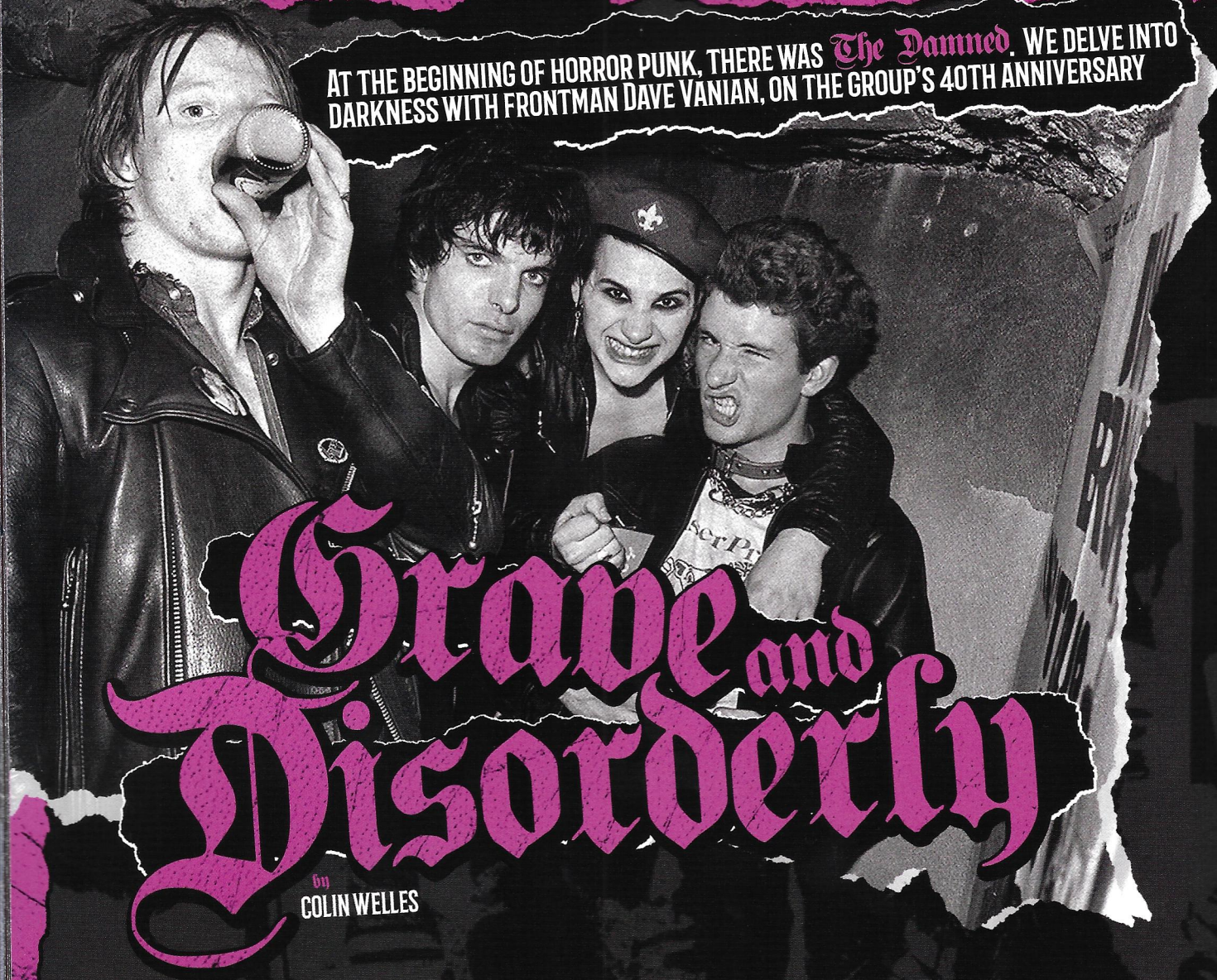


AT THE BEGINNING OF HORROR PUNK, THERE WAS *The Damned*. WE DELVE INTO DARKNESS WITH FRONTMAN DAVE VANIAN, ON THE GROUP'S 40TH ANNIVERSARY



Graze and Disorderly

by COLIN WELLES

THE CRAMPS, MISFITS AND THE DAMNED ARE THE UNHOLY TRINITY OF PUNK ROCK HORROR BANDS.

And while The Cramps and Misfits are highly regarded, The Damned, which formed in 1976, lives up to its name and remains relatively unknown. It's strange considering they directly influenced the Misfits, and were the first British punk band to get signed (to Stiff Records), release a punk single ("New Rose" — months before the Sex Pistols), put out a punk album in the UK (*Damned Damned Damned*) and tour America.

Celebrating their 40th anniversary, the members of the group have proven themselves not just true punk rock journeymen, but also horrorpunk pioneers. Singer Dave Vanian (as in "Transyl") is the original goth/vampire punk — a gravedigger who owned a hearse in his younger days. Early band photos show him wearing dark suits, sporting black makeup around his eyes and lips and jet-black hair, always projecting a delightful menace.

He formed the band with bassist (later guitarist) Captain Sensible, guitarist Brian James and drummer Rat Scabies. Vanian has also been its one constant member, with James leaving in '78 (and returning briefly in the late '80s), Sensible leaving in '85

(but returning in '96), and Scabies leaving in '96. The group has seen various other members come and go over the years, and even had Motörhead's Lemmy Kilmister play bass for them briefly. Joining Vanian and Sensible in The Damned's current lineup are Stu West on bass, Pinch on drums and Monty Oxymoron on keyboards.

After *Damned Damned Damned*, which featured the aforementioned staple "New Rose," came classic albums *Music for Pleasure* ('77) and *Machine Gun Etiquette* ('79). With song titles such as "Plan 9 Channel 7," "Wait for the Blackout," "Dr. Jekyll & Mr. Hyde," "I Just Can't Be Happy Today" and "Sanity Clause," The Damned solidified the unholy union between punk and horror.

In 1980, the group shook things up sonically, releasing *The Black Album*, a quintessential and groundbreaking record for its influence on goth music. It sees the band trading some of the three-chord punk for a more atmospheric sound made more haunted by Vanian's darker lyrics.

Like all good British punk bands, however, The Damned also got political, taking their repressive government to task. On the 1984 song "Nasty," recorded for the TV show *The Young Ones*, they took the piss out of British film censors over the banning

DAMNED



of "video nasties."

The dreamy and enchanting *Phantasmagoria* ('85) would then secure their place in the hearts of goth fans with haunting songs such as "Shadow of Love," "Grimly Fiendish" and "Sanctum Sanctorum." They followed it up with 1986's *Anything*, which was considered poppier, then slowed their output, releasing *Not of This Earth* in 1995, *Grave Disorder* in 2001 and *So, Who's Paranoid?* in 2008, in addition to various singles, live albums, EPs and compilations. As of press time, the group has crowdfunded a yet-to-be-titled new album and is touring for its 40th anniversary.

To celebrate the milestone, we met Vanian in the dark corridors of a cavernous club to let him spill the blood on his love of the macabre and mysterious.

WHAT GOT YOU INTERESTED IN HORROR IN THE FIRST PLACE?

I can't really say. It's just that even from a very young age it fascinated me. Not necessarily the stories because I probably didn't understand them at that point. I was too young. I wanted to live in the houses. When I saw *Frankenstein*, I wanted to live in [the monster's] house. And *Dracula*, I wanted that house he lived in. I didn't realize they were horror films until I was six or seven or something.

WOULD YOU SAY YOU WERE INFLUENCED BY THE HAMMER FILMS AT ALL? DO YOU REMEMBER SEEING THOSE WHEN YOU WERE YOUNG?

I did, but I saw Universal films first. It's an eclectic mix. I saw all kinds of German films like *Nosferatu* and *Caligari* early on. All the black-and-white expressionistic films from Europe along with Hammer stuff. Hammer and Amicus too had an amazing style. I liked the way they had a team of writers and actors that would always be featured in different roles. The same way that Roger Corman did with Vincent Price and all the Poe films.

I'VE HEARD STORIES OF THE MISFITS AND GLENN DANZIG BEING FANS OF THE DAMNED EARLY ON AND TRYING TO TOUR WITH YOU.

What happened was way, way back in the beginning, we played in New Jersey; we did a few gigs with the Misfits and became friends. I was asked to do a track with them. I went out to their house and we did some rehearsals in the house and there's a cassette of the song that Glenn had written, but nothing went any further than that. I was very busy on the road with The Damned and they were off doing their own thing. When Glenn left the band, Jerry kept asking me to join the Misfits. But it wasn't the Misfits later on, it was a band he had called Kryst the Konqueror.



Grimly Fiendish: (from bottom) Dave Vanian, Brian James, Rat Scabies and Captain Sensible.

THAT WAS JERRY ONLY'S BAND...

Yeah, as much as I liked them in the early days. I thought they were great with Glenn in the band, it wasn't the same kind of stuff that I wanted to do.

IN THE LAST DECADE THERE'S BEEN AN EXPLOSION OF HORRORPUNK BANDS. DO YOU FEEL LIKE YOU GUYS WERE THE INSTIGATORS OF THAT?

No, I don't feel like we're instigators, but it's strange to me to see how horror's become so widespread. It's literally everywhere. It used to be kind of... "select" isn't the word. It seemed to have a band of followers. It wasn't looked upon as real art, I suppose. I used to think it was

a shame that horror films that were very good didn't get the acclaim they should've gotten.

WHAT ARE SOME OF YOUR FAVOURITE HORROR FILMS?

There's so many. There's one American film I've always loved, which was almost a B-movie: *Lemora: A Child's Tale*. I was banned by the Catholic society or whatever they call it in America. They banned it because it's a story of a young girl whose father disappears – he's a gangster – and she ends up going into a swampland looking for him and it's full of vampires. This woman leads this family, but they're all children and they're all vampires. A really bizarre film. I like the Corman films, like *House of Usher* and *Tomb of Ligeia*, *The Abominable Dr. Phibes*, and obviously the original Universal films. A few years back, I got the Universal Monsters remastered sets and went back to look at them. When you haven't seen them for a long time, you forget how beautiful they look. And also, I was a huge fan, although it was perhaps lighter, of Paul Morrissey's *Blood for Dracula*.

WITH YOUR SONG "VIDEO NASTIES," WERE YOU OUTRAGED WITH WHAT WAS GOING ON IN ENGLAND WITH THE BANNING OF HORROR FILMS?

Oh yeah, it was ridiculous at the time. And the irony now is all those things they made a fuss about are openly available. No one ever bothers about it. I always think that I believe in self-censorship. A young kid can't go and see it so I don't see why it should be banned. It should be up to us to make our own opinions for ourselves. I can remember when *Texas Chainsaw* made a huge outrage at the time. I remember going to see that. It was a good film. I liked it. I am more of a fan of story which has more cerebral plots. I don't mind blood and gore. It's just that I think sometimes it's just torture all the way through.

NOW, WHEN YOU WRITE SONGS LIKE "GRIMLY FIENDISH"–

I didn't write "Grimly Fiendish." Grimly Fiendish was actually a comic character. It was a cartoon that was a take-off of *The Addams Family* and Grimly Fiendish was this character that had bats flying out of his mouth all the time. He looked like Uncle Fester. Pointed teeth, I remember.

WHEN YOU WRITE LYRICS, ARE YOU INTERESTED IN WRITING GOTHIC IMAGERY?

When it happens, it happens naturally. I like to live that way, if you like. It doesn't seem unnatural to me. Obviously, there was "Plan 9" about Vampira and James Dean's alleged affair. That was a funny thing. Of course, there's "Thirteenth Floor Vendetta," which is about Phibes. That was an interesting song because that track was writ-

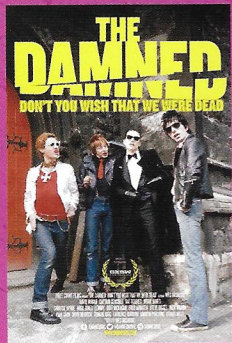
NEVER MIND THE SEX PISTOLS...

THE DAMNED: DON'T YOU WISH THAT WE WERE DEAD

Starring Dave Vanian, Captain Sensible and Rat Scabies
Written and directed by Wes Orshoski
MVD Entertainment Group

There are very good reasons fans of The Damned are so possessive of the group, and you'll find them in Wes Orshoski's documentary *Don't You Wish That We Were Dead*. The 110-minute film (now on DVD) looks at the history of The Damned through (at times uncomfortable and heartbreaking) interviews with the four original members, those who joined during that band's multiple lineup changes, and the musicians they've influenced over the years.

Although The Damned released the very first UK punk rock single in 1976 with "New Rose," the group is usually overlooked in favour of compatriots The Sex Pistols and The Clash when it comes to punk history books.



Part of this is because The Damned never fit comfortably within the "punk" category. With a trademark black sense of humour, songs about death and monsters, flirtations with psychedelia, and lead crooner Dave Vanian's vampire aesthetic, the

group helped usher in the goth subculture that would explode just a few years later.

Orshoski filmed the band over a three-year span and the doc boasts archival footage as well as contemporary live performances, both of which reveal that The Damned is just as vital, anachronistic and antagonistic as ever. There's also a generous amount of bonus features included the hardcore fans. Long-time guitarist/singer/songwriter Sensible provides the doc with an enormous amount of laughs, both sharp-witted and puerile, while Vanian remains the charming yet enigmatic dandy he's always been.

Don't You Wish That We Were Dead is a deliriously pointed examination of what it means to be "punk rock" as it navigates – but never passes judgment on – the conflicting personalities of the most underrated punk band of all time. Is there really a curse on The Damned that has prevented the group from being as well-known as its peers? You'll have to watch the documentary to find out, but you just might get an education on the real meaning of punk along the way.

LESS LEE MOORE

ten in 24 hours, literally from nothing. We were in a studio in the middle of nowhere in Wales, which was reputedly haunted. We had been watching *Phibes* over and over. And I started to write something, and Captain said we should make it into a song. That was six o'clock. About four hours later, the drama went off. They said, "You're never going to write any of this rubbish. Blah, blah, blah." And then we literally wrote the music, wrote all the lyrics, put all the sound together and it was finished by dawn the next morning.



HAS ANYONE EVER APPROACHED YOU ABOUT ACTING IN A FILM?

No, unfortunately not. I would love to have done something over the years. For a short time, not so long ago, I did a little TV show where we invited people to send in clips of horror films that they had made and then we'd show them. The idea was that they'd appear on the show and the best one would get the opportunity to make a proper full film, but the cable channel it was on fell apart and it didn't finish. ... It was called *Dave Vanian's Dark Scream*. It was good fun. I just kind of introduced the track.

WHEN YOU GUYS FIRST STARTED, YOUR LOOK WAS ONE NOBODY HAD TAKEN ON IN PUNK ROCK. WHAT INSPIRED IT?

It seemed to evolve naturally. That was the weird thing at the time. It was more of a case of doing what I wanted to. No one else was doing it at the time. Of course, now it's very different.

WHAT IS THE COMMON GROUND BETWEEN HORROR AND PUNK ROCK?

It's like *The Addams Family* and *The Munsters* – basically stories about odd people, people who are different. I think in some ways, punks and people, especially from the original era, identified with oddballs and people who did their own thing and saw it as quite more of a natural thing. I remember when they made *The Addams Family*, at first it was put down as "This isn't right." But then [audiences] realized they're actually a perfect family. There's nothing wrong with that. They're

just different. So, I think that relating to the odder side of things is an interesting way of identifying something and realizing, perhaps, that it's not a bad thing.

YOU THINK IT'S EASIER TO PUT POLITICS INTO THINGS LIKE HORROR? SORT OF METAPHORS...

I don't know. Sometimes. I don't know if it's easier. I don't know if it's taken more serious that way. Certainly, you can have messages. Science fiction and horror – science fiction especially. All those B-movies from the '50s

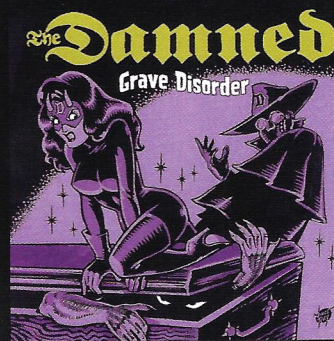
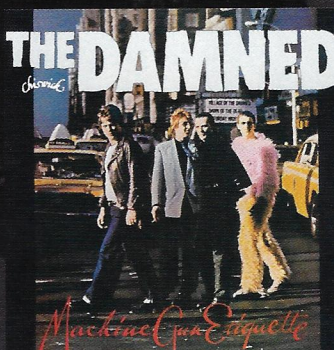
that were essentially the Cold War, like *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* and things like that. It was a reflection of America's paranoia of anything that was from Europe. "The Russians

are coming." The irony is just like anybody else at the time, people thought it was this big, menacing thing that translated through the B-movies. That was always there. I think films, paintings, writings always reflect the political mood anyway. I don't think there's anything unusual about it. What happens now is that there's a big recession going on in the

world. What happens now and in the next few years is that it turns out really good art.

WHAT IS INTERESTING ABOUT HORROR IN GENERAL TO YOU?

To me, it was different because there was an aspect of what were called horror films that I thought was very poetic and beautiful to look at. When I was younger, I loved the houses, I loved the moonlit skies, the lighting, everything about it. That style of film. I just wanted to live in that environment. I think that probably influenced me through my whole life. It's not uncommon now. I think at the time, I probably didn't realize that was going to happen and horror films [were] something that you went to see for a scare and there was nothing else



to it. I didn't realize the impact they were going to have until later. Now, there have been generations of people who've been influenced by something to do with it. And obviously, not going out killing, but just the style. ☹️