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MUSIC

► There are a lot of things you can call San Francisco punk veterans the Dwarves, but boring is not one of them. Over the past 20 years, the band, well really vocalist Blag Dahlia, guitarist He Who Cannot Be Named and whoever happens to be with them at the time, have been a lightning rod of controversy, have never made the same record twice and have remained quintessentially and unapologetically punk as fuck for just those reasons.

Best known for their album covers and their frantic, anything-can-and-will-happen live shows (the first time I saw them it was over in less than 10 minutes and at least two people had chairs broken over them), the band has evolved musically, but has never been anything more than a tongue-in-cheek bunch.

Not everyone seems to get the joke, at least it seems that way when outsiders peek into their microcosm of musical debauchery, so when band leader Blag Dahlia isn't on tour with the band, he's been doing some alternate presentations of his art that make it much more apparent that this is one brilliant guy, not just the front man of one of punk rock's most incendiary acts.

"In the Dwarves, it's sort of delivered with a straight face so sometimes people don't get that it's supposed to be funny," says Dahlia. "That's kind of why eventually I started doing the acoustic performances and writing books and stuff, things that had always interested me and you get a chance to see more of the humour behind it. With the Dwarves, you kind of have to get the joke, but at the time that it's happening it's right in your face and you can get your head knocked in and all kinds of shit can happen and it doesn't seem funny."

In the early years, the Dwarves were probably better known for the violence at their shows than for the music itself. In 1990, their *Blood Guts & Pussy* album on Sub Pop really put them on the map. It was a 12-song, 15-minute classic that's akin to a garage punk version of Slayer's *Reign In Blood* in the fact it's a perfect album that you don't want to change. The band's live show contains the same sort of off the cuff, unrestrained madness to it that, as Dahlia openly admits, can be just as dangerous as it is exhilarating.

"Yeah, I've been beaten with objects, stabbed, I was stabbed in Canada in the throat, so I've had all kinds of things happen," says Dahlia. "It can be very scary, but if you are sort of in the moment with it, there's no time to really think about it. I get more scared thinking about it later, there's not really time to be scared when it's going on."

This doesn't mean you can expect their show here in St. Catharines this week to be a bloodbath. Nor should you expect it to be eight minutes long, like that first time I saw them at the YMCA in Lancaster, PA back in early 1997. The band is playing more standard sets most shows these days, and things still do get a little crazy, but the really twisted sets usu-



THE DWARVES

YOUNG AND GOOD LOOKING

ally only occur for shows that are out of the ordinary.

"It really all depends," says Dahlia when asked if the brief, crazy shows are a thing of the past. "Some shows it makes more sense than others. Like opening for people, with the Dwarves you are more likely to get one of those shows. Or if it's some set up thing like South By Southwest. When it is just our show, we tend to just go out and do it. It still gets really crazy but it's not an abbreviated show."

However, if it is some other band's show or some industry shit or something then we just sort of fuck it up," he laughs.

While their sound has changed over the years on record, you can always expect to hear the band playing vicious punk rock when they hit the stage to play.

"The live show is pretty much the

straight up punk stuff still because it's hard to recreate the newer albums without a lot of extras. I like to get paid, I don't wanna bring out a bunch of soundmen and assistants so I can make it sound just like the record. It's like 'fuck it, let's get out and play' and have a lot of fun and get everybody going.

"That was part of how the Dwarves started, real punk rock in the sense of knocking out crazy shit and letting the chips fall where they

may. The records are a little more controlled.

"The craziness is half the fun of it. Who wants to sit there and do the same old shit. You want to get that feeling that anything can happen and I think that goes a much longer way than trying to recreate your record exactly." P

[SEAN PALMERSTON]

MUSIC DWARVES

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