassist Jay Bentley in Vancouver and guitarist Brian Baker in Washington, D.C. "I think I'd like to get an apartment in LA," Graffin says. "You never really leave."

After all these years of social criticism, what strikes you the most as needing change?

In our 20-odd years, we haven't really seen a world that's gotten better in the important ways. The whole package for the album is a montage of images that we are being bombarded with these days over the airwaves. We have the self-help guru, phone sex, the Psychic Friends Network and, of course, the television evangelists. Everyone is showing you, making you think there is a better life than the one you have. But we aren't bombarded at all by people teaching you how to live a better life, so consequently we have a society of dreamers who are hoping for a better way of life, but no one knows how to achieve it. It's sad to say that all we've achieved is an increase in technology, yet we have more people who are unhealthy, more people who are working harder for much less pay, more people who are starving. Yet we have the Internet. So we give people this false sense of progress, and we pat ourselves on the back, yet we don't look at what's really in front of us. We don't ask ourselves how is the quality of our life, which is why the album title is "No Substance," because we've really become a society that lacks substance.

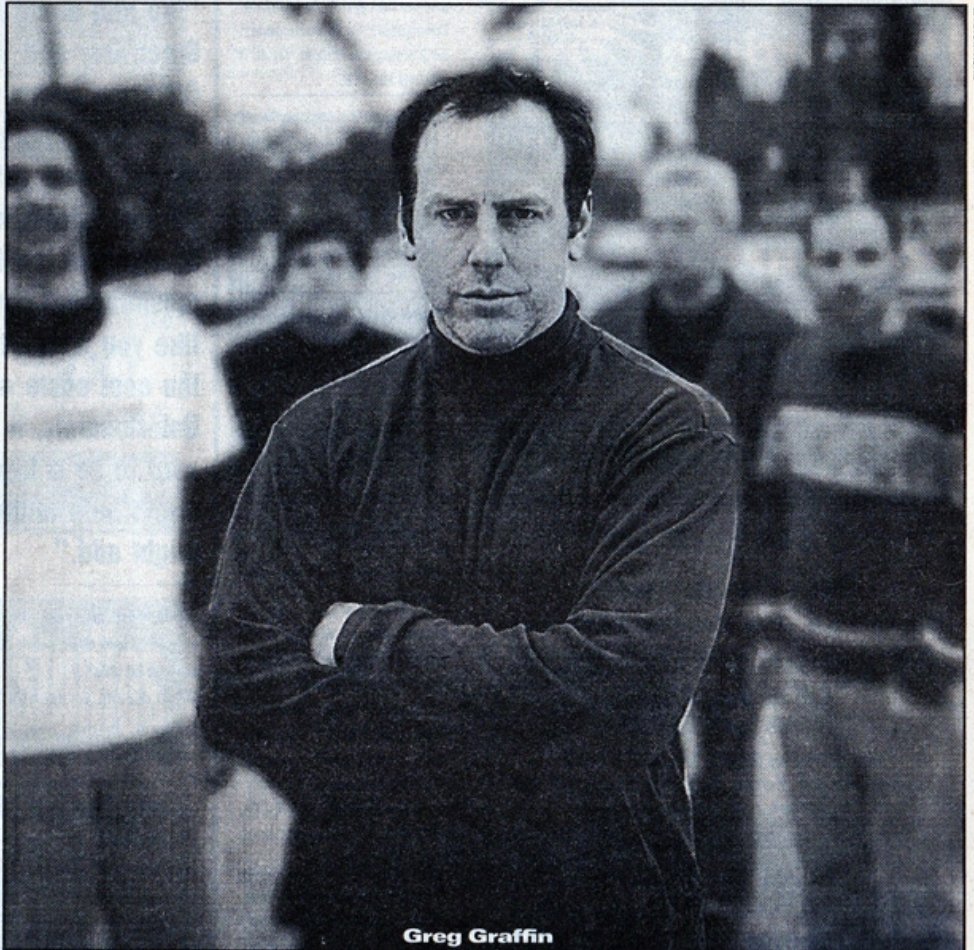
Does it bother you that webpages have replaced human contact?

What has a webpage brought us except for another way to bombard us with images? We're becoming more cerebral, less physical.

Isn't Bad Religion cerebral? Because of your background and your lyrics, people consider Bad Religion to be the thinking person's punk band.

Yes, but the essence of punk is sociability, bringing people together, not forcing them into their own little corners where they can escape from the world. In unity, there is power, there

DEEP THOUGHTS WITH BAD RELIGION



Greg Graffin

is social welfare. Please don't confuse cerebral with intellectual. Cerebral is much more general. When I say it's dangerous to become a cerebral species, it means we've divorced ourselves from experience, which is the greatest food for intellect. By becoming cerebral and detached, we are becoming dumber. I don't think there's any intelligence in fantasy. Anyone can fantasize and not better themselves one bit. But intelligence is something we can acquire and is probably the most worthy striving a man or woman can do.

That almost makes it sound like you have more of an education in the humanities than in science.

Really? My initial interest was in human evolution, and my undergraduate degree was in anthropology. The real standouts of science, like Carl Sagan, who's lifetime goal was to bring the complicated portions of science into the mainstream, hopefully inspired people just to be more skeptical.

You criticize the pervasiveness of media, but can't it also be a good thing?

A lot of people think of the same thing because they're being bombarded by the same thing. Most scientific discoveries occur in numerous places independently without any interaction; fascinating things like sunspots, which were discovered on three continents independently. Darwin thought of evolution independently of a colleague, Alfred Russell Wallace, who, instead of traveling around the world was studying a rainforest.

So it's not the level of it, but the quality.

There's no absolute level or limit. That's partially dictated by the people who consume it. I don't think we're over-saturated, because people continue to consume it. That's what I would like to raise people's consciousness about, because there are better ways to consume it. Better is the wrong word. I don't want to moralize the issue. This bombardment is creating an

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NoExit

"us and them mentality." You're either beautiful or you're not. You're either self-realized or you're not. You're either psychic or you're a lost soul. You're either sexy or you're not. Those are harsh and untrue presuppositions that are reiterated by these media.

"We can argue whether Green Day and the Offspring addressed relevant issues or not. Maybe it was relevant to the young people buying it, because it talked about masturbation and feeling like you weren't part of the cool caste of society. Unfortunately, it became cool to be a loser. Beck didn't help matters, I might add."

What about other consumables, like pop culture? How does punk stay its course amidst all this?

What needs to be done, to keep punk relevant, is that people have to address relevant issues. We can argue whether Green Day and the Offspring addressed relevant issues or not. Maybe it was relevant to the young people buying it because it talked about masturbation and feeling like, I don't know, like you weren't part of the cool caste of society. Unfortunately, it became cool to be a loser. Beck didn't help matters, I might add. In order to thrive, you have to be persistent and provoke people to think a little bit and not just cash in on the easy pop culture. I think that's where Bad Religion have always succeeded. It's been an advantage for us to bubble underneath the mainstream. It's kept us focused on what we knew best.

Before punk broke here, it seemed that Bad Religion were bigger in places like Germany than groups like Pearl Jam. We still are.

Does that seem odd to you, that Europe would embrace you more than America? No. Europe is literate. It didn't surprise me at all. What did surprise me is that the first year we went over there, German-speaking

people were discussing these same issues that we are now. They don't have tabloid magazines. They don't have Jerry Springer, because they have standards that are a lot higher than ours. And I don't think there's a reason we need to persist in this mediocrity, because we have far more potential than that. It's part of a long, deep tradition that goes back to immigrants who came here for opportunity and shunted their traditional way of life. It led to a lot of recklessness, carelessness.

But before you get to Europe this summer, you have the Warped Tour.

We'll definitely be playing some open-air festivals. It's funny, we're not really hyped on it. I'd much rather do something like the Lilith Fair, but Warped is considered the hard rock tour. It's the most rocking of the tours out this summer. H.O.R.D.E. is more contemporary, mainstream rock, and Lilith is more feminine rock.

Not only that, but the title itself is based on a tale from Jewish mythology, where Lilith was the first woman created, not Eve, and the religious connotations...

...preclude Bad Religion from playing it. But as punk bands go, we're far more progressive than the rest. We have a girl roadie and a girl manager. We wrote a song for abortion rights ["Operation Rescue"]. We play Rock for Choice. So we should be playing Lilith! If we're discounted because we have penises, that's lousy, and they should have to answer to that. What if there were a festival of only Jewish bands? They'd rightfully be under scrutiny. But it's all marketing, and that undermines women's intelligence. That makes me sick.

But isn't the Warped Tour itself a marketing vehicle for Vans?

Not with Bad Religion on the stage. Sure, they're going to stick a logo on the poster and try to sell it to skate kids, but ultimately the crowd will be Bad Religion fans, and they know us for our integrity and our ideas, not some skating thing. The Warped folk know that. We've weathered all storms of criticism, and we're not worried about it. If you can attack us on intellectual grounds, for our lyrics and ideas, then it's valid. But if you want to criticize the fact that we signed to a major label or some company has an involvement in this package tour, that's not legitimate. When the day comes that we all have plastic reconstructive surgery, then you can say we're superficial.

Do you still teach? Only in Bad Religion. ★