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## CHRIS MARS

on painting, schizophrenia, and The Replacements

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MARS



# BAD RELIGION

The World According to Bass: An interview with Bad Religion's Bottom End (Jay Bentley)

Bad Religion are not so much grandfatherly captain cool honchos of hardcore punk as much as rock solid purveyors of all things fast and furious. You may hate or love Greg Graffin's brand of whiz kid intelligence and the frenetic down strokes of three guitarists, but they have unmatched gusto and discipline that make Fugazi seem like part-timers. Their records may not all be legendary or even listenable sometimes, but when they hit the road they throw down a wide net of history and grab whole new generations of listeners. They may have a business side, but they're frank about it, compared to many bands that buy suburban hideaways while posing as beans and potatoes graffiti boys. So like 'em or leave them, this is the bass side of the story.

We've changed booking agents, and the guy who is now our booking agent is someone I really like and admire, which is rare in the music business. I don't like anybody really.

#### **Why is that?**

Just because I think they are all scum.

#### **Isn't that the nature of the business?**

The nature of the business is that people want to make money off musicians. So, 99.9% of those people have never picked up a guitar, have never been on a tour, they don't understand what happens to bands every day they are out there, and they keep grinding these guys into pulp for their 15% commission. They are scum (*laughs*).

#### **Bobby had to quit the band, and his career as a drummer, after he found out that he couldn't lift his arm above his head anymore?**

Yeah, that's true.

**The nature of the business is that people want to make money off musicians. So, 99.9% of those people have never picked up a guitar, have never been on a tour, they don't understand what happens to bands every day they are out there, they keep grinding these guys into pulp for their 15% commission.**

#### **Did that make you painfully aware that the last twenty years of being in a band has taken its physical toll on you guys?**

Yeah, but the difference between Bobby and myself, or Brian Baker or anybody else who has an injury which in the middle of the Blink 182 tour, I fell off a skateboard and broke my arm. I could have gone home and said the tour's over, but I said fuck it, whatever, I broke my arm. I'll move the guitar up.

#### **That must have been painful.**

It was very fucking painful, but you know what, I had four other guys that rely on me, back to the scum part, guys that rely on me to provide these guys' living.

#### **You felt that you just had to get the job done?**

Right. You know, it's like what happens to me doesn't matter, because what about everybody else? So when I got home it wasn't like I bottled myself up into a room and drank beer, I went straight to a physical therapist and started having work done, because I don't want to be that guy.

#### **But it was too late for him. Even with surgery, because of the nature of his injury, he only had a 50/50 chance of having successful surgery.**

It was too late because of his, well, I won't say unwillingness, but his inability to seek

professional help, and that just wasn't in his ball field. And what it finally came down to is, there are two sides to this coin, one side is surgery, and the other side is quitting. That's all there is, and there are no other choices.

#### **And the surgery, from I understand, would not necessarily help.**

Everybody we talked to said, maybe it would help for awhile, but it will probably come back if you continue to drum, do I don't really see the point in it.

#### **You now have Brooks, who played with both Suicidal Tendencies and the Vandals. What has he added, if anything, that Bobby could not?**

When Bobby first came into the band for *Generator*, he was like Brooks. He was wild. He could play shit that I couldn't believe. But I think over the course of a lot of years he kind of had the wildness beat out of him, and it just didn't want to be wild anymore. He just wanted to play drums and get the fuck

minute just because. I was like, fuck that, you are telling me what to do, then I thought, that's probably a really smart thing because Chris is a good mixer and he really did do a good job on that record, so I fought it just because I could, but then realized that I was being arrogant and stupid.

#### **So that was a good decision?**

It was a great decision. It saved the record.

#### **But now having three guitars on board, do you feel a bit squeezed?**

No, because there's one guitar player in the band, and that's Brian. Brian is the best guitar player in the band. Everybody in the band knows that. So Brian does the bulk of the work. Brett writes amazing songs and plays things on the guitar only he can play because he wrote it that way. Gregg has a really unique down stroking style and a style all his own, so everybody has their place. It's not like three guys all racing towards the finish

out, and that's not his fault. I don't blame him for that at all, that's just the nature of this band. It's that generally speaking over the past bunch of years we haven't necessarily been the nicest people to each other. So eventually, people just get tired and they don't want to try anymore. Bob just kind of skated along like the rest of us for the last couple of albums, so when Brooks came into the band, it was very much like when Bobby came into the band in 1991.

#### **Was part of the reason that no one seemed very happy was because Bad Religion was on a major label?**

No, it had nothing to do with it. Labels don't mean shit. Labels are labels, no matter if it's Epitaph or Dischord or Atlantic or Sony. They are all the same. There's a guy who runs it, and a bunch of people below him. That's pretty much it. So being on Atlantic didn't really mean much to us because they basically left us alone. They didn't care what we did. They knew we were perfectly capable of producing our own stuff and going out on tours.

#### **They even let you record one album in Greg Graffin's basement in Ithaca, New York.**

Yeah, but they made us mix that record with Chris Lord-Alge. They made us hire a mixer, but I didn't care. I kind of fought it for a

line in some wild scramble for guitar prowess. It was very organized in terms of who was going to do what. There was never any question, it was like, this is the way it is going to be simply because letting Brian doing the bulk of the work cut the recording time in 1/3, because he can just sit in a chair and play shit that most people can't. That's just him, and that's what he does.

#### **The only three guitar band I can think of is Articles of Faith, the hardcore band from Chicago led by Vic Bondi during the 1980s.**

I think that the concept of having three guitar players because you want is completely different than having three guitar players because you have to. Do you understand what I mean by that? Like having three guitar players by choice I think is stupid. It's overkill. If you get three guitar players because you can't kick anybody out- like Brett's coming back and playing guitar- well nobody's getting fired. You just add one more.

#### **You just push the envelope more?**

Sure, why not? Use it to your advantage. It's not awkward because there's no egos involved in the guitar playing. In fact, everybody just stands there and says, who's going to play what, and they laugh and have a great time.



### So getting songs written is not like a wrestling match?

Not at all, which I didn't really understand, because everybody has been asking us that, like what's it like having three guitar players, and I never really understood it until I saw that people were imagining, yeah, baby oil wrestling under hot lights to see who was going to play the solo (*laughs*). I've always said, no, no, no, that was never an issue. It never came up.

### Gregg Graffin said that you tried to take this record back to the *No Control* period.

No, I think that's too old. Back to the *No Control* period is too far away. You know, when we made *No Control*, we were just barely out of being blind. Just kind of humming along doing stuff and not really understanding why. We made records because we could. There is a certain elegance to that, which really lends itself to those records, but that's not part of what we are doing now. I think we are very purpose minded. When we went in to make this record, I think we were driven by a very specific goal, and that was to get out of the rut we had put ourselves in with the past 18 months. Brett and I were having a conversation when we were still on Atlantic. Things had progressed with Brett and myself so that we were back on speaking terms after he wrote the songs for *New America*, so we were talking a lot and he said, do you remember what the Ramones' thirteenth record was? I said no, I don't. He said, nobody does. You know. It might have been

*Adios Amigos*, but I'm still not sure. But nobody remembers it. He said, that's where you are going. You are about to make your thirteenth record that no one will remember, because it will be yet another Bad Religion record. Don't you really want to do something special, and I said yes. That in itself didn't really mean anything to me, because talking about it and doing it are two very separate things. And at the time, we were basically in a hole, and strange things happened, organically, that just allowed us to walk away from everything and put us right here right now.

### Gregg has said, "We really try to deliver the songs the way are supposed to be when we play live, but sometimes it's a lot harder, because they are not easy songs to recreate." Do you agree?

There's only a handful of songs that are musically hard to recreate, like an example would be "All Good Soldiers," because it's bizarrely complex. The songs on this album are not too difficult to recreate. But in Gregg's words, that's very simple for me to explain, because he writes songs for himself to sing that are within a comfortable range of his voice. Brett writes songs for him to sing that are at the peak of his voice because Brett likes the way that sounds. But Gregg cannot sing those songs every night, night after night, because he'll go BLAH. In that sense, it's very true, because it's hard to recreate a lot of the vocal patterns we do, and that's on a lot of songs. Musically speaking, not so much, because I

think that's something we've always tried to stay away from, like getting too production-oriented in the studio, because you can say, let's do 69 tracks of guitar. On "Against the Grain," honestly I think we did 28 tracks of guitar, but it doesn't sound like it. It's not muddy. It's really intricate singing coming and going, and all this stuff that you could never do live. We tried to do the song live, but it just didn't really... Well, it's not the same, we just cut it in a way that we could do it. It doesn't sound anything like the record.

### It seems a little unfair to say that you would have made a thirteenth record that no one would remember because it was just 7 or 8 years ago that you made *Stranger Than Fiction*, and that's when you guys really gained a large fan base, whereas the Ramones' success story really ended with the 1970s for the most part.

Yeah, but it hadn't continued for us. *Stranger Than Fiction* was huge by our standards.

### You were on 120 Minutes, the Conan O'Brien Show.

Yeah, but the *Gray Race* did half that, and *No Substance* did half that (*Gray Race*), and *New America* did half that (*No Substance*). You know, it was a pretty consistent decline.

### But did it reflect the quality of the records or just the failure of marketing?

I think both. I think that by the time we made *New America*, there was just a lot of

questioning as to why. To be honest, I just went there because it was in Hawaii. Because Gregg was really excited about working with Todd, so I didn't give a shit about that. But I figured, I'll go sit on the beach for two months and just drag my ass around. I'll show up every once in awhile and play something that they want me to play and then I'll leave, and I won't contribute and I won't care.

**A lot of the early hardcore guys like Dukowski from Black Flag said things like, if I ever have to do this for a living, it goes against everything I believe.**

Totally. I've been saying that forever. The low point of my career was the tour after Blink 182.

**Not the Blink 182 tour, but the one after, which you headlined?**

The Blink 182 tour was fucking funnier than shit. It wasn't our responsibility, it was huge, and we just went out and fucked around. It was brilliant. What better thing can you do than just go out and scare the shit out of people...

**But it drew criticism from your hardcore fan base.**

You know what, fuck them. I don't mean that like, fuck my fans, but you see you say the hardcore fan base was complaining, and you know what, I wouldn't go. I didn't pay 30 dollars to see me play with Blink. I just get people who complain about everything we do, from what I eat for breakfast to who we tour with. I am over it, and I have been over it since 1989 when we couldn't play Gilman St. Warehouse because we were too big. So, how many things can you do when you keep bending over backwards to make everybody else happy? Fuck it. That's not me. I don't want the fucking flag. I'll just wrap it up and send it back to whoever keeps sending it. I don't want it. I am here for me and my friends, and we do what we like to do.

**So why was the tour after Blink 182 such a low point?**

Because now we're on our own. Going out with Blink 182 was no responsibility, completely wonderfully childish, the big rock shows, going to the big stadiums, all the catering, just the whole fucking thing. It was everything that we've never, ever had, so it was funny. It was funny to us and enjoyable. Not in the sense of wow, I want this, or this is what we should be having, but this is the dark side of the moon. And okay, that's enough, that's over, now let's go out on our own tour like we always do. That tour just opened everything up where I felt like, god, I don't know what I am doing any more. I do not know why I am here. I didn't. Three-fourths of the way through the tour I kept saying, I guess this is it. I always told myself that when I got to this point, I am going to walk away. Graffin felt the exact same way. The end of the tour was the end of Bobby's career. It was in South America, and Gregg and I looked at each other like that was it, like we're all going to go home and never talk about this again. It was over. We've always

said that the one thing we didn't want to do was be a re-union band, which is why we tried to put out a record every year, or close to it. We tried to keep product out there because we keep writing songs and keep having fun doing it. That was, to me, the lowest point since *Into the Unknown* came out, because it was over. And that's how I felt. I got home and the first thing I did was fire everybody, management, booking agent, and accountants. I said you're all fired.

**Did you feel liberated?**

No. I fired them because I didn't want to pay them anymore. I didn't feel that after 22 years after being in Bad Religion that they knew half of what I knew about being in Bad Religion and I was paying them money to guide me. Fuck that. You don't know anything, you just suck the money. You're fired. I did like what I said. I made a few phone calls and hired some friends, people that I actually respected. I said, I don't know what we are going to do, I'm not sure really where we are going right now, but I want you there if we do anything. I want to rattle things up and change things, but I don't know what's going on. We might never play again, I don't know. The day came and went for Atlantic to pick up the options, and I was very happy, because I did not get a phone call. I thought, that's it. All I needed was one day. So I called everybody and said, we're off, we're off, we're off. Write the letter, send the letter, because that's all we needed, a letter saying we're done.

**That's it?**

That was it. They had a specific date as to whether or not they would pick up the option. We didn't have anywhere to go. There was no hurry.

**So it was a clean break?**

Yeah. It was somebody else I wanted to fire but couldn't really. You can't fire your label, but when the day comes and goes, then you can. All of that happened, and it was so funny, because Brett kept popping in and out, and Gregg and Brett were now talking about writing material. We had no idea of what label we were on. We still had a record due with Sony, for the rest of the world.

**You hadn't been cutting demos or anything?**

No, nothing. I remember talking with Brett and saying maybe we could do something with Epitaph for North America, because I don't know what our deal with Sony is. I think he was kind of into that and felt that it was a pretty cool thing to the point where he called me a few days later and played a demo over the phone. Listen to this, I wrote this, but it was all distorted over the phone. But I was just so happy that he was excited about writing that I was like, great, great. That was June of last year. From February, when Bobby left, until June, was like that really dark, not knowing what was going to happen, you don't really know for sure time.

**But after June, it came together very quickly?**  
Really quickly. We said, we better find a drummer.

**You tried out five drummers, but knew he was the guy after one song?**

I knew when he sat down.

**How?**

You just know. You see people and the way they compose themselves. Just the way they are. Bobby was in the band before he played a song. Back when Bobby tried out, Bobby was setting up his drum kit, telling jokes, just talking shit. I go, I like this kid. He's funny. He got it. He understood that it wasn't a big deal. I guess it is, but he didn't see it as such, he just saw it as something to do on a Thursday, which really worked out, because he wasn't impressed, he wasn't afraid, he didn't care. He was like whatever, let's play some songs. And that's what we were looking for. I don't necessarily like playing with someone who just waits to be told what to do, because I'm like, then why are you here? If I am going to tell you what to do, I can get anybody. I need you to tell me what you are going to do and go, that's great. That's being part of the team, otherwise you're just a fucking anchor. Literally, it's true.

**It seems that many bands think of drummers as being expendable.**

I totally disagree. But that's fine, because they're expendable drummers. You can look at the history of bands who have become wildly popular after being together for some sensible time, they get popular after they get a better drummer.

**But often they also drop drummers on the verge of major label deals, so they never give them a chance.**

I disagree. What about Nirvana? It's sad, because maybe I'm talking shit about the drummer, but no, I'm just saying, look, these guys are just mega-talented.

**There's no doubt that Dave Grohl is talented.**  
Wildly so.

**It's night and day from *Bleach* to *Nevermind*.**

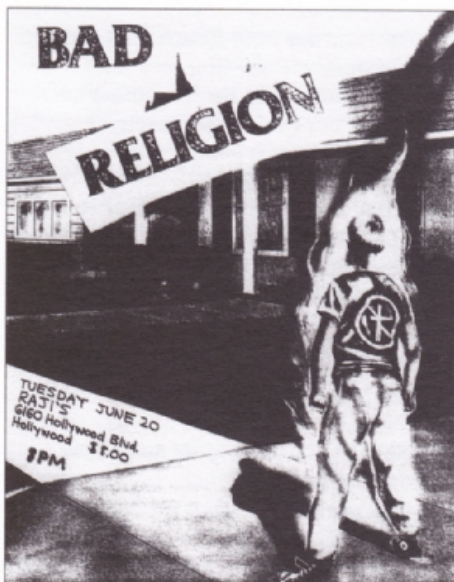
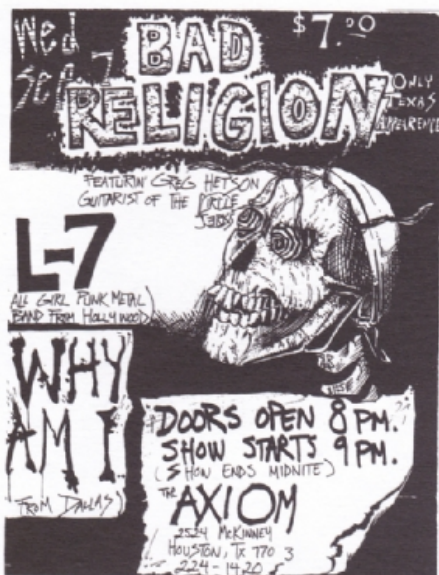
Right. I think that the drummer is far more important, but maybe that's because I am a bass player, but I think that having a mediocre drummer is going to hold you back.

**Green Day kept their drummer, however, it seems like he underwent some serious practice or even lessons from the indie records period to their major label records period.**

I think Trey is a good drummer. We did a lot of tours with them.

**But don't you think he spent some time working on his chops?**

But isn't that respectable?



Yeah, but what I'm saying is that they did not cut him loose from the band. But, why would they? He's a good drummer.

**But with bands like the Replacements, they got on major labels, cut loose their drummers in the midst of being popular, and within a record or two dissolved.**

Well, I understand. In that sense, it is a pretty ugly scenario that seems to be happening quite often, so maybe there's someone like me on a major label, a drum shark who swims around and anytime a band is signed, they go, your drummer sucks, we've got another drummer for you. They insert some other drummer to help them along. I feel bad, but I think it's far more important than most people think. Having a good drummer is very important.

**But it's not just the drummer, but the rhythm section that comes to mind when I think of classic soul and Motown records.**

But see, you're talking about James Jamerson, who was the bass player on everything, so it's not really a rhythm section, it's just him. It would be like, what if Flea was in every band? That wouldn't make anybody very happy. You know, everybody sounds like Flea. But, in that sense, in Motown or a lot of that early stuff, there was a standard to play with, and for most of us, the standard was just learn what you can from everybody and then create your own style. I think that is something that even all the guitar players got, which was create something on your own from out of everything that you can learn from everybody else.

**Do you think that Bad Religion has to bear the burden of its fans a lot more than Green Day or Blink 182?**

No, I don't think so. I think for every ten hate letters I get, Green Day must get thousands.

**I remember an ad that was once placed in fanzines. It had a picture of bombs, and said something like, the people who make these bombs are the same people who make Bad Religion records. Was that a low blow?**

These are things that I have put aside, because I find them redundant. The whole thing that everyone seems to have an innate ability to do is complain. But being pro-active seems to be the most difficult thing to do. It's a lot more easy to complain about something to do anything differently.

**Someone in the band said, "Very infrequently are people actually spending time making a better life." Is that what you're saying—don't complain, go out and make yourself a better life?**

I don't personally care what anybody does. I make my better life, right? 9 times out of 10 people that are complaining are trying to rain on my better life, and I won't let them. It doesn't bother me. I don't mean that in an angry way. I don't mean I shut myself off to the world, or I am a recluse that doesn't pay attention. I hear them. I hear exactly what

everybody says to me, but at some point or another, I'll go, you basically have just reduced yourself to nothing more than a slobbering fanatic who is mad because we have a video on MTV. But, you admitted to watching MTV, and that's why you're mad about it, so I don't need to have this conversation anymore, right? Like, I saw you on MTV, you fucking sell out! What? I don't even see me on MTV. You know? I don't! So I just kind of laugh and go, whatever. People that do that... Well, I understand that, because when I was 15 I was very mad at X for playing at the Greek Theater, because I liked seeing them at the Whiskey. And how dare they go play the fucking Greek Theater where I have to sit up on the grass nine miles away, fuck those guys. That was when I was 15, so now I am over that obviously, I understand a bit better about reality (*starts laughing*) and dynamics, but it doesn't mean that people don't feel that way, and that's what I always say to them, I understand how you feel. I really do, but I don't agree with it, but I understand how you feel. And someday you'll realize, yeah, I guess that was pretty stupid.

**Do you feel connected more with those late-1970s punk bands like X rather than...**

I don't feel connected with them at all, because they are actually so much older than I am that when they were in their heyday, I was fifteen. Bad Religion and all those bands weren't playing at the same time...

**But Greg was already making music with Red Kross during the late-1970s, so there was really only a few years difference sometimes.**

If you talk about X, the Screamers, Black Flag, and the Germs, I never got a chance to know those people. If you go to the Adolescents, Social Distortion, and TSOL, those are the people I ran around with in L.A.

**You've seen the reformed Adolescents and TSOL?**

Yeah.

**But you've said, I don't want to be in a band that does the reunion tours.**

I was talking to somebody else about this. They had this *Flipside* benefit in L.A. that everybody played at. A 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary thing. So many bands played, but the best band that night by far were the Adolescents.

**All original line-up, right?**

Yes. And I sat there and watched them play and said, I don't know why these guys ever broke up. I don't know why they stopped playing. Obviously, they couldn't get past whatever problem they were having, they never got over it. But they were the greatest fucking band ever. Ever. It was just a total... There's no word to describe how disappointing it is that they didn't stay together and didn't make more records together and continue on, because they are the best band from that generation.

**Do you think by Bad Religion constantly putting out records and just being around has**

**helped these other bands like TSOL and the others to come back?**

I don't know.

**You know, provide them a young audience?**

Okay, I'll go with that. But I don't think like that.

**How typical is it for an 18 year old to really like bands made up of guys in their 40s?**

How old was Black Flag when I was seeing them? They must have been 35.

**But the Dictators, who are touring, are at least in their 40s.**

But I'm not going to see them.

**But punk primarily spoke to young people.**

Maybe it's admirable that people are willing to go out and see where this all came from. That's obvious, when you stop and think that in the last five years some of the biggest bands in the world have been "punk rock" bands, whether it's Blink 182, Green Day, or the Offspring. These guys are coming out here espousing punk rock, and so maybe it's actually having a trickle down effect where people are listening to these bands and going, but where did they come from? I know that by 1992, when people were actually talking to us about where we came from, because no one had any idea that we had been around for 12 years, I kept saying the Adolescents are the best band in the world, even though they had broken up ten years previously. I just felt a responsibility to let everyone know, yeah you might like us, but the Adolescents are the best band in the world. So I try not to take responsibility for anything. The bands that are coming back now and doing these tours are doing it because we've been doing it for 22 years? I just think more along the lines that alternative, or "punk," is now a mainstay, and not a fad. It's a real, viable source of music.

**The major press always said that punk musicians couldn't play, and never took punk seriously. But it has been elevated to a degree where people respect the music.**

Well, fuck that. There's two different theories why that happened. One is that people who are our age have come to be editors at magazines. Well, they are now coming into their own. So they are saying, we liked this when we were younger and it is not stupid and not mundane. On the flip side of that, the same people who were saying ten years ago that punk was shit and you guys suck are now saying we're great because they have to. This is what sells their magazines. It's what the kids want. You see? They have to suck ass now and say, you guys are great. Yeah, but twelve years ago you said we were shit. Well, now you're great! Well, I have to say that because it sells more magazines. It makes me look cooler if I say that.

**So, that goes back to your first statement that the business is all bullshit?**

It's all bullshit. From top to bottom, and it doesn't have anything to do with me. That's

what's so funny about it. When magazines put pan bands, and it's not even me, it's any band, but a few years later they got them on the cover because they're selling 17 million records, you tell me if that's hypocritical. It's like, you're just rolling with the tide. You're not standing by anything. You're like, I guess we better put them on the cover if we want to sell 100,000 copies. If not, we can just insert not popular artist here.

**Are you happy that you never gave in to trends and put out a rap-influenced record, or a reggae-inspired record?**

We don't have the talent to do that. With Bad Religion, the one thing that we found out was that the best thing we do is Bad Religion.

**So why vary from the form?**

Well, I think we like to push the envelope of what we think Bad Religion is, but we're certainly not David Bowie. You know? We are not going to change our entire platform with every record. That's not for me, and I don't think that's for the rest of the guys. I think that we just look at this as something that we really just enjoy doing and in the sense we are not looking for anything else to make us happy, or to catch up with something or be part of a scene. People have always said that. You know, you keep putting out the same records over and over again. But we did that for twelve years and nobody noticed. And we were perfectly content to do it and not get paid.

**But that's like saying that AC/DC has churned out the same record for their entire career.**

You know what, no. Maybe they have, I don't know. I like what we do.

**You haven't always liked what Bad Religion has done.**

I didn't like *Into the Unknoun* and I wasn't that clear with *The New America*. I wasn't sure. It wasn't that I didn't like it, it was just that I didn't know why I was doing it, and that was confusing.

**So it wasn't the music per se.**

It wasn't the music, it was just I said- why I am doing this? Am I doing it for money, am I doing it for... I don't even know why. I can't be doing it for money, because I know I could make a hell of a lot more money if I stopped playing music and went out and got a real job. You know?

**Or you could join Guns and Roses.**

No, because then I'd have to play with that guy, and that's not going to happen.

**How long have you been in Vancouver?**

7 years.

**That's nowhere near L.A. Are you there for peace of mind and geographic distance?**

It has nothing to do with me. It's totally for my family. It's totally for my wife and kids. It has nothing to do with me. I like it there because it's a really nice place.

**But if the family could be in L.A., would you move back?**

No, I don't think I'd ever move back to L.A. Not now. I had a hard time leaving, but once you leave L.A., there really isn't anything there for you unless you have enough money to disappear. It's not for me. There are so many people that it's too many people, and I don't think you realize that when you live there, but when you go away and come back you get this overwhelming...

**But Vancouver is a big city.**

Not nearly as big. There are 2 million people there, and 10 million in L.A. And 2 million people in Vancouver is like British Columbia, the entire province. Trust me. It's a totally different ball game.

**After this tour, what can we expect from Bad Religion?**

We get three weeks off, not really, more like two weeks and change. Then we go to Europe and start the same thing there.

**Brett isn't playing on all the European shows.**

Just like he's not going to be playing on all the American shows. He's putting his schedules together to say, this is when I come out, here's when I can't.

**Do you change the set lists for those nights?**

No. I just tell him what sets we're playing each night, so he can add songs and take them out. It's up to him to learn them.

**How organic are the sets?**

We'll make a set list and then it will transform.

**I mean, there's twenty years worth of stuff.**

There's a core of what we want to do, which is seven or eight songs off of the *Process of Belief*, and we'll play that many songs off the new album because it's fun.

**But you're not simply hawking product when you play live?**

No, and it has nothing to do with that. This is more just for us because it's fun. Trust me, when I say, we'll play one song off of *New America*, because that's not fun to play.

**What about *Suffer*?**

As many songs as we can fit in. So when we were doing sound check today for two hours with Brooks, we played the entire *Process of Belief* album and then jumped right to *Stranger than Fiction* on down. We didn't play anything off *Gray Race*, wait, we did play "Them and Us," and then we played everything from *Stranger Than Fiction* backwards.

**So why not the later period stuff?**

Brooks has just kind of learned everything up to that point. He learned everything from *How Could Hell Be Any Worse* up to *Stranger than Fiction*. We made him learn "Them and Us," which he did. But if you asked him to name you a song off of *No Substance*, He would just stare at you and go, I don't think I have even seen it (*laughs*). I think when

Brooks came into the band, it was so much easier for me to call Epitaph and my friends and say, hey, send this guy the catalog so he can learn the record, then when I called Atlantic and asked if they could send our new drummer our catalog off of Atlantic, they said, who are you? I was like, never mind. I'll just have him go out and buy them himself, which, of course, he's not going to do. That kind of settled it.

**Would you say the band has the best relationship amongst yourselves than in the last several years?**

Yeah, by far.

**How will it be possible to keep it that way?**

I don't know. Shit happens, that's just the truth. Things happen when you are at your most miserable. Something can just snap and it's over, or something can happen and it's the unbearable lightness of being, and everything is wonderful and you don't know why. Obviously, when you are in a band as long as we have been together, you see just about anything you could ever see, both sides, everywhere, every up and down, everything in the middle, and right now it's a good one.

**Does seeing the Adolescents make you say, I feel glad about where I come from and glad about the music I play?**

I say it when I see them, and I say it when I see us. I say it when I'm listening to...

**Do you listen to Bad Religion records?**

I listen to this one, surprisingly, which I don't ever do. I don't like our music, but I listen to this record. I shouldn't say I don't like it, I don't listen to the records because I get burned out of them after awhile, and then I just don't listen to them anymore. You can't listen to them for 600 times in a row. I'm glad about where we came from, I don't really know where it is. It's a strange spot. I was talking to someone else about this. They were talking like, Oh I thought you were from Hollywood. I was like, no, we're from the Valley. I think that by the time that 1988 rolled by, there was no nowhere to be from, you know what I mean. Everything was dead. So, we weren't a part of anything anymore. By the time we did *Suffer*, there was nothing to a part of.

**Graffin said, "Suffer re-solidified our status and re-energized the whole punk scene."**

That's way too much.

**But you did say it happened during a low point in the scene.**

But just because we made a record that made me happy, I wouldn't ever have the balls to say...

**But it seemed to make a lot of people happy. We only sold 3,000 records.**

**That's not bad for the time.**

Yeah, that's not bad for the time. But it's not what everybody thinks it was. It didn't rein-

vigorate anything (*laughs*). We went out on a tour and lost 1,000 dollars each playing for 80 people a night. There was no re-invigoration. I think people look back at the record now, or for the past, and say, what a great time that was. But you weren't there. No one was there. Crickets were there, and tumbleweeds, and nothing else.

**So people are putting a little gloss on it.**

I think that sometimes people get a little misty and glossy and think, oh man, what a great time. Bullshit. There was nothing. Zero. So it wasn't like trying to be part of anything. I don't even know why the hell we made the record other than it was fucking great. You know? It took us six days, for no other reason than just to do it, which is cool. That is almost how we made *Process of Belief*.

**You could tie the two albums together in terms of spontaneity and natural feel...**

Like, we got nothing to lose. Let's just go...

**In a way, you came full circle?**

Well, yeah, five or six times (*laughs*). It keeps happening. I don't know why. There will be another seven year stretch and things will fall apart, then after awhile it will all come back together. Fuck no, that's not going to happen.

**Do you want to retire soon from Bad Religion, or retire from music all together?**

I don't know. I never think about how long I will go on. I've been saying that I can't really imagine doing this at a certain point, but I don't know what that certain point is. Like, what I said last year, when I just did not understand why I was here, there will come a point when I will know it well before everyone else, and if the band's not ready, but I am ready, I'm just going to walk, because that's okay. And I think, one of the other things was last year when Bob left and it seemed over, it was thoroughly depressing because it was almost like going out with a whimper. You know? Just a fucking mediocre record, and just all the shit, and it just felt like BLAH, crap. All that stuff meant nothing. It was weird. It just kind of fizzled, and after this record was made, Brett and I were talking and I told him, this is the kind of record that I could retire on, where could say, I am happy about this...

**And walk away?**

Yes. Walk away. Just like turn off the lights, thanks. I don't know if that means I will or not. Brett already called me and started to talk about the next record, like, okay, on the next record, and I said, hey, I am still enjoying this one. Give me a couple months. Let's go out and play and do all this. There is something to be said, and it's not to slight everything that this band has accomplished, because I think we have done a hell of a lot for guys from a garage in the valley, because when the core is together, it works, and that's undeniable. I don't why, but it really is something special.

**But when it doesn't?**

When it doesn't it's really not good, but right now, the machine is up and running.

**So instead of planning ahead, you're enjoying the run while you have it?**

The one thing I told myself that I was going to do, well, when we made *Suffer* I was too young, dumb, and drunk to really appreciate it. I had a great time, because as you said, everybody looks back and glosses it and makes it all flowery, so I get to kind of smile and say, yes it was. I can remember that. I can remember sitting in the truck stop with no money drinking ketchup and hot water, saying to Brett, why am I here? At the same time, I can remember playing football and the shit we did, but I am going to try and enjoy this. This is really what people try to do this for. I know it doesn't make a lot of sense. But when you are having fun and things are working well, no matter what you're doing, whether you are playing music or you have a hockey team, or you're inventing some software, or you're a silkscreener, or whatever it is, when things are running well, it just seems like fun.

**There's a great quote from a Hal Hartley film, "If you do not enjoy your job, it will eat you alive."**

You know what. You know when people ask me to this day, what was it exactly that happened between Bad Religion and Epitaph, why did you guys leave? I say, we were all having a good time but that was eating us alive because it was growing too fast. Super painful growth spurt. Your feet are a size 15 in a size 8 shoe. That was how it was and we all kind of felt it. We got to get out of this suit. It's not working. We didn't know what to do. So that was scary and confusing and exciting and weird at the same time. That's one of those things where there was nothing you could do about it, either you roll with it and grow, or fail. That's your two choices.

**It seemed like the right choice to move to Atlantic?**

We didn't have a lot of options. We really didn't. I was working at Epitaph when all this was happening, so there was a family style bond between Bad Religion and Epitaph because it was our label, well, it was Brett's, but it was ours. I have a very profound respect and admiration for what that label has done, because going from a napkin on a dining room table.

**Figures and accounting on the table?**

No, it was just the logo, the first E logo on a napkin, to be put on the first Bad Religion record and the first 7", to becoming a label that people wanted to be on, which was weird to us, like people want to be on our label? That was really bizarre, to everything that happened with the Offspring and beyond, where you just go, this is impossible. It's never been done before.





**The Offspring really hit the big time after Brett left the band.**

But that's why.

**So it seemed like the right move for the band and him?**

It's not coincidental. Everybody had thought long and hard about what they were going to do. You'd be surprised to know that the fuse that started that entire chain reaction was Gregg saying, I don't want to go back to school, I want to tour more. Graffin had been in school every year since the beginning of time, which basically allowed us to tour during spring break and the summer, and during the summer it was getting shorter and shorter because we all have kids, so all of a sudden the tour frame was becoming tiny, which was fine. I was working at Epitaph and we'd go out and play shows here and there now and then, and when we did tour it was very stressful. I remember being on the road and having Fletcher from Pennywise mad because I did a wrong thing on their record because I was in charge of production at Epitaph, and I was bummed because I was like, I am out here and can't do anything about it, so roll with it. But when Gregg said that he wanted to tour more, that started it, because I said, okay, I am going to quit Epitaph because I want to tour more too. I want to be a bass player, not a desk jockey, right. But Brett couldn't tour more, the label was burgeoning and he knew that. He knew he had to leave,

and there was nothing he could do about it. The question was, how are we going to go about all this? And what we couldn't seem to get to was that let's go to an Italian restaurant, have a few bottles of wine, and talk about where we are all at right now, and what we want to do, and how we are going to get there. Instead, we had, what's very typical for us, this immature blow up, which led to Brett quitting and us leaving and everything being hostile, and airing dirty laundry, like ex-girlfriend type shit. None of it was anything that anybody didn't already know, and it didn't really matter, but it just seemed so bizarre. But now, here we are, and we are in the exact same scenario, we're on tour, but Brett can't come on tour, but he's not hostile or mad about it. He's like, I can't come, and we're, okay dude, whenever you can come out, we'll see you later. We'll carry a guitar for you, we'll find a place on stage and mark a little X for you so any time you're ready to come out we're ready to roll. We couldn't seem to get to that spot then, and that's too bad, but you know what? That was the first thing Brett and I talked about when we got into a room alone, and we were sitting there kind of talking after eight years. I said, if things didn't happen they way that they did, we wouldn't be here right now, so I don't feel bad about anything that happened and I don't carry any resentment or hostility. That stuff was no different than any other stuff we did, or fights we had, when we were fifteen, eighteen or

nineteen. Graffin and I used to get into fist-fights, and it didn't break the band up. It's just the way it is. And he said, you're right, and I said, so we're just happy to be here.

**It's just about looking each other in the eye and saying, you're the same kid I grew up with in the valley?**

Totally. Every time some one would ask me and we would get into this war of words, or Brett said this, and I'd have something to come back with, he'd come back with something, but at the end of the day, he's still the guy I spent fifteen years of my life being out on the road with, experiencing things that only band mates can experience. So you're no longer just buds from the valley, you are family. I've spent more time with these guys than I have with my own children. That's pretty radical, that's a pretty heavy thing to say, and I don't say it proudly, I say it factually. So even though we seem to be in a problematic world with each other, it didn't make the reality go away that we're really family no matter what.

**And that probably comes across best on this record. The previous records seemed a bit processed and forced.**

You know what I think? *Stranger than Fiction* was a great record, but I think in a sense, it was a great record for Brett.

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We went out on a tour and lost 1,000 dollars each playing for 80 people a night. There was no reinvigoration. I think people look back at the record now, or for the past while, and say, what a great time that was. But you weren't there. No one was there. Crickets were there, and tumbleweeds, and nothing else.

**He wrote all the singles.**

He wrote all the singles. In a sense, that was the record he wrote and retired on.

**The one he could walk off on?**

Right. Fuck it, I did it and I'm out of here, and I can hold my head up, which was great. I think Gregg did an amazing job with the *Gray Race*, and Brian Baker brought an amazing amount of guitar work to that album as well. I think Brian stepped up as the new guy, not trying to write new songs, but bringing a lot of new talent and there's some ideas that Gregg would not have thought of on his own. I think that album is a sleeper, and people will go back and go, that is a great fucking record. *No Substance*, what can five guys do in the studio given an insane amount of time and nothing better to do? That's what that record was. That's a fact. I don't mean that as a slag, that's a reality.

**But the *Gray Race* b-sides, like "The Dodo," are great.**

Fucking great. The choruses are weak, but the beginning and the verse of the Dodo is amazing, but the reason that song failed is because the chorus was weak. Once that, "It's the way of the Dodo" kicked in, it was like

no, you lost me there, because you had me going with that "I see a white haired man, he's got a suit on him..." and I'm going with it, then it opens up into this fruity melodic thing, and it's like, that's too bad. Sorry. Next. But that's why it goes away. The one song that I think of when I think of songs that are b-sides, well, I think there's two songs now, but I think that "The Fast Life" is a great song that did not go on the record, and "News From the Front" from *Stranger Than Fiction*. Those were two great songs. And Andy Wallace, when he heard that "News from the Front" hadn't made it on the record said, you've got to be joking. I just looked at him and said, unfortunately, it's not. We say that till this day, "Oh, you're joking."

**You could have sold another million copies!**

I don't know about that, but I thought that it was a great song.

**It's for the box set.**

We've tried to generally put everything we've recorded out somewhere. I think there's maybe three songs at most that kind of disappeared, that we played a couple of times, but we didn't record them.

**There are so many bands that hide things in the vaults, and you have to wait for bootlegs.**

Trust me, I think people have this impression that we make these albums...

**You recorded sixty songs, but only released twenty!**

No, you just throw everything out there that you can. I think that some of the songs, well like on this album, I think there's two or three songs that didn't go on this one, one of them because Brett didn't like the way it came out, and he wrote it. He goes, I didn't like the way turned out, and I want to save it, and I don't want to put it out anywhere, but try it again later. Try again on the next record and see if we can't do it better. I kind of thought, that was part of that next record discussion we were having, and I laughed and said, I like the optimism, the idea that we will be making a next record. So, we already have a song (*laughs*). That's one down. I'm not really thinking about that at all. I'm not really thinking about anything right now.

**And that's a good place?**

Yes, it is. I don't think about anything.