

born dead icons



Born Dead Icons are killing machine from the arctic wasteland of Quebec... Ok maybe not really but they are a damn fine band in the vein of Motorhead, Amebix and Discharge... this is the little chat I had with them when they pulled through the Bay Area on their latest tour. Interview by Thorn. Photos by Peach.

MRR: We'll start out the normal boring way... say your names and what you do.

Alex: I'm Alex and I play drums.

Pete: I'm Pete and I play guitar.

Phil: Phil, play bass and sing.

Francis: Francis, play guitar and sing.

MRR: Band history— when did you start, how you came together etc...

Alex: Ok, the three of us— me, Francis and Phil were all in Drift and when Drift broke up we just wanted to keep playing music, the drummer from Drift quit, actually, and I just started playing drums, I used to play bass, and Phil started playing bass at the same time and sang. I think that was in year '97.

Phil: We kinda want to do something different.

Alex: Yeah we wanted to make something different. Then we had some guitar player changes over time, and we're on our fourth one now. (laughter)

MRR: (to Pete) Good luck! It's like Spinal Tap or something... (laughter)

MRR: You guys toured for a long time on just a demo right?

Alex: Not even a demo... the first tour was with nothing. The third show we ever played was the first show of our first tour. So we just toured with nothing, it was a pretty bad tour but it was still fun.

Phil: It was just to work the songs and see how it would go.

Alex: It was more about traveling and having fun I guess. But the second tour we had the demo and the seven inch out.

MRR: You guys are from Quebec, why do you sing in English

instead of French? Especially given that it isn't your first language?

Pete: That's a good question.

Alex: I dunno, like all the bands we did before, like Drift and even before that we always sang in English because we grew up listening to a couple of punk bands that used to sing in French, and they were really really bad...

(laughter)

Alex: I mean there's a lot of languages that are really good, really aggressive when they're sang and everything, but French just doesn't make it I guess.

Pete: It's just easier to convey a message in English too. Especially since the audience is mostly English speaking.

Alex: I feel that, already people know that we speak French and it's already hard to make contact with people but I think if we made French lyrics then it would be even harder to make contact with people.

MRR: The reason why I ask is that, from my perspective, it would be easier to convey your ideas in French as opposed to trying to come up with the right English phrasing.

Phil: I mean we don't speak really well because we don't really have any chance to practice where we live, because everybody we know— all our families are French. The only time we can practice is when we're on tour, usually we understand— everything we watch on TV, everything we read, whatever— we can understand it perfectly. We can write pretty good too, we sound pretty bad and everybody thinks we're not good at English at all....

Alex: We can write it probably just as good as you...

MRR: That's not saying much...

(laughter)

Alex: It might be an advantage for us too, because we have to put more time into it, so we spend more time working on the lyrics and



we always come back and are like "oh no that doesn't work, or this does..." I don't know how our lyrics are for someone who...

MRR: I think the lyrics come off really well in English. I was wondering, since it's not your first language— I'm not saying that you don't speak well. I mean when we have conversations I feel we understand each other fine. I was just wondering why...

Pete: Maybe it's just habit, I mean when I first started listening to punk it was always English, with the exception of a couple of bands that we talked about earlier that were pretty bad, I guess we just grew and when you form a band or you deal with punk it's just always English. I didn't really even question it when I started writing lyrics, not for this band, but for other bands. It just came out in English without even noticing that it was purposely in English...

Alex: It just it just kinda came automatically at some point—

Phil: ...the bands that sing in their own language... I mean Spanish is pretty good to scream and stuff...

Alex: Italian, Japanese...and I'm not even saying that the bands that sing in French are all bad— some of them are pretty good...

Phil: ...but maybe it's too... the writing in French is too poetic. There's too many words and...

Pete: It's a very long language.

MRR: A lot of people in the U.S. kinda joke about Canada being the 51st state, how do you feel about this perception that a lot of kids have— I mean a lot of people in the U.S. don't even think of it as being another country...

Phil: I mean in Quebec it's kinda... It's different than the rest of Canada I think. You know, everyone speaks French and we kind of have different culture— I don't want to say it's totally different— but we have different roots than everybody...

Alex: The western part of Canada was colonized by the English and it's pretty much like here in the U.S., but Quebec was colonized by the French— so it has more of a French culture. I wouldn't say it's more liberal but I guess a little bit— especially when we tour in the U.S.

which is getting more and more conservative, like you see all these religious billboards and things like that. There's nothing like that in Quebec— I mean all the churches are closing down, there's no religion at all...

Phil: I mean the American culture is pretty big in Canada but you can still feel there is a difference. You can't really explain what it is.

Pete: I mean when you travel around you just notice the difference...

Alex: Canada is definitely closer to the U.S., you know if you travel to Europe it's going to be way more different...

Phil: ...but Quebec, Canada is almost like Europe.

Alex: Even Montreal, which is only like an hour away from Plattsburgh, NY...

MRR: When I was in Montreal it totally felt like I was in a different country, but in Toronto, it doesn't. It's cleaner (laughter) but...

Alex: Montreal, even, is not a good reference because there is a lot of English there. We grew up in Quebec City and in Quebec City it is totally different because nobody speaks English...

Francis: Like 99% of people speak French.

Phil: We grew up there so it's like totally different— it's

Quebec culture kinda mixed with American culture but not...

Alex: American culture just goes through like TV and music and stuff like that but when you grow up, the way your parents raised you is not the American way of life...

Pete: ...and for religion. We say there's no religion because of what happened historically. Quebec used to be a totally religiously dominated society to the point where it was backwards from the rest of Canada, until like the '60s, so like I guess when something oppresses you, when it's gone or when it has lost its influence... I don't

think there are any religion classes in school anymore and you always have the choice to take it or not. So it's a totally different thing than the rest of Canada where you have religion classes...

Alex: People just go to church to get married or to baptize their child. It's a habit, they don't really know why they are doing it.

MRR: I was wondering what sort of differences you saw in a sort of day to day life, between the two countries and you sorta answered that but what about in the punk scene, if any?

Phil: Well, it's almost the same...

Alex: ...Canada has always had a history of punk since like '78 and along time ago, but most of the punk that comes from Canada— when they first start listening to bands, it's mostly American bands or British bands, like most Americans do. So punk rock just comes from all the same place. There's a few bands from France that are still big in Quebec, and we grew up listening to them but they're pretty shitty... that's what maybe the difference would be punk wise.

Pete: Because we have welfare in Canada and you don't have it really here in the states, it seems like a lot of punks tend to be a lot more lazy with what they do with their time. I'm not saying welfare is bad, if I was on welfare, and I had free money every month I would do something with it, but most people— especially in Montreal— just basically spend all their money on booze. It's good to tour in Montreal at the first of the month cause everybody has got money

and they'll just go and blow it all. People just seem a lot more apathetic with their lives than they are in the states, because people here have to work for their money and in Canada they don't have to... but they don't really take advantage of the fact that they get free money...

MRR: That's odd, especially compared to my observations when I was in Europe, that one of the reasons why the squat scene exists like it does and... most of the punx I met in Europe didn't work, they were mostly on some kind of government welfare type of program and that's a lot of the reasons why the youth centers and the squat scene thrives like it does, but there's nothing like that in Canada?

Alex: It lacks organization, I guess. Its also like the Canadian punk scene is really small. Like if you are a band and you want to play shows in Canada you can play like maximum 20 shows in the whole country. There's like Vancouver, Victoria, Calgary, Saskatoon, Regina, Winnipeg, Montreal, Quebec City, Toronto, Ottawa and a couple of other smaller shows you can play but that's like mostly it. And there's like big drives between places so there's no links between the scenes which means that the punks are pretty isolated from each other, which makes it harder... plus there's a lot of punks that look punk but they are just like... in Montreal if you are a kid in the street, you're gonna look punk but you're not... they buy all the badges but they've never heard any of the bands, they don't know any of the ideas of punk. Like all the squeegee punks...

MRR: Squeegee Punx are poseurs?!

Alex: Yeah! Yeah! Seriously, I work at a store that's in like downtown Montreal, some of these kids are like racists, homophobes... they're not punk at all... they have like Doom patches and Crass patches but they're all like "...fucking niggers..." or whatever they've got nothing to do with punk... which makes it look big and they even go to shows...

Francis: But they just get fucked up.

Phil: The goal is to just get fucked up... yeah like if you play a show at the beginning of the month you're going to have like tons of people because the welfare checks came on the first of the month...

Alex: There's also a big difference, like with Europe and America- not just with the U.S. but Canada and the U.S. Like in Europe it's more politicized but here it's starting to be a little more but...

Pete: As far as squats go, we have harsher winters up in Canada and we have different laws which make it harder to go in to buildings and just take it over... I don't know what the laws are but they are enforced really harshly.

Alex: You have to have electricity at least just heat it cause seriously you can't live.

Pete: As far as welfare goes, maybe in Europe its a good thing but in Canada it just pacifies people...

Alex: One guy in Quebec said the best way to kill a guy is to pay him to do nothing...

MRR: Yeah cause if you don't take advantage of that...

Phil: There are people getting welfare who are putting efforts into things, and that's good but most of them just drink their checks. In three days they don't have any money so they borrow money...

Alex: I'm not pro-work but I think if people are getting money they should get involved and put their energy into something or else your life just goes nowhere.

MRR: I mean I'm totally pro-working for something I care about and that's why I'm always kinda like "Man, if I could just get welfare so I can put my energy into something I really care about" or I could just get funding from somewhere so I could just work for something I really love, cause lets be honest- punk doesn't pay the bills. I think that working for something you really love is great. The feel that I got from a lot of people on the dole in Europe was that they were definitely using that to their advantage.

Phil: Yeah totally...

MRR: Well to switch gears, your first seven inch came out on Deranged, and you were supposed to do the LP on Deranged but it didn't. What happened, why did it come out on Dead Alive?

(random grumbling)

MRR: Do you not wanna talk about it?

Phil: No No No, we can talk about it but... we don't wanna like...



Alex: Yeah, cause it's not so clear right now, with Gord- the guy who is doing Deranged, so like I dunno... I guess we'll say it but if we say something too much you can... you know? (laughter)

Phil: I dunno know if you met him or write him on the internet or whatever...

MRR: Gord?

Phil: Yeah, Yeah...

MRR: I've known him for a long time.

Phil: He's cool but he's doing his stuff in a weird way... I dunno, he's not into it like... he always seems like to make the image that he's been into it for a long time but... I don't complain about that but...

Alex: Mostly, it's like, when the seven inch came out the sound was pretty bad and that was partly because of the recording. The recording had something that lacked there but the mastering fucked it up real bad. He's trying to save money on everything- like the mastering he did cost him like fifty bucks and like a good mastering is like usually like \$200. He just got the cheapest place to do it, and they totally fucked it up and even the quality of vinyl- you can see the quality of vinyl that he's doing, it's really thin and he just tried to... it's not because he doesn't have the money cause he has all the money he needs to put out quality stuff, he just tries to save on everything. It was a pretty bad experience with the seven inch and we just- when we put out the LP, the main reason why we did that was because we wanted to re-record those songs, cause we were all pissed. We got the seven inch just right when we left on tour and we hadn't really listened to them and then we came back from tour and and were like "fuck we sold *that* all of tour!" We were all pissed and we wanted to re-record it.

Francis: Also Gord wanted to wait a little bit cause he wanted to sell more seven inches before he put it out...

Alex: I dunno, he still thinks he's doing the next album... but really Billy from Partners in Crime is doing it... he asked us a long time ago...

Phil: ...and we're closer to those people than to Gordon because he doesn't really seem like he's into it, that's the way I feel about him...

MRR: What do you guys have coming up next, closing comments...

Alex: We're on tour with From Ashes Rise for like ten weeks and we talked about maybe doing two split seven inches with them- I mean we just talked about it but... like two different labels would put it out but...

Phil: Cause we've gotten pretty close with them from doing this tour so... as soon as we get back from the tour, we have some new songs, and we're going to write a few more songs, and we're going to record for the new LP.

Alex: Probably like January or February...cause like we've been together for like three years and we wanna sorta pick up the pace a little bit... or like...

MRR: You wanna put out more shit...

Alex: Yeah...

MRR: You wanna make the big time!

Alex: Yeah... (laughter) I mean, uh, no. We've toured like three times and we just have like the twelve inch and the seven inch. I feel like we could have done more. We've just been too lazy or something... Plus we're going to try to go Europe in the spring, but I dunno, we want to have the LP done and that might be kinda rushed, so maybe the fall...

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