

WON'T BACK DOWN The Queers Keep It Ol' School, Dis the New School

BY JOHN B. MOORE

A LONGSIDE BANDS LIKE THE Descendents and Screeching Weasel, The Queers were one of the most consistently solid pop-punk bands of the '90s. There were no deep political messages behind their songs, no rallying cries to the moshpit; just quirky three-minute bursts of wry (sometimes juvenile) humor, picking up where The Ramones left off.

Nearly two decades later, boasting a roster of nearly 30 current and former members, The Queers are still churning out solid pop-punk

opinions about the current punk scene? I remember you making reference at some point to the Dropkick Murphys.

Right. We had one song that was loosely based on them, called "Little Rich Working Class White Boys." I'm just not into that scene. It's not the music so much. I don't think they're anything special at all compared to my heroes, but that's just me. That whole scene, at those shows, it's so violent. I look around, like, "Oh man, nobody's learned anything from this fucking trip we're on!" I remember I was in Australia at this radio station and there was a poster of the Dropkick Murphys.

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songs. With a new DVD (*The Queers Are Here*) and a new record (*Munki Brain*), The Queers are about to spend the better part of 2007 trekking the globe to promote both.

Joe Queer, the band's one constant member, recently spoke about the group's beginnings, The Ramones and the current state of punk-rock.

How much has the band's sound changed since the early days?

Well, like a lot of bands we started with fast, short, kind of angry stuff, and we grew from there. We've had people come and go, so it's almost like a solo project now for me. I always loved the pop stuff and the Beach Boys stuff, so the longer I go, the more I'm into that type of stuff and not so angry. Playing longer, you just dare to try different stuff.

You've got more of the surf guitar sound on the newer records.

Yeah, ever since we did *Don't Back Down*, which was about 10 years ago, we started doing more backing vocals. I don't know, the punk-rock scene is kind of dumb and really insulated. It's like if you don't work by these guidelines, then you're a pussy or you're not cool or whatever. To me, my music always started with The Ramones. They were always like a good punk twist on the Beach Boys to me.

So what does your audiences look like nowadays?

It's funny because we'll get pretty normal people, a lot of girls and kids with Mohawks, because we do a lot of the fast stuff live, so we kind of cross over. Each album has some of the in-your-face fuck-you songs, then you've got some poppy things with Beach Boy harmonies. It's kind of a weird thing.

A lot of younger punk bands today seem to cite Green Day as an influence, but don't really go back further than that.

Right. They don't do their homework and see what the influences were for a lot of bands, or go back to the early days of punk-rock— the Sex Pistols, the Damned, the Clash, Black Flag— and listen to that stuff. To a lot of these bands now, Black Flag and The Ramones are more like a clothing line almost. If you grow up and really live that credo of bands like Black Flag, the Dead Kennedys, the Ramones and the Angry Samoans, it doesn't give you much of a stomach to tolerate much bullshit in the punk-rock world these days. People always think I'm shooting my mouth off, but there's a difference between shooting your mouth off and talking the truth.

Have you gotten any flack from others for your

It was a drawing of a kid in a wife-beater with a studded wristband on, cocking his fist back to fight. I thought, what kind of fucking message is that?! I mean, the world's full of assholes, but we don't have to give them a platform to exhibit their stupidity and actually glorify it on a poster, do we?

Having said that, I know Al, their singer and the guitar player. He's a good guy and he always comes to our shows.

So I don't hate them personally. Then again, some of the shit they do is questionable, but that's what makes the world go round. They make different decisions than me. People ask me about Billie Joe from Green Day wearing eyeliner and I say, "Well, I wouldn't, but I don't think he's any less of a person because he does."

Did you have any idea when you started some 20 years ago that you'd be able to make a career out of this?

No. The band really got together in 1990— Hugh and me and B-Face. Up until that point it had been more of a jokey thing, and we'd go a year without playing and have different lineups. We played around Boston and opened up for the Ramones, the Descendents, the Dickies and the Samoans... those were the biggest gigs we got. We never toured. It's an acid trip to start

thinking that you could tour around and do this shit. Then all of a sudden we met Ben Weasel (of Screeching Weasel) and he got on Lookout (Records), then Lookout wanted to do an album with us. Then we did a couple of tours and started getting royalty checks and thought, "Good god!" Because, before that, really the best you could hope to do was be some loser kid in a band on a Black Flag-type tour. Yeah, you could do it, but it wasn't viable economically. Then we went on tour with Screeching Weasel, then we did one tour with Rancid and we'd get a royalty check for something like \$2,200 and we were like, "Whoa, are you fucking shitting me?!" It's like that old George Burns thing: by the time we realized we had no talent we were already famous, so we kind of stayed with it. Some people drifted off and some died and... I don't know. I'm still doing it for a few more years. We never thought we could do it this long.

You've got a new record and DVD. What are The Queers doing next?

We're going to be touring two weeks in April, then we've got three weeks in June, then off to Europe in July. We're doing a bunch of festivals opening for Marky Ramone, and Dave (the Queers' bass player) and I will play with Marky, too, so that will keep us busy for July. No idea what's up in September, but October is back to Europe and in November we go to Brazil and Japan. It's like my year's all shot now!

