



➤ TOUGH QUESTIONS FOR

KEITH MORRIS

Few musicians form new bands at the age of 55, let alone extremely loud punk-rock bands channeling classic late-'70s hardcore. Then again, most people aren't Keith Morris, the outspoken original lead singer of Black Flag and longtime Circle Jerks frontman. On their debut album, *First Four EPs*, his latest outfit, OFF!—a supergroup of sorts featuring guys from Redd Kross, Burning Brides, and Rocket From the Crypt—plow through 16 tracks in 18 explosive minutes, roughly four times shorter than our recent phone conversation. *BY JOHN SELLERS*

"The way I look at OFF! is, what would have happened if I never left Black Flag?"

This album is over before you know it. Were you guys in a hurry or something? Yeah, if you cough or go to the bathroom, it's gone. I'd think that part of the mentality is that you'd listen to it and go, "Wow, what was that?" and then want to go back to it.

Has the lack of material made it difficult to book shows? We don't really pay attention to that. Just because the promoter says you have to play for 40 minutes doesn't mean you have to. And I know a couple of ten-minute jokes, so I can bust out my comedy routine. There's the yuppie and the bear in upstate New York, and then there's the young future CEO and his golf lesson.

Could you give us just the punch lines? Sure. "You didn't come here to shoot me" and "Well, it looks like it's not going to be your day."

Those'll kill. Why did you decide to make OFF!'s music so reminiscent of your earliest work? The way I look at it is, what would have happened if I never left Black Flag? Like, what would have happened if [guitarist] Greg Ginn would have lightened his reign and allowed a bit more creativity among members of the band?

Calling the band OFF! isn't just a coincidence, then? Yeah, OFF! has that Black Flag reference. But why not Raid? Actually, Raid came up and I laughed my ass off because, to me, that sounds like maybe the fourth track on side two of a Thin Lizzy album.

Do you ever regret leaving Black Flag? Well, two months after leaving, I was doing Circle Jerks, so there was no reason to be bummed out. But I was mad that the communication broke down. All of a sudden, every time somebody needed to point a finger, it was at me. I was losing all of the arguments and I'm the small guy. I was always picked on in high school, and one of the reasons I was in this band was to get back at all of those people. And now I'm being picked on by the guys in the band.

You performed with Circle Jerks in the mid-'80s while wearing a back brace. How'd you pull that off? You might have some kind of injury, but once you start jumping around and get into your adrenaline, you kind of become bulletproof. I had crushed a

lower lumbar vertebrae, which controls the lower section of the body. The last question the doctor asked me at the hospital was "Are you able to get an erection?" And I said, "Yeah, of course." And he said, "Okay, so go on out there and be a part of the world."

Do you have children? No, but all of my friends have kids, so I'm constantly being referred to as Uncle Keith. If it comes out a kid's mouth, it's cool, but if it's coming out of their mom and Keith wants to get next to Mom, it shoots down the whole fucking program.

You have pretty awesome hair. What's your secret? I wash it once a week. I use a mint soap that has a bit of hemp in it. It's all-purpose soap, so not only can you wash your hair, but you can brush your teeth, wash under your arms, and go at your crotch and your ass.

When was the last time you got your dreads cut? Twelve years ago when I came down with diabetes. A friend said, "Your hair, it's hanging down past your knees. How do you do number two?"

Have you ever gotten it caught in a door? That's a common occurrence. And what that tells me is "It's time to cut the dreads." But I'm a lazy prick—and anti-establishment. You hear people mumbling, "He's a white guy with dreadlocks. I don't like those people." Or someone will tap me on the shoulder and go, "Dude, those dreads are so happening."

Well, aren't they? Yeah, but all of these people are saying, "You'll get laid if you cut your hair." And the situation is, if I've got to cut my hair to get laid, whomever I'm going to get laid by is probably not worth cutting my hair for. If I've got to wear a certain costume, no thanks. I'm not here to impress people.

That's pretty clear. When do you think you'll be too old to be doing this? Probably when I just fall over. The idea that we've got to plan for our retirement and we've got to put money away, it doesn't always work that way. Sometimes it's a struggle. And this is what I chose to do. And I'm pretty much just an idiot for letting it go on as long as it has. But it could be worse: I could be down on Skid Row, living in a cardboard box. But I have a really cool apartment and I'm starting to love my life.