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## BAD RELIGION Success Sermon!



# Bad Religion

**BAD RELIGION**

**BAD RELIGION** Bad Religion

**FOOD FOR  
THOUGHT**

**OR**

**MIND**

**CONTROL**

**MADE**

**SIMPLE**

**BY JACK RABID**

Photography by Lisa Johnson

**BAD RELIGION**



**"We're starting finally to become staples of under ground music, it's a good cross section of the alternative music scene that will come to see us now. We get the speed death metal kids, the Gothic kids, the hardcores, the squatters, the alternative radio-types, the industrial people, they're all into us now."**

**F**ugazi is not the only wildly successful group still holding on to the indie ideal, spurning major suitors and doing it themselves. To paraphrase an old Clash t-shirt, L.A.'s Bad Religion is the only hardcore band that matters.

With a career that spans twelve years (with their original lineup more or less intact), they've issued six albums, two EPs, and two singles, all on their own Epitaph label. With the exception of their now-disowned second LP, actually a decent, bizarre excursion into more commercial-sounding progressive rock called *Into The Unknown* (which made it to Chuck Eddy's Top 100 metal LPs of all time in *Stairway To Hell!*), Bad Religion is a numbing yet crisp and beautiful aural assault. They rely more on high-speed hooks and stunning, rapid-fire melodies than on wall-of-noise bashings to establish their soaring impact. Only their older contemporaries, the '80-'84 Bad Brains and Minor Threat, ever equaled this kind of clean, overdriven power, and Bad Religion surpasses both for truly catchy tunes. And when they cool down to mid-tempo, they're even more powerful.

But along with Fugazi, Bad Religion's

innovation is to take the integrity and passion and bring it to broader audiences, far beyond the constricting confines of later-day punks. Like Social Distortion, they may never shed their hardcore reputation. But guitarist Mr. Brett claims their audience is becoming more like that of The Ramones. "We're starting finally to become staples of underground music, it's a good cross section of the alternative music scene that will come to see us now. We get the speed death metal kids, the Gothic kids, the hardcores, the squatters, the alternative radio-types, the industrial people, they're all into us now."

Need proof? Phoning the band is also to phone the Epitaph offices, so the sales figures are straight from the horse's account sheets: 1989's *No Control* sold eighty-five thousand units worldwide, 1990's *Against The Grain* did ninety-thousand, and according to Brett, the advance orders alone on their brand new release, *Generator*, have already topped both. When I suggest that's quite a pile, the big-cheese label boss laughs. "Believe me, it is a pile. We had 'em out in the warehouse. Because we don't drop ship, we had to look at every single

one before we shipped them. We touched every single box. We had to charter a fucking plane to get 'em to Europe!"

When the laughter dies down, he continues: "You think I'm joking, don't you? The freight company had to charter a special plane. It was eleven pallets. That's...how many boxes Jay? It was like five-hundred-and-twenty-eight cases." Bassist Jay Bentley has his calculator out: "Fifty-three thousand units," is the response. When one stops to consider that the latest over-hyped British press/major label alternative department/120 Minutes' darlings are lucky to sell twenty-five thousand, it becomes even more impressive.

What accounts for their appeal? For one thing, they're among the smartest bands of any kind. Singer Greg Graffin has a masters degree from U.C.L.A. and is closing in on a Ph.D. in Evolutionary Biology from Cornell, while co-wordsmith Brett is a high school dropout and former near-death drug casualty whose reading list and vocabulary measure up to Graffin's; he'll also gladly beat you at chess. Not only does such sedulous behavior lead to such ponderous lines as "the masses are obsequious/Con-

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tented in their sleep/The vortex of their minds ensconced in the murky deep" ("1000 More Fools" from 1988's *Suffer*), but the use of words like "surfeit," "enthalpic," "phylogenetically," "accretion," and "tumbrel" (from *No Control*) have sent thousands scurrying for their Webster's.

Whether quoting Darwin and Cambridge University Lucasian Professor Stephen Hawking (see *No Control*'s "Big Bang"), borrowing lines from The Beatles and William Blake, roasting Terry Randall (*Against The Grain*'s "Operation Rescue"), or registering bitterness over Desert Storm ("Heaven is Falling" and "Fertile Crescent," both on *Generator*), this band's liberal ideas are as mind-scrambling as their big-guitar detonations. Amazingly enough, with Graffin's breathtaking, throaty, ascending voice over-accentuating each syllable, one can even discern these words despite the sheer speed of the music (take note, shoe-gazers). The melodies and advanced harmonies he fashions are great material for shower singers.

Two other releases include a two-hour video documentary of a recent European tour called *Along The Way*—a dizzying montage of fierce footage from fourteen frantic shows—and the back catalog CD *1980-1985*. A video for their new single "Atomic Garden" gave the band their first-ever MTV airing in April. "It pays homage to the great Sergei Eisenstein," claims Brett. For those not up on film history, "He's an influential early silent filmmaker, modern art

-type guy. His films (best known: "Battle-ship Potemkin," "Alexander Nevsky," and "Ivan The Terrible") are like art pieces."

Because of Graffin's Cornell commitments, and subsequent participation in archaeological digs out West, the quintet—which also includes ex-Circle Jerks' guitarist Greg Hetson and new drummer Bobby Schayer—only exists a few months a year; they can only convene to record every Christmas vacation, and likewise tour on spring and summer breaks. They had all of six hours at the end of mixing *Generator* to film the MTV clip before Graffin flew back to the East Coast. To be part of last year's *Maximum Rock 'N' Roll Anti-Gulf War Benefit #7*, recording tapes had to be mailed back and forth between Ithaca, N.Y. and L.A.


But they're all too busy to get frustrated. Brett and Bentley have their hands full running Epitaph (which also features Dag Nasty, Down By Law, No FX, Pennywise, and Instead on the roster), and Brett produces practically every punk/garage/under-ground/mod/psychedelic/hardcore band in Southern California in his Westbeach studios.

As well, Graffin, Bentley, and Brett are all new proud poppas, one son for each. Not only are Graham, Maxwell, and Miles (respectively) unlikely to grow up staunch Republicans, but they had better develop muscles quick, 'cause their dads obviously have not heard of child labor laws. "Now we have roadies!" exclaims Brett. Is this not

cruel? "It's not labor, it's chores!" He and Bentley crack up.

Despite recent parenthood, all vow to keep their part-time monster in the pink, unleashing one roller-coaster LP per year. Brett finishes by recommending the Noam Chomsky Reader, urges voting for Jerry Brown, patiently explains the definition of "anthropocentric" (from *Against The Grain*'s "God Song," it's "God in man's image"), declares that Hawking's A Brief History of Time offers "an answer for the beginning of the universe that doesn't entail me believing in the Judeo-Christian tradition of a patriarchal, anthropomorphic God," and takes a McLuhan-esque view of current media, as detailed by the new disc's finest moment, "Only Entertainment." The epigraph for that song on the sleeve warns, "People don't read anymore, they watch T.V. The news is often their only source of non-fiction. We must remember that the news itself is only entertainment."

"George Orwell had a vision," Brett reflects. "What that was, was a camera everywhere, Big Brother is watching you. And what has turned out is actually the same thing, but something even more insidious that what Orwell imagined, which is everywhere you go, instead of a camera there's a monitor. People compulsively look at the monitor, so rather than Big Brother having to watch people, Big Brother simply compels people to watch him and controls thought that way. It's just as pervasive."

So much for escapist "entertainment." 

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