

CLASSIC ROCK REVISITED

FRONTIERS RECORDS

FOREVERMORE

Deep Purple
PHOENIX RISING

Features:
RISES OVER JAPAN: 30 minute-long
live footage filmed in Japan

PRESENTS...

TWISTED SISTER
DOUBLE LIVE

NORTH STAGE '82 NEW YORK STEEL '01
From the start of their recording
career in 1982 & the beginning of
their reunion career in 2001.

40 Years of Rock
A Decade of New
Recordings! 2001-2011
www.foghat.net

News Interviews Reviews Concert Reports Giveaways Rock Shop About Us Contact Us Links Mailing List Home

Navigation

- News
- Interviews
- Reviews
- Concert Reports
- Rock Shop
- Auction
- Giveaways
- Crossword Puzzle
- About Us
- Links
- Contact Us
- Home

Merchandise

- ♪ APPAREL
- ♪ INFANT BAND APPAREL
- ♪ HATS, CAPS & BEANIES
- ♪ BELT BUCKLES
- ♪ CUPS, MUGS & GLASSES
- ♪ WALL ART
- ♪ NOVELTY ITEMS
- ♪ SHEET MUSIC & SONG BOOKS



sheetmusicplus
*****.com



A DEAD KENNEDY WITH A KILLER SMILE: AN INTERVIEW WITH EAST BAY RAY

By Jeb Wright

Back in the early 1980's, I was in a record store in Wichita, Kansas searching the bins for any new Iron Maiden or Black Sabbath albums when my buddy walked up to me with an album that showed Jesus Christ on a cross with money in the background. It was called Jesus Christ Incorporated by a band called the Dead Kennedys. We had never heard of this band but the cover was so cool that we bought it.

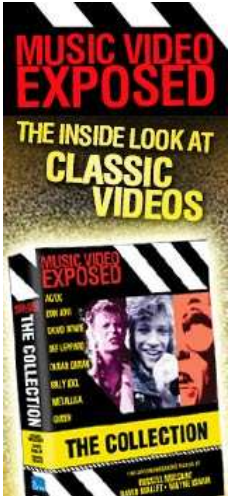
We had been partying all day and when we got back to his place we were not in the purest state of mind. We put the full sized LP on the turntable but somehow failed to note that it was to be played at 45 RMP. We sat there, in our altered state of mind and listened to the album trying to figure out why it sounded so gloomy. At that moment, I think we accidentally invented stoner rock! Eventually, we figured out that we had to speed it up. When we did, our senses were hit with the most popular West Coast punk band of all time: Dead Kennedys.

Back to the record store we went to pick up Fresh Fruit for Rotting Vegetables and, later on, Plastic Surgery Disasters.

I may be a metal head at heart but the DK's introduced me to punk and I latched on to this band for the radical political content, the crazy rhythms and the driving guitar force. There was even a time I spiked my hair, took a white t-shirt and scrawled 'DEAD KENNEDYS' on it in black marker because I couldn't find an official DK t-shirt anywhere in Kansas. I was even inspired to paint the nail on the middle finger of my left hand black so I could make a statement when I flipped off authority figures.

I still love the Dead Kennedys all these years later. I never became hardcore, as I didn't see any sense in moshing or beating each other up for fun. I just liked the music – still do. So, you can imagine my joy when the opportunity arose to interview the Dead Kennedys' guitar player, East Bay Ray. I was emailing the publicist back to set up an interview before I had even read all of the press release that was sent to me about East Bay Ray's album with his new band The Killer Smiles.

In the interview that follows, East Bay Ray and I discuss the new album in detail. East Bay Ray and the Killer Smiles is a fresh new band that mixes Ray's punk roots with some modern Foo Fighters type vibe. That said, this one is still more old school than modern, which is just the way it should be. The new songs are all killer and include two songs played by the Kennedys on their last tour, as well as a remake of the classic "16 Tons."



ROCK
.COM

Join Our Mailing List



Jeb: Before we get started I have to ask, do I call you "Ray" or "East Bay Ray" when we are talking?

East Bay Ray: East Bay Ray is fine.

Jeb: I was not sure of the proper way to address you.

East Bay Ray: Well, "genius" will do [laughter].

Jeb: I love your solo album, East Bay Ray and the Killer Smiles. This is a very complete album with great songs. You should be very proud of it.

East Bay Ray: I am very proud of it. Hopefully, people will get to hear it. I think if people can hear the album, then they will like it. The way things are these days, that is hard.

Jeb: Paul Leary, from the Butthole Surfers, produced the album. He has produced a lot of big names.

East Bay Ray: We have known each other a while. We haven't really hung out recently because he is in Austin, Texas. We used to hang out a lot back in the day. Some of the first shows we played in Texas were with them in these hollowed out warehouses in Dallas, Austin and San Antonio. We have kept in touch over the years. When I knew I was going to be doing this record I called him up and sent him some tracks and he was interested.

Jeb: This does not sound like a bunch of songs that you dusted off. This music sounds really fresh.

East Bay Ray: Some have been around longer than others, and some have been in different forms. I started finishing them off with Skip McSkipster, the vocalist on the album. He was in the band the Wynona Riders, who were on Lookout Records in the East Bay. They were there after Green Day and the label had a hard time handling the success of Green Day; they expanded too fast and Skip's band got lost in the crunch. I knew Skip and he came onboard to sing for The Dead Kennedys, which he is still doing, actually.

We tried to write songs years ago, but it didn't happen. When we are on tour with Dead Kennedys people are always coming up and going, "Where is the new material?" That has been going on forever, even back in the day. We started writing again, and it was really coming out good this time, so we started recording. We've actually played a song or two live with Dead Kennedys.

Jeb: One of those songs that is on the album that you played with Dead Kennedys is "Your Such a Fake."

East Bay Ray: We have played that. We've also played "Area 51." We snuck them into the set and, luckily, the Mosh Pit kept going. One time with the Dead Kennedys, we went on tour before our new album, Plastic Surgery Disasters was in the stores. We played those songs and everyone just kind of stared at us. This time, with the new songs, they went over well and it was encouraging. We knew we had good songs. Skip has a different viewpoint, lyrically than [Jello] Biafra, so that really makes these songs not Dead Kennedys songs. It is very similar in that fact that it has my guitar playing.

Jeb: Why call this East Bay Ray and not Dead Kennedys?

East Bay Ray: It's because the lyrical content is different. It is out of respect for the band's legacy, too. The lyrics are less overtly political. I like to say that they are more about personal politics and how people treat each other, rather than journalistic politics. I think they have more timeless poetic quality as opposed to journalistic quality.



Join Us On Facebook



Find A Record

Label

Natl. TV campaign for new artists. Submit your music today.
www.TateMusicGroup.com

country lyrics/poems

nashville music producer reviewing lyrics/poems for recording project.
nashville-music-prod.com

Is Obama a Socialist?

Yes or No? Share your opinion now!
www.SpringboardAmerica.com

TuneUp: iTunes Cleaner

Automatically Find & Fix Songs with Bad Info & Missing Album Art.
www.TuneUpMedia.com





[Buy Stadium Rock](#)

Jeb: I love your version of the classic "16 Tons."

East Bay Ray: That song is an old song from the '40's and '50's. Tennessee Ernie Ford had a hit with it in the 1950's. Merle Travis had a more country version in the 1940's. "16 Tons" is really a song about corporations taking over America. That is happening more and more now.

The Supreme Court defined a corporation as a person, an entity, so they could spend unlimited amounts of money on them. There is a Shakespeare quote that says, "If you prick me, do I not bleed?" Corporations do not pursue liberty, life or happiness; they pursue profit. Money may buy you happiness, and it may not, but it is not the same as life, liberty and happiness, which is what human beings pursue. Corporations have been given a big lift up by the right wing Supreme Court members.

I like to tell this joke: There is a CEO, a Tea Party member and a Union member all sitting around a table that has ten cookies on it. The CEO takes nine of the cookies and tells the Tea Party member that he better watch out because the union member is trying to take his cookie.

The Tea Party, during this whole debt crisis, was yelling that they would accept no new taxes for millionaires. Millionaires are taxed at the lowest rate they have been taxed at for decades. Back in the Eisenhower days, when everyone was getting rich, they were taxed at 70% and the economy was doing just fine. Under George Bush, they received this huge tax break and the economy dived, and the jobs are gone. When people say that if we tax the rich, then there won't be jobs, then they are lying. The stock market is going down because when Americans don't have jobs they don't buy things. When that happens then even the rich can't get rich.

Jeb: I was really afraid that the Tea Baggers would bankrupt our nation just to get a President elected. That is not only immoral it is despicable.

East Bay Ray: I don't know if they really know what they are doing. They have knee-jerk reactions and they are not looking at the big picture. There are plenty of people on Wall Street that are terrified of them. Even they realize that you have to pay some taxes.

On the news they say that the deficit is the biggest problem but that is not true. The biggest problem is joblessness. If we had more jobs then that would mean we would have more tax revenue. They cut the tax rate and that is what caused this deficit. When tax rates are high the economy does better. I know it does not make sense but history supports it. The Tea Party does not want to look at history, they just want no new taxes. Their whole plan is not going to create jobs. Some people suspect that they want to make the economy worse so they can get rid of Obama. To me, that is being a traitor and is un-American.

We have left wing politicians, and we have right wing politicians, and they are not all good, and they are not all bad. Some people get things done but to deliberately – well I don't know if it is deliberate or not – but if they are okay with joblessness going up because that will beat Obama, then that is bad. I've never seen anything like this in American politics before.

Jeb: When did common sense become unfashionable?

East Bay Ray: Well, what it is, is the media. They don't report things anymore; they just express opinions because it's cheaper that way. The news has become entertainment. The problem is that most people jump onboard of what other people think. Most people see the news and believe what they are told, which is that a balanced budget will help the economy. Most economists know that is not true. Will the media ever educate anybody? No. You can't tell the American people stuff they don't want to hear.

Jeb: You have always liked telling people your version of the truth in your songs. You said this is not politics in the big picture, but rather politics on an individual basis. Is this something you have always believed is the key?

East Bay Ray: People keep hoping that change will come from the top down but change happens from the way that you treat your friends, family and co-workers. If you don't treat them with justice and respect then it is never going to happen in the big picture.

The best place to get your politics about the world is not from lead singers and rock musicians. A lead singers job is to make something catchy, and to make a catchy phrase; it is not for in-depth analysis of the world's problems. People ask me if music is going to change the world, and my answer is that music doesn't change the world; you do. You have to start with your friends, family and neighbors.

Jeb: You don't write the lyrics but I'm wondering, since it is your name on the album, do you approve, or disapprove, of the lyrics during the creative process?

East Bay Ray: I don't approve or disapprove of them; I give my suggestions. I may change some lines, here and there.

Jeb: I love the tune "I'm a User."

East Bay Ray: Actually, that is one that Skip did not write. Another musician friend and I wrote that song.

Jeb: Let's talk about your guitar playing. The Kennedys were known for many one or two minute songs...

East Bay Ray: I disagree with you. The short songs were mostly on In God We Trust Inc. Most of the other songs were, quote, unquote, normal length. I suppose Fresh Fruit for Rotting Vegetables had some short songs, but it also had some long ones. Frankenchrist has some epics.

Jeb: Which way do you prefer: Long song or short song?

East Bay Ray: Looking back on this album, it was such a struggle to get it written, and recorded, that I think there needed to be more stretching out on these songs. I think there should have been more instrumental parts in-between versus. The songs were ideas that Skip and I had in our heads and we made little demos to see what it would sound like with a full band. We have already started writing songs for the next album, which we can hopefully record soon. We don't necessarily want to make the songs longer; we just think we could make them with less words. It was actually Skip's suggestion to do that. I agree with him.

Jeb: That is a team player for a singer.

East Bay Ray: It is not the amount of words that you use; it is the quality of the words you use. You don't have to be a rocket scientist to figure that out.

Jeb: Skip being easy to work with must be a nice switch for you compared to Biafra.

East Bay Ray: It is nice to work with someone who's a team player.

Jeb: This is an East Bay Ray album, but this is really a true collaborative effort.

East Bay Ray: Skip put a lot of work into this album. We worked on the songs, and even on different sequences of the song order.

Jeb: The sequence works. "Raising the Stakes" starts things off and grabs your attention.

East Bay Ray: I would put the songs on my iPod in different orders to see how they worked together. I thought "Raising the Stakes" was a good introduction to the sound of the band and then we just took it from there.

Jeb: Are you going to tour as Dead Kennedys or as Killer Smiles?

East Bay Ray: We are going to tour as East Bay Ray and the Killer Smiles. We've released a press release and we are talking with different booking agents so we can book some shows. I would really like to play a big hall as a third or second bill to a headliner, that way a lot of people can see us.

Jeb: Are you comfortable calling your music punk?

East Bay Ray: I call it alternative. I think it is more like Smashing Pumpkins or Foo Fighters. We didn't write the songs with that in the back of our mind. We started writing the songs and this is just the direction that the music took us. Skip's lyrics are different, and while the Wynona Riders were a punk band, they are not the Dead Kennedys.

I would discuss things with Skip. I told him that some of the great song subjects, that have political and social overtones, are more like Bob Dylan lyrics. Bob Dylan does some overtly political songs but most of his songs are artistic in the sense that you can apply them to your own life and your own situation. I wanted this band to be much more human and less like some kind of a religious cult.

Jeb: Are you saying that the Dead Kennedys became that way?

East Bay Ray: Parts of punk rock have. There is a punk Taliban out there and if you don't do it their way then they get mad at you. It has even happened to Biafra. For me, that was always opposite of what Dead Kennedys were about. We were always about thinking for yourself and finding information out for yourself.

Jeb: At what point did punk turn from that being the modus operandi to the attitude of partying and smashing into each other?

East Bay Ray: I can only speak from my own experience, but here in northern California, San Francisco, there was the Mabuhay Gardens, which was the CBGB's of San Francisco. Back in the day, the guy who booked it, Dirk Dirksen, would have a punk band, a pop band and an art band all on the same bill. He would mix it up. The different audiences would cross-pollinate, so to speak. The bands were much more interesting. In about '82 or '83, the scenes split apart in California. There would be punk shows and, separate from that, there would be art shows. There were also pop and new wave band shows. I think that is when it became a little less interesting.

If you think about CBGB's, then you can see all the different styles of music that was going on. They had bands like the Dictators and the Ramones but they also had Blondie and Television. Amazing music came out of that because the different bands were actually listening to each other.

Jeb: When I heard the Kennedys for the first time I thought you made the Sex Pistols look like The Pet Shop Boys.

East Bay Ray: Oh, I wouldn't go that far.

Jeb: You were groundbreaking in many ways. You cussed on albums, and that was shocking at the time. I was smart enough to see that it was about more than that. You were also very political and you made a great statement musically. I was into hard rock and you really got to me with your views and your outrageousness.

East Bay Ray: When you talk about being outrageous, you have to realize that outrageous is really a short time phenomena. What is really avant-garde is when you change the form of stuff. It is like when Impressionism turned into Cubism.

There is a difference between shocking and avant-garde. People get over shocking very quickly. You hear 'fuck' on HBO all the time, so it is not really shocking anymore. Content can be shocking but that does not make it avant-garde. Punk rock music went retro back to the garage bands of the '60's with a little more finesse. It was the change in the form that was avant-garde and that is why it has lasted. The Mohawk haircuts are not shocking anymore because that is fashion.

Jeb: Did you start the Dead Kennedys?

East Bay Ray: I am the founder. I put an ad up in this independent record store called Aquarius Records, where all the musicians hung out, and where all the right records came out. Biafra answered the ad. We wrote the songs, and I actually financed the first record, "California Uber Alles" and "The Man with the Dogs." The drummer and I sold them out of the back of our car.

Jeb: When you think back to young East Bay Ray, and compare him to who you are now, do you smile at the past and think that you were naïve, or do you think that you were pretty damn savvy?

East Bay Ray: I was naive about one thing, and that was Biafra. Klaus [Flouride], Ted and I all bought his talk. We found out later that it was just talk.

Jeb: Jello Biafra was a big part of that band.

East Bay Ray: Oh, he's talented but what can you say to someone that lies to you, skims royalties from you, and then, years later, when you find it out and go to him, he goes to the press, makes stuff up and calls us names?

You need to go to Facebook and go to the East Bay Ray Fan Page and go to the notes. There is a thing called Melissa's Myth. The band Neurosis used to be on Alternative Tentacles, too. They kept quiet for years. Biafra had a record of theirs for years and they finally got the record back. He did the same thing to them that he did to us and you can read all about it. People can't understand it because he has such a carefully crafted image.

You know how you used to believe in Santa Claus, but then you found out that Santa Claus doesn't really exist? Just because he doesn't exist doesn't mean that the spirit of Christmas is dead. When people start getting into idol worship is when you start getting into trouble. Cult of Personalities do not work.

Jeb: Is that another reason to do this as the Killer Smiles?

East Bay Ray: I want to do the Killer Smiles because this is new music. Hopefully, people will like it and we can record some more. This band is new and exciting for me. The other stuff is

fun to do, but I have played "Holiday in Cambodia" in every show I have ever played. Actually, that is a song, which I really love, and we do play that in the Killer Smiles.

Jeb: You are not turning your back on the past.

East Bay Ray: I love the Dead Kennedys music. As an artist, I need to record new stuff. The reason for doing this interview and doing shows is to get people to hear it. There is so much static out there these days that it is hard to get heard.

Jeb: The Killer Smiles is music that you want to go back and hear again and again. I have been cranking this up all week long.

East Bay Ray: One of my intents was to do that. I told Paul Leary that I knew he knew how to make songs that will make an immediate impact. I told him that some things need to be subtle and not high impact. I wanted people to be able to listen to it and not be sick of it after three or four listens. He looked at me and said, "Thank God, that's what I want too." He works for a lot of big labels and they are always trying to tell him how to make a hit. When you have a big PR machine then you can make anything a hit. When you're trying to make good music then you do your best and hope people like it.

Jeb: Marketing is a segment of the music business. However, you have never been too concerned with marketing.

East Bay Ray: The people at MDV have some ideas and I know the guy who runs the Dead Kennedys Facebook page. Hopefully the label will buy some ads. You need to spend money to make money. The big labels are very, very crippled.

The Foo Fighters spend money. They have been doing a lot of free shows and that costs a lot of money.

I met Dave Grohl earlier this year at South by Southwest. It was a great experience. He is very down to earth, we spent a half an hour talking. He told me that he had three musical idols. He said one was John Bonham, one was Paul McCartney and the third one was me. I said, "You've got to be kidding?"

Jeb: What is the biggest misconception people have about Punk Rock?

East Bay Ray: The biggest misconception comes from punkers. They think there is some kind of Punk Rock Rule Book. People with your background, that are more mainstream, make the misconception that punk rock only contains three chords. There are many, many bands that play much more complicated music than that in the punk genre. Devo came out of the punk rock scene. Television and Bauhaus are very talented musicians. Punk rock started as a PR gimmick with Malcolm McLaren and the Sid Vicious look, so people read into it their own feelings and it took on a life of its own.

Jeb: Last one: Are you comfortable with people like Dave Grohl and myself putting you up on a pedestal?

East Bay Ray: I realize that technically I'm not the best guitar player in the world, but I am unique and recognizable. From an artist's viewpoint, that is a very important thing. I am able to communicate the same emotions that everybody has but I do it in a different and unique way.

Jeb: I love that you come across as a regular guy. You don't have a huge ego.

East Bay Ray: Everybody has an ego; I just don't buy my own hype. I don't watch enough television and advertising. I try to be a human too.

Visit East Bay Ray on Facebook

Send
Jeb
Wright
and 6
others
like

VISIT THE ROCK SHOP FOR ROCKIN MERCHADISE



🎵 APPAREL 🎵 INFANT BAND APPAREL 🎵 HATS, CAPS & BEANIES 🎵 BELT BUCKLES 🎵 CUPS, MUGS
& GLASSES 🎵 WALL ART 🎵 NOVELTY ITEMS 🎵 SHEET MUSIC & SONG BOOKS