

FUGAZI

Fifteen minutes with Ian MacKaye is like watching the first half of a movie and having the cable go out. There's much more to the singer and guitarist of the legendary Washington DC band Fugazi than the hintings such an interview can provide.

Ian started the independent record label Dischord in 1980 at the age of eighteen. The label has just released it's 86th release. After Minor Threat's breakup, he sang for Embrace and finally started Fugazi in 1987. Ian's resume is not the most impressive aspect of the humble yet charismatic man. It's how he does things. Simplified it's punk rock's DIY (Do It Yourself) philosophy. Dischord records sells its discs for \$8 postpaid, basically half the price you'd pay at your typical mall chain store. Fugazi has a "low-door pricing policy", which generally relates to the astonishing \$5 admission to it's shows, with equally successful bands charging upwards of four times that amount, Fugazi is the K-MART of punk rock value. "The five dollar thing in this country we find is a particularly humorous currency. It's incredibly humorous to keep forcing these clubs to do these \$5 shows. I certainly don't like to pay a lot for shows. I think all music stuff should be cheaper. Everything is inflated. Everyone wants a piece of the pie and it is all artificial. We've been a band for six years. We didn't start out playing shows to thousands of people. We started playing to 50 people. We're efficient and we're economical and we've been able to operate on a \$5 door from the beginning. I don't see why anyone else couldn't do it if they wanted to. You run into more problems with bands who have tour buses and managers and lawyers. That is expensive. We don't always make money. On this tour we did a show where 3,800 people came. We made \$400. We work on a percentage only. And that's humor. It's the irony of the situation. We insist on low door pricing and we're willing to back that up by not asking for guarantees. It's a lesson. Be ever more vigilant about the room that you are playing. If you can't fill up the room then don't play it.

Fugazi also does not stand for the stupidity that occurs at many of the 90s concerts. MacKaye explains his strong feelings on the lack of respect concert-goers have towards each other in their stage diving, fighting and moshing practices, "I think every band right now has to deal with this behavior stuff, because MTV has deemed it proper crowd behavior these days. It has nothing to do with music." MacKaye is quick to quell any disturbances at Fugazi gigs, taking everything into his own hands. "All we really want to do is play the show. It really sucks. But what can we do. The security are beating the shit out of people, and the kids are doing things that are totally exasperating the whole situation.

I don't want to be in the position to censor people and their kind of expression. At the same time, it's just too bad that it has to be put in terms like obey." MacKaye seems to wonder why the crowds don't use their heads and figure out alternative ways to enjoy and express themselves at Fugazi and other band's concert. "If you don't want to screw things up, then you find other ways to express yourself. You try to throw curve balls, you don't just give security what they want. Which is acting like a bonehead. That's the way I am in life. I don't give the cops anything to fuck with. I keep a low profile, that's how I actually get through life, make moves. Not delivering what they need to stop me."

With the band's third disc "In on the Kill Taker", Fugazi has gained immediate universal critical acclaim. Against his normal fluidity with words, Ian hesitates and rationalizes their success, "With each record they talk about, like, this like, you know, they talk about us as like this, whatever, really important band. I think when this record came out everyone wanted to get in on the ground floor. And they all wanted to get the record straight away. They wanted to be part of it ahead of time. It's like the Cypress Hill phenomenon. When their first record came out, it sold well but it wasn't like the hugest hit, but everyone started talking about them. So when the second record came out everyone was like fuck it, I'm buying it now. That's why it (Cypress Hill's "Black Sunday") came in at number one, right?"

Fugazi's brand of alternative rock is hard to classify, and if you try to get MacKaye to put a label on it, he comes back with "We don't ghettoize ourselves like that. By calling ourselves a hardcore band or a punk band. In my community, there is a definition of hardcore but it's not necessarily the same definition that everyone else has. So when you use terms like that it doesn't really have much meaning at all. My point is that we are a band and we play music, and that's totally legitimate and doesn't need to be validated by any kind of terminology. Our music is as valid as Mozart or Charlie Parker's."

Being portrayed in the media as the important band that they are, Fugazi's humor has been lost, and everything the band does is approached very seriously. "It's because of the way the media responds to humor.. The problem with media is that humor and the printed word don't always go well together. I have a dry humor. People take the printed word quite literally. We're a society raised on Bibles and dictionaries and we just think it's always the truth. So whenever I had said something as a joke people just read it totally wrong, so I decided that when I speak to someone I'm just going to answer their fucking questions. Cracking jokes

is actually the easy way out. It's a lot more challenging to actually answer someone's questions. Just straight answers. If this band has a fuel. Then that fuel is humor. We laugh constantly. We have got to be one of the most humor laden bands that ever existed and no one would know it. We even have jokes on our records and in our live shows and people still haven't figured those things out." With all of the grass roots level, do it yourself pride, the never vacationing MacKaye appears to be surviving his non stop lifestyle without much downtime. Asking him how he handles his lifestyle emotionally, MacKaye responds as if the question is unimportant, "Don't know yet. I work. I'm not unhappy. Whenever I think about going on vacation I think well, fuck there's always other stuff I could do anyway, so might as well do that."

Only Minor Threat comes any where near the sales of Fugazi on Dischord. "Jawbox, who are now signed to Atlantic anyway, they sold about 15,000 copies which is less than a tenth of what we sell. We have been approached by all of them (majors) at one time or another. The general rule of thumb is that you can double or triple your current sales on an independent if your signed to a major label. With that logic... We have no interest, so they don't bother anymore."

On the label, "I definitely see it (Dischord) ending at some point. The label exists to document a musical

community, so when the community dies, so will the label. I only put out DC bands. As it is right now, Jawbox signed, I think Shudder to Think are going to sign, Circus Lupus have broke up, Lungfish are totally on the skid, on hold, it's kind of tough right now. I'm supposed to do an album with Slant 6 when I get home. There's always bands, but they have to appeal to me. At some point I assume that there is going to be enough of a distance that I won't... There's already a different kind of a relationship between me and the bands. Where before they were my straight up peers, now they are like kids, much younger. People I don't know that well, or hang out with as much. So it's just bound to happen. There will be another community, they'll have their own thing, but it just won't involve me. The point is that it is not exclusive, it is proof that it can be done and that other people should do it to. I was always much more interested in creating a network of independent record labels. Not like an official network where people would pay in on anything, but where everyone would have a label to document their region or the music they thought was important. "(as far as bands on Dischord signing to majors) I don't want to be responsible for holding anyone back, we have no contracts."

And the legends closing comment: "I don't think a lot of people realize that I'm 31 and that I've been doing this for 14 years and I'm not fucking around." by Frank FOE