

The Columbus Dispatch

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For more than two decades, the Dwarves have churned out punk rock not meant for a family audience.

In recent years, however, the San Francisco band ‹ led by singer and spokesman Paul "Blag Dhalia" Cafaro and guitarist He Who Cannot Be Named ‹ has infiltrated mainstream pop culture. Dwarves songs have been used in episodes of Viva La Bam, SpongeBob SquarePants and Monster Garage.

The band's latest studio album ‹ The Dwarves Must Die, released in 2004 ‹ still contains the group's two main characteristics: black humor and ribald language. But it's also packed with catchy tunes and star power.

Josh Freese (Vandals, A Perfect Circle), Dexter Holland (Offspring), Nash Kato (Urge Overkill), Nick "Rex Everything" Oliveri (Queens of the Stone Age, Kyuss) and Gary Owens (the voice of the cartoon character Space Ghost) all did recording time for The Dwarves Must Die.

The group's new product, FEFU: The DVD, features grainy early Dwarves footage, much fake blood and the Suicide Girls ‹ a punk-rock burlesque troupe.

Dhalia recently talked from San Francisco about himself, the band he formed A: Not really (laughs). In the early '80s, in his hometown of Chicago ‹ and you really didn't think of rock or punk which will perform Sunday night in the rock as a career. There just wasn't any Ravari Room ‹ and his vision. success in it for anybody.

People in California had a different

Q: In high school, did you envision take on it, I think. Everything here was, yourself at 40-something playing in a like, youth culture, big money. Even from band in clubs? the earliest days of punk here (in California), there were people pushing it as a lifetime thing.

But I'm from Illinois. There, people would throw beer cans at you out of a car and yell, "Go get a job! "

Q: Did your parents consider singing in a punk band a good use of their son's time?

A: Well, they didn't care in high school, but as I actually started to do it, yeah, they weren't too thrilled about it. I don't blame them, you know. It's a pretty (expletive) career: You get exploited; there's a lot of drugs and insanity. It's not exactly your parents' dream.

Q: What did your parents make of your notorious album covers?

A: Well, I never let them be too hip to what I specifically was doing with it, because that was just more mortifying to them.

My mom worked with veterans who were addicted to drugs, so she just hated the idea of a song like Free Cocaine.

Q: The songs on The Dwarves Must Die are tuneful, wholly listenable things. Have you ever feared that fake blood and real nudity on your album covers might work against you these days?

A: It's sort of the equivalent of Renaissance sculptors not being taken seriously because their . . . (works) were nude. There's just a bizarre kind of prudishness and this sort of reverse discrimination, where as long as your band is really boring and your whole concept is really boring and your art is really boring, then maybe you might be talented.

Q: Where does that come from?

A: I think it has to do with when rock 'n' roll stopped being fun and started being something critics had to analyze.

The Dwarves Must Die is a super-eclectic record; it wasn't just pop-punk. It was also hip-hop and turntable stuff and garage rock, and rock and surf. It's a question of how eclectic you are in your taste. That's what we've been trying to push the entire time.

Q: When did the Dwarves begin to evolve into the Dwarves?

A: We were always very hedonistic, even when it was a teenage thing. We've always been misanthropes and outcasts. We just started being what we already were.

As the years went on and more people knew who we were, we stopped getting into so much (trouble) † not because we calmed down but because people got the joke and came to the shows specifically to see this stuff.

You still get some yahoos who are just on the attack, who don't realize what's going on. But for the most part, people get the joke. They have fun with it, and the band is sort of better now, plays music better.

That's kind of another thing about the Dwarves experience: Most punk bands start with a big bang and write a couple of good songs, then get worse and worse † whereas with the Dwarves, we insisted on getting better, both with songwriting and production and the way we played.

Q: You mentioned Renaissance sculptors earlier. You perform next to a living sculpture † He Who Could Not Be Named.

A: Let me tell you, he eats terribly and he never works out, ever. It's like the Iggy Pop thing. Lucky bastards, you know? I smoke a joint and eat some Ben & Jerry's, and I can't take my shirt off for a month.

Q: Which region of America hates the Dwarves the most?

A: Washington, D.C., has never worked for us. Detroit is another place. We always did really good once we hit Atlanta, but basically everything south of Baltimore and north of Atlanta is just uninterested in the Dwarves. We're not pleasant or college-y enough.

Q: Why have so many Dwarves come and gone?

A: Well, they've come, but they've sort of never gone.

It's sort of like the Wu-Tang Clan of punk. I can always call on this reservoir of people. But Clint Torres, who was playing bass with me for the last couple of years, is now playing with Gnarl's Barkley, and Nick (Oliveri) was here for a while.

People go off and do other things. I'm not going to try to stop them.

Q: When will we hear a new Dwarves record?

A: That last Dwarves record took a lot of finagling to get all those star cameos. Eric Valentine's an amazing producer, but it was hard for him to justify making a Dwarves record when people are offering him a halfmillion dollars to make a record. I don't know if I can make a record better than The Dwarves Must Die, but when I can, I'll do it.

Dwarves will perform in the Ravari Room Sunday night with The Bloody Irish Boys, Muscle Puzzle and 1point3.

Doors open at 9pm. Tickets are \$20 in advance and \$25 at the door. www.ravariroom.com