

PERCEPTION ISN'T REALITY

Before 'Nevermind' blew up, Tad, not Nirvana, was the toast of Seattle's nascent grunge scene

By Peter Lindblad

In his meaty hands, Tad Doyle holds a buzzing chainsaw, his face twisted into a maniacal scowl so mean it would make Satan soil his drawers.

Wearing a thrift-store flannel shirt and stocking cap in his band's video for "Wood Goblins," he is every bit the psycho-redneck-lumberjack Sub Pop had in mind when marketing Tad, the loudest, heaviest and blackest of all Seattle's grunge-era exports.

For his part, Doyle — who often sported a T-shirt of serial killer Ed Gein — willingly went along with the ploy, as a new MVD Visual DVD documentary, dense with live footage and candid interviews, on Tad's career titled "Busted Circuits and Ringing Ears," makes perfectly clear.

"Certainly, we loved to play that up," admits the charismatic Doyle, a man of large girth whose boundless onstage energy, reckless stage diving, comic exploits and blinding metallic guitar riffs helped establish the band Tad as a force to be reckoned with in the burgeoning Northwest music scene of the late '80s/early '90s.

"Like (Sub Pop label co-founder) Jon Poneman said in the DVD, if you're going to be in a band, and you have a garage that you practice in, and you have a day job, and you want to make it happen... there are a bazillion bands out there doing that. You've got to stand out in some way, and what we did with Sub Pop was pretty much take things that we knew about ourselves and exploited them, and made them bigger than life."

Actually, the image Sub Pop and Tad created wasn't too far off the mark. But, it didn't tell the whole story.

"There is some truth to a lot of the things we did,"

"... we were coming out with these ideas and putting them to tape as soon as were writing it. It's like being given a raw canvas and doing it right there on the spot."

— Tad Doyle on recording
'Infrared Riding Hood'



Charles Peterson

▲ From the "Wood Goblins" video, Tad featured Kurt Danielson, Gary Thorstensen, Tad Doyle and Steve Wied.

explains the likable, happy-go-lucky Doyle. "Both (Tad bassist) Kurt (Danielson) and I grew up in a logging town, he in Stanwood, Wash. I grew up in a small community (near) Boise, Idaho. And I cut cordwood out in Stanley, Idaho, one summer, and I know how to use an axe, but as far as being lumberjacks... I guess there is a little bit of truth to the redneck aspect, but we're educated rednecks, not trailer-trash rednecks."

In fact, it was that backwards culture that Tad would pillory in smart, often funny, but sometimes violent and vulgar lyrics based on real-life occurrences.

"We were definitely fascinated with deviant behavior, the underbelly of American society that just wasn't being talked about or sung about," says the Doyle, an ex-butcher who first played with Danielson in Bundle of Hiss until 1988, was a drummer with H-Hour and also performed with a Gang of Four tribute band called Red Set before forming Tad. "We got sick and tired of hearing another love song, essentially. And we wanted to shock people and have fun doing it."

From the start, after bringing guitarist Gary Thorstensen and the wildy creative drummer Steve Wied, formerly of Skin Yard, into the fold, Tad challenged audiences with a grinding, ear-splitting riot of '70s metal and punk that changed direction on a dime and caused massive sonic earthquakes. Unfortunately, controversy seemed to follow Tad everywhere, and legal troubles, substance abuse and label complications derailed the band before it got big.

After exploding onto the scene with 1989's sacrilegiously named *God's Balls* (it came from a line in a porno movie Danielson had seen), produced by Jack Endino (who helmed Nirvana's *Bleach*), Tad followed up with the thun-

derous throwdown of the *Salt Lick* EP in 1990. Recorded by Steve Albini, who worked with Nirvana on *In Utero* and has fronted bands like Big Black and Shellac, *Salt Lick* was a runaway semi that smashed through every barrier put in front of it. And like all of Tad's records, it had surprising grooves.

"One of the things people don't know about us is that Kurt and I were heavily influenced by early Motown stuff, and we have a sincere love and respect for the early funk pioneers," says Doyle. "And there's definitely a booty-shaking ability to (our music). For instance, 'Wood Goblins,' there's a riff that just gets hammered, but at the same time, it's got the sensibilities and song structures of groove music."

And even though the insanely infectious "Wood Goblins" video stemming from *Salt Lick* was banned from MTV (ostensibly for being "too ugly,") Tad seemed unstoppable.

On a co-headlining European tour with Nirvana, who was supporting *Bleach* at the time, Tad more than held its own. Humbly, Doyle says of the shows, "Sometimes they shined, and sometimes we shined, and every band had their off nights."

Still, initially, Tad appeared poised for bigger things than Nirvana. In fact, in the DVD, author Charles Cross, who wrote the Kurt Cobain biography "Heavier Than Heaven," said that Tad, and not Nirvana, was initially the "favored horse coming out of Seattle."

A series of disastrous circumstances would cut Tad off at the pass, however, beginning with the album *8-Way Santa*. Named after a type of blotter acid, *8-Way Santa* saw Tad working with Butch Vig, who produced Nirvana's groundbreaking *Nevermind* LP, and becoming more melodic.

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The problems began with the first single, “Jack Pepsi.” The cover art featured the Pepsi logo, with the band’s name inserted in place of Pepsi, and the soft-drink company sued. That wasn’t the end of it.

On the cover of *8-Way Santa* was a photo of a man cupping a woman’s breast. Being a bit naïve, Tad thought nothing of it until the woman — who had become a born-again Christian — saw the LP by chance in a record store. A lawsuit was inevitable.

“When you do those sorts of things, you’ve got to expect some repercussions,” says Doyle. “... but I’m glad things turned out the way they did, and I think it’s going to be one of the things that helps the music live on.”

Pulled off the shelves, *8-Way Santa*, with the original artwork, became a collector’s item. “As a matter of fact, you can’t find it anywhere as a result,” says Doyle. “I’ve seen it on eBay going for crazy money.”

Tad’s warped sense of humor would get the band into hot water again after the release of 1993’s *Inhaler*, the band’s major-label debut and first record with new drummer, ex-Accused basher Josh Sinder. A tour poster showed then-President Bill Clinton with a marijuana joint and the words, “This is heavy shit.” Giant Records then dropped the band from its label.

Even though Tad would find a home with EastWest/Elektra Records, the cursed crew had grown weary of its trials and tribulations, and alcohol and drug abuse was taking its toll. Tad would release *Infrared Riding Hood* in 1995 before calling it a day.

The recording of *Infrared Riding Hood* was a transcendental experience. “Kurt and I had developed our synergy even more as time went on,” says Doyle. “We pretty much went into the studio without any solid songs... we were coming out with these ideas and putting them to tape as soon as were writing it. It’s like being given a raw canvas and doing it right there on the spot.”

Looking back, Doyle, whose latest project is *Brothers Of The Sonic Cloth*, has no regrets.

“The bottom line is, I think the stuff that we’ve done stands on its own, without any justifications of any kind,” says Doyle, who looks back fondly on Seattle’s day in the sun. “It was definitely a little microcosm here. There weren’t a lot of really good, heavy, or any kind of independent, acts coming through. You could go to a show in Seattle, and you’d be lucky if you saw a good one from outside the area. So, it was very much a vacuum, and a lot of bands were supporting of each other and were very good friends, and I think that was pretty much what made it what it was.” **GM**