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Last Crack

Reviews

Burning Time

(MVD Audio/

Metal Mind Productions)

[Interview with Paul Schluter - Guitars](#)

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When one thinks of the state of Wisconsin (i.e. the land of beer, cheese and the quasi-legendary Green Bay Packers), the words ‘...region that has produced many noteworthy musical acts...’ don’t exactly immediately spring to mind. Maybe it’s got something to do with the permafrost or maybe, well, maybe as a whole we’re just too boring or unimaginative. Despite numerous noteworthy and influential contributions from acts ranging in diversity from [The Buzzhorn](#), Boz Scaggs and The Violent Femmes, the resulting sonic carnage, as memorable as it may or may not have been, has ultimately had little--if any--lasting impact on the often tumultuous realms best known as the Hard Rock and Heavy Metal genres. Honestly...can you even remember the last time a Metal group from Wisconsin caught your attention?

Well, get ready as everything, like it or not, is about to change with the long-overdue return of the mighty Last Crack. Hey, man...don’t say we didn’t warn you.

On the brilliant, newly remastered and re-released Burning Time (2006), an ingeniously assembled fourteen song collection of Alternative-tinged Hard Rock each track, beginning with the emotion-laden “Mini Toboggan”, and the maddeningly infectious “Energy Mind”, immediately commands the rapt and undivided attention of even the most uninitiated of listeners--myself most definitely included--with a seamless, mostly mid-tempo barrage of passionate vocals, blistering fretwork and imaginatively abusive rhythms. Basking in the glory of a long overdue, limited edition repackaging, the still ferocious quintet wastes little time getting down to the proverbial business at hand (i.e. kicking the listener’s ass while stimulating their attention-starved brains), tearing through each composition with a carefully honed precision.

Continuing with the curiously-titled--albeit highly effective--“Kiss A The Cold”, and the rumbling, impressively multi-dimensional “Papa Mugaya”, the criminally underrated combination of vocalist Buddo, guitarists Paul Schluter and Don Bakken, bassist Todd Winger and future White Zombie drummer Phil Buerstatte (both of whom have since been replaced by four stringer Darren Soderholm and skin pounder Skee, respectively) steamroll ahead with an almost sickening ease. Effectively solidifying an already undeniably well-deserved--and undoubtedly hard-fought--reputation as a legitimate creative force not to be ignored amid the increasingly stagnant ‘...reunion...’ sub-genre, the group tears through each composition with an almost gleeful exuberance that somehow belies the actual age of the recordings.

Originally produced by the acclaimed Dave Jerden (Alice In Chains, Jane's Addiction and Offspring, to name only a few) at the now infamous Hollywood, California-based Eldorado Studios, other standouts, including the uniquely exhaustive "Downbeat Dirt Messiah", and the delightfully oddball (trust me!) "Love Or Surrender", offer a wealth of compelling further sonic evidence in support of the group's more than considerable musical and technical prowess. Not surprisingly, closing this absolute '...must have...' with blistering, crystal clear renditions of both the previously mentioned "Energy Mind", and the equally impressive "Mack Bolasses" (taken from the group's scalding 2005 offering *Burning Funkhouse Live*) only add even more fuel and fire to an already overwhelmingly impressive effort.

So what's wrong? Absolutely nothing. In fact, things couldn't possibly get much better. Easily one of the most highly anticipated re-issues in recent memory, the majority--if not all--of the decidedly thunderous (yet thought-provoking) wares contained herein are intertwined with enough raw energy, passion and airtight musicianship to thoroughly satisfy even the most sincerely pessimistic of detractors. Seriously folks...if the all-consuming blast of '...thinking man's...' Hard Rock that is *Burning Time* somehow doesn't whet your freakin' whistle, nothing (and I mean *nothing*) ever truly will. Thus, if you are still looking for an ear-pleasing alternative to the painfully mindless bullshit that is so often force fed en mess, then this, my friends, might just be what the doctor ordered. Trust me, you won't be disappointed.

Interviews

Recently, acclaimed **Last Crack** guitarist **Paul Schluter** was kind enough to speak with us regarding, among many other things, the re-issue of the group's long-out-of-print classics **Sinister Funkhouse #17** and **Burning Time**...

Todd: How was Last Crack formed?

Paul Schluter: "Actually, funny enough, we were formed from a billboard at a music store. ...Don Bakken and I had been in another band together and kinda needed something better... So we put up an ad. We were like seventeen or something, so we just put up an ad saying '...two guitar players looking for a singer, bass player and drummer...'. ...Phil and Todd called us up and we started playing with them. About a year later, we had put up another ad after going through a couple of lame singers. ...Then we found Buddo's ad...it said something like '...back from Austin, looking for a band...', so we called him, he came out and that was that."

Todd: When Buddo became a member of the group, was the chemistry immediate or did it take time for it to develop?

Paul: "Yeah. ...When Phil and I play together, we always make a lot of eye contact. Half was through the first song, I remember looking at Phil and he was giving me the same look that I was feeling. ...But the weird thing was is that it wasn't the perfect marriage of exactly what we wanted right off the bat. Both sides kinda had to come to each other. We were definitely coming from a different place than Buddo. He was coming from a Punk/Underground place. ...But he was a good singer, we were a good band and good musicians. ...We weren't even necessarily going for the same thing musically, but we just melded it and made it work, which kinda makes it more interesting, I think."

Todd: I guess I never envisioned Buddo coming from a Punk background...

Paul: "...You can probably hear it more on the Sinister Funkhouse # 17 album. He actually comes from more of an underground than Punk background. ...But shortly after he joined us, he also joined a Punk band called The Snot Rockets...and we used to hate it. I remember the night before we were supposed to do our first demo, we went to see him play with them and the first thing he did was stick the mic in his mouth and just scream. ...We were thinking '...oh, great...and he's gotta sing for us tomorrow...' But eventually he just quit that and put it all full force into us."

Todd: What inspired the name Last Crack?

Paul: "Well, when we first got together with Buddo, we had written a handful of songs and one of the first ones Buddo ended up calling "The Last Crack Of Doom". We were like ...oh, that's cool, but can you take the "Of Doom" part off?'. (laughs) So we decided to call it "The Last Crack" and that ended up on our first four song demo that got us signed. ...When you have a band...eventually you are going to have a show and you're going to need to come up with a name. That's how half the bands in the world have been forced to decided on a name, ya know? So we had a show coming up. Nothing big, just one of our first shows and we needed a name. I remember getting on the phone with everybody and suggesting that we use one of our song titles. We had "Concrete Slaughter Hogs", "The Last Crack"... "Shelter" and I was just like '...how about Last Crack?' and everybody agreed to it and that was just what it was. ...We all liked it enough and we had all liked the name of the song since Buddo had taken the "Of Doom" part off of it. It was just a time issue. We needed a name, it was the title of one of our songs and it was just the easiest thing to do that we could live with."

Todd: Well, it certainly could have turned out worse...

Paul: "Yeah...because eventually, those names just become you. I remember when we were in L.A. recording Burning Time, our producer Dave Jerden said '...hey Paul, check this out...'. So I put on the headphones and he said '...that band is called Alice In Chains...' as he played me "Man In The Box". I can remember thinking '...man, that is the stupidest name for a band...' ...He gave

us a tape and we listened to it for forever while we were out there. It was the only thing we listened to for like six weeks and eventually the name just grew on us. When we got back to Wisconsin after being in L.A. for six weeks, I was turning people on to this band that hadn't even been released yet. I would tell people they were called Alice In Chains and people would say '...what? That sounds just stupid!' Of course all of those people own the CD by now. When you first have a name, everything sounds dumb, especially when you're trying to come up with one. And then, eventually, whatever you choose becomes you, ya know?"

Todd: How did the group become involved with Road Runner Records?

Paul: "It's funny...I think by being on that label, we ended up a lot of places that we didn't really belong. We did our first demo after only being together as a band for a few months. We only had like nine songs written at that point...when we went into the studio to do our first demo. ...After we did our first demo...we had like five hundred cassettes. We were sellin' 'em and since we were young and always going to parties, we would always take a tape to the parties. At one barrel party in Madison, some guy came up to me when the tape was playin' and said '...hey...is this your band?' and I said '...yeah...' and he was like '...this is pretty cool. I know this kid in Minneapolis who runs this fanzine and he talks to record labels all the time. If you give me this tape, I'll get it to him...' So I gave the tape to the guy, and we ended up in touch with this seventeen year old kid named Jake Wisely who ran this publication called Sheet Metal. He ended up later becoming the president of ASCAP in Chicago. ...He ended up getting someone from Shatter Records, a small independent and Monte Conner from Road Runner Records...both guys flew out to see us on two different occasions. Monte basically signed us right on the spot after he saw us. We got an offer from the first guy...but we thought we were gonna get this huge contract because we were young and expected a lot (laughs). Monte came to see us...and he came backstage and said '...normally, I'm not supposed to do this...but we're going to be doing business together...'. Shortly after that, we signed our Road Runner contract. At the time, they were this huge Indie with great worldwide distribution, so we just sorta went for it...although at the time, I don't think they were the best label for us being that they were even heavier than they are now."

Todd: All things considered, it's too bad you couldn't have signed with them twenty years later...

Paul: "...I think at time they didn't know what to do with us, but they obviously saw something in the band and it was a good break for us. They sank some money into us and believed in us enough to let us do that second album, which I think was a lot more like us. That first album is real raw and real low budget. ...The second album is so much more refined. It's something I'm still proud of to this day."

Todd: What was the main catalyst behind Buddo leaving the group?

Paul: "We were out on tour and being that we were on Road Runner we were out with bands that probably weren't the best for us. We would have liked to have been out with Jane's Addiction and Faith No More...and that was all more doable in that time frame. It wouldn't have been impossible to go out with bands like that, but we were out touring with Armored Saint and Wrathchild America. And it's funny because both of those bands requested to tour with us, but neither of those bands wanted to tour with each other. ...So we ended up out with those guys for like a six week tour. Buddo kinda hated it, even though the singer from Armored Saint just loved Buddo. He would follow us around and be like '...hey...where's Buddo at?'. I think he just thought Buddo was an interesting guy. ...I think, on that tour, there were a variety of things. We had two managers at the time...who were partners. The label had gotten us our management because we were actually signed without management. That's why we didn't even up touring for the first album. ...So the label sorta wined and dined a couple of guys for us...and Buddo ended up latching onto one of the guys. ...Part of the problem was that Buddo was a bit more straight-edged and our drummer was sorta living the life with women, drugs and whatever, so there was some tension there. So Buddo would go and talk to one of the guys about this and eventually, he started saying things like '...well, you could always go solo. I'm sure Road Runner would take you on as a solo artist and you get your own band and call all the shots...' Eventually, that's what happened. One day Buddo just said '...I quit...'"

Todd: It's a shame he couldn't have been reasoned with...

Paul: "We all tried to talk him out of it, but there was nothin' doin'. ...I think management just misguided him, plus I think he was unhappy with not being able to control our drummer. Plus, some of the record company pressures were staring to get to him, too. When you're in an up and coming band, you always want to do interviews and people just always wanted to talk to him in those times. Plus, the label was making him out to be some sort of mad man with all this stuff that he wasn't, really. There was a variety of stuff, but a lot of it had to do with tension within the band. Buddo was on one side, Phil was on another side, I was probably smack dab in the middle, Todd was a little more of Phil's side and Don was more on Buddo's side... Looking back, it probably would have worked if we had replaced our drummer. But if you take someone out of that creative force, you change things."

Todd: How involved is the group with the Sinister Funkhouse #17 and Burning Time re-issues?

Paul: "...The company (Metal Mind Productions) had called our current manager and told him that they were doing it and asked if we had anything to contribute, which makes me very happy because those albums went out of print. You can still get them, the originals, all over E-Bay, but it's another thing altogether to have them out there in the stores. ...So I was overjoyed. They asked us for pictures, a bio and all this stuff. In the original CD, the booklet was just a double

fold-out...ya know? The re-issues come with sixteen page booklets, have digi-pack covers...and have a full cardboard cover. They look just amazing! I dug through all my old photo albums and sent them just a bunch of stuff. They've made collages for each of the albums, which is really cool. ...We also have a live album called Burning Funkhouse Live, it's all songs from the first two albums, that we recorded here in 2002 in Madison to a sold-out crowd in a club. It was an amazing night and we happened to record it. We spent quite some time mixing it and putting it together, so we gave them two live Sinister Funkhouse songs for the Sinister Funkhouse re-issue and two live Burning Time songs for the Burning Time re-issue. ...It's great to have these two re-issues come out. They're remastered with 24 bit mastering on gold discs...I couldn't have asked for anything better. ...There were always things about those albums that we hated...so I sent a couple of note to be forwarded to the mastering person saying things like '...please turn up the bass on the first album...', so that's much improved and I also always though the first album sounded harsh, so...now our albums have that new standard of loudness that matches up to current CDs."

Todd: What was the primary motivation behind the group's reunion? Did you feel as if the band had unfinished business that needed to be addressed?

Paul: "I think we probably all felt that way over the years because it was such an abrupt end. I've always felt bad for our fans, ya know? I'm a huge music fan and music coinsure and I've always felt that we've had unfinished business. Plus, to top it all off, we're all, with the exception of our original drummer Phil, still here. But we knew of a number of really good drummers that we could hit up. And the drummer is probably the easiest person to replace, ya know? ...A friend of ours (Maximum Ink owner Rökker), who became our manager and is a great marketer, promotion guy and motivator, too...he ended up calling us all up. We had been working with him...one our third album Runheadstartscreaming in '94. He had done the artwork and he had gone with us to Europe when we had done some festivals over there. He's been our friend ever since and he just sorta started it... He said '...man, you guys should just do a show or something...' and he just ended up calling everybody. ...We had actually already done some jamming with our original drummer Phil as early as 2000 and had started writing some stuff. It was really cool for all of us to walk back into a rehearsal together, ya know? But it didn't work out at that time. It wasn't too much longer before Rökker called everybody and just kinda lit the fire under everybody. We had a meeting, decided to do it and had a blast. We worked really hard to be as good as we could possibly be and the really great part about it is that we recorded it that night. The real bummer from that night is that we didn't get a lot of video. We got some that night, but...it was just a magical show and I'm really glad that we did it."

Todd: Any truth to the rumors that the group has been recording new material?

Paul: "Yeah...we've got thirteen songs started at my studio in Madison. We started it last September. We all just took like a week off from everything to play the basic tracks. We had been writing for about a year or two prior to that and it was a long and tedious writing process. It's been difficult, as it's always been with Last Crack. We wrote half of Burning Time months before we got there to record it and I know Buddo had half the lyrics by the time we got there. ...We started recording in September and it's some great stuff. I'm really pleased. ...So far, we have drums, bass and I've done about five songs on guitar. I think Don has done about nine songs on guitar. So it's kinda just sitting in limbo right now, but we've been meaning to pick it right back up and get done with it. We all have our own projects...and they've become almost like priorities to us. It's funny...Last Crack is huge to us and if we do anything with it, it means we can go and tour Europe and do a bunch of other fun things, but it gets put to the side while we all get busy doing other things. For a long time, I was working with my band once or twice a week and then once or twice a week with Last Crack, and that's when it probably works the best. And now the other guys are doing the same thing."

Select Discography

Burning Funkhouse Live (2005)

Runheadstartscreaming (1994)

Burning Time (1991)

Sinister Funkhouse #17 (1989)

* features vocalist Buddo

** features vocalist Shawn Anthony Brown

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