



RETRO FETISH

DEVO

BASSIST JERRY CASALE TAKES US BACK TO DEVO ISLAND

by Virginia Pelley

In the early '70s Allman Brothers era of arena rock and hippie hair, there were a few artists whose music shared the spotlight with the postmodern concepts behind it. There were the New York Dolls, Brian Eno, and Devo.

Acclaimed by *Rolling Stone* as innovators while simultaneously derided as "fascists," few would argue that Devo wasn't ahead of its time; computer music and electronic drumming didn't exist pre-Devo. Although the band boasts a loyal fan base and did a summer 2005 tour, bass player Gerald Casale, who founded Devo with Mark Mothersbaugh in 1972, maintains that the group was never a commercial success and was in fact the most misunderstood band of the period.

"Devo was like the Rodney Dangerfield of new wave," Casale says. "You have to remember we were criticized by the old rocknroll establishment for being mamby pamby, pop assholes who were prostituting themselves with merchandising."

Casale spoke to *Venus* about Devo's missed message, their new DVD, *Devo Live 1980*, and his latest project, *Devo 2.0*, in which Casale conceptualized, selected, and directed a Devo cover band of 10- to 12-year-olds for Disney.

Little kids are going to sing subversive Devo songs?
You said subversive, I didn't! It's going to be interstitial entertainment on Disney channels, and it's going to be offered on a full-length DVD.

What did you think of MTV back then? "Whip It" was a big thing for them, wasn't it?

John Sykes and Les Garland [of MTV] took us to

lunch in West L.A. and pitched this brilliant thing they had, because they knew that we had five videos in the can, and they said, "Look, we can't pay you guys, man. [But] everybody's going to see you. That's priceless." We so believed in the vision we created ... we thought music videos were the future. And when they came to us, they were only broadcasting in three cities. They showed them over and over until they got a national franchise. And within six months, they wouldn't show us, because radio was driving the show. So the only videos they started to show were radio hits. They only put "Whip It" on because it was in the top 10.

"Video Killed the Radio Star" ... they played endlessly. Which wasn't true. Video didn't kill the radio star. I wish it would've. [Video] was a failure, a fantastic art form that became an ancillary commercial for top-40 radio.

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In the intro to the DVD, "The Complete Truth About De-Evolution," you state that the current administration makes the Reagan era look like a ray of sunshine.

Absolutely. The degree of horror that we live in every day that people just accept. Most people are *not* analytical, not rational, and not very aggressive. They're cattle. We're in a corporate feudal state, run by a moron.

You never thought that deevolution would come true?

Not like this. No. The meek did not inherit the earth;

they inherited turds. [Deevolution] was an idea we never wanted to come true, and we never thought it would come true.

I remember reading interviews with Bob Dylan and interviewers would say, "But all these people are misinterpreting your lyrics," and he'd say, "I'm so glad they do, 'cause if they didn't, they'd hate me." The kids loved us, [but] they didn't understand the irony.

Was Devo contemptuous of its audience?

It started off that [way] because of the time we grew up in, and then our audiences were coming to see us on purpose rather than us kind of invading audiences, so we sort of had a change of heart — like, shit, these people really like us. So we ended up identifying with our audience. Booji Boy used to come out on this kind of extended version of "Beautiful World" and talk about "Devo World," and he'd talk about all the horrible people and the ass-

holes, and we'll all go to Devo island together and be rid of the assholes, get rid of the normal people in the world, and the whole crowd — they felt so disenfranchised for whatever reason. Our audience identifies with being the outcasts, people who have been hurt, not respected, people who have been fucked over or not understood. When Booji Boy would say, "Someday after we leave Devo island, we'll come back and 'kill all the normal people!'" the whole crowd would go more nuts than they had all night, they'd scream. It was like *Island of Lost Souls*."