

COUNTDOWN TO OBLIVION



Without a doubt Countdown to Oblivion is an all-star Toronto line up; ex-member this and that but do they live up to their past outfits? CTO sounds nothing like Anti-Flag, nor the Swarm and that's all good by me. Musically Countdown has Swedish metal worship with the snotty in-your-face attitude of genuine hardcore punk. A fucked combination, but somehow they pull it off well: speed, humor, energy, books, mosh, brains and fun; its all there. Interview by Gord Deranged

MRR: Is there a theme behind the name "Countdown to Oblivion" or did that all go down the toilet with the whole Y2K disappointment?
Jaime: From what I know, I think C.C. just said one day "hey how about..." and that was that. As for Y2K, I think it is a delayed reaction and NEXT year the world will end and nobody will be ready, except I guess for all those crazy cult people that think everyday is the last.

Katie: In the beginning, we filtered through a sea of name ideas including SWEATLEAF, HOT LIXXX, and THE CUNTING DAUGHTERS, but the one to eventually win favour was THE DIRTY DIRTY RETARD FUCKERS. However, this name reared during a time when the band, as a whole, was slightly more concerned with political correctness and since we all boast at least one recognized learning disability coupled with varying degrees of A.D.D., we felt the implications of such a name could have been hurtful and insensitive to ourselves and our own special needs. Instead, we decided to pay homage to a hallmark of Canadiana and chose a name that when abbreviated would rhyme with B.T.O.!

Stephe: We were trying to come up with a rational name before our first show. The show was on New Years Eve. There is always a countdown on New Years eve. Punk is about nihilism. We put the two together and came up with COUNTDOWN TO OBLIVION.

Chris: If I start I won't shut up. I really won't.

MRR: How did the band form?

Chris: Punks and skids in a nuclear accident, like what happened to Melvin the Mopboy in the Toxic Avenger.

Katie: The Big Bang theory!

Jaime: I wasn't around for the original formation because I was away (with Anti Flag) at the time, but when I came back, I was asked by Mr. Perry to rock with him, Bubby, Katie and C.C. How could I say no?

Chris: There are varying legends about the origins of the CTO, and here's a synthesized version: It was 1998. Katie and Ryan had wanted to make a hott lixx metal band, and had practiced a few times already. Others among our ranks, inspired by a supercharged Danko Jones show in a friend's living room, were stoked on making another band, a punkass hXc band with our friends, despite all the bands we already played in.

Katie: After many months of all talk and no action, I went out and put a rent deposit on a unit in this horrifically run-down rehearsal space in one of the city's sketchier neighborhoods. Soon we were making weekly visits to this fit-to-be-condemned structure, pissing in bottles, trashing abandoned vehicles and making music on the side.

Stephe: Then we added our friend RJ on guitar to thicken up the guitar sound.

Chris: When it all came together, it was a tug of war between punk-ass hXc and noodle-doodley metal, a pretty fair representation of our collective allegiances, all rolled into one.

MRR: How does it feel to NOT have any ex members of ACRID, GRADE and NEW DAY RISING in the band?

Chris: It's kinda rough, you know, but you just try to take it day by day.

Katie: Gee, I never really thought about it. I guess it's just one of those things that I've always taken for granted!

Jaime: FUCKING GREAT, although we are quite guilty of the whole ex-member thing.

Stephe: Not that there's any shame in any of those bands or people, but your point is that to an outsider our scene could look pretty incestuous with everyone playing in everyone else's band...

Chris: And so begins the painful yet unavoidable ex-members-of hoo-wah...

Stephe: Katie was in WARFARE STATE when she lived in Ottawa and she has another band called RAMMER. Ryan use to play in MR. NOBODY and HOLOCRON and currently plays in the BLASTCAPS and TEEN CRUD COMBO, with Jaime. Chris originally played in a band from Hamilton called BASKET CASE, and more recently, LEFT FOR DEAD, the SWARM and now RUINATION. RJ was in IGNORANCE NEVER SETTLES and then AVARICE and is now in FUNERARY. Jaime started off playing in a band called THE SHUTTLECOCKS and then joined ANTI-FLAG and played with them for 2 years. And I use to sing for ONE BLOOD. So as a band we have a big past and there are lots of skeletons in our collective closet.

Ryan: I think it's great NOT to be a band that relies too heavily on the fact that we're all ex-members of some fucking ancient T.O. hardcore band that very few

people, especially American kids, even care about. But to answer your question... it feels great not to be a 'burb kid.

MRR: Tell me about the scene in Toronto now vs. a few years back?

Chris: Then: Everyone sitting on the floor, notoriously lifeless. Now: Shut up, fag. So and so is gay. So and so is a gay fag. Fags are gay. Shut up you queer gay fag. Mosh. It's that on one side and the upwardly mobile rock star glam shit on the other.

Jaime: Well, I was really into the whole 'don't wash, drink a lot, don't work', punk rock scene and it was pretty lame. That scene seems to have died down considerably in the last little while.

Ryan: It's incredibly different. I'm sure everyone in the band can attest to this - most of us play in at least one other band and the interesting thing is the absence of cross-over. It's rare to see COUNTDOWN fans at a BLASTCAPS show, at a TEEN CRUD COMBO show, whereas a few years ago, 1994 or 1995, these bands would be playing together. I don't know if it's because the scene is so large and split into little factions or what the fuck has gone on, but it is very segregated more so than it's been in the past.

MRR: What do you sing about from a lyrical standpoint?

Stephe: The first song we ever wrote was called "Up in Flames" and it's about all the backwater xenophobes who made our lives hell growing up. Chris wrote the song about growing up in Hamilton, but we can all relate to the experience. Growing up as a weirdo in small communities automatically makes you a target for losers who look for scapegoats to disguise their own inadequacies. Growing up with it leaves you with lasting impressions of the scapegoat experience.

"Spray P.E.C." is a song written about the Pepper Spray inquiry, which was called after the media caught the RCMP (the national police) hosing down protesters with fire extinguisher-type canisters of pepper spray. The demonstration was over Suharto's involvement in the A.P.E.C. summit that Canada hosted a couple of summers ago. People were just indignant that this dictator was being treated like a head of state.

A song we call "P.T.A." (aka "Poster Children for Family Values") was written about the way talk shows use punk rockers as a lesson for bad parenting, portraying guests as fuck ups, products of the disintegrating nuclear family-style upbringing. Most hardcore kids I know choose punk rock and they come from well adjusted families, and who the fuck has a "Leave it to Beaver" style family anyway? There is some dysfunctionality to every family I know of. All these talk shows seem to do the same episode on punk rock and the dolts who go on the show become propaganda for the family crusaders and an underlying "good Christian family role model"



theme. It reminds me of the way social workers or cops or just paternalistic figures in charge of fixing those problem children approach punks in this stereotypical manner, like we are the problem.

One of our more recent songs was written by Chris called "More Dead Kennedys". It's about class differences extending into the value of life attached to affluence, money and power, and the way we measure people's significance by their relation to fame or power, rather than by their actions or values (with the recent example of JFK Jr., another American pseudo martyr).

"Four Alarm Fire at Lockport Gambino Ford" was written for the "They Live" split, to poke fun at THEY LIVE and their hometown. If you tune into a Buffalo newscast, you would swear that the place is always on fire. Their local news is dominated by fire stories. There are so many odd and quirky things about Buffalo that were just waiting to be written about. Kids in Toronto and Buffalo will get the joke.

MRR: Talking of lyrics, do you folks want to say a few things about Who's Emma (local DIY record store/venue) since it is the topic of at least one of your songs that I know of?

Chris: It is? Who's Emma is a good thing to have around even if it's been the source of a lot of frustration and has maybe come to typify the useless pseudo-political squabbling that divides and redivides something that really needs all the help it can get. Even so, we have all had a lot of good times there. The best shows I ever saw there were DROP DEAD, VOORHEES, 9 SHOCKS TERROR and HIS HERO IS GONE. Bad PA, good times. Smells like balls but serves a good purpose.

Jaime: Ahhh, Who's Emo, oops I mean Who's Crusty, ooops did I say that out loud... It's a decent place for a show, if you can't find anywhere else. I don't really know all the politics, but I do know that a lot of stupid shit has gone down there.

"Members" having meetings about people. If you go there, watch what you say, someone might hear and form a committee about you and your foul mouth.

Stephe: We only wrote one song about the experience of armchair anarchism - "Take it Apart". The song is written out of frustration with volunteering at "Who's Emma". Who's Emma is a local anarchist run punk store that sells records and books and they do shows in their basement. Most of our band members have spent time volunteering at this D.I.Y. hardcore joint. The stagnant process of collective decision making frustrated the lot of us with endless amounts of debate that proceeded practical decision making. These frustrations were not unique to Who's Emma and are there for any new group that is trying to develop their infrastructure, but when debate proceeded day-to-day needs, you begin to question the place's priorities. "Take it Apart" refers to the fixation on analysis at the expense of reality's everyday needs.

MRR: What is your favorite song from a lyrical standpoint and why?

Chris: "Spray-P.E.C.", it comes across just like we intended it to, which doesn't always happen. Also "No Brainer" because it's fast and short and the double vocals work well on it.

Jaime: I like our "SPF GO!" song because it makes fun of stupid fests, and the stupid kids that find it necessary to go to those all the time. Hey, you better create a safe space for people... blah, blah, blah.

Stephe: The song is actually called "The Fest Sex I Never Had", and it is my favourite song too. The song is written specifically about how the good intentions of festivals never really translated into revolution thanks to the inexperience of activism by the participants. Instead you had matches of moral one upmanship that lead fest-goers in search of scapegoats within the scene. In a number of instances, scene kids became victims of

stigma attached to some serious allegations. These "outings" were pretty sketchy and only led to bad feelings between people instead of working to resolve structural issues. Fest politics has been effective at raising some issues, but the forum they get raised in and the manner in which they get addressed seems more about posturing and less about resolving things. You'd swear these kids were all SXE by the moral posturing that goes on.

Ryan: The song about the kids from Buffalo, "Four Alarm Fire At Lockport Gambino Ford". It's very well written especially the part where Chris and Stephe use the names of Buffalo bands in the lyrics, as lyrics, not names. Very clever and witty.

MRR: How do you describe yourselves to someone who has never heard you before?

Jaime: Someone told us that we sound like SLAYER mixed with BLACK FLAG.

Ryan: Something like a group of Canadian hardcore kids were in a van touring around the Greater Toronto Area listening to MINOR THREAT, HIS HERO IS GONE and SLAYER, at which point they were abducted by aliens and returned mistakenly to Sweden where DISMEMBER, IN FLAMES and AT THE GATES were now playing on the radio... I guess.

Katie: Like a heavier LIMP BIZKIT.

Chris: Deep Purple meets Piledriver.

MRR: Want to mention why you decided to tour Eastern Canada as oppose to going south of the border (USA) where the tour would have been a lot better from a financial and exposure point of view?

Jaime: I think we did Canada because it was easier, because we're all country proud!

Chris: Expose THIS!!! (cut to image of me brandishing my buttocks) The East Coast was like a more stressful version of a vacation than a tour. Hell, we played for 4 kids in a turnip warehouse and met some of the raddest people ever (i.e. Mark Black, Lionel Stanley and Co.). That's rea-

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son enough.

Katie: Canada is such a vast land which is largely ignored by touring bands. We thought it would be fun to make a trek that few ever will.

Stephe: I wanted to tour the Maritimes, because I had heard about how beautiful the east coast of Canada was. Bubby had also heard that the hardcore scenes were pretty responsive to shows and he had some contacts thanks to the BLASTCAPS and his HOLOCRON touring days. Despite no-one knowing us, our shows in Halifax, Saint John and Glace Bay were incredible. For months we tried to figure out how we were going to do it and then out of nowhere Eric from PHALLOCRACY told us about their old van being for sale so we bought it and things just seemed to fall in place. In P.E.I. we got to play a turnip warehouse at the last minute. Chris made a pentagram out of turnips. We were covered in red turnip dust for the rest of the tour. We basically treated the tour like a vacation and I totally recommend it. That way you won't feel let down about how broke you are, being an unknown band on your first tour. You should just go places that you want to see and treat it like time away.

Ryan: As far as why tour the east coast, no one does it. As far as it being less lucrative financially, I don't think that was the case at all. No money conversion, food is incredibly cheaper in Canada, gas was in Canadian money and no annoying border crossings. That's the fucking worst. As far as exposure is concerned there is a huge active scene there that no one seems to care about. We did pretty well. I assume we did as well as if we'd gone to the States. No one knows us there either, but with touring the East Coast we got to play in front of cool ass Canadian hardcore kids, on stages with awesome Canadian hardcore bands.

MRR: What are the band's plans/tours? Now I know how difficult it has been and will continue to be for you folks to go outside a 5 hours radius due to work responsibili-

ties, how does that affect the band's rational and financial situation?

Chris: No, we are not rational, you're right. Nor are we situationists. Very true, very true. It makes us irrational and financially unsituated. Yes. Good point.

Katie: I'm happy if we can all make it to a single practice.

Jaime: It sucks, we can barely get it together to play local shows because of everyone's schedules. Hopefully we can work something out. I would like to go away again. It was fun and there was lots of porn involved.

Stephe: The commitments that our band members carry are pretty crazy. I work full time, I do a weekly hardcore radio show, I write for MRR, FULL CONTACT, and T'AIN'T, and then there is COUNTDOWN. Everyone else in this band leads similar double lives, with second bands plus work and school commitments. Our work schedules are vastly different. There is only one time a week that we can get together as an entire band for practice and that is limited to a 2 hour timeslot. A tour requires some major schedule changes with our works and usually some starving after we get back, but we are all anxious to get on the road. Our inability to tour at whim or with some degree of flexibility has been a source of anxiety and frustration, but I think we have developed an understanding of our limits and are getting better at communicating them to people.

MRR: Best show memories you wanna share with us?

Katie: Pulling up to this club in Sherbrooke and accidentally backing into some sedan type car parked behind the slot we were trying to cram our fat ass van into. The opportunity for a hit and run definitely did present itself, only minutes later we were face in front of an entire sidewalk full of hardcore camera geek kids snapping away.

Chris: God damn Kids! They ruin everything!

Ryan: Jaime Towns at the HIS HERO IS GONE/CTO show, drunk out of her mind hording all the chaos, throwing beer bottles and hurling jugs of water onto expensive camera lenses.

Jaime: Playing to five people in a turnip warehouse in PEI and hanging out there for a couple of days. Oh yeah, and when we played with IRON MAIDEN and the SCORPIONS and they thought we rocked so hard that we release a triple live album together. That ruled!

Chris: Us going into a supermarket in Nova Scotia with RJ running around in a hockey mask and getting pulled over for it 1/2 an hour later like we were wanted criminals (cut to "Breakin' the Law"), and me in the RCMP cruiser getting hell for having 11 people crammed into Tammy (our slutty van with proper seating for 2. And driving straight from Halifax to Ottawa. Holy Christ. Bubby gets a boner in the van, like a dog. "Diesel Dick", he calls it. Good times. And lastly, when these crusty French kids in Sherbrooke, PQ - the same one's who'd asked Katie if she "liked to make the fuck before marriage" - told us, that "we trashed" and that (Jaime excepted) we "didn't look or sound like straight edge kids". I think that was the nicest thing anyone's ever said to me.

MRR: Any last words?

Chris: "hashiesh". Oh, and "titular".

Jaime: CTO is a cream dream supreme.

Katie: I think Bubby (Ryan) and Towns are still seeking inmate correspondence whereas I'd prefer photos of attractive Scandinavian boys.

Stephe: We have a bunch of comp. songs coming out soon on 625's "Barbaric Thrash Attack 2000 vol. one", one on "The Street Enters The House" (an all-Canadian, Bleeaarrgghh!-like comp by Fans of Bad Productions - which also has LEGION and THE SWARM), 2 songs on a benefit project called "Counter Culture" - to be released by Coalition Records (Holland), and one on the next Suburban Voice comp - which will be a benefit for a women's shelter. The split ep with THEY LIVE is available from Ugly Pop Records at 2 Bloor St.W., Ste. 100, Box 477/Toronto, ON / M4W 3E2 (or e-mail at bastardx@interlog.com), and the "Brain Surgery for Beginners" ep is available from Deranged Records contact Gord at P.O. Box 543 / Station P / Toronto, ON / M5S 2T1 or derangedyouth@hotmail.com. Anyone wanting to reach us directly can write Katie or Jaime at 2037 Dundas Street West / Toronto, ON / M6R 1W8 / Tel.: (416) 532-6082 or E-mail Jaime at meximullet2000@yahoo.com.

Ryan: Just big thanks to all the people who have helped us along and there are a lot but a quick few Patrick Scott, Bill Corbett, Paul Pfeiffer, Gord Dufresne and Simon Harvey. And fuck all Toronto promoters, I'd like to thank all of you for ruining the independent hardcore music scene in Toronto... and I mean ALL promoters. Thank you



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