

GBH interview by Mark Prindle, conducted via e-mail during October, 2002

Colin Abrahall is the lead singer of long-lived punk rock band G.B.H. When the wonderful folks at Go-Kart Records offered to set me up with an interview, my immediate thought was, "Have you actually READ my G.B.H. review page?" Here are a few excerpts:

- "I cannot come up with a single reason why anybody would like this album for any reason at all."

- "Is there really an audience for this stuff? Who are they? And why is their musical taste so bad?"

- "I can't believe I bought every GBH album. Time to sell 'em on ebay!"

- "I've had the flu for four days now. Sometimes I wonder if I'm giving GBH such bad reviews because my sickness is affecting my feelings towards EVERYTHING. But then I listen a bit closer and realize they suck."

So yes, I was a little concerned about this. But the fact is (A) GBH's 1982 LP *City Baby Attacked By Rats* is, in my estimation, one of the greatest 5 or 10 punk albums ever recorded (which is to say one of the greatest 5 or 10 albums PERIOD), and (B) their latest CD *Ha Ha* is the best album they've released in nearly twenty years. So I DID want to interview Colin. I just didn't want him to ever in a billion years find out about my web site.

So what do my good friends at Go-Kart do? SEND HIM A LINK TO MY G.B.H. REVIEWS. As you read the following email interview, keep in mind that when I wrote the questions, I had no idea that Colin already knew how much I hated most of his band's albums. Sigh....

(MP = Mark Prindle, CA = Colin Abrahall)

MP: As leader of one of the longest-lived punk bands, what is YOUR definition of "punk"? Is it more of a political / social attitude, a type of specifically loud & fast music, or something else entirely?

CA: Well, first of all, I don't consider myself a 'leader' of anything... being the singer, you always get more attention because I suppose you're the focal point. We (GBH members) are all equal in my eyes. My definition of punk would not be the same as anyone else's 'cos in my opinion its different for everyone, but sure, there would be points on which everyone agreed... I think it's a mixture of political and social issues as well as a love for good, honest music.

MP: What kind of music were you listening to BEFORE punk hit? Did punk attract you immediately or did you have to warm to it?

CA: I didn't have much interest in any kind of music before punk, but as soon as I heard the early stuff on the radio by the Sex Pistols and the Ramones I was hooked and had to find out as much as I could about it. There wasn't a lot of information to be had in the beginning, though, so I dug for whatever snippets I could find!

MP: Was GBH a group of friends that formed a band, or a band that became friends after forming?

CA: We were all friends first. I've known Ross since we both played football for the same team when we were 10 or 11 years old. (Years later) we would drink in the only pub in Birmingham that would let punks in! It was always an ambition to be in a punk band, as that was one of the points of punk rock- you didn't have to be a great musician or anything, you had to just have a love for it.

MP: I have been a huge fan and proponent of *City Baby Attacked By Rats* since I first heard it thirteen years ago. What was the reaction among the punk rock community when that album came out? Did you guys immediately become punk legends because of that album? Or was that something that built up over time?

CA: Legends in our own lunchtime more like! We were, I suppose, part of the second wave of bands along with Discharge, the Exploited, etc. when *City Baby...* was released. It got a 5 star review in *Sounds*, which

was the most popular music weekly at the time, but we didn't get along with Gary Bushell, the reviewer, who was basically a straight, not a punk, that went on to "invent" Oi music (sarcasm). But I guess he did us a favor by writing such a good review. At the time we were signed to Clay Records, which was a small record shop in Stoke-On-Trent, so when the album got into the top 20 in England we were amazed. Clay had no A&R department, etc. It was just one man. So it was really a word of mouth thing, rather than any payola / major label bollocks.

MP: What was your reaction to the "grunge" youth movement of the early '90s? Did it seem analogous to punk's rising at all, or was it entirely different?

CA: The grunge thing wasn't a big surprise. Apart from the obvious stuff like Nirvana, most of it was poor "alternative" music, like punk bands who were too stoned to play fast. And all this "I hate my parents" shit... very middle class America.

MP: It's hard for me to get a historical read on how your career has gone over the course of two decades. I own all the albums, but I have no idea which are considered "GBH classics" or which were greeted with negativity (if there were any). Would you mind giving a quick history of which of your albums were most and least popular (again, if any), as well as the ones that you personally are most proud of or (if applicable) least proud of?

CA: They are all classics, Mark. You should know as you've written about them so passionately! Some have been described as "metal," which is the biggest load of crap I've ever heard in my life. I hate heavy metal and everything it stands for... does it even stand for anything? Heavy metal to me is Motley Crue, shit like that, but to some people's ears our music sounds like it. Well, I just don't get it. It's obvious they don't really listen. You know what they say, don't you? "Those who can, do- and those who can't, write about it." Our career has gone like this: We make records and we do tours... so far for 23 years.

MP: In my opinion, your new CD *Ha Ha* is easily the best thing GBH has released since *City Baby's Revenge* -- it's fast, it's fun, it's tough, it's consistent, it's lyrically interesting and it's extremely catchy. Plus it feels a lot more like PUNK ROCK than the thrashy metal sort of sound you had for a while there. I'm curious as to how you guys feel about the record - what was the mood while you recorded it? Was there a feeling that you had a special one on your hands, or was it "just another album?"

CA: We always have fun when we record. We had the songs rehearsed pretty good, as every time a record contract fell through we just went back in the studio and wrote more stuff. We know the engineer really well so it was a stress free time, and we knew what we had to do each day so just got on and did it. In your review of *City Baby's Revenge*, you call it "boring," so is it a compliment to say that *Ha Ha* is the best thing that we've released since?

MP: I was pleased to hear a lot of great social commentary on the new album -- "Desire of Poverty," "Song for Cathy" (fantastic song), the anti-drug one --a far cry from "Slut!" What are some of your favorite songs on it, and your lyrical inspiration for them?

CA: I like most of them. In fact, I can't think of one that I don't like, if that doesn't sound too pretentious. Lyrically I try to paint a picture of what's going on in my head in a way that another person can understand. I also like double meanings, and if I can get some cheesy rhymes in it too, all the better!

MP: How have you guys managed to stay together for so long? What's your secret?

CA: Don't you read the lyrics? "Skin and gravity!" Also friendship, and I suppose love. We've been in some real bad situations together and at our very bleakest moments we've managed to have a laugh out loud.

MP: What is it like touring with GBH? How do you kill the time between gigs? Are your audiences all ages, or mostly kids -- Is there a lot of sex and/or violence? Give me the dirt! The filth and the... well, you know!

CA: Touring is brilliant, and I love it even though you do get some down time like when you're missing family, etc. But something always happens to lighten the mood. Traveling between gigs we listen to music, watch movies, buy silly things from truck stops, sleep, smoke, drink and do when not in motion. I'm a family man so I cannot divulge any naughty goings-on, but use your imagination...!

MP: Have you ever felt any desire to change your appearance or play a different type of music, but you resisted because you were afraid of how GBH fans might react? Or have you always been strictly into the punk, hardcore and metal that you're known for?

CA: To change deliberately is dishonest in my opinion, and I think that old maxim about being true to your self is fairly right. For example, I'm not into dance music so why would I want to make dance music, etc. Although I do like other forms of music like reggae, and I'm a big fan of Elvis and Johnny Cash!

MP: It seems to me that the British music press is always desperately on the lookout for some new, completely British musical style. (Thus their hair-splitting distinctions between types of electronica like jungle, trip-hop, drum-n-bass, etc.) As a band playing a form of music first developed many years ago, do you feel unfairly left out of their coverage? Or do you not really care about those kinds of outlets?

CA: The music press has always been made up of failures. Opinions are like assholes- everybody's got one (even me!) There are only three chords out there, so unless someone discovers the lost one, nothing will change but fashion, and fashion equals money. But everything has a shelf life and the shallower it is, the shorter such life it has.

MP: You guys have worked with a lot of different record labels. Are you at liberty to discuss how you've been treated by the "industry" over the years? As punk is generally considered to be music for teenagers, do people ever give you guff about being a 40-year-old punk rocker? If so, what is your response to them?

CA: If you're in a band you will get treated like shit. You have to expect that from day one. I never even read the first contract we signed, because I knew that if I read it I would never put my name to it. Contracts are always stacked on the company's side. Why is punk music for teenagers? I've never heard that one before. It's music and it shouldn't have any restrictions placed on it. The only person to ever give me a hard time about being a 40-year-old punk rocker is my wife! And I'll be 41 on December 5th so don't forget my card!

MP: Are there any current, newer bands that excite you?

CA: I can't think of any off hand, but if nothing is doing in today's scene I just go back in time to where I know there's lots of good stuff and wait for another one to come along.

MP: What are your other interests outside of music?

CA: Football, reading books, watching television, and gardening.

MP: In your opinion, is there any chance for another youthful musical revolution comparable to the rise of punk rock?

CA: Never!

MP: Thank you so much for the interview.

CA: Thank you and good night!

Mark Prindle is a frequent contributor to zines such as California Pop and NY Waste. You can see more of his highly opinionated reviews & interviews at his website: <http://www.markprindle.com>