

Not content to lump themselves in with the crowd, Marilyn's Vitamins brought social and political issues back to the attention of an apathetic scene and helped revitalize Toronto punks' once proud tradition of awareness and action. 1998 sees the band with a new album, a heavy tour schedule and a growing global fan-base of kids who are finding out how important messages can be communicated through amazing music.

The band stormed out of the Toronto scene in 1995 with their debut tape "Down and Out In Levittown", followed up by their signing with Raw Energy and the release of their debut full-length "In These Shoes" in 1996, the "Squeegee Girl" 7 inch in 1997 and their best so far, "Politics On The Dance Floor" in 1998.

Marilyn's Vitamins can be contacted through Raw Energy 65 Front Street West, Suite #0116-42 Toronto, ON Canada M5J 1E6 (416) 410-6749 or through the website at <http://rawenergy.passport.ca>. Bookings are handled by Shawn Forstner at Raw Energy Bookings. Call (416) 410-6749 or email rawbookings@sprint.ca.

This interview was done by Damien Abraham, street reporter for CIUT Radio's "Mods & Rockers" radio show. The Vitamins were represented by Colin Vitamin (vocals and principal lyricist) and Adam Puerile (bassist and song writer). Not present were Danny Complex (guitar), Dick Teenager (drums) and Jeff Obnoxious (guitar).

MRR: How did you get started as a band? Give us a basic history.

Colin: We formed just over three years ago last May. We were basically four guys who needed an outlet. Back then it was me, Jeff, Dick and a guy named Wooder on bass. Danny joined after 3 or 4 months and after about a year and half, just after "In These Shoes" came out, Adam took over on bass.

MRR: What got you into punk? What made you decide punk music is for me? As opposed to another style of music.

Colin: When I was a teenager I listened to a lot of hip hop and I couldn't relate to a lot of the violent and sexist imagery. I was wimpy kid and never really got into the macho aspect of

it. A friend of mine, actually our old bass player, loaned me a Dead Kennedy's tape. I could really relate to everything they were talking about. The song "Jock-o-Rama" was a milestone in my life because the town I grew up in was a complete hockey town and I was this artsy kid who couldn't skate and was used to getting picked on by jocks.

Adam: When I was 13, I hung out with some guys who listened to a lot of the alterna-crap of the time, as well as some hip hop. My friends' older brother was into punk and he loaned me a Bad Religion CD. It was "Recipe For Hate" and I totally got into everything they were saying and it turned me on to that over all this "alternative" crap.

MRR: Do you think the messages in your songs get through to the kids? Do kids ever come up to you after shows and say "you guys got me into punk rock"?

Adam: We've never had anything that extreme. We've had people come up and say "yeah, I totally agree with what you're saying, I really like what you're about." And we do our best to get our ideas across through lyrics and rants on stage.

MRR: Do you ever wonder if people really get what you're trying to say? Do you ever look into the crowd and see some guy acting like an asshole and singing along to your lyrics?

Adam: Well yeah, we do get massively inebriated guys beating people up during our set and then coming up to us after and saying "Yeah! That was great, that was so cool."

MRR: Does that ever get a little daunting?

Adam: It's funny in a way.

Colin: I found that when we released our first CD "In These Shoes" and the song "Tear It Down" was on it. Everyone assumed we were promoting mindless destruction. They didn't actually pay attention to the lyrics, the idea that if you're going to try to change society you should work towards creating a new environment rather than just destroying your surroundings. So when we're singing "what goes around fucks you around", and the whole crowd is shouting "Tear It Down!" a lot of the time I don't think people get what we're talking about. Because sometimes the guys who are singing along are the same ones kicking in the

urinals at the club we're playing in.

Adam: Or setting fire to the bathroom.

Colin: That hasn't really happened in Toronto - more in the suburban areas.

Adam: I think people in Toronto know more about what we're about because we've played more in the city. They've seen us live and heard us talk and rant. But in other towns where we've never been, kids may just have the CD and they may interpret the songs differently.

MRR: Is that why you have the explanations for the songs in the Squeegee Girl 7 inch? And are you going to do that on the new album?

Colin: On the 7 inch I just explained why I wrote each song but we're not doing that on the new album.

MRR: Why not?

Colin: I personally wanted them in, Adam didn't, he wanted it to be left open for interpretation.

Adam: Some of the songs I thought were very literal and pertained specifically to Canadian politics, specifically to Ontario and could have used some explanation, like "October Monday" being about Ontario's teachers strike. But other songs like "100 Bodies" and "Pension Watch", or "One More Scene" I thought were really too poetic and the interpretation would have been really dumbed down and shoved in your face if it was given a complete explanation.

MRR: But a song like "The Rapist In Me" from the 7 inch; just from the title could be misconstrued.

Adam: Yeah, but the lyrics totally explain...

MRR: But sometimes even after the lyrics are printed some kids don't get it. What if you weren't in a band? What would you be doing?

Colin: I'd probably be writing. It's my favorite aspect of the band. So I'd probably be doing something along those lines.

Adam: I'd probably be writing too, stories and stuff. Right now I'm pursuing animation as well.

Colin: I want to be in a band. It's what I want.

MRR: On a lyrics-to-music ratio how much do you allot to each? If you had a song with exceptional lyrics and awful music or the other way around...

Colin: We try to balance it out. We're motivated primarily by our message, what we want to talk about. We write about the theme and usually go from there as far as music goes. Sometimes we start with the music and work towards lyrics.

Adam: We've never really been in a position where we had lyrics or music that we thought were terrible because we constantly change things until we're happy with them.

MRR: You guys recently opened for Rancid. What was it like playing in front of an audience that wasn't really a punk rock audience?

Adam: I liked it but I didn't like it. There were a lot of commercial radio kids who weren't really into us, which is fine because we got to say what we wanted to another audience who had never been subjected to it before. But then again, there were big burly security guards with their arms crossed in front of the bands and a big steel fence to keep the audience back.

Colin: A lot of the guys screaming over the segways while we're talking about the vilification of people stricken by poverty.

Adam: Great big balls of id spewing beer at us.

MRR: What would you say the biggest problem facing the punk rock community is today?

Colin: Probably this tough guy image that's coming back. Guys throwing fists in the pit.

Adam: The whole big dick bravado in punk rock.

Colin: It's great to be a "man". And the fact that people aren't singing about anything anymore. The whole point of our album "Politics On The Dance Floor" is that punk rock should be about something. Not everyone has to be in a political band singing political songs. If it's not from your heart, if all you can come up with is another song about beer or your girlfriend leaving you, then you might as well be singing over a dance beat.

MRR: Do you think you've turned away any people because of your politics?

Adam: There seems to be this backlash against this whole "P.C." political idea. There seems to be an uprising of bands going "fuck off, why are you being so serious all the time?" Stupid bands singing about stupid stuff, saying "we're not serious, we don't have to be, it's punk rock, it's supposed to be fun, you're not supposed to be serious."

Colin: And because we take stances in our music and when playing we get lumped into this category of being a band that doesn't have

any fun. We'll hang out with bands after shows and they'll be shocked if any of us drinks a beer or smokes a joint. And all these people are afraid to talk around us because they think we'll be these P.C. tyrants following them around yelling "Did you say bitch? Did you say fag?" Personally, I wouldn't talk like that but I can't tell other people how to talk and I wouldn't.

Adam: That's part of our whole stance. Sure we don't do that but we're not going to condemn you for doing it. We've got our own ideas and shoving them in your face is not what we're about.

MRR: Do you think it's the bands duty to make sure people don't dance too hard in the pit?

Adam: Not a duty.

Colin: We ask people not to stage dive and crowd surf when we play. The only reason why I'm like that is because I've been in the audi-

Colin: For me personally, I like the idea that a punk rock show is a place where people can go to communicate and as a person in a band I don't want to feel separated from the audience. I like the intimacy of shows where we can pay attention and see what's going on in the pit. And if someone is getting hurt or if someone is being an asshole we can say "hey, calm down."

MRR: That's kinda changed. I can remember seeing you guys two years ago and you came right off the stage and grabbed the back of my head and started singing the lyrics right in my face. Not so aggressive, but certainly intimidating.

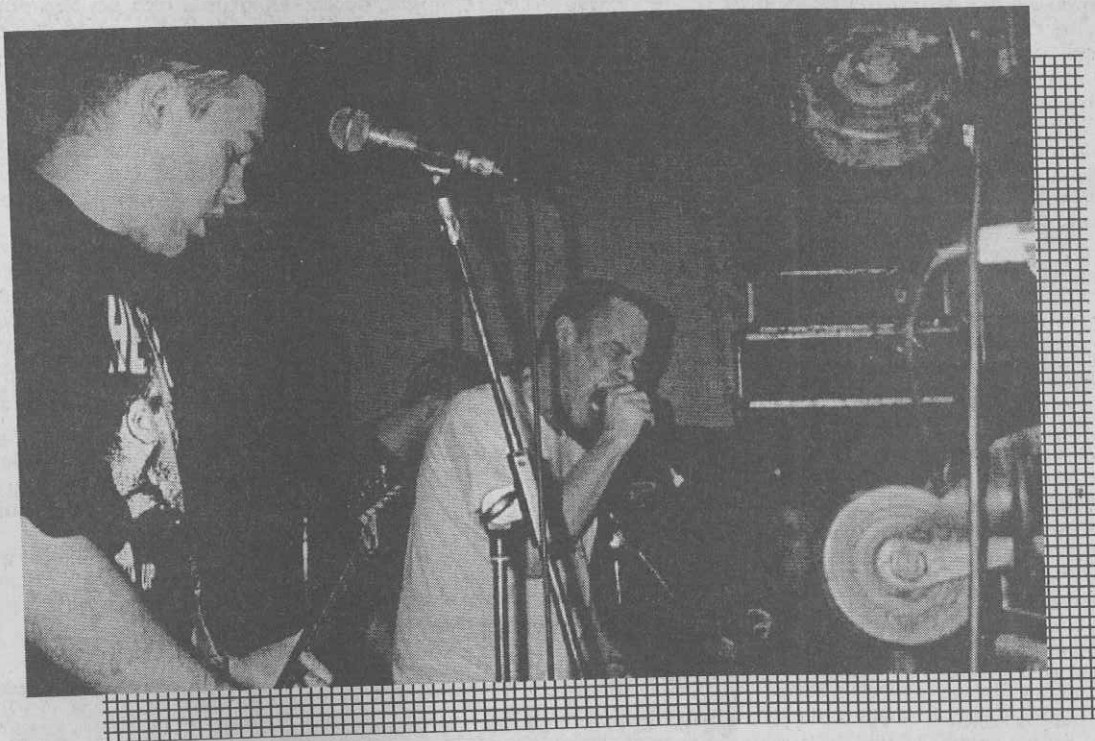
Colin: I didn't do it violently. I still come up to people and sing in their faces.

MRR: But I was standing way at the back.

Adam: It was a pretty aggressive show.

Colin: Yeah, but I don't try to hurt anyone. ever. I remember a show where a guy was running around elbowing people and I grabbed him and told him to relax.

Adam: I remember a show last year at the El Mocambo. It was a wicked show - everyone was going nuts but there was this one kid who kept diving off the stage and after the song we asked, specifically to this guy to please stop but he kept



ence before and gotten kicked and punched. I remember being at a Citizen Fish show and I was well off to the side with my girlfriend pogoing up a down, no touching anyone, in nobody's way and there was this big pit and guys were coming out of it specifically to run into me and other people and I hate that. I hate being at a show and being afraid. So when we're playing I don't want to create an environment like that, where people are afraid to be at the front of the stage or are afraid that someone is going to land on them. We ask people to respect other people.

Adam: That jock mentality comes up again.

Colin: I don't want to get into a debate about what punk is, but I don't think punk is disrespecting people - especially other punks at a show.

MRR: Just a last note on this subject. Do you think it's also the responsibility of the person in the pit?

Adam: I don't think it's an issue of responsibility. It would be cooler if people were to just say "yes, I understand that we're all here to have a good time. Why do we want to beat each other up?"

doing it again and again and again. So finally he goes on the stage one more time and Colin gets him in a headlock and starts running around the stage singing away mid-song with this kid in a light, playful headlock. The kid was smiling and just loving it but Colin was trying to get the point across for him to stay still for a minute. Colin lets him go and the kid jumps off the stage again.

Colin: Actually we catch a lot of heat for asking people not to stage dive. Guys are always saying "It's part of the scene". The problem is that the majority of people jumping off the stage are larger than the people they land on.

MRR: Do you think you've turned people away with your stance on stage diving?

Colin: Oh yeah.

Adam: I know we have.

Colin: As I said, some people tell me it's part of the scene and that we're ruining punk rock. But all we're saying is dancing should be fun and liberating - not something that makes people fear for their safety. It's not like we're telling people not to dance, we encourage it.

MRR: Is it hard being the only political band on Raw Energy? And in Toronto as well?

Colin: I don't think we're the only political band on the label, we're just the ones that the most vocal about political issues.



Adam: Well I definitely don't think we're the only political band in Toronto.

MRR: As far as bands go in Toronto, there are very few who talk the talk and walk the walk. And you guys seem to be one of the few torch bearers left. A lot of bands will talk a big game and not live up to it and while others will not talk about it and actually be very down-to-earth people and politically aware. You guys seem to be the only two guys that do both.

Colin: Well, we're just trying... well, I don't want to sound like a cliché, but we try to be true to ourselves in our songs. What we write about and what we say on stage is what we really feel.

Adam: We're not trying to set a standard for anyone else's action. If it comes across as us being these great torch bearers, it's completely coincidental. We never tried to put across some big important image. But if a song we've written has happened to make someone think twice about something, then that's our job done.

MRR: This sort of question sums up most of the questions thus far: what keeps you going, when you see people not understanding what you're talking about and seeing people getting into fights at shows? What makes you think "we're going to keep writing songs and maybe one day we'll get through?"

Adam: The one kid who says he or she does.

Colin: A lot of it for me, when I'm writing, is a personal thing. I'm venting my frustrations. A lot of our new material is very political but very personalized. Issues like economics; what little money we make outside of being in a band as well as what we make as a band, and how it's assumed we make a lot.

Adam: The idea of wage as a symbol of status, we touch on that. As well as a lot of stuff about the scene. I think because after the last album we were thrust into the spotlight.

MRR: Is that what 100 Bodies is about?

Unless I misinterpreted it grossly.

Adam: No, no, you're right. 100 Bodies I wrote about the show when I was talking to a bunch of people afterwards and they were saying "great show, blah, blah, blah, but all these fucking new kids showed up, they don't even know what it's about, they just got here." And my whole idea was that you can't say who has a right to be there and who doesn't. Very few people are going to find something and stick to it through their whole lives and it's my hope that whoever comes into punk rock, for however long, when they move onto something else they'll take something from it. They'll take some aspect of these punk ideals and apply it to something else and that's more than you could ever ask for. There's no way you could ever say anyone has more right than anyone else to be there. That's why I wrote 100 Bodies.

MRR: Outside of music, what are some of your influences?

Colin: George Orwell specifically 1984 and Animal Farm. Lately the works of a comic artist named Evan Dorkin, he makes a lot of jokes about the punk and ska scenes and I can relate to a lot of them. The work of another comic artist named Ted McKeever as well. He credits a lot of distorted images, men in suits and ties that look like the life has been sucked from them.

Adam: I like a lot of small press comics as well. I'm totally into Evan Dorkin. He has a lot of bitter, un-remitting social commentary filled with tongue-in-cheek humour. Books as well, some Goldman, Meltzer and Chomsky. Also art, paintings by Goyd and the expressionists and impressionists as well. And some Voltaire thrown in for fun, or credibility. (All laugh)

MRR: Are you guys a straight edge band? You've mentioned

you have problems with drunk guys at shows.

Colin: Not just drunk guys at shows, just macho assholes in general. We're not opposed to people getting drunk. In the band there are guys who don't drink or do drugs and guys who do and some who do it to excess. And the thing we try to put forth in our music and in our music and in our lives is that there is room for every different kind of lifestyle. I don't eat meat or drink milk but Jeff does. I think he's wrong and he may think I am as well but we can still co-exist. We try to bring that idea into our music. But then again there's rumors all around Toronto that we're all straight-edge vegans.

MRR: Last summer the van broke down, this winter your tour of Quebec was canceled when an ice storm hit. Do you think you guys have some bad luck when it comes to going out on the road?

Colin: I think every band has bad luck when it comes to touring. Lots of bands have horror stories about being pulled over by cops, and having to pour their beer out. That would suck!

Adam: I think with every bad experience we've had at least one good one.

Colin: And we've murdered more celebrities

than any band ever. Almost every time we go out of town a celebrity dies. We went to Michigan and the lead singer of INXS killed himself. We went to Ottawa and the Notorious B.I.G. got killed. When we went on tour for 7 days, we killed three of them.

Adam: Jimmy Stewart, Robert Mitchum and

Jacques Cousteau. It was a great moment especially for Robert Mitchum who was always trying to be the patriotic tough guy.

MRR: Who are you looking forward to killing this year?

Adam: Prominent members of the religious right.

Colin: Ted Nugent.

