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By: Diane
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BAD RELIGION

Bad Religion Interview
By Diane Scott

Brett re-joins. They sign back on Epitaph. Bobby's shoulder injury forces him to leave the band. Brooks Wackerman becomes the new drummer. Change is all around Bad Religion. With everything this band has faced, they still put out a new album, *The Process of Belief*, which is absolutely unbelievable. Bad Religion proves that they are able to handle 50,000 things on their plate, all the while maintaining their composure. Just one of the many reasons their fans adore them and their music. Jay Bentley was kind enough to take some time before the show to fill me in on what it means to be in Bad Religion, how they cope with all the changes, and how every-

thing is going for them.

SKRATCH: In your new record, *The Process of Belief*, I noticed some sound similarities to *Stranger Than Fiction*. Is this due to the fact that Greg and Brett worked together on the songs for the new album, which they had not done since *Stranger Than Fiction*?

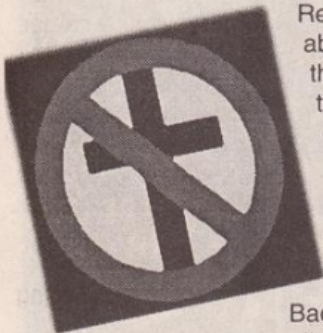
JAY: It has everything to do with it. This record is the logical record to follow *Stranger Than Fiction*, because those two write against each other; they don't write with each other, they actually are competitive with each other, which is great, 'cause you know, Brett will write a song and go, 'Check out my new song,' and you can just see Greg going 'Fuck!' And then he goes back to him and goes 'Check out MY new song,' and you can see Brett

going 'Fuck,' and now they have two songs, and so that's how they work. So this record, because Brett has had a lot of time to work, he had like six songs right off the box. When all the dust settled and we were like 'Where the hell are we?' and all of a sudden we're back on Epitaph, Brett's in the band and we're all happy. Brett's got six songs and we all heard them and you could see Greg's going 'I gotta go home.' He went home and came back later with like 15 songs, going 'Check out my 15 songs.'

SKRATCH: And you guys all add in your parts too?

JAY: Yeah, like drums, guitars and bass are what me and Brian and Brooks do. And then the singing, Greg does the leads and then me, and Brett and Greg will

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ONIE



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do all the harmonies. And then it's done. We're pretty quick in the studio. We don't spend a lot of time. The more time you spend, the more time you have to fuck things up and make it bad.

SKRATCH: I know Brett and Greg have Pro Tools studios in their houses; do you all have something similar to record ideas on?

JAY: Well, not quite the same. Everybody has a different version of something like that. Brett's is probably the best because he has a studio and he has access to a lot of really great material. Greg's is really good, for what he's got in his house. It's very impressive, you know, realistically speaking, it's probably too much for anyone to have in their house just as a demo studio. Mine is basically like a RadioShack tape deck with a plastic microphone and a guitar amp! (Laughs)

SKRATCH: As long as it works ...

JAY: It works for me. And then when they send stuff to my house to listen to or work on, they either burn CDs or send ADATs or DATs or whatever. We're waiting for that time when we can all just make a record via the Internet. We all have like DSL connections, we're like 'We're not going to the studio — we're just making it right here, right now.'

SKRATCH: I wonder if that will be the future of music.

JAY: We're pretty rare, just because we've been together for so long, we don't really live near each other. Literally, we're thousands of miles away from each other. You spend eight months out of the year with these guys; when you're not on the road you want to get as far away as humanly possible! (Laughs) So, there is something to be said for being in the studio and in contact and sitting in the producer's chair and saying, 'Do it again,' and having that ability. You won't be able to replicate that over the Internet. It's like instant messaging someone; you never know who you're really talking to — 'Is

this really you?' No, it's somebody else. Who's playing drums?! (Laughs)

SKRATCH: How was it to work with Brett again, after you all got back together? Was it kind of like old times, where you just picked up where you left off?

JAY: Yeah. It wasn't KIND OF like old times, it was exactly what I know, and think of, as Bad Religion. When I think of this band in its entirety, and in its best form, it's with Brett. We had personal problems that we couldn't seem to get over in '93, but it's not really that big of a deal. In terms of fighting in the band, it's nothing new. We've been fighting since we started, when we were 14-years-old. Graffin and I used to have fistfights. You know, that's just the way things are. But we're all OK with that, it doesn't mean anything. But '93 was different because it was decisions that affected the rest of our lives, you know, between Epitaph and the band, and school and all this shit that we were doing. Those were really heady decisions, and we weren't mature enough to make them like adults. We made them like children, and got away with it. We also picked up where we thought we needed to be at the time, and then spent basically the next couple of years trying to do what we set out to do, why we broke up. We didn't break up, but why the whole thing splintered. And then when all the dust was settled, everyone was back exactly where they were before. Within an hour of me not seeing Brett for seven years, we were sitting alone in a room and I said, 'You know if everything hadn't happened this way we wouldn't be sitting here right now. And nothing makes me happier than sitting here right now, so I'm glad.'

SKRATCH: So everything is wonderful being back at Epitaph?

JAY: Oh, it's perfect. The word I used to describe it, and this is not a sexist term, but it's just tits. (Laughs) Being back on Epitaph is like, yep, perfect.

SKRATCH: How have things been between Bobby and Bad Religion since his injury? Has the friendship remained intact?

JAY: I spoke to him two days ago for an hour and change. We always still talk. He's OK. I mean, it's a bummer what happened, but he knows it's not his fault, it's not really anyone's fault, it's just something that happens. It would be no different if I got into a motorcycle accident and lost my hand; I wouldn't expect the guys to figure out a way to keep me in the band, it's like, no wait a minute, it's over. You need to get another guy.

SKRATCH: And I know that Brooks has been a great addition to the band.

JAY: Yeah, you know, that's the one thing that you look for when you're trying to replace someone as good as Bobby, you try to find someone who's going to bring something even more. Just like anything else, every time you bring something new in, you get a whole new package, so you never know what you're going to get ... it's just like Cracker Jacks. (Laughs) What's it going to be now? Surprise!

SKRATCH: I consider Bad Religion to be one of the most talented bands I have heard.

JAY: Well that's just tenure. I think after you've done something for a modicum of time, you find that you excel at your craft. It doesn't necessarily mean that you can fly an airplane, or perform a trepanotomy, but you better be pretty good at what you're supposed to be doing. Otherwise you should stop and go find a new career. (Laughs) I am a fortunate person that I get to do what I really love for a living, which is rare. You know, I know that people go out and they find jobs that they love, but the thing that I love to do became my job. So that's pretty cool. I am a fortunate guy.

SKRATCH: I heard that Greg is going back to school again.

JAY: Well, he's not necessarily GOING



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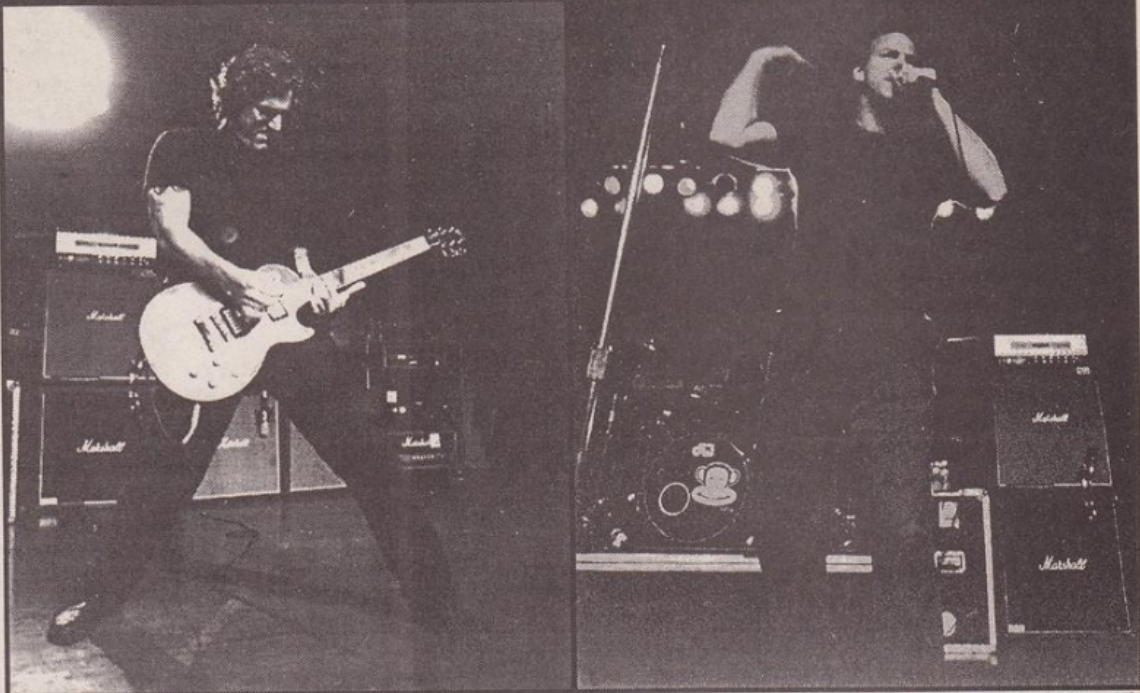
SKRATCH

back to school; he actually did his orals in January, which is pretty good because he spent six years away from school. That was part of the whole '93 blowup. He said, 'I'm not going to go back to school, I want to go tour more.' So it was like he just kind of left school. And I agreed with him. I said, 'School will always be there, it's not going to go away, but you can't always be the singer in a band

and tour the world' because you just can't, I mean that's just a reality. So that time that we spent out on the road was great, it was a lot of fun. It was a great experience and was all learning stuff, but now the learning is over. And it's not that it's still not fun and that the roller coaster ride isn't still going, but we know the ride. And so I think Greg feels that he can now return to school and pursue his studies, within the time frame that he allows himself away from Bad Religion. He's kind of reversed the roles. But we are starting to tour a little less, this year we will tour a lot more, but next year we probably won't tour that much at all. So we're learning how to dedicate our time to the specific things that we want to do outside of the band.

SKRATCH: Do you think his furthering his education will influence his songwriting?

JAY: When he started his whole path to education, he wanted to pursue paleontology, but you can't get a doctorate in paleontology, there's just no such thing. He got his masters in geology at UCLA, and then went to Cornell to pursue his PhD in biology, and those two things put together allow you to understand what you are looking at and what rock form it is, so that's kinda how you have to make that happen. I think he's



found himself more ensconced in biology, he actually discovered one of the oldest fishes on the North American continent, so he's kind of this prehistoric vertebrate specialist. (Laughing) Whatever that means! To be honest with you, I don't even know where he's going with it right now, I have no idea. We've talked about a lot of things, but in terms of what he's actually pursuing, the only thing I know is one time I said, 'What are you going to do with your Ph.D.?' And he said, 'Hang it on my wall and be the singer of Bad Religion.'

SKRATCH: Do you have any say as to what songs are released to the radio stations from your albums?

JAY: No. In this instance, not only did the radio choose it as a single, but it was a total fluke. The song was taken to KROQ by Epitaph months before the album was coming out. Dave and Andy, the guys that work at Epitaph, we're all friends because we've been together, Epitaph and KROQ, we've all kind of grown up together in LA, so they said, 'Listen to this song "Sorrow," it's pretty powerful,' and this was after September, and everyone that heard the song was saying how this was so timely, even though it was written in July. And KROQ heard it and said that it was a good song, but all they did was put it on the radio, like once at noon, and they got unbelievable phones on it. It was never

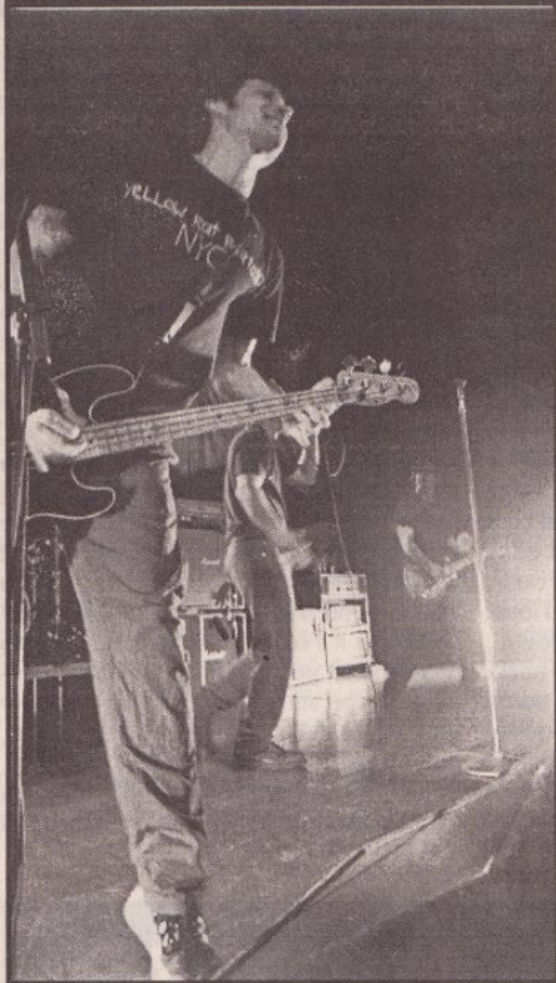
meant to be a single by anyone's stretch of the imagination, it just took off. Which is cool, 'cause that's really how it should be. I think it should be organic and if people like it, great, and then it is what it is. And if they don't like it, you know, that's kind of the stranger part of the recording business, is that someone gets a paycheck to pick the singles. Which is kinda like being the guy that lives in Vegas, betting on horses, and that is how you make your living. Ick. Good luck.

SKRATCH: As a headlining band for this year's Warped Tour, do you have any plans or expectations for how it will go?

JAY: Uh, for something like the Warped Tour, the only thing that crosses my mind is, 'What am I going to wear?' That's all I care about, 'cause you get a half an hour a day and in a half an hour, most bands probably blow off seven songs — we can do probably 20. (Laughs) We don't talk a lot and we just play as fast as we can. It's just like a traveling circus, which you really just get on and hold on for the ride. You're out there for two months and it's just crazy. Every night, people have no idea, you know, they all come to the party and when it's over and they leave, there's still like 300 guys left from the bands sitting around going 'Now what are we going to do?' And that's just trouble in a bag. So it's a pretty demanding tour



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from that point of view. It really is so fun, that all you need to think about it 'What am I going to wear?' And that's like dresses and kilts and, you know, sand bags or whatever. You just have to think way outside of the reality.

SKRATCH: Are there any bands you are particularly looking forward to play with at Warped Tour?

JAY: Everybody. NOFX is on the bill again, like they were in '98, and that is a big deal for me, 'cause I called Kevin in August of last year and I said 'Just so that you know, we want to be on Warped Tour next year' and he goes 'Dude, it's so early' and I go 'I just want you to know now.' He was like 'We're not even CONSIDERING bands' and I said 'But I just want you to know that we want to do it next year, so that I don't have to worry about it.' He's all 'Do you want me to write that down?' and I told him if he had to, yeah! (Laughs) And then I called Fat Mike and I said, 'Look, I just committed to doing Warped Tour' and he was excited and

said, 'Cool, I'm going to call.' Warped Tour is so much fun. The bands are a part of this whole thing; it's a big machine that says, 'This is our world.' And so you get a little sampler of skates in the half pipe and motor cross and the guy being shot out of a cannon, I don't know where the hell that came from! But, you know, that's really what Kevin has always set out to do, was to give people a sampler plate of what our world is. This is our Southern California bizarro-fucking world — it's like music, skateboarding, motor cross, if you could put a wave pool out there and have surfers, he would. You know, snowboarding now, all this stuff is just what we do with our lives, and I like the fact that that's what he's taking out on the road. So, you know, people that might like, ah, the Bosstones are on the bill, so people that like the Mighty Mighty Bosstones might come out, and maybe they see No Use For A Name, who they've heard of, but have never seen before, and in a half an hour they go 'God, those guys were really good.' And then they decide to check them out next time. It's good because it opens up everybody's

eyes to many different things. Like this tour, us with Less Than Jake. People are like 'Why are you touring with them?' — because they're different than us. I want people to experience everything, and, trust me, Less Than Jake; they're big enough on their own. They certainly don't need to this. I'm really honored that they came out on the road with us. And, in the same way, their fans come to the show and they go, 'Oh, I've heard of Bad Religion, I've never seen them' so we kind of have a job to go 'We're OK, you might like us.' You know, like green eggs and ham; you might, just try it.

SKRATCH: I consider Bad Religion to be "educational punk" (JAY laughs) because you stand for and sing about issues of importance. What do you think of my views and the numerous pop-punk bands that sing about girls and love that are so popular today?

JAY: That's just us. I don't think about what other bands are doing. Like, critically, I don't really care what they do. Most of

the bands, well I could probably go to the point of saying that 90 percent of the bands are people that I have known, just 'cause we've been on the road for so long and you meet everybody and you know them. So some bands you don't like because the people are assholes, it has nothing to do with their music, you just don't like them. And some bands you actually like, even though they suck, because the guys are really nice. So to me, I don't really listen to most of this punk rock music, because I listen to it every night when I'm on the road, and I'm busy thinking about what we're doing, but when I'm not listening to us, it's something far off from that. Something more Elvis Costello like; I need to hear some smart-ass guy, but not screaming at me. And that teen angst thing, it works for Billy Joe, but it doesn't work for Greg Graffin. I couldn't imagine him sitting up there singing about masturbating until you go blind. That's just not us. And we don't want to be that, and that's great, so, you know, we all have our shoes to fill, and ... we just go on.

SKRATCH: Has it been difficult over the years to stay true to your punk roots and not be persuaded to go a different route by your record label?

JAY: The labels have always left us alone, because for 12 years we were on our own label. (Laughs) Which is always easy to do. Atlantic's always been, I don't think they had any idea what we were doing; we were just on our own. We did whatever we wanted to do. Changing direction, that's a responsibility of the band. So, I don't think we've ever tried to change direction, in the sense of being like David Boey, where in every album you're a different character. That wasn't really ever for us. People say, 'Oh, your records all sound the same' and I'm like 'Thank you very much.' We're Bad Religion; that's what we are supposed to sound like.

SKRATCH: What have been the highlights of Bad Religion's career thus far?

JAY: You know what? Sitting here right now doing this interview. (We laugh) Anything. You wake up and realize that I'm the luckiest guy in the world and you go and have some coffee and then you come and do a sound check. Every moment is a highlight, because I, at some point, get to go on with the rest of my life



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and look back at all this and go 'I had a great time.' And I didn't take advantage of it and I didn't think that everyone was, you know, in my way.

SKRATCH: What do you see in the future for Bad Religion? Do you know how many more years you expect to be making records and touring?

JAY: (laughing) We're on an hour-to-hour basis. I can't answer that ... I used to say five years, but I said that for 15 years, so after awhile you start saying 'I don't know anymore.' We're just going, and as long as it's fun and creative and meaningful, then we'll participate. I think if we feel like



we're, I don't know, if it feels like we're just dragging a carcass around, I don't want to have any part of that. The idea of a reunion thing is not appealing to me. Which is why we try to have a record out every year or so ... every 18 months, and just keep busy.

SKRATCH: So is one of the hardest parts of being on tour being away from friends and family?

JAY: Yeah. Right now, that's where I'm at. I've been married for 13 years, I have a 10-year-old and 8-year-old boy, and I miss them. They're getting old enough to come out on the road and have fun, so maybe I can balance that out if we keep going for a couple more years, then maybe that might work out. Part of being in a band is making sure that there's at least one person in the band that you won't kill, because that's kind of who you have to pony up with and make eight months of your life OK. If you all don't get along, it's no good. You know, you don't expect to be best friends with every body, because you just can't be, but you at least hope to find some common ground, somewhere. Like some of us go to hockey games, but we don't agree on some other things, so we'll all go to a hockey game together and have fun and find other people. You just kind of make it up on the road. But, for me, being away from

my family is the hardest part.

SKRATCH: So who is your one? Or would you just kill everyone?

JAY: Well, I can't kill everyone or there's no band! It changes all the time. I think that one of the things that we've found out, and maybe that's part of the dynamics of the group, is that you change dance partners. And that's healthy. I think if you start forming little weird alliances, that's not really that good either. We're pretty mature when it comes to trying to deal with problems. Like I said, in '93 and '94, we couldn't really get over that, we were very arrogant individually, which didn't really help. It still happens from time to time that someone's head will puff up and you wonder what hell's going on, so you walk around with a bobby pin going 'pop' — 'cause it's fun. It is something that, no matter what you do outside of what happens on the stage, you find that that hour and a half that you spend out on stage, you all get along like you can't imagine. You're like a team. So even if you were sitting back here fighting about some food

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around 30 songs, we've been on stage for around an hour and 20; that's just mathematically

thing — 'I don't want Jack in the Box after the show, dammit.' (Laughing)

SKRATCH: Do you really do that?

JAY: Oh fuck yeah. Once you get out on stage, once the drum beats start, OK, here you go. And there's just no stopping that, and I think that's the most important thing. You don't have to agree on everything, and we certainly don't, we never have. But we all understand that we don't have to agree; we don't live in a group house, we don't own a van and never have. We're all individuals. We just come together to play music; outside of that we're all individually different guys.

SKRATCH: That must bring a lot more to the band.

JAY: It does. You know the adage, if two heads are better than one, then five heads must be way better than one. So having everybody feel like they're just as important as every body else really works, having a democratic society, where there is no leader, and you're just basically a committee, no one ever feels like they're getting shit on. And that's really healthy.

SKRATCH: How do you choose what songs to play while on tour?

JAY: This tour wasn't that hard because we really wanted to play a lot of songs off the new record. And we know that, at

cally the way that it works. So all we basically had to do was pick eight songs off the new record, and then pick 22 songs from our catalog, which is basically two songs off of each album, which is so simple. We just go, 'OK, what are we going to play off Suffer? We'll play "Suffer" and "Do What You Want." What about "No Control?"' You know what I mean? It's just fairly simple to do that.

SKRATCH: Is there anything else you would like to add about the band or anything else?

JAY: Nope.



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