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INTERVIEWZ

Crown the Lost



CROWN THE LOST

by Matt Coe

Standing out in the American scene isn't easy- so when acts like Pittsburgh's Crown The Lost hit full force with their melodic power thrash assault, I champion their sound. Signing with Italy's Cruz del Sur Music, their new album *Blind Faith Loyalty* represents an album that may take you weeks and months to discover every special nuance, but I assure you it will careen your head and heart for the better. I contacted rhythm guitarist David E. Gehlke who happily took the time to answer my numerous questions.

Let's start with from the beginning. Tell the readers more about David E. Gehlke the person, how you moved into being a metalhead at age 11 and where the decision came to move from being a mere follower to picking up an instrument and wanting to learn to play? Outside of Metallica's "For Whom the Bell Tolls", what were some of the other songs/ artists you emulated at the start?

David: When I was younger, my aspiration was to be a professional football player, of all things. Considering how lanky and non-muscular I am now, it was probably a wise choice that I didn't end up pursuing it when I grew older. This is sacrilege in Pittsburgh, but I grew up a die-hard Cleveland Browns fan, so that was pretty much all I cared about. My family is from Cleveland and my dad is a big fan, so that was how we bonded when I was little and I've been hooked ever since. When they moved in 1995, that's when I got more and more into the metal to the point where football and any sports were a total afterthought. I guess you can inadvertently thank Art Modell for kick-starting my metal career, huh?

Did you have any family members or friends who helped spur on your interest in music? Also I've read in previous interviews that you came to a decision in high school to quit playing sports and devote yourself more to playing music. What sports were you involved in and did you feel it was a push and pull evolution that music won out in the end- explain the circumstances behind your decision?

David: Both of my parents were into hard rock/metal, so it was natural for me to get into it. My dad was and still is into AC/DC and Metallica and my mom always had classic rock like Led Zeppelin going, making it pretty easy for me to gravitate toward that style of music. Def Leppard was the first band I liked, if that gives you any indication of where I started, but once I moved onto Metallica and Megadeth, I was obsessed.

I played football and baseball in high school and quit before my sophomore year. It wasn't too hard of a decision - I just wanted to go home and listen to metal. Totally lopsided actually and I don't regret for it for a second. I may not be typing this very interview if that were the case...

Sinning Is Our Savior is the pre-cursor to Crown the Lost- was this your first serious band and how did you eventually meet up with Joe Bonaddio who at one point was the singer and guitarist in this band? Is it true that you weren't playing guitar at the time but holding down the bass duties? Tell us about these early days with SIOS...

David: Joe and I met at a Shadows Fall/Lamb of God concert in June of 2002, I reckon. We both had near-identical taste in music and just started playing together. There's no real dramatic story to it, actually. We both grew up doing Sinning...it was a major learning experience for the two of us and we made lots and lots of mistakes, but now that I think about it, I'm glad we went through it together. I played guitar when we started, but switched to bass so we could let our then-bass player (Ryan Eicheldinger) sing. When that didn't work out, I went back to guitar. Then we got someone on par with Joe, then I switched back to bass. Pretty exhausting. I kept on having to buy new gear every time I switched instruments. But by then (we're talking early 2005), the band was creatively spent and I had set the wheels in motion for Crown the Lost.

How was the public and press response to the *Painted With Utter Desolation* full length release that came out in April 2004? How much different is the sound of Crown the Lost compared to this act- as I've heard it was still in the technical thrash vein except with harsh vocals versus the melodic singing you currently employ?

David: *Painted* did very well for us, surprisingly. It was picked up by Screaming Ferret Wreckords, but those guys had zero business acumen and literally sat on the album and made all sorts of empty promises. You know, the usual stuff young bands are subjected to. Style-wise, it's not terribly different than CTL since Joe and I wrote all the songs. There were no clean vocals, obviously, but we did rely heavily on the same things we do now, which are melodies, Joe's leads, and writing compact, memorable songs. We were pretty young (early 20's) when we did that album, but like they say - you live and learn.

At what point did you decide to change the group around to Crown the Lost? You describe finding your current singer Chris Renaldi via a terrible demo of his old band- what previous



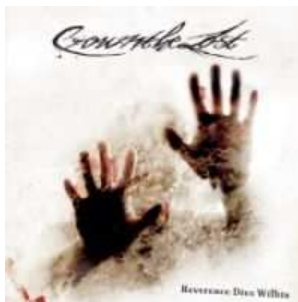
band did he sing for and how could you tell he would be up for the challenge of singing for this band at such a young age (as I've heard he entered at 18)? Does he have any previous vocal training or does this just come naturally to him?

David: I started Crown the Lost while we were still doing Sinning. At that time I had zero input in anything Sinning was doing and since I'm more of a take-charge kind of person, I had to start my own band. Initially, the plan was to get everyone from Sinning into the band, but everyone balked, so I had to scrounge up some rather unreliable people to play in CTL. That in itself was a 6-month process until Joe came aboard to play drums, of all things.

Renaldi's old band was called Insanitary Destruction and from what I remember, copied Maiden note-for-note. Musically, they weren't very good, but I instantly fell in love with his voice and figured he'd be the right guy to start a band with. When we got him into CTL, he was already used to singing - he sang in his school choir, plus he had band experience, so it wasn't that difficult. He did take some time in adjusting to a regular practice schedule, but the older Renaldi gets, the better he gets and at this point, he has almost full control over his voice. I'm curious to see how he'll sound in five or so years...

Your name came from the Suidakra song "Crown the Lost", but I've heard you agonized over a band moniker for quite a while- even forgiving Chris for wanting to call the group Dark Angel due to his lack of metal knowledge. For the sake of humor, what other poor/ lame names did you banter around and how long of a process did it take before Crown the Lost won out?'

David: I had some super lame names like Dreams Wide Awake or Years In Waste (tries to remember...), so I'm not immune to any criticism. All the good band names are taken up, so you have to resort to taking someone's song title, which is exactly what we did. Once I broached Crown the Lost to Renaldi, he liked it and it has stuck ever since. It's funny - we used argue day and night over Sinning Is Our Savior and I can't remember a single instance where we've thought of changing Crown the Lost.



Reverence Dies Within came out self-released in 2006- how long did it take you to come up with the material for this album, what was your time like in the studio and what are some of your memories/ struggles surrounding this recording?

David: The material for *Reverence* came together in less than a year, actually. Since writing for a clean singer was totally new for Joe and I, there were all of these new avenues in which to explore. I'm still surprised at how well some of the songs off that particular album have held up. We recorded the album with Eric Klingler (Pro-Pain, Icarus Witch) and I remember how quick we were able to complete it, but how we wished we had more time and more budget. Plus, we consumed a lot of pizza for whatever reason. And Renaldi took only a week to do vocals as opposed to the three months he took for the new album. From a recording standpoint, it sounds good, but Blind Faith just destroys it, which I guess is the goal for any band for their second album.

It seems like you've had a revolving rhythm section throughout the history of Crown the Lost. Has it been more personality conflicts, stylistic clashes or other circumstances as to the instability of these slots? Have you hopefully reached a conclusion with your latest acquisitions (Kevin Antonacci on drums since the fall of 2008, Dom Scarano on bass since February 2009)?

David: Yeah, the drum and bass position have been a problem for us, absolutely. Our first "real" drummer was Jon Rice, who is now in Job For A Cowboy and we always knew he was going to leave, so his departure wasn't that big of a shock, but the two drummers that followed weren't really cut out for the band. It was one or the other. Either one was a cool dude who couldn't play our material, or the other was an unbelievable drummer but had such an attitude problem that it divided the band and almost led to me quitting last year around this time. It was a lose-lose situation. I could literally sit here all night and list this particular drummer's transgressions while in Crown the Lost. Some of it truly boggles the mind and kicking him out (I dislike him so much I'm not even going to mention his name, ha-ha) was far and away the best thing we've done.

The bass slot hasn't been that big of a problem. Ryan pretty much dropped out of sight early last year and his replacement, Shawn Gunter moved back to Ohio, but luckily, we found Dom through Kevin. I hope I'm not jinxing the band, but with these two now fully-entrenched, we're getting along and functioning better than ever. It's a very cool thing to look forward going to practice knowing you're going to be spending the next two hours in our rehearsal room with people we actually like. It's done wonders for the band and I know we're eager to really hit the road with these guys and eventually, record our third album.

You and Joe are the older members of the group at 27 and 26 respectively, as the other 3 are between 19 and 22 years of age. Does this create conflict when it comes to band direction or band business- especially because of your involvement through the years between working at record labels and writing for music magazines/ websites?

David: There's no conflict with this, as yet another nice thing of being in a band where everyone gets along, is that everyone has their own role and responsibility. Joe is mostly responsible for the music, Renaldi the vocals and vocal melodies, Kevin our art design, and Dom fills in the blanks. I have a hand in every facet that was just mentioned, but all business decisions ultimately fall on me, which is fine. We've taken a long-term approach to the band, which means we're not in the hole financially, we've built a solid network of bands/industry personnel, and we set goals and plan ahead. I know that sounds a bit lame for a metal band, but that's how we operate and so far, it has worked.



It seems you treat the band much like running your own business- so what types of short term and long term goals do you set for the band and what do you think you've learned through the years to keep the cash flow going in a positive direction for Crown the Lost instead of bleeding your costs and/ or mental spirits dry?

David: There weren't any specific goals outside of when we started, to put a good, high quality album out from the onset. It's very difficult to build a fanbase in Pittsburgh, so the easiest (but more costly) alternative was to write an album and release it independently, which was *Reverence Dies Within*. That has been the lone endeavor that was funded outside of the band - everything since has been funded with proceeds from that album, shows, and merch sales.

The new album *Blind Faith Loyalty* to me represents a fresh outlook on the thrash genre- as you prefer to go with melodic singing, contrasting speed and blast sections at times and emphasize versatility with the harmonies and solo abilities. Explain to the readers what your goals are with this album in comparison to your debut- and what you feel you've learned with this experience that makes Crown the Lost special in the sea of metal bands these days?

David: Our goal from Day 1 has been to combine clean singing with extreme metal, whether it be death/thrash/black, whatever. We fall more under the thrash banner and I'm sure others will agree. With the new album, we tried to make things more immediate, yet explosive, if that makes any sense. It's certainly more technical, but at the same time, I think the songs are easier to follow and digest. Perhaps we're all about dichotomies, I don't know.

I'm not sure if we're "special" quite yet and that will be up to others to determine. However, I think the usage of clean vocals throws people for a loop and since we're not a straight power or thrash metal band, it gives us a unique edge. Then again, that's really not for me to decide - that's up to you guys and the people that buy/download/download illegally our music.



I've read that you and Joe handle the songwriting duties in a separate manner. What differences do you see in his material versus your material- and how long does it take from initial conception to completion for a Crown the Lost song? Can you also provide an example



of the easiest and most difficult songs that came about for *Blind Faith Loyalty*?

David: Correct. Our songwriting process is pretty cut and dry: Joe does one half, I do the other half. Joe tends to write the more aggressive, in-your-face material that is more complex than anything I could come up with. I tend to gravitate towards anything melodic, so my songs usually come out with a lot of melodies with a great emphasis on choruses. Plus, we purposely sequence the album so neither one of us has a song in succession. I think it gives the album some balance and flow.

Most of the songs on *Blind Faith Loyalty* came together pretty quickly. We write at home, then bring our songs to rehearsal where they are fine-tuned. We usually don't collaborate, which is probably why the process is a lot quicker and easier for us. In the end, it's up to Joe to add any sort of embellishments in the lead guitar department and once he's happy, we know a song is ready. I don't envision this process changing, but the nice thing about our new lineup and the fact we're older and slightly more mature, is that Joe and I have more open discussion with the rest of the band about the songs, which is already

starting to reap dividends with our new songs.

What are your views on intelligent lyrics to match the well thought music you display? Do you believe audiences place an equal emphasis on the words and music for Crown The Lost? What are your personal views on metal lyrics and their importance for the scene?

David: We spend a great deal of time on our lyrics for that reason alone. Plus, since we have a clean singer, we can't just throw any random words out there - they have to make sense and be of some level of intelligence. I think our impact would be less if we were to not take this seriously. As for most metal lyrics, you have a lot more wiggle room if you are using growled vocals, but I still think they're important, although some bands don't value it as much as we.

In a live situation do you have to pick and choose certain rhythm and harmony parts to play- as I believe in songs like "Drawing the Parallel" and "Symbiotic" there are more than 2-3 layered riff parts flying around within the same measure? Do you try to separate the studio sessions from what will happen on the show front?

David: There's no deliberation over who plays what part - Joe does 99.9% of the harmonies, melodies, and leads and I hold down the rhythm parts. Joe is one of those rare players who makes everyone around him better and he rarely, if ever plays a lead line or melody that isn't tasteful or doesn't fit the song. That being said, how we sound on record is pretty close to how we sound live because it's the same process across the board. Maybe in a few years I'll start swiping a solo or two, but I'm not too worried about it now.

You write for Blistering.com as well as wrote for the mighty Metal Maniacs at one point. How did you get the writing gigs and how tough is it for you to be on the other end of the keyboard, criticizing another band's style or record? Who are some of the writers through the years that you've admired, followed and respected for their opinions on the scene?

David: I started writing in 2002 for the new-defunct Throat Culture magazine and slowly started making the rounds. I was fortunate enough to join the Blistering staff in 2003, where I've been ever since and I did Metal Maniacs from early January of 2006 to when it folded, which I must say, is a travesty. Even though I was on the staff, I enjoyed reading the magazine more than writing for it. Don't ask me. Perhaps it's a nostalgia thing.

It's not very tough for me to be on the other end of the keyboard. You have to be objective when you write about something and regardless of the fact I'm in a band, I'm going to give something a fair review. I'm not immune to criticism and if someone gives us a bad review, I can certainly take it. I hope so.

Off the top of my head, some of the writers I admire would be guys like Jeff Wagner, Martin Popoff, and Ula Gehret. All three are unbelievable writers, have fantastic taste, are witty, wordy (especially Popoff) and when they recommend something, it's typically spot-on.



What have been some of the best shows you've played with Crown the Lost through the years? If you could assemble your dream festival from any era with any band, name a 7-8 band lineup and where would this show take place?

David: We've played lots of good, but not great shows and that's simply a product of playing in Pittsburgh. Support for the metal scene is what I would call "lacking" and it's no secret - everyone knows about it, but no one is doing anything about it. And it's not like we haven't tried, but you end up hurting yourself more than helping if you lump a lot of shows in the city together. Turn-out will be piss-poor and after a while, it sorta wears on one's soul. Some shows that stick out have been with Macabre, our good friends Divinity Destroyed in New Jersey, God Forbid, and anytime we play with Hollowpoint, who are one of the better bands in all of Pittsburgh.

How would you describe the average follower of your band? Do you attract more of a younger audience, older audience, or an across the board variety of follower? Have you been able to convert some non-metal followers into regular Crown The Lost fans- either through your work relations, family or so forth?

David: I can't really put a handle on that, but I think our followers fall into the typical demographic for metal bands, which is males ages from 18-49, I reckon. The advantage of having a clean singer is the ability to pull in more people outside of metal - and we have - although it's not a high number. People probably find us slightly more tolerable for that reason alone.

Where do you see the metal scene going over the next year or two? Are you concerned about the economic turmoil or do you think in these times, people still turn to entertainment for a healthy release?

David: For starters, CD's are going the way of the dinosaur, which is an absolute shame. There's something about holding something in one's hands that makes an album special and you lose that with digital files. Plus, the sound quality isn't as good and there is no artwork and credits to be found. It totally takes the charm out of hunting down new music. However, the metal scene is still going to be around. There's so many bands and so many advocates of it, that it would be hard to kill it. It will never peak in America again, which is fine, but we now have a thriving underground that can literally support itself and that will ultimately get us through any economic hardships.



How would you describe the personalities within the band? What do you think each person brings to the table to make Crown the Lost special and unique? Do you share any hobbies/ interests outside of the group?

David: Christ, what a tough question. We're all different and I'm sure anyone who knows us can attest to that. We're not one of those bands who look and act the same (cue the 8 million metalcore or deathcore bands going right now) - just look our ugly mugs for God's sake. Ha-ha. But seriously, we're not all mellow dudes, believe or not. Well, maybe I am and so is Kevin. The rest of the guys have too many quirks to mention here. We all like football, except Kevin, and we all share a strong affinity for eating, which works well for a bunch of skinny assholes like us. Now that I say that, our collective metabolisms will be thrown out of synch...

Since GASP Etc. is a half horror movie, half music website, I figured I would ask what have been some of your favorite horror movies or documentaries through the years?

David: Hmm...that's another tough question. I don't consider myself a horror movie buff at all and I don't watch a whole lot of TV. Is there anything you'd recommend?

What's the best advice you've ever gotten concerning the music business- be it from someone either in the field or outside?

What advice would you give to people to help them achieve their dreams?

David: I had the good fortune of working at Inside Out Music America for three years and I learned A LOT. The pay wasn't great, but I took the job so I could learn about the business, make contacts, and take that knowledge and use it in Crown the Lost. I learned quite a bit as to what not to do, that's for sure, but more importantly, I was surrounded by knowledgeable people who were willing to show me the ropes.

In this day and age, I think it's a little far-fetched to become the next Metallica or Maiden, so my advice would be to have fun at it. Once you scrape away all of the BS and nonsense (and there's a lot), it's best to just have fun, which is what we're trying to do.

You may have the final word...

David: Much thanks for the interview, Matt. I hope everyone will take the time to check us out on [Myspace](#) and above all else, support metal. Cheers!

