



INNOCENT WORDS NOVEMBER 2014 COVER STORY - The Dead Milkmen: Not Dead Yet

OCTOBER 31, 2014 / 1 COMMENT / 329 VIEWS



In 2011, after taking a break for more than a decade, Philadelphia's greatest punk band, The Dead Milkmen, surprised fans with a new album. Many assumed it was the band's swan song – including some in the group – but The Dead Milkmen are back this fall with an even better follow up, 'Pretty Music for Pretty People.'

Just a week before the record's release, the entire group was cool enough to answer some questions, debating everything from the current state of punk rock in Philly (it's either alive or well... or it sucks, depending on who in the band you ask); recording now versus in the early '80s; and whether or not punk rockers should collect vinyl.

Innocent Words: After so much time off, a lot of people were thrilled when you finally released 'The King in Yellow' in 2011. I think many assumed that was the last album we were going to get. When did you decide to go back into the studio to record another full record?

Rodney Linderman: In my case it was a combination of a growing dissatisfaction with 'The King in Yellow' and my deeply flawed personality. Don't get me wrong; I love that album and think it's filled with many great ideas. It's just that, to me, many of those ideas seem kind of unfulfilled. I listen to it now and I think "We should've chopped a verse here or added a bridge or chorus (our in-joke with "Ego Likeness," "We gave that song what it needed...a chorus!"). I think we were just so happy to be making an album together that we didn't want to say anything that might endanger it.

Songs are like children; telling someone that their song could use a double-chorus at the end is tantamount to telling someone that their kid could use a nose-job.

So I kind of wanted a do-over on 'The King in Yellow.' Also, I was beginning to get an idea for the songs that I might contribute to a new album should tell a cohesive story. I got this idea while watching "Project Runway." The collections on that show have to be cohesive. I wanted to hire Tim Gunn to produce the album and call it "Make it work!" Also, I find it harder to not write songs than to write them.

Dean Sabatino: I don't think any of us wanted to just play the old songs over and over again and then tour as an "oldies act." We have all kept up our musical activities over the years in one form or another so it seemed natural for us to begin writing new material.

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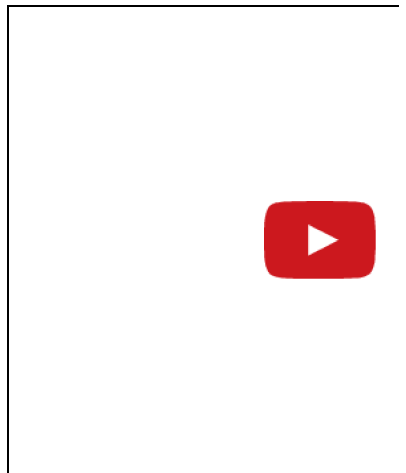


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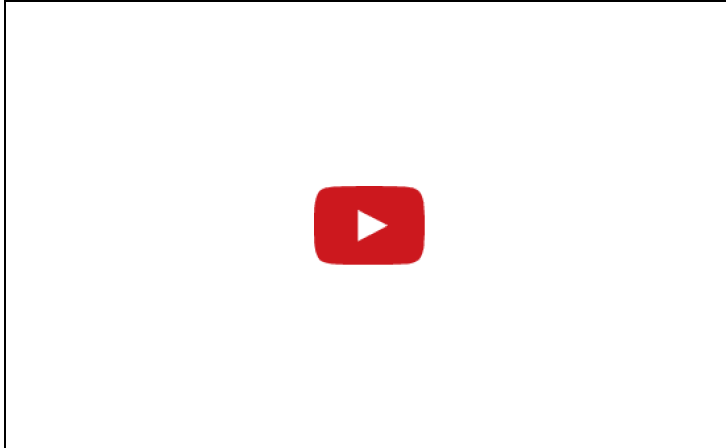
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Dandrew Stevens: Someone had asked us if we were interested in putting out a bunch of singles on his label and we all liked the idea. Then we sent him some demos of songs we were working on and then that didn't happen. But, we still liked the songs so we thought we would just borrow that idea.

Innocent Words: How does writing and recording nowadays compare to when you guys were first starting out? Have you changed your approach to writing over the years?

Rodney: Thank Aqua-Buddha for DAWs (Digital Audio Workstations, for those of you with non-imaginary friends, sex lives, and no past history of playing Dungeons & Dragons). DAWs enable us to sketch out songs and then send to rough versions to each other for review. We can also send each other the stems (separate tracks, for those of you who actually had dates to the prom) so the other guys could replace my terrible parts with their better ones. DAWs have made it much, much easier for me to ask the other guys for help. I would just send out most of a song via email with the subject line of "Songwriting Help Needed." For example, I got stuck while writing "Dark Clouds Gather Over Middlemarch," so Dean sent a guitar part that saved it.

A word about "Church." Many, many thanks and praise to my friend ZooG von Rock from Angelspit for teaching me about "Church." Once-a-week, I devote 3 – 4 hours to songwriting. That's "Church." No social media allowed during Church. Just brew some tea, light some candles, write some songs. If friends try to interrupt you, just say "Sorry Jaw'n, I'm in Church."



Dean: I agree with Rodney that it's much easier to collaborate now using home studios and sites like Dropbox to exchange working files. We have a directory on there that we load up song ideas like firewood – ready to burn through. Even after this new record comes out, we'll probably spend the winter writing even more new tunes for next year.

Dandrew: I didn't originally write with these guys, but now that I have been it's been pretty cool. Rodney does a lot with VST's and all that stuff, Dean has a nice recording area. I know Joe does, too, so we just kind of pass demos to each other through e-mail, usually. I have written music with other people before, but never in this way and I think it's a really convenient tool for instant collaborating.

Innocent Words: Leading up to this full length, you put out a few 7-inches. Is that something you guys will do again in the future?

Rodney: I hope not. I'm not a fan of vinyl. Maybe that's because I drink too much to properly operate a record player...or a butter chum. And maybe this is just me, but did you ever notice that people who are really into vinyl seldom know anything about aggressive music? Seriously, ask someone who's really excited about owning Coldplay on vinyl what they think of the new Prude album and you'll probably get the same look you would if you asked Jim Bob Duggar to operate an electron microscope.

Dean: I think the singles were a fun project, but I think we'll return to full-length releases at least for the foreseeable future.

Dandrew: I'd pretty much record on any format with these guys.

Innocent Words: Did you know all along those would all make it onto the bigger record?

Rodney: I always saw the songs as part of a larger work. Again, in my head they tell a story. There was talk about just doing the singles and then starting the CD from scratch, but I was violently (seriously, violently) opposed to that.

Dean: I see them all hanging together pretty well on the full length LP. There is some dark subject matter covered.

Dandrew: I think so.

Joe Genaro: Yeah. The idea from the start of the project was to eventually release them as a package, on an album.

Innocent Words: Do you plan to tour when the album comes out?

Rodney: We have jobs, so that prevents any full-scale touring. We'll still play some shows here-and-there because there are still people turning up at our live gigs who say "I've waited 25 years to see you live." I've fallen out of love with playing live shows, so that sort of keeps me going. Also, it's fun to test Daniel Graves' Law: One month after you play [City X], you'll get a tweet saying "Please play [City X]."

Dean: I'm hoping we play a bit more after the release of this album. We'll see what our schedules allow and if people will have us play.

Dandrew: Would be nice, but not very likely.

Innocent Words: When you guys reunited for those shows in Philly and Fun Fun Fest, did you know that the band was getting back together or did you look at it as a one-off reunion?

Rodney: I was so certain that that would be our last show that I tossed my beloved DX-11 synth into the audience. When I got home, my wife greeted me with "You dumb fuck, you might as well have thrown money."

Dean: I don't remember talking about keeping it going until after the shows. We didn't want to jinx it maybe. We had fun playing the Philly warmups and then Austin – and then meeting afterwards it seemed like something we'd want to cautiously keep doing as long



as it was still fun.

Dandrew: Rodney did, indeed, pass his keyboard out to the audience, had it sent back to him, and yet again passed it out to the audience, so I figured that might have been the end. But then when we were at Joe's solo show at Beerland later that night Rodney said, "I can't wait to record." And I was like, "Yeah."

Joe: I thought of Fun Fun Fun as a one-time thing. It was fun getting together to rehearse for it and play the warm-up shows. I'd no idea we'd be getting back together in the New Year until on the trip home from Texas when someone mentioned having a meeting on New Year's Day to discuss the possibility of playing more shows.



Innocent Words: Philly and South Jersey are experiencing a great punk scene right now. Are there any newer bands you are listening to?

Rodney: I would have to strongly disagree. In fact, I'd have to disagree so strongly that I'm currently wearing a straight-jacket and typing this with my schlong. Philly is probably the most inhospitable city on the planet towards underground music. In the 30 years I've lived here, I've watched Philly move from being a city dominated by terrible classic rock to a city dominated by terrible alt/indie/dad rock. There's nothing more depressing than being on your way to see an underground band that you know might be drawing 50 people, and having to walk past an a venue where hundreds of people are lined up to see someone sing in child's voice (grow some fuckin' pubes already) while staring at their shoes. Who the shit decided that Hootie and Blowfish were too loud and aggressive, so things needed to be toned down even more? It's enough to make you piss on a fixie. This is because the press in Philly has absolutely no interest in promoting underground music, and it's why many underground bands skip Philly and play Wilmington or Lancaster.



Look, people have a right to enjoy shitty indie rock, but I also think they have a right to know what else is going on in town.

I think I reached my breaking point on this about two years ago when I went to see the iVardensphere/ESA/Ad-Var-Sary/End the DJ show. In any other city, that show would've received at least some press, but not in Philly. I was lucky enough to hang out with Rebecca Coseboom from Stripmall Architecture & DarkDriveClinic at that show and she kept saying "I can't believe this show wasn't written up in any of the free weeklies." My friend Jim and I had to explain to her that Philly, sadly, isn't like other cities.

OK, onto a happier topic: bands I like. Along with the bands mentioned above (except for Hootie), I also enjoy are (alphabetically) Aaimon, Alter der Ruine, Amanda Palmer, Ambassador21 (name-dropped on the new album), Angels on Acid, Ashbury Heights (Dark Clouds is a nod to 'em), Assamblage 23 (Tom Sure is a genius), Be My Enemy, Beauty Queen Autopsy, Belladonnakillz, Belzeboss, Caustic, Cease2xist (Where's your God now?), Cocksure, Crudbump, Dead When I Found Her, Die Sektor, Distorted Memory, God Module, Hanzel Und Gretyl, IAMX (Chris Comer is a genius), Junksista (Who couldn't love them), Krystal System (If

you don't own "Rage," you should get it immediately), Live Not On Evil, Ludovicho Technique, MC Lars, Pretty Addicted, Rasputina, ROME (The ROME from, Lux. Jerome Reuter is one of the best lyricists alive), Sage Francis, Santa hates You, ShiSho, Stiff Valentine, Vomito Negro, and XP8. Apologies to anyone who should've been included. I tend to get carried away with lists.

Dean: We all have differing musical tastes so I might balance Rodney's comments (though he is right that the industrial/goth scene gets ignored here for some reason) by saying that I do think there are some good things happening with the punk/indie scene in and



around the Philly area. There are some good venues and I think that R5 puts some good shows on (though sadly it sounds like the church basement is on the way out).

We've tried to have some of the local bands play shows with us including Bleeding Rainbow, The Psychic Teens, S.T.A.R.W.O.O.D, and one of my very favorite Philly bands (when they were still together) The Party Photographers. It's great to see bands like the Menzingers get some recognition and growing in popularity. I got to see them open for Rise Against a while back and they were fantastic.

Dandrew: I don't really see a scene from where I am, but I know there's a lot of great music happening in Philly. I can't speak for New Jersey, but Bunny Savage & the Shallots are a scene of their own. And yes, S.T.A.R.W.O.O.D. will mesmerize you! Dean and I recorded with Madalean Gauze recently. And I don't know if The Tough Shits are still around, but they were/are great!

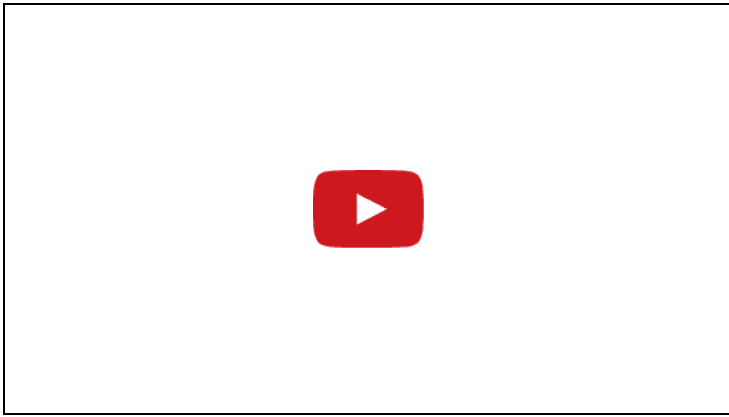
Innocent Words: Aside from this new record, what else are you and the others working on?

Rodney: We're working on a few things, but they're secret. Shhhh!


Dean: You'll hear more from us later this year and into the spring. I would also like to mention that I'm also playing drums on an album coming out this fall called Warm Seclusion Structure by a band called I Think Like Midnight. It's for lovers of the lost art of the rock instrumental.

<http://www.ithinklikemidnight.com/warm-seclusion-structure/>

Dandrew: I've been working on a collaboration with the amazing MC Breath recently. Working on strange solo stuff. I'll pretty much play music with anyone that wants to, and is at least relatively passionate about it.



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The Dead Milkmen Premieres New Song New Album 'Pretty Music For Pretty People' Out Oct. 7th
SEPTEMBER 26, 2014

1 comment

 **Dave Fried**
November 2, 2014 at 9:27 pm - Reply
Wow, who is this MC Breath fellow? I'd sure like to check out anything they're working on!!

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