

# BANNED FROM MAXIMUM ROCKNROLL!

I'M NOT ONE TO HAVE FAVORITES JUST FOR THE SAKE OF HAVING FAVORITES. I DON'T HAVE A FAVORITE MOVIE OR BOOK. WHEN IT COMES TO BANDS, HOWEVER, NOMEANSNO SIMPLY LEAVE ME WITHOUT A CHOICE IN THE MATTER. MUSICALLY THEY ARE IN AN ELITE CLASS. LYRICALLY THEY ARE IN THEIR OWN CLASS. WHILE MOST BANDS HIT AND PASS THEIR PEAKS WITHIN A FEW YEARS, NMN KEEP GETTING BETTER THROUGH DECADES. AND THEY'RE EVEN BETTER LIVE THAN ON CD. THEY'RE JUST BETTER.

FOR THE UNFORTUNATE UNFAMILIAR, NMN PLAY PUNK WITH A STRONG JAZZ INFLUENCE, AND DASHES OF OTHER GENRES. THE LYRICS EXPLORE AMBIGUITY, DOUBT AND NOTHINGNESS IN A VARIETY OF CONTEXTS; STIMULATING RATHER THAN SERMONIZING. LIKE ALL GREAT BANDS, NMN HAVE A DISTINCTIVE SOUND, BUT IN A PINCH THEY MIGHT BE DESCRIBED AS A LYRICALLY DRIVEN, PUNK VERSION OF RUSH, WITH VOCALS AT THE OPPOSITE END OF THE PITCH SPECTRUM.

WITH THE FRATERNAL RHYTHM SECTION OF ROB AND JOHN WRIGHT AS ITS FOUNDATION (AND INITIALLY ITS ONLY MEMBERS), NMN HAVE BEEN RELEASING ALBUMS SINCE THE EARLY EIGHTIES. FOR THE PAST SEVERAL ALBUMS TOM HOLLISTON HAS QUITE ABLY HANDLED GUITAR AND BACKUP VOCALS. THE BAND ALSO HAS AN ALTER EGO, THE HANSON BROTHERS, WHO ESSENTIALLY PLAY ORIGINAL RAMONES SONGS. AFTER A SHOW AT CHICAGO'S FIRESIDE BOWL (IT REALLY IS A BOWLING ALLEY) I HAD A CHANCE TO GET JOHN'S THOUGHTS ON PUNK, PUCK, AND POLITICS.

**MRR:** I've seen that shirt before (John is wearing a shirt that says "Banned from MaximumRocknRoll"), and I was wondering what the story behind it is.

**John:** Yeah. That was some fight that Tim Yohannon and Jello Biafra had when Tim decided to refuse Biafra and Alternative Tentacles any sort of print in the magazine. I guess we weren't punk enough anymore.

**MRR:** I asked the people who are running MRR now if the interview was OK, 'cause I had seen the shirt, and I knew there was some shit between MRR and AT, but they don't really know about it now.

**John:** Yeah, it was Tim really.

**MRR:** But they did ask me if you were still punk enough.

**John:** (laughs) I don't think so.

**MRR:** I lied and said you were.

**John:** Well that's the thing, I mean, what's the difference between that and Spin magazine refusing to write up young local bands, or alternative music? It's the spirit, it's the spirit of exclusion and that sucks in all forms. For me though, I don't really care about whether any magazine wants to write about us or not. It's up to them. But, I just thought it was silly, the reasons. I can understand, "we just want to make money, so we're gonna write about bands that'll make us money." That's simple; straight to the point. But not something about, "well, your style of music isn't punk enough." I suppose they want to write about a certain scene and what not, but it's just kind of crazy. We've never been any kind of band, you know our style is just sort of all over the place, but it was definitely the punk rockers and the alternative music scene that was our milieu and what we grew up in. And we've remained completely independent, for our entire existence really. You know, to an extent. We still need people to work for us. AT has always been—you know, for all of Jello's foibles, he has a clear idea of what he wants with his label, and he sticks to it. And for better or worse—I don't always agree with him—but he pretty much sticks to what he says and we've had a good relationship with him over the years. It's been a very pleasant



# NOMEANSNO

and friendly relationship, so we have no complaints. The business between AT and MaximumRocknRoll really has nothing to do with us at all.

**MRR:** I have another T-shirt question for you. Can you explain the no yin and yang shirts?

**John:** Oh yeah, the nothing. That's basically the symbol for nothing. The yin yang representing all, or everything, and just putting a slash through it.

**MRR:** Yeah. I got one on the last tour, and I've never had so many questions about a T-shirt.

**John:** Yeah, it's not a statement, really. It's just a design. Robby sort of talks about nothingness quite a bit in the music, and that symbol, that's what he thought would be a great way of expressing that idea. No everything. You know, like I say, it was just more or less that we wanted a catchy design. We'd done a lot of pictures in the past and we wanted something simple that wasn't a picture of anything, just a design. And the red slash is very bold...

**MRR:** And it's got a punk tradition too, like the no swastikas and the no crosses.

**John:** Well, everyone just immediately looks at it like, "no what?" We're conditioned to respond to that symbol. So we thought it would be an interesting symbol. It gets people talking, like, "What? What's this all about?" My wife was accosted on the street by a guy—luckily they guy was in a passing bus because she thought the guy was gonna punch her or something—but he was yelling out the window "Fuck you! Fuck! Whaddaya, fuck the fucking Taoist man? Ya mock em? Yayaya." You know, he was completely upset. He

thought it was ant-Taoist or something.

**MRR: Yeah some people really do flip out over it like, "What? No balance? No harmony?"**

John: Exactly. No balance, no harmony. No black and white.

**MRR: I wanted to ask about your lyrical influences. They seem to mostly be literary.**

John: Well, Robby definitely writes almost all the text. And he's always been in to philosophy and reads a lot. He also writes prose as well as lyrics. He's just a writer. And he's grown up quite a bit. You can tell, his lyrics have changed quite a bit over the past twenty years.

**MRR: If somebody wanted to read his prose, is there any way they could access it?**

John: Not at the moment, no. He has apparently finished a book, a novel. Not a really long one I don't think, but whether he lets anyone read it is another question. He might. You never know. Maybe he'll post it on the internet or something.

**MRR: So from what I've read, you guys are a bit less involved with the band, compared to how you used to be.**

John: Well, what do you mean by less involved?

**MRR: Well, it seems like you're touring less.**

John: A little bit less, yeah. I've got two boys at home, so it's not easy to take long periods of time away from home. But this is how we make our living. This band is how we survive. And we tour pretty extensively when the new CD comes out. We do quite a number of tours, and then it peters off and we take some time off. We've always done that though. In the '80s we were touring like mad, we were young and we didn't have a name and we just played, played, played. But since then we've always made sure that we could step back from the music. You know, you need a life outside of music. You don't have anything to write about, unless you're at home and just living your life, living a life like anyone else. You've gotta have some perspective. So, it's good to get away from music so you don't burn yourself out. So many great bands just burn themselves out and end up exploding, breaking up. So we've been careful not to work ourselves to the bone, but it's still a pretty full time thing. You're always at least thinking about what's going on, and writing music takes a lot of time too. You know, the work you do is not just on the road, there's practicing and writing and whatnot. But, yeah, we definitely try to step back from the band whenever we can. For me, when we go home I'm inundated

with kids and family and all that goes with that.

**MRR: What about the Hanson Brothers? Are they still active?**

John: Well, they made an appearance in April. We played five shows out west, just around Vancouver and Seattle and they went



**ROB WRIGHT BASS**



**JOHN WRIGHT DRUMS**



**UN-NOTICED GUITAR**

NOMEANSNO IN 1990

very well. We have written a few new songs, but we haven't really gone at it too seriously, because we've been quite busy with Nomeansno. As well as, Tommy and I have a band, his band that he's had for years. The Show Business Giants. We spent a long time working on the last CD we put out and did a

tour over in Europe, so that took up a bunch of time as well. And that a pet project too. Most people don't know anything about it, but there are a few fans out there. But, we've never played in the States before, except for one or two shows in Portland. We have been over to Europe a couple of times. It's fun to do that, but that's really a vanity project because there's no money involved in that at all. It's great music and it's great fun to play, so I try to make time for that as well.

**MRR: I've heard that Nomeansno is really well known in Europe.**

John: Yeah, Europe, Germany really, is the breadbasket for this band. Generally the shows are bigger, but we still play some small shows over there, like in England and up in Scandinavia. But, yeah, generally we're a little more well known. Not famous, but what do call it? A little bit more of a known reputation and our name gets kicked around a lot. It does in the States too, in a certain scene, but over there even the mainstream knows a little bit about us. We get written up in some of the main papers over there. But they tend to be also a little more music-oriented in Europe. You know, even the major papers will write about weird shit, just cuz people are interested in it. They're a little more open about it. Here it tends to be quite cliquy. Certain papers write about certain things. Especially the major papers, it's all business. You buy your interviews, you buy your articles, it's all payola pretty much. But in Europe, they're like that. There's really cheesy commercial stuff, but you also find more of a crossover.

**MRR: Oh yeah. I wanted to know, as an outsider, what you think about how we elect our president (Needless to say, this was during the middle of the Florida fiasco).**

John: What a kafuffle, eh? [this is the most Canadian thing I've ever heard anyone say] Jumpin' Jesus. Well Al Gore, he must be the... I personally don't think Al Gore is going to win. I think Bush is going to be elected. But Al Gore man, talk about the most depressing end to one's career. You get the most votes, and you don't get to be president (laughs). (In a whiny voice) "But they voted for me!" But as far as Canadians are concerned, it doesn't really make much difference. Actually, as far as businessmen are concerned, Bush is the better of the two because Bush will be more pro-trade and Canada's always like, "uuhhuhuh, don't close your borders," and Gore is more backed by protectionists and whatnot, which might make it more difficult. For people like us! They keep making it so fucking difficult for us to come down here. And it's fucking



Democrats that make it difficult. They're the ones closing the borders. Yeah, the Republicans are very anti-immigration, anti-Mexican and all that stuff. But it's the Democrats are the ones who are like, "they're taking our jobs."

**MRR: Yeah, I remember going to see the Hansons in Petaluma and the show was canceled because of immigration problems.**

John: Yeah. We missed the first five shows that tour waiting for our paperwork, cuz it has to be done like thirty-five days in advance. We have to have signed contracts thirty-five days in advance. A lot of clubs now know when they're booking Canadian bands, they know now that—ugh. But a lot of them have no idea: "what do you mean you need a contact in advance?" Most places don't even have their calendar filled thirty-five days in advance. So, sometimes it is a real pain in the ass for a booker to get these contracts, explaining to people that if we don't have them, we can't come in. And then what happened with that, in particular is that our paperwork got shuffled off to Buffalo somewhere and got delayed two weeks. And we're like, "can't you rush them through, push them through?" and they're like, "nope, they'll get through when they get through." And they go through five days late, so we're sitting in Vancouver watching, there goes one show, there goes another show, waiting for the fucking papers. It's totally stupid.

**MRR: So you guys talked a lot about hockey tonight, for a punk show. And with the Hansons and everything, I was wondering how much you guys are really into hockey.**

John: Well, My life doesn't revolve around hockey, but it's the national sport in Canada. I love the game, I love watching the game, I love playing the game. But I'm not a sports freak, in any sense. But yeah, I watch hockey. Actually Tommy, our guitar player, he used to be a real hockey nut but he's kind of not anymore since Gary Bettman's been the head of the league. He's kind of ruined the game a little bit.

**MRR: You guys liked having the fights in there, or what?**

John: Well, not so much that, it's just too many teams and just expanding for the money and commercializing the game. I mean, that's also the players, the salaries. That's in all sports. It used to be that players were people just like you and I, playing the game. And now it's like, well I don't give a shit about some fucking multi-millionaire, some spoiled millionaire jock. So, you lose that personal involvement with the sport because it's so mercenary now.

STEFAN DE WOLF



NOMEANSNO TODAY

STEFAN DE WOLF



MILES DAVIS

**MRR: Do you think it's also losing its Canadian identity a bit?**

John: Oh yeah. The league isn't Canadian anymore. It never really was, except that almost all the players were Canadian. And that's long since gone. Canadians make up, I think it's less than half now. People still watch it because they love the sport, and they love to watch the sport. I think people get more and more... they're not as personally involved with the team and the players as much as they used to be, I don't think. I think that's true in baseball too, and in basketball. It's just hard to care about millionaires. Especially when they're idiots.

**MRR: I liked the songs off the new album (No One). I haven't heard it 'cause I ordered it of the internet and they sent it to my old house. Anyway, could you talk about the new album a bit, maybe where it fits in with your other work?**

John: Well, it's defiantly kind of a darker album. It kind of hearkens back to *Mr. Happy*. It's a little more simplified. Long songs, a little more like stories. It's not a wham bam punk rock album. It just kind of has a tone. I really enjoy it though. The first two songs, "The Graveyard Shift" and "Under the Sea," are sort of wham bang, and then it starts drifting into a little bit darker territory. I don't know how to describe it, the songs are little bit slow in building themselves up and developing. I really like "Our Town." We played it live before it was on the record and it was a bit hard for the audience to take because it goes on and on and its all really the lyrics. Now that the albums been out I'm curious to see if it goes over live, since people have had a chance to hear it.

**MRR: Well, "The World Wasn't Built in a Day," is kind of like that, and it seemed to go over pretty well live.**

John: Yeah. It's a little more like that song in a way. The whole album is. Especially "Bitches Brew." We do a Miles Davis cover. Robby took that song sort of spared it down, simplified the music, shortened it, took all the soloing out, and wrote text over the whole thing. It's about sixteen minutes long, but it's just a long story. Kind of like "The World Wasn't Built in a Day" in a way. And it's really interesting, but it's the kind of song you listen to by yourself, with the headphones or something. It's a real listening song. The album I think is more of a 'sit down and listen to it' album, not so much a 'rock out to it' album.

**MRR: Well, I'll look forward to getting it—eventually.**

John: Excellent.