



JACKSON HARMONY AND DISSIDENCE ★ UNITED

By Leah Weinberg

Four bands. Three kids. One man. And he does not go by the pseudonym Clark Kent, either. The name is Chris Shiflett, and he is probably best known in the mainstream as the guitar player for the Foo Fighters and in the punk community as the guitar player for Me First and the Gimme Gimmes. But as many will learn today, he also fronts two other outfits that he can add to his already impressive resume, one of these being California punk rock quartet Jackson United.

Jackson United, in its earliest form, was not even a band at all when first conceived by Shiflett back in 2003. The project started out under the moniker "Jackson," an old nickname of Shiflett's, and consisted of Shiflett and a handful of songs that he had written. Fearful that if he did not take the songs into the studio that they would never see the light of day, Shiflett grabbed his older brother Scott (bass player of Face to Face) and friend/drummer Pete Parada (also of Face to Face fame) and set off to make the "band's" first record.

With that task successfully accomplished, Shiflett decided to take Jackson United--the "United" bit coming after failed attempts to copyright "Jackson" on its own--on the road. As a result, the task of putting together a proper line-up for touring purposes then stared Shiflett straight in the face. Enter guitar player Doug Sangalang, whose five-year tenure with Jackson United



puts him close to being there since the beginning. The two were friends well before Sangalang joined the band, having met when Sangalang was touring in Screw 32 and Shiflett was a roadie for Wax. Today, Jackson United is Sangalang's only musical outlet. With a wife and daughter, he has packed away the dreams of "making it" as an artist and is 100% content playing music with, and supporting, his good friend. "In all reality, Chris writes pretty much everything," says Sangalang. "And that's sort of the way it was designed. This is his creative outlet, so I kind of look at it as my job to support him in that and be the best right hand man that I can be."

Since adding Sangalang, Shiflett has had a revolving door of drummers and bass players, brother Scott coming back in and out of the fold repeatedly. Though he is not taking part in Jackson United's current bout of touring due to commitments with Face to Face, Scott did play bass on the band's new album, on which the Shifletts and Sangalang were joined by Dave Grohl and Taylor Hawkins on drums. *Harmony and Dissidence*, released digitally 2008, is 14 tracks of varying interpretations of punk rock, and is certainly a departure from the Weezer-ish tendencies of some of Shiflett's work from his previous release *Western Ballads*. More raw with a more evident punk and roll sound, the album contains a sprinkling of surf rock and, as with all of

his bands, receives influence from all of Shiflett's former and current efforts, from No Use for a Name to the Foo Fighters. Standout tracks include "Black Regrets," the melodic "The Land without Law" and the single "21st Century Fight Song."

On the heels of *Harmony and Dissidence*, Shiflett and company find themselves taking advantage of a good-sized hiatus in the Fools camp and trying to book a string of tours to keep the guys busy for the next several months. Unfortunately, the activity level of Shiflett's "side" projects (Jackson United, Me First and the Gimme Gimmes and Chris Shiflett & the Cheaters, his "country-flavored" outfit) now depends almost entirely on the schedule of the Foo Fighters, which is why Jackson United has been so quiet, Shiflett hasn't toured with Me First in "forever" and he has yet to record any Cheaters material. He also has to take into account the need to spend time at home with his wife and kids, three boys all under the age of six. Trying to juggle so many things at once is certainly not for the faint at heart.

"It's definitely not easy," Shiflett admits. "When I first started [Jackson United], I wasn't married and we didn't have any kids. So time off back then was really time off. I would just surf and go to the beach and hang out, kind of do whatever I wanted. It has changed a lot now so it's definitely harder. That's probably why I don't

move fast with my side projects because I just don't have time to. So that's why I really want to try to get as much touring under our belts as I can over the next six or eight months while I have some time off."

In addition to Shiflett and Sangalang, today's Jackson United line-up includes Shiflett's cousin Charlie Ellis on bass (the guy definitely likes to keep things in the family) and Mighty Mighty Bosstones drummer Joe Kid. Kid came in the picture after Shiflett had completed *Harmony and Dissidence*, while Ellis joined the band after first auditioning this past September. Even though Ellis had the family connection going for him, he still had to formally audition for the bass player position left open by his cousin Scott. To prepare, Ellis played along with the album several times a day until he was ready to play for Shiflett, and then Shiflett brought him in to rehearse with Kid. Even as a family relative, Ellis didn't think he had it in the bag. "I was pretty nervous," Ellis recalls. "Chris is awesome, he's my cousin, I love him, but I knew that he wouldn't want me to be in [the band] if I wasn't good enough. He would tell me that I wasn't good enough and not have me do it if I couldn't."

Having subsequently made the band, Ellis plans to tour with Jackson United until he begins college next fall. The band recently returned from a week of shows in the U.K. and are hoping to set up several tours for the next few months. Contrary to message board ramblings, Shiflett is eager to get back to the East coast and in fact would love to set up a proper nationwide tour. But as a result of the band's obscurity and the crumbling economy, it is difficult to find bigger bands that will take them out and tours that would be profitable (or even allow the guys to break even).

As for what bigger picture lies ahead for Jackson United, both in the immediate future and beyond, Sangalang offers some insight: "Ideally we'll continue to play and tour throughout next year with the Foo Fighters taking a little hiatus. And stay busy, hopefully spend a couple of weeks on the road out of every month, [make] another album. I think it's one of those slow and steady progressions. I think that we'll be doing this 10 years from now most likely. I don't have high expectations. I just know that it's something that we all believe in and that we really love doing. No delusions of grandeur on my part."

Out of all of the projects that Chris Shiflett has been involved in, Jackson United is probably the least talked about and known, yet it is ironically the band Shiflett probably loves the most. "If you don't have that big machine behind you, it's hard to get the word out about your band," explains Shiflett as to why Jackson United is so under the radar. "All we can do is try to get out on the road and play more shows. That's what we're trying to do. I'm realistic about what this is. It's not like we're gonna sell 10 million records and all of a sudden be the size of Motley Crue or something. That's never, ever gonna happen, which is totally fine." ❧