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## Interview with Blag Dahlia of The Dwarves by Janelle Jones

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Interview with vocalist Blag Dahlia  
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## DWARVES

Interview with vocalist Blag Dahlia

By Janelle Jones

Discussing just part of the allure of the DWARVES latest record, *The Dwarves Are Born Again*, I mention to Blag Dahlia how, even at 18 songs (which may on the surface seem like a lengthy, prolonged album to some people) it's fast-moving and keeps your attention. The frontman explains, "Exactly, Janelle. You've hit the nail on the head. That's what we're shooting for: I'm making a record that people with a modern attention span can put on and actually enjoy, whereas most people are making records where you might like a song or two on it- and that's really the difference." Read on for more about the band who are celebrating their 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary, their crazy good new album and what the impetus behind creating it was.

**The last time I talked to you was when the last album came out in 2004...**

Wow, you were only like 12 years old at that point.

**No, 24, but since that time, what have you been up to? What else do you do besides this?**

There's a lot of sodomy, trying to keep the sodomy going, rampant drug abuse, I like to watch television shake my fist and swear a lot. Sometimes I tell kids to get off my lawn...

**[Laughter] Come on, seriously...**

Basically, after *Dwarves Must Die* came out it kinda gave a little renaissance to the band and we spent a good part of three years on the road after that. We went to Europe four times and we finally sorta broke through over there, started playing festivals and stuff like that, and we toured the States several times. There was a lot of touring on that record. The other thing that happened was, we started getting a lot of music in these MTV reality shows like *Viva La Bam* and shit like that, doing a little soundtrack stuff here and there. And there's big projects- I made a record called *Candy Now!* which was very different than the DWARVES. Sort of the same way *Dwarves Must Die* went through all the different punk styles and hard styles, this *Candy Now!* went through all the American retro styles, so we would do like a kind of '70s pop tune and then a duet and then a female torch song and I did it with a really great East Bay band called PERSEPHONES BEES. The guitar player, Tom Ayres, pretty much played all the instruments and the female singer, Angelina, dueted with me. So that was a departure for me. I kinda got sick of- after making [*Dwarves Must Die*] and being on the road so long it was like, fuck, let's just do something totally different. Once that was done and I realized nobody gave a shit, I had to go back and make another DWARVES record. So I spent the last two years trying to do that. It was a lot of recording, a lot of fucking around and a lot of touring.

**Promos nowadays, you don't really get CDs with artwork, only MP3s and stuff, so, who's even playing on this new record? I have no idea.**

That's the other interesting thing about this record, the big thing here is it's the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the DWARVES, which is kind of a cool thing, and we just came out with a big handout- you wouldn't have gotten it yet 'cause we just were doing it with the publicity guys, but it was "25 Things You Don't Know About The Dwarves" because I realize the band has been through so much and so many different kind of things and a lot of people will only know one side of it, like they'll only know the punk-rock side of it or the DIY side of it and they don't know that we had a top-10 producer produce our last four records. Or it'll be people who, "I know you because I know this band or that band" or something. We're just a band with a lot of different sides to it. There's the sort of no manager, DIY, punk side of it and then there's the super-produced, good musician session guys side of it and there's the arty, experimental side of it. So there's just a bunch of funny shit in [the "25 Things..."] and it tells you so much about the history of the band.

**Yeah, I love hearing that, how I know you started out as SUBURBAN NIGHTMARE and I have that first record, the garage-y stuff. But you've been through a lot of changes.**

That's the other thing, just speaking of things people don't understand about the band is we're one of the original modern garage bands. We were like a '60s-ish group. It took a very long time for that to become a popular thing. And by the time it did, we had become very established as a supposedly hardcore band or a punk band. To us, we were always a rock 'n' roll band. And that's a big surprise to people who are on the garage wavelength. We were there, man, that's where we started and we're still there. One of the things that's cool about this record, you were asking who plays on it, it's everybody. It even goes back to the original guys from the garage days, guys like Salt Peter and Vadge Moore...

**How'd you get this to happen?**

One thing I'm glad about is we've managed to stay friends with pretty much everybody who was in the band. There's a lot of bands who go through one good period and then that falls apart and then they stay around, spend the next 20 years repeating themselves like SOCIAL D. We always changed and got different people in and most of them remained friendly with the band, with the posse. So not only do we have me and HeWhoCannotBeNamed as the original guys we also have the original garage guys like Salt Peter who I went to high school with who's really great, who does cartoon themes for *SpongeBob* now and shit like that. Then there's guys from the real hardcore days, the *Blood Guts & Pussy* days, like Vadge Moore and guys like that and then there's guys from the pop-punk days, Spike from ME FIRST AND THE GIMME GIMMES and the guys who were around when we did *YOUNG AND GOOD LOOKING*, which was the record that put us on the map in California because it was on Epitaph and it was a very pop-punk record at the right time. So it's just everybody's on here- Nick from KYUSS. It's people from the whole history of the DWARVES, so you get a record that sounds like the whole history of the DWARVES. There's deep garage and surf kinda tunes and the blazing hardcore and there's long-hair rock 'n' roll shit from that period, so it's very across the map.

**Yeah, the whole "born again" theme, I wasn't sure if it was because the last record, *Dwarves Must Die*, which I didn't know if that was your swan song, but then it could even be what you're saying about having all these other guys being a part of it, some who have been out of the band for a while.**

Yeah and it's sort of the DWARVES as posse, the DWARVES as WU-TANG CLAN. What happens when everybody that was ever in the band gets together and fucks around?

**I love the last song ["The Band That Wouldn't Die"] when you just namedrop everyone.**

[Laughter] Well, there's shit like that. So have you heard the whole new record?

**Yes! I got the MP3s so I don't have any artwork, but I think I can guess what it's going to be...!**

That is cool, although I got back at them and said, hey man, you gotta do this again because they did the real low-quality MP3s, the 128 ones, and you really gotta do it at 192 or it sounds pretty shitty, so the fact that you still liked it at 128 means the record sounds pretty fucking good.

**Just from the last record, you guys were all over the place. Hip-hop even. This one I know you were saying was all-encompassing and surf and rock, but it's a little more...punk.**

The return to punk, yeah. We had to do that too because I heard from the fans. Some people got mad about the hip-hop or industrial shit. You know me, to me, that's the funny part: we were never about being predictable or doing exactly what you thought we were gonna do. That's the other thing about *The Dwarves Are Born Again*, I wanted to signal the people okay if you just like the punk-rock DWARVES, you're going to like this record better than the last one because it's more like the old punk-rock DWARVES. But, still, there's variations and those crazy things. That's what always makes me laugh because you just can't compare the DWARVES to other bands because what happens with other bands is they'll have some other style that sounds hard and heavy and then they'll sorta progress and get mellower and mellower and then people say these guys aren't as good as they used to be. But with the DWARVES, we had our hardcore sound, and now we have an even nastier, faster, harder hardcore sound. So you can't really say it mellowed out. But then on the same record, we'll have an unashamed pop song with big harmonies, I'll get Dexter Holland to sing on it, Mike from ME FIRST and all these guys so it sounds very pop and people think, "Wait a minute, these guys have gone pop!" And then the next song is some extreme form of hardcore or death metal, where you're like, "Wait a minute, is it really fair to say these guys have gone anything?" It's more like we just do all the different styles. That's kinda what I'm shooting for 'cause to me, people don't listen to entire records anymore; they're much more inclined to just put it on random or listen to Pandora. I try to make a record that's like Pandora on its own, all these different styles so you don't get bored with it.

**People don't have the attention span anymore...**

Well, I think you have to earn it, and I think that's what *Dwarves Must Die* was hinting at, and what I think we achieved with that record was that it was for the new low attention span people. It changes every 30, 40 seconds. And that was the deal. Okay, people don't like to listen to a standard punk guy with a standard punk haircut play standard punk 20 songs in a row on a record anymore. Fair enough, I don't like to listen to that. I didn't like to listen to it 20 fuckin' years ago. So, okay, let's keep people interested with our record so listening to our record is like listening to shit on shuffle. And I think we made it happen with *Must Die* and I think we made it happen here with *Born Again*, so I'm really proud of it. You can just tell when you make a record whether people care about it or not. Everybody always tells you, "Yeah, it's great!" but you can tell when you play it for people whether they're like, "Whoa, this is pretty interesting."

**Have you played any of the new songs out live?**

Yeah. The big one everybody loves of course is, the title is "The Dwarves Are Still The Best Band Ever," but basically it's called "Let's Just Get High And Fuck Some Sluts."

**[Laughs] The theme song.**

Yeah, it just opens the record, it says, "Yeah, we're back. We haven't changed. We're still willing to do this." And we've been doing "Stop Me Before I Fuck Again" which is a duet between me and Rex Everything. He's got a great wild rock 'n' roll voice that's very extreme and I like to use him because I tend to sing more and he tends to scream more so I like the sound of our voices together.

**An hour ago I was looking at our last interview and you asked me if I thought *Dwarves Must Die* was "a masterpiece." So what do you say about this one, is this a masterpiece again?**

[Laughter] This is more like a mantelpiece. I always have a special place in my heart for *Dwarves Must Die* 'cause the way it all came together was so unbelievably unlikely and I actually got to record the whole thing with Eric and mix the whole thing with Eric. Usually it's some kind of combination of other people coming in. Eric Valentine is just a real genius guy and it's a pleasure for me to be in a studio with him...

**Wait, so did he work on this one?**

Yeah, he did but it was more working on various parts or helping on various things. With *Must Die*, I took an even longer period of time so I could get him to help with every part of it and to really produce it with me. With this one, you'll really feel his influence in there. But it's a little different. But that's what I think makes this one a little more punk because I really like the combination of me and Eric producing together because I'm a punk and he's a pop guy and that's the combination that I like and there's a lot of that on this record, but I think this record's a little more punk rock. If you're somebody reading AMP Magazine, you're gonna like this record maybe more than the last one. But once you move out of your mom's house and you start fucking, maybe you'll like the other one better. I don't know.

[...] I remember I asked you that stupid age-old question, “What do you wanna be remembered for?” And you said something like, “The greatest rock ‘n’ roll band in history!”

Yeah. Why do it otherwise? When I was a kid and I was going to shows, I’m looking up and seeing Lux Interior standing there or seeing whoever. I saw MINOR THREAT, I saw BLACK FLAG, I saw the MISFITS, so when you see these bands, it’s like, I have to be *that* good.

### I always love hearing this, so how did you get into the whole punk-rock scene?

Here’s how it happened for me: when I was a little kid in the early ‘70s I would listen to the radio and back then the radio was integrated, which it is not anymore, which is really sad, and you’d hear the O’JAYS do “Back Stabbers” and “Love Train” and then you’d hear Elton John do “Crocodile Rock.” I just liked the pop songs on the radio ‘cause they were good. And then I got a little older and more sophisticated I started getting into Broadway show tunes and things that had stories and things that had variations and I got into things like Franz Zappa and these things that were more almost like novelty music, and if something wasn’t really sophisticated it didn’t really catch my eye at that point. And then when I was 14, we moved and I started school in Illinois and I didn’t have any friends there, I didn’t know anybody there, I didn’t know how anybody did anything. But I’d already started smoking weed and started going downtown and listen to records. So the first day I went to school, I stuck out my thumb and I started hitchhiking and this kid picked me up, he was a senior in high school and he said, “Hey man, nobody hitchhikes around here, I don’t know what you’re doing.” And I was like, “Fuck, all right.” And this guy became my friend and in one week he played me the *Nuggets* record which was the original ‘60s record with THE SEEDS and THE STANDELLS and all these obscure ‘60s bands. This was 1980. And then he played me this record by Eddie Cochran and another record by Gene Vincent, so I discovered rockabilly. Then I remember at the end of that week we went to the movies and we saw a movie called *The Decline Of Western Civilization*. So basically in one week I learned about ‘60s punk, rockabilly and hardcore and I hadn’t really known these things existed so this is the story of my rock band experience. For me it’s always been part of the same thing. If you grew up in California, it’s, “Oh man, it’s the mods versus the rockers versus the skinheads versus the punks,” but if you grow up in a place like Illinois, we were just happy to have anything that was different. To me it was like I happened to meet these people who were into cool music and underground shit. Remember there was no internet, there was nobody to tell you about it. You had to go find it on your own. But for me, I sort of got the whole story in one week, like this is all part of the same thing; it doesn’t really matter what kind of clothes you’re wearing or what you’re doing, it’s all youth culture or rock ‘n’ roll. It was all kinda tied together for me. So I would go downtown to see all the early punk bands at the beginning of hardcore but I didn’t fit in with that, I didn’t wear their pants, I didn’t shave my head, I wasn’t part of it. And at the same time I would go see Bo Diddley and Chuck Berry. They were still out there and there would be all these- what you’d now call retro people- but we called them Potsies ‘cause they looked like people from *Happy Days*, but I didn’t fit in with them either. And then I’d go to the ‘60s punk shows that would occasionally happen, like THE FUZZTONES and didn’t wear the right uniform. So we were always a band that had its own identity and didn’t really struggle with trying to fit in. It made it hard to market the band. Guys like Fat Mike would tell me, “You guys are a garage band.” And then guys from garage bands would say, “You guys go too fast, you’re like a hardcore band.” And then other people would go, “Fuck you, you stopped in the middle of a sentence saying a Captain Beefheart song a cappella. What the fuck are you?” A lot of times in a place like California or Manhattan or I guess now it would be Brooklyn, if you get these places that are a hotbed of a certain activity, it breeds this hive mentality.

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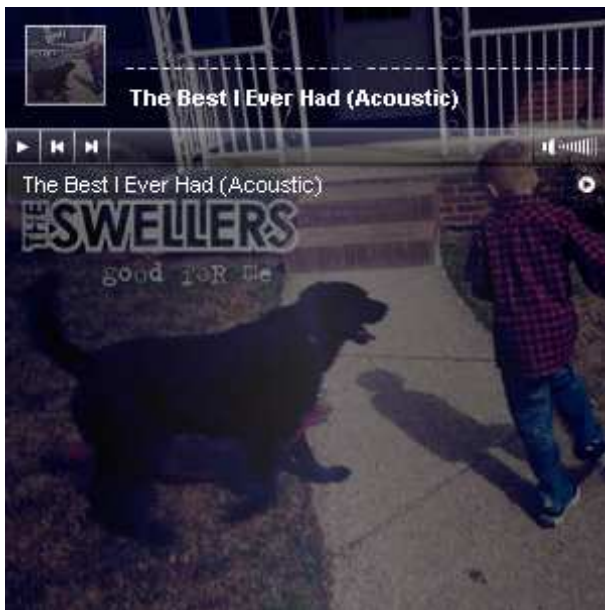
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