

Sick of It All

Beneath the Surface



At 10.30am I discover I'm supposed to be interviewing Sick Of It All in half an hour. Trouble is, I've no means by which to tape the interview. After a frantic dash across town, I find the equipment I need, complete the interview and relax for the first time in an hour. Unfortunately, today Beelzebub has decided to fart in my face, for upon playing back the tape there are no lovely words from across the ocean. Instead, words bluer than any ocean are muttered, and for the next two hours I become very matey with the unfortunate receptionist at the Cabaret Metro in Chicago.

Eventually Sick Of It All bass player Craig returns, and discovers New Zealanders are not just a pain in the arse for Bill Clinton. However, Craig is a man out to disprove any crass stereotypes that exist about unfriendly New Yorkers, especially the sort perpetrated by mags like *Maximum Rock and Roll*.

"They'd just written us off as New York tough guys. We're not like that. They're saying: 'You're from New York, so you must be like a tough guy, violent asshole.' Funny that they'll point the finger and try to make us look bad when they've never met any of us. They just wrote us off 'cause we were a hardcore band from New York. That's pretty rude. They talk about being open minded — that's not being open minded. That's as bad as the people they condemn."

As far as Craig is concerned, hardcore is misunderstood by many who only pick up on the gangster images some hardcore groups culti-

vate. "A lot of bands will be gangsters this month and next month they'll be whatever the new trend is. We're not trying to ride the gangster trend. We're not trying to be something we're not. Just because we're from New York, doesn't mean we're a pack of jerks."

Instead of scaring people away by pretending they're the baddest muthas that ever stalked a stage, Sick Of It All want to attract all types of people to their shows, particularly members of the fairer sex. "Now we get a lot more girls turning up, we encourage them to dance and sing along. They paid just as much money as everyone else — why should they be afraid? Just because the music sounds aggressive, doesn't mean we have to alienate anyone. I love it when girls turn up to our shows. If girls turn up they like you for the music — unless they think you're cute. We don't get much of that!"

The scruffy tribes of youth culture also make their appearance at Sick Of It All's shows. "Heavy metal kids like us because we have a hard sound. Alternative kids like us because it's a different thing. Punk kids like us because we're basically a punk band."

The hard sound Sick Of It All generate has been captured for posterity on their latest album *Scratch The Surface*. "We worked with a guy named Billy Anderson, who's done the Melvins and just completed a Mr Bungle record. He totally understood our sound. He helped us bring the energy of the music out."

Helping Sick Of It All spread their message wide and far with *Scratch The Surface* is a record deal with Warners. This deal is seen by

Craig as a major breakthrough for hardcore music. "By us putting out an album on a major label, that's like, to me, groundbreaking. Depends what you consider hardcore. I've been around a while, and I know what real hardcore is. We're the first hardcore band to get signed to a major label."

Despite achieving a deal with a major label, Sick Of It All are not quite yet in the same league as Green Day — the mega unit shifting, Californian proto-punks, and fellow travellers on the pot-holed punk rock highway. "Up until Green Day got popular they were a very small band that got lucky 'cause they wrote excellent music. A lot of people say: 'Oh fuck Green Day, that's not punk.' I think Green Day is a punk band. Two years ago they'd be opening for us in this tiny little place... I think their music's great, but it's a far more accessible, catchy, California punk thing. I think that is also very ground-breaking and helps us in a way. Even though the music's different, the attitude's pretty much the same."

The attitude may be the same, but the global audience is a weensy bit smaller for the lads in Sick Of It All. Craig puts this down partly to MTV and the attitudes it breeds. "MTV has too much power in America. Kids don't go out and look for music, they just let MTV tell 'em what's cool. From our stand point, MTV doesn't really play us. We don't really get much of a chance outside of going out and busting our ass playing every night."

At least Sick Of It All-ers get to bust their asses all over the world. According to Craig,

travel is one of the best parts of being in the band. "I'm never happier than when I'm on the road. I must write 20 postcards a week — I spend more money on postcards than I do on food!"

Occasionally the touring lifestyle has little drawbacks. "A coupla months back we played in a squat in Italy, with no toilet and no running water, in the middle of the woods, getting bitten by mosquitos. We were using one speaker for a PA. It was my twenty-fifth birthday — a funny way to celebrate it."

When Sick Of It All bring their poor, broken carcasses down under, expect to see some wild, aggressive, rock and roll abandon. "I'm very excited about touring. We're really energetic. We brought the jump into hardcore."

Considering the amount of bands Craig's been in, he should know. "I used to be in Agnostic Front. Before that I was in Youth Of Today. I'm like the slut of the New York hardcore scene. I've played in every band. I've been in Sick Of It All since 1992. We all knew each other from when we were young. I'd fill in on bass and write songs while I was in Agnostic Front. When their bass player quit and Agnostic Front broke up, it was the natural thing for me to be in the band."

Given the amount of eardrum rupturing bands Craig played in, it comes as some surprise to find out the tunes he listens to in his spare time. "I listen to a lot of R&B — stuff totally dissimilar to what we play. I like to listen to Marvin Gaye to help me get to sleep."

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