



STOMP & STAMMER

news • music • noise • opinion • garbage

volume 21 • issue 1 • october 2015



Alyssa Yohana

7



17



23

Girlpool

"We feel so inspired by the people that come out to our shows."

Holly Golightly

"I was an anti-social worker."

Rebel Scum

"I love the movie, myself. Shit, I'd go through it all again."

Cover: DIIV

9

"So many artists in the past have done a lot to glamorize drug use. That was never something that led me to use drugs."

6 **News Leak**
All The News That Spits

26 **Support Our Troops**
Jeff Clark's local music spew

11 **Get Out**
Stomp and Stammer's concert calendar

28 **Caught On Film**
Two Middle Fingers, way way up!

21 **Know Your Writes**
We know what you like

30 **Call Sheet**
S&S's take on local film action

22 **Clubland**
Stomp and Stammer tells you where to go

31 **Pet Sounds**
Stomp and Stammer gets warm and fuzzy

50 ACRES OF PAIN: REBEL SCUM'S DARK VICTORY

A decade ago when Atlanta

filmmakers Video Rahim and Francis Percarpio (abetted by the crew of Worldstorm Arts Lab) began their work on *Rebel Scum*, a rockumentary about the Dirty Works, a self-described “psycho white trash punk band” from Knoxville, Tennessee, they had no idea of the immensity of frustrations and dangers that lay ahead. Sure, Dirty Works lead singer Christopher Scum was a former junkie on methadone maintenance with a tenuous grasp of sanity and a penchant for beating himself bloody onstage. And guitarist Steven Crime was a raging alcoholic, in-and-out of jail. And yeah, the band would break up and then get back together about every other day. But what’s not to love about a bunch of dirt-poor, surly, drunken and sometimes violent lowlifes hell bent on making the most offensive music as possible while soiling the stages of every dive bar shithole in the American Southeast? *Everybody* loves this kind of stuff, right?

“When we first started the movie, we thought this was going to get big so fast,” says Rahim. “We were already counting our money. But all we’ve done is lose tons and tons of money. I’ve lost jobs over this, I’ve lost friends... It’s been a ten-year journey.”

And what a journey it has been. During two years of capturing the public and private lives of the Dirty Works, Rahim, Percarpio and crew were privy to all manner of lawbreaking, drunken arguments, fistfights, bug-eating (seriously), bloodletting, drug activities and – the icing on the cake – one of Christopher Scum’s legendary near-suicidal benders. Oh yeah, one time Scum’s girlfriend Renee pulled a gun on them, too.

But the Worldstorm crew emerged from all this chaos at least physically unscathed, delivering the final edit of *Rebel Scum* in 2009. And here’s where things got even more difficult. A slew of festival premiers and guerilla screenings were received warmly by viewers, but film distributors just wouldn’t touch it with a ten foot pole.

“This movie is so different and backwards from what the media is trying to sell people right now,” says Rahim. “The distributors would see the movie, and they didn’t understand the southern accents and they didn’t see any dollar signs behind it.”

“It kind of just floated out there for years, but I wouldn’t let it go,” Rahim continues. “Other people just said hey, let it go. It’s dead. But I kept pushing and pushing.”

“But years after we finished the film, the market has changed. People are interested in rock documentaries in particular right now. I think we just finally got to the right time. You’ve got to remember that a lot of classic cult films took a long time to come out. A lot of cool movies just don’t make it – they just get lost in the shuffle. If it’s a



STORY BY
JOHN SEWELL



cult movie, it’s going to take like five years before they [distributors] see any money. So they don’t want to do it.

“It’s funny,” Rahim continues. “When I look at my favorite films, the ones that had the most obstacles seem to end up being the most interesting and that have the most lasting impact.”

So maybe Rahim, Percarpio and company will at last reap well-deserved recognition for *Rebel Scum*, a twisted masterpiece of *cinema verite*. Finally, *finally*, after six years of indie cinematic sub-obscure, *Rebel Scum* will be available on DVD on November 24 from Wild Eye Releasing, an outfit that specializes in horror, exploitation, art house and documentary films. So the good guys always win in the end, right?

Well, it’s not so simple. There’s the matter of paying for production costs: Percarpio shelled out over \$100,000 of his own money on expensive 35MM film stock that, incidentally, looks great. (*Rebel Scum* is a real movie, not a shot-on-video-on-the-cheap quickie.) There certainly *is* a market for *Rebel Scum*, but it usually takes a long time for such appallingly exotic fare to become part of the cult canon. But *Rebel Scum* is a truly great film. And it *will* find its audience – eventually.

Simply put, this is one crazy-assed movie. The film shows a scuzzy side of life that is so fucked up, it couldn’t be faked. The Dirty Works and their orbit of friends, family, sycophants and psychopaths aren’t “just everyday folks.” People like this live life fast and hard, without heed to the exigencies of laws, finance, sanity and safety/stability needs.

At the center of *Rebel Scum*’s maelstrom is Dirty Works auteur, Christopher Scum. Scum (nec Christopher Shane Andrews) has been through a lot of changes in the eight years since *Rebel Scum*’s filming: He’s lost a lot of weight, gained a modicum of control in his life, written volumes of poetry, prose and music criticism for a handful of zines, and released several recordings with the Dirty Works, as a solo artist and in a slew of side projects.

And as to whether or not the Dirty Works have broken up – well, it’s anybody’s guess. The band’s last public performance was in 2013.

In every waking moment of his 40-something years on Earth, Scum has consistently pissed in the face of conventionality and cheated death. To classify his tormented existence as a lifelong work of violent and confrontational performance art is the understatement of the year.

But is it art? Well, Scum’s self-destructive and sometimes scatological antics belie an insatiable drive for self-expression. You might not like what he has to say or how he chooses to say it, but you’ve gotta admit, this guy cranks out the content. Scum’s oeuvre may be ugly, puerile or just downright dumb: but at his core, this guy just wants to

entertain – to be loved, even.

Scum has purposely lived life on the razor's edge. But recently, cruel fate caught up with him in the cruelest and most unexpected way.

Late this summer, Scum and his lifelong girlfriend, Renee, were driving back to Knoxville from a beach vacation in South Carolina when they were rear-ended on a highway interchange by a gasoline tanker. The tanker ruptured, with thousands of gallons of gasoline spilling on the highway to erupt in flame. Four people were killed in the inferno – including Renee. The heat from the explosion was so hot that it literally melted the cement on the highway. Scum had third-degree burns on over 40 percent of his body. Since the accident he was in intensive care for weeks, has endured several skin-graft surgeries and is now in physical therapy.

"Now there's this tragedy in Chris' life," says Rahim. "It's really weird – because here's somebody who's been preparing himself for as much abuse and violence as possible. I mean, how much pain can one person take?"

"When you watch the movie, it's very much about the relationship of Chris and Renee – how much they needed each other to continue living and grow. And in the film, you see at the end how much better and cleaner Renee [who weaned herself off methadone in the movie] is. And after the movie was done she lost a lot of weight and was really getting herself together.

"Chris is the only person I know that could have even dealt with this [the tragic



Renee

circumstances of the accident], Rahim continues. "I mean, I don't know what dealing with this is going to be for him. But here's this guy who was abused as a child who hits himself and cuts himself and burns himself. He's always tried to see how much pain he could take – and now he's going through the most painful thing in his life. The accident hurt him physically and it hurt him emotionally because he lost the person he loved."

Scum convalesced in a hospital in Savannah, Georgia for over a month. Presently he is living with his sister in rural Ohio as he recuperates. And it's impossible to summon a guess what's more agonizing for him, the emotional pain or the physical pain.

"I'm just taking it day by day," says Scum. "But it's hard getting the energy to even get up out of bed after all that.

"I was with Renee for over 20 years," Scum continues. "People remember us for all

the fucked up shit we went through. But we had some good years together – some *great* years. No one could replace her.

"My prediction is that I'll be through the pain in about six more months. But I'll tell you, my pain has gotten a *lot* worse. The burn doctors in Cincinnati, they're saying that [the pain] is really a good thing because that means the nerves are coming back. But with the skin grafts, I feel like I'm wearing a shirt that's three sizes too small with a bunch of needles in it."

Mentally reliving the accident and survivor's guilt are probably the hardest things. Scum says that his memory of the crash is "like this bad video tape that I keep replaying thousands and thousands of times in my head. I can't get it out.

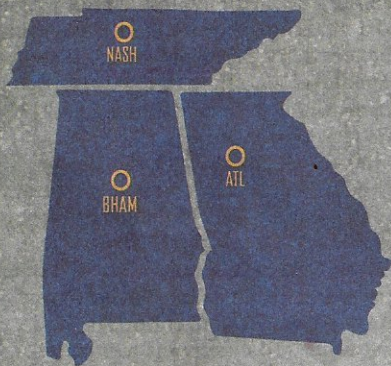
"My clothes burned off in the accident," explains Scum. "I got out of the car and I was naked in the street, trying to get Renee out of that car – until a passerby came and pulled me away.

"I just kept trying to get back in there because I knew that everything that was important to me was dying in that car: My wife, my dog, everything that was important to me got burned up in there, even my guitar. In the last words I ever heard Renee speak, she was screaming for me to help her."

Scum is lucid, if a bit scattered in conversation. And he still has that opiated southern drawl. As we talked he would be joking one moment and recounting horrors in the next. It's as if the enormity of everything that has happened over the last ten years

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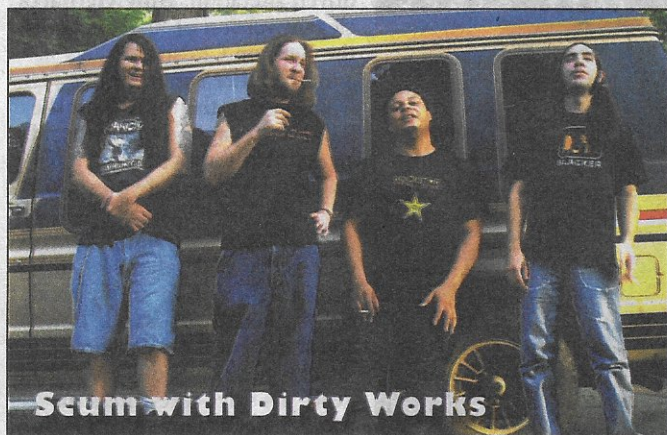
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(and especially since the accident) is simply too much to comprehend.

But even in the face of tragedy, Scum is still performing for his public. Since the accident he has received thousands of social media messages (and several donations) from fans worldwide. His recovery, resilience and defiance of pain have become his art – his social media followers his audience.



"I call them friends, people I didn't even know were there," says Scum. "It has opened my eyes, not only to all the friends I have, but to all the people who really cared about Renee."

In his way, after the tragedy Scum has risen to the occasion and is doing an encore for his countless supporters – a group that is sure to grow after the movie's release. And therein lays the bitter irony. Scum will finally reap the notoriety/fame/infamy he has always courted, but he doesn't have a partner to share to share the glory.

"I've been through so many transitions since the movie was made, and especially since the accident, that I'm not even sure I know myself any more – or the person that I was in the movie, anyway," says Scum.

This, of course, is an inherent onus of documentary filmmaking that Rahim and Percarpio faced while making *Rebel Scum*: How might one capture the entirety of someone's personality and life experience in a two-hour movie? It's impossible – especially if the person being portrayed is as vexing and contradictory as Scum. (That said, *Rebel Scum* certainly portrays Scum sympathetically. And furthermore, Scum's life is so over the top, it would be utterly impossible to capture its myriad complexities on film.)

"I love the movie, myself," says Scum. "Shit, I'd go through it all again."

"But Renee, she *hated* it," Scum continues. "She hated it with a passion."

"We were both heavier [during the filming] than we'd ever been in our lives. So she felt like she was gonna go down lookin' like a fat chick for all eternity because of this movie. At the time we were both on methadone, and we were just ballooned up. But at least she'll be remembered for a while. The movie *is* a reflection on our lives, for what it's worth. She touched a lot of people."

"And when she was drinking, she touched a lot of people – with her combat boots," adds Scum, laughing.

Still, Scum says he feels that his portrayal in *Rebel Scum* is perhaps a bit one dimensional at times.

"People see the movie. And from that, they think they know me," says Scum. "And they *don't*."

"Any time I tried to show some intelligence or tried to show my creative side or even tried to make sense of things – it seems like they'd cut that out," Scum continues. "Instead they'd show me saying something dumb and then cut to a shot of me beating myself in the head. Sometimes I think I just look like a dumb junkie that beats himself in the head, you know?"

Scum concedes, however, that his, ahem, extreme onstage behaviors

are indeed visually spectacular – and, hence, lend themselves to the cinematic imagery in the movie. He is also well aware that what he does is repellent to the proverbial Average Joe. But Scum says that his gore-fueled antics belie a dark humor.

"It's funny as hell, dude," says Scum. "But a regular person, they'd be horrified and maybe even sickened a little bit by it. They're not gonna understand the humor that I find in it. And they're not gonna get that I'm just doing it [hurting himself] to make me feel the way I want to feel."

"I mean, people want to see blood. And when I'm onstage, I'm totally feeling it. There's nothing poseur about me. I mean, those brass knuckles were on my microphone for one reason: to bust my head open so that I could feel the blood running down my face. I don't really care about who's filming it and who's watching it. I wanted to *feel* it."

Scum plans to return to Knoxville after his convalescence. He says he should be home by the spring of 2016, and back on stage with a band by the summer.

So, once his body has healed, will Scum resume the onstage bloodletting?

"If it takes me there, I will," says Scum. "I wouldn't shy away from it. That's the best I've ever felt in my life as far as getting rid of anxiety. I get a high from it. I mean, toward the end of a show when I'm all bloody, that's like the best heroin rush ever."

"I've always done crazy shit to get a reaction from people. I got kicked out of school for punching myself in the face in study hall when I was about 13. After that, they had a big conference with all my teachers and they were like, 'we don't think he would ever hurt anyone else – but we just can't have someone beating themselves up every time the teacher leaves the room.'" ■

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