



# Biohazard



# Shattering Skulls

**A** heat haze shimmers over the porch. It's the start of yet another bootiful day, yet something is wrong. There's no concrete, no lovely multi storeyed buildings, just grass sheep and the odd goat. It'll be another week before the sweet aroma of petrol fumes and urban decay is smelt by my hayfeverish nose. Thankfully, for the next half hour, I have a link with the civilised world in the form of the very civil, softly spoken, Billy Graziadei (the short haired one), vocalist and guitarist with New York's finest, Biohazard.

Reading the promo sheets, I come across repeated references to the Brooklyn Dodgers. 'The roar of 50 angry motherfuckers chanting violence in unison is the sound of Biohazard. Brooklyn hasn't heard such an angry mob since the Dodgers left almost 40 years ago.' Who were the Dodgers, and why did they leave? Well, I, for one, am not going to die wondering. I break the ice by demanding to know the connection between the Dodgers and Biohazard. Mr Graziadei appears a little taken aback by the question. Apparently the Dodgers were a baseball team that emigrated from Brooklyn to LA, much to the chagrin of Brooklynites. According to Mr G: "Brooklyn has never been the same since."

It's little wonder the music of Biohazard is so uncompromisingly angry with the lads growing up in Brooklyn bereft of the moral guidance and calming influence of sporting idols. A lack of quality baseball is not the only down side to life on the wrong side of the tracks.

Graziadei says: "Sometimes we go back through [Brooklyn] and see the same people, doing the same drugs, on the same street corners. The band pulled us out of some paths that would have ended us up in jail, on drugs, or definitely on the downward spiral."

For Graziadei, punk rock was the music

that shaped his formative years and helped him avoid the downward spiral. Whilst in high school, Graziadei was unknowingly introduced to heavy metal. It's this punk/metal fusion that drives the Biohazard sound. Mr Graziadei tells a cautionary tale for all young punkers of how he was unwittingly infected by the insidious metal vibe.

"There was this punk band in school. They played this talentless music — you know, two chords played really fast — the coolest music, and me and my friends were really into it. Anyway, the guitarist left town, so I said: 'I'll buy a guitar if I can play in your band.' They said okay, and the bass player taught me this three song medley. I liked the riffs and I thought they were really heavy. About three years later, I was turned on to the band that wrote those riffs, and that band was Black Sabbath. Recently, we ended up covering a Black Sabbath song." The song Biohazard cover, 'After Forever', is on the recent Black Sabbath tribute album. It contains the lyric: 'Would you like to see the pope on the end of a rope?' When I question the Catholic raised Mr Graziadei on the lyrics, he defensively points out they're Ozzy's, not his, before expounding his interpretation of the song.

"It's about being sceptical. It's a battle between do you believe in God because someone says this book [that bible] is true. I find it hard to believe something like that. None of the band believe in organised religion."

This scepticism extends to other well respected societal institutions. "I don't trust politicians. In there is the word liar. I think politicians tell people what they want to hear just so they can get their vote. Politics is a very touchy subject. We're not politicians. We sing about stuff we see. We don't preach."

In 1992, Biohazard looked at the problems in their neighbourhood on their break-

through album *Urban Discipline*. On 94's *State of the World Address*, Biohazard's concerns have become global.

"On our first tour, in 90, we'd never been out of New York, let alone America. Anyway, we were in Copenhagen, and we sat down with this 12 year old kid who knew more about America than I did. That was like a turning point, when you're on the outside looking in, you can see the big picture."

Viewers in New Zealand are unlikely to see Biohazard's "big picture" appearing on any of our mainstream video shows. The video for *Tales From the Hard Side* is divided into three parts, depicting in turn a car-jacking, a life of crime, and the ignorance of racism. "The video shows how society can push people to crime, or drugs, or even to hate someone who looks different," says Graziadei.

During the course of this chinwag, Princess Di's face has been gazing blankly at me from a magazine. Suddenly my heart knots with fear. Does Di know what she's doing by moving to this nightmare world. Still, maybe she could hang with the Biohazard boys. I inquire if the Princess could perhaps be 'down for life' with the lads. Graziadei is hesitant before deciding: "I don't think she would ever mix with the riff-raff of Biohazard." Later, Mr Graziadei decides maybe Di's a fan after all. If Di is a fan, then she can rest assured that, should she attend a Biohazard concert and suffer any harassment, Biohazard are prepared to go down swinging on her behalf. On a recent tour of Europe, a show was cancelled due to the band and security becoming involved in a scuffle over treatment of the crowd.

Upon mention of troubles with bouncers, Mr Graziadei's voice takes on the weary tone of a septuagenarian after a hard day's bowls. "No kid pays money to come see Biohazard and get punched in the face or strangled 'cause he's trying to have a good time. When we see security guards doing

that, we freak out. There's nothing worse than a security guard trying to break someone's jaw 'cause they want to get on stage and shake your hand or sing with you."

Well, possibly there is — say, crippling yourself slamming. "We grew up slamming. Our shows have been totally chaotic. Kids have gotten paralysed at our shows and we don't want that to happen. I don't want that on my conscience."

Occasionally it's the band who is in danger. "We're used to kids stage diving, but at one show we played in Sweden, there was this kid from Bosnia who'd left his family in the war. He was going crazy, slamming into us and, one particular time, he ran up to the drum kit and jumped over the cymbals and toms, landing right in Danny's lap. That's never happened before and it wrecked the entire drum kit... pretty sick."

Thankfully life is not all rock 'n' roll mayhem. Graziadei relaxes by practising ju jitsu and keeps body, if not soul, together by enjoying the wholesome goodness of health food. Whilst Down Under, Biohazard hope to have time for surfing or snowboarding, if the tour schedule allows. The touring lifestyle can occasionally resemble a scene from the movie *This is Spinal Tap*, Graziadei's all time favourite rock movie. "Every thing in that movie I've seen come true in touring with the bands I've toured with."

When Biohazard play support for Slayer, you can be certain their amps will only go to 10. This should be ample. In a recent British metal mag, their live performance received the highest possible accolade of a shattered skull, while Pantera could only manage a severe migraine. The only way to find out whether Biohazard are worthy of the shattered skull is to check them out yourself. After seeing Biohazard and Slayer, a severe headache should at least be guaranteed the next day.

KEVIN LIST