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A CONVERSATION WITH KEITH MORRIS



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BY GREG PRATO

Few humans can say that they were responsible for helping launch one classic punk rock band, let alone two (and a possible third one in its early stages), but that's exactly what maniacal frontman Keith Morris has accomplished - as a member of Black Flag, the Circle Jerks, and now, Off! And on September 25th, the highly anticipated Jerks documentary, 'My Career as a Jerk' (directed by acclaimed filmmaker Dave Markey) will be released as a DVD via Music Video Distributors. Mr. Morris was gracious enough to chew the fat via email recently, on a variety of topics...

SK: How did the idea come about to do a Circle Jerks documentary?

KEITH MORRIS: We'd gone back and forth tossing the idea around for a few years and were eventually propositioned by Porterhouse Records to make a historical CJs documentary. They had me compile a coupla lists consisting of locations of various venues being the Starwood, Whisky A Go Go, Blackie's, Fleetwood, Stardust Ballroom, Olympic Auditorium, Raji's, Cathay De Grande and others the Jerks had played at in Southern California to include in the footage. The second list was of all the characters I wanted interviewed for the doc being John Doe and Exene of X, Flea and Anthony Kiedis of the Red Hot Chili Peppers, John and Dix Denny of the Weirdos, Ian MacKaye of Minor Threat/Fugazi/Evens, Mike Ness of Social Distortion, Jello Biafra, Gibby Haynes of the Butthole Surfers, Johnny Depp, Christina Ricci, Ryan Adams, Jeffrey and Steven McDonald of Redd Kross, Gary Tovar and Paul Tollett of Goldenvoice. I also wanted to include Dream, Gary Hirstius and Angry Dave Gibney who all worked or toured with us. Greg and I discussed this scenario with the guys from the XGames film crew who were gonna cut, splice and compile the doc but they became busy and never got around to this. After a couple of years and them not returning any calls we were approached by MVD and Ed Seaman and the documentary was back on. Ed and I talked about who we wanted to make the doc and both of us were completely sold on Dave Markey. Dave was the perfect choice due to his love of the band and due to the fact that he was responsible for so many INSANELY bitchin' films, including "The Slog Movie", "The Year Punk Broke", "Desperate Teenage Lovedolls" and a small library of Sonic Youth videos.

SK: Are you pleased with the finished product?

KEITH MORRIS: I saw an early cut and was moved by the work Dave had done but finally had the opportunity to view the final film at the Cinefamily Theatre in Los Angeles and sitting there watching it onna big screen blew me away. I was with my girlfriend and she said the CJs should be proud of the way the documentary turned out. Yes I'm pleased with the finished film! I'd give a copy to my mom!

SK: Was there anything you learned about the band (or the way others viewed the band) that you didn't know beforehand?

KEITH MORRIS: Well we'd all had our falling outs for whatever reasons and while watching the film I'd pretty much tossed all that crap out the window. We were young and crazy and having fun so nothing really mattered! As we'd grown up things changed and some of the peeps' priorities changed and because of this it was easy to go our separate ways. Also, Henry Rollins description of how we approached our music is really interesting!

SK: I remember in the Mötley Crüe book, 'The Dirt,' they mentioned that they used to party with the Circle Jerks at their old house. Do you have any memories of hanging out with those gentlemen back in the day? Were they good hosts?

KEITH MORRIS: Well Lucky Lehrer - who was our first drummer - lived 2 houses/apartment buildings from the Whisky A Go Go, and at that time, you'd have The Undertones playing one night followed by The Psychedelic Furs the next night with Mötley Crüe the next. It was a giant party on the Sunset Strip in West Hollywood and it all seemed to start at the corner in front of the Whisky. All sorts of characters gathered there and having 2 or 3 of the Mötley Crüe guys hanging out with members of TSOL, Adolescents, Plimsouls or Gun Club wouldn't be out of the ordinary. Drinking beers and chewing the fat with a bunch of guys who played music was commonplace, and everybody in attendance was a great host!

SK: Any other rockers that the Circle Jerks hung with or partied with back in the day that we wouldn't suspect? John Belushi, perhaps? David Lee Roth?

KEITH MORRIS: John Belushi was a fan and we'd actually hung out with him at Irving Plaza in NYC as he came to witness a show, and ask us if we'd be interested in performing on Saturday Night Live. Of course, Fear played, and because of the audience's reaction our chance of having the opportunity to play on SNL was slim to none. Diamond Dave - who is more commonly known as the lead vocalist of Van Halen - owned an after hours spot called the Zero/One Gallery and was pretty much just the host, the main contributor to our delinquency for our early morning party shenanigans. There were quite a few others but I can't recall them at this time. Get back to me inna 'bout a year!

SK: Which classic punk documentary that you were involved in do you prefer and why - 'Decline of Western Civilization' or 'Another State of Mind'?

KEITH MORRIS: This question's easy. "The Decline Of Western Civilization " as this film became a

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allowed us to get in the van and go see America! We started getting phone calls from people all over the world and the doc opened doors for us, X, Fear and Black Flag.

SK: Are you pleasantly surprised with how well Off! has been received?

KEITH MORRIS: Hard work pays off (no pun intended!) and has allowed me to go out and play places I've been offered before but because of a lack of commitment and not being able to keep our shit together were never capable of doing. I've been to Australia, Spain, Norway, Sweden, Finland, Scotland, Switzerland and getting ready to go to New Zealand...I've got the greatest job a guy could ever wish for.

SK: When was the last time you indulged in a haircut?

KEITH MORRIS: What's hair got to do with any of this? Is there some sort of rulebook or list of things to do to look a certain way to be this or that? I've cut my lazy white guy dreadlocks twice in the last 13 years. The last "trim" was 5 years ago, when I'd gotten them caught in my car door and couldn't turn my head to look in my rearview mirror as I was trying to back out of my driveway. As for a real haircut, that'd be about 23 years ago.

SK: Are you pleased with the construction and sturdiness of the "[Keith Morris Throbbhead](#)" by [Aggronautix](#)?

KEITH MORRIS: Well, I'm such a studly character that they could've painted a clown face on the Throbbhead and I would be happy. One of my ex girlfriends described me as a little duck diving under the water for food, surfacing, shaking off the water and paddling along...AND I'm in the great company of Iggy, Milo, Roky Erickson, Handsome Dick Manitoba, J Mascis, Wayne Kramer and James Williamson!

SK: Any plans for the Circle Jerks to reunite to perhaps support the release of 'My Career As A Jerk' on DVD?

KEITH MORRIS: No plans to get back together - even though we've been asked - because I'm in a new band and that's my priority. Why would I want to go back to the CJs when I'm having a BLAST? Why hang out with a bunch of guys who called DIMITRI - who was supposed to produce a new CJs record - overbearing, egotistical and arrogant when all of those adjectives describe them? Why go back to a

giant glob of negativity? I've never been so excited about being in a band and why ruin this? I'm having FUN!

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