

# helmet

Sometimes I get so wrapped up in music that I don't know who's big and who isn't. For some reason I never realized how popular Helmet is. I went to see Helmet, expecting Rollins to headline for some reason. I guess I just figured that since Rollins was a guest VJ and all, people would be there to see him. Anyhow, Helmet's show was huge, lots of really awesome lights, that caught me off guard. Their musical power and fierceness made me smile! I got to speak with their singer/guitarist Page Hamilton on the phone just prior to their gig...

**FOE** How do you feel about being in the same issue of Rolling Stone as the Rolling Stones? And do you think you have the same staying potential as the Rolling Stones?

**PAGE** Yikes! Nobody has as much staying power as the Rolling Stones. But to be in the same issue as the Rolling Stones is fucking awesome! The Stones are the Stones... obviously one of the seminal bands, phenomenal songwriters, Keith Richards picks up the guitar and you know who it is immediately. It's totally cool. I was very happy about that. As far as the staying power, I think, the music we've done, and hopefully the music we will do, I can say right now, the band won't have as long a life as the Stones. First off, Helmet formed in a much later date in our lives, we weren't 19 years old! I feel good about the stuff that we put out and I think the music will last and be played for a long time. But it's not the kind of music that you put on and immediately get into right away. But if you know the band or listen to this type of music, it might be immediately satisfying. It's not pop music, that it is written around repeated vocal hooks. I didn't get into the Stones til I was 18. Because I was like a kid, I was like whoa, this is too heavy. I remember hearing it and going wow this is the weirdest stuff, and now it's the Stones, it's household.

**FOE** Is there anything that transpired during the Rolling Stone interview process that they didn't print that you would have wanted them to?

**PAGE** Uh, no. It's slightly incoherent in that it is an article. Spin and Rolling Stone, they don't do, well, at least with us, a question and answer type thing. They interview, then the writer does a lot of research and observes a lot and throws in quotes here and there. So it's always frustrating to read something like that and you feel like you sound like an idiot. Cause I'm not a man of few words, I have to explain something from every degree on the compass. So I focus on a point and keep coming at it til I feel like I have made my point.

**FOE** There was one thing that I didn't even know, and I guess basically cause I don't read a lot of other interviews, there was reference to you as "Mr Straight edge"

**PAGE** I think he referred to peoples perception of me. Not that I am, but their perception.

**FOE** Right, just the way you carry yourself.

**PAGE** Basically clean cut, I don't sit around and talk about drugs, I'm not busted in bathrooms, on the floor. My socializing and life outside of the band is fairly low key. As a band we're not the party animals on stage so we don't go on tour and get fucked up every day and play. So that's where the perception is from.

**FOE** How's the tour going with Rollins and Sausage?

**PAGE** It started in July and played seven straight days in the heat belt. It has been a very physically gruelling tour for us. Everybody involved, the crews, the bands, it has been really tough. But very

satisfying and enjoyable. Being out with bands that we get along with very well, and there's a bunch of really fun people out there. The collection of hard rock eccentrics on the road. It's really been fun.

**FOE** This may seem like a really off question, but, do you guys get groupies coming up to you?

**PAGE** We don't. With us I can only speak about Helmet. We have a lot of fairly young fans that wanna shake our hands or get autographs and stuff. They like to stand around and gab about stuff like other bands and music and how we got started. We don't have a bunch of horny looking rock girls. We don't attract that kind of an audience. Occasionally you'll see some of those spandex types at shows and they stand out and it seems out of character for our audience. I think we don't convey that kind of an image and I certainly don't encourage that. I think there's a much more aware audience out there than in the 70s and 80s.

**FOE** Do you miss being a small band?

**PAGE** I look back at those days with fondness. Like wasn't that a great time we had back packing in Northern California or I remember when that was just a field and now it's a shopping mall. We feel very fortunate as a band to have had some great experiences. We don't feel guilty about where we're at. We've paid our dues. We're not a bunch of 19 year olds with a gold record out of nowhere. I feel what we've done is very rooted and has longevity. We're not a pop phenomenon with a big hit off our first record on Big Bucks Records and a hit video. We've been at music for a long, long time. I don't miss sleeping on floors of a van, having drunks tell us how great it was to have Helmet at their house, while their dog pisses on the rug, and they're pouring beer on your head.

**FOE** Do you find that a lot of the people who listen to your early stuff are heavy drinkers and depressed types?

**PAGE** Are you saying that we have a bad effect on our fans?

**FOE** No, what I'm driving at is when you play music, when people listen to your music, what are they doing or why are they listening to it?

**PAGE** We get a lot of stuff, people you wouldn't believe that are Helmet fans. Like these performance artists told me they were exhausted and it was Jam and needed some driving music, in went Helmet and they were energized. People say they love to have sex to Helmet, "It's just so pumping". There's also the party music in the background rocking out thing and playing air guitar like I did to Zeppelin. Music should be that, something different for everybody. Music brings people together. A lot of kids make friends when they go to concerts, the common love of something and that gives you something in common, and that's what the whole punk rock scene, that's what it developed into which is a social gathering for people and I've said you know we're not really concerned with being part of the scene, one scene in particular, we just wanna make good music and we'll gain some and lose some fans along the way.

**FOE** Have you gotten many bad reviews about the new disc?

**PAGE** Plenty. In Cleveland my buddy Jason Pedigrew (sp?) who writes for Alternative Press, he thinks there is sort of a backlash in the heavy music thing that's sorta big right now. We came out with this underground noisy thing, combined with this heavy thing, turned them on to something that was pretty fresh and so as a result we got some backlash from it. A lot of it is based on that but that's ok. It's all part of it. The press is the press. Everybody has a right to their opinion and no writer will approach writing a review in the same way. Some people base it on the music. They have a collection of records, like my collection, that they value and cherish, whether rock, jazz or classical or hip hop and other people base it on the current climate of grunge or power rock. Whatever you want to call it. What is in fashion now.

Unfortunately, that's what most of the writers do as far as energy and commitment to listening to music.

**FOE** The reason why I asked that is because it is a challenging record, the first time listening to it, I didn't get it. But now I love the record.

**PAGE** The music that is my favorite music in the world is the music that when I first listened to it, it gave me a headache. As I grew as a human being, I needed more to satisfy me. A lot of three chord rock, that watered down out-takes of Blue Cheer isn't exciting to me right now. I get excited listening to Bartoy String Quartets (HUH?), since 1979 and I still get very excited about it.

**FOE** Where did you get the cover photo for the new album "Betty"?

**PAGE** It's from a Florida photographer that does a lot of family stuff. We went to the people who have been doing the covers for the last two albums and told them what I had in mind, about the woman in a natural, but groomed serene setting, and with one of those happy expressions on her face, so they started plowing through archives of photos and discovered this retired photographer who said, "Use whatever you want, take the stuff, thanks for the dollars. I thought I would never see anything from this."

**FOE** How important are the lyrics to you?

**PAGE** I'm completely obsessive and anal about the lyrics and will stress out over one word in a sentence or phrase. It's gotta sound right. It's gotta mean something to me. It has to convey some sort of image and I think if I succeeded at anything, it is at creating vivid images within one line, you know, then putting those images together is another thing so you try to create some sorta vibe, to the whole song but I've always focused on one line. A lot of stuff just falls in my lap.

**FOE** What would be some of the songs, that would be most important to you or contain the lyrics you are most proud of?

**PAGE** The clearer songs on this album are "Wilma's Rainbow" and "Overrated". "Biscuits for Smut" is a real personal thing. Where a lot of images came to me simultaneously. I was just trying to write them down quickly. Things that I labored over were "Vaccination" where I had this idea for the chorus, for a long time "the humble goals, bad nutrition, rely on me, there's one condition, imitated, so adored, the wind picks up, my suit gets torn" and I just couldn't get that out of my head for a long time. So I wrote the verses around that. Songs I wrote fairly spontaneously were "Silver Hawaiian" and I wanted that Beefheartian vocal and have a little bit of nonsense in there and it's kinda goofy. Try to get any meaning out of "Land sakes alive, the steak's alive". I suppose I'm bumming on meateaters.

**FOE** Is AM REP always gonna put out your vinyl?

**PAGE** I hope so. It works out great for us, we like to have vinyl out.

**FOE** How many were pressed of the double 10" version of "Betty"?

**PAGE** 10,000

**FOE** Will you ever let your hair grow?

**PAGE** I've let it grow, right now it's about 1 and a half inches long! I'm feeling real into this Woodstock revival thing. I'm gonna let my bangs grow. I'm gonna go wild (sarcasm duly noted). We are what we are and in 20 years people will be listening to the music and saying those guys are cool, they look like next door geeks, they look like me when I was growing up. You don't have to play the part of a rock star to be in a rock band.

**FOE** The first album, how did it do after it was reissued?

**PAGE** To tell you the truth, I don't know. I think it's still less than 100,000 records. It sold more than we ever dreamed it would, considering how much we spent on it.

**FOE** And your second album went gold?

**PAGE** Right.

**FOE** How is the new one doing so far?

**PAGE** The new one is taking Europe by storm. We struggled like crazy on the last one in Europe. I know in Germany we sold 16,000 copies of "Meantime" in 2 years. In two weeks we sold 50,000 copies of "Betty" in Germany. We sold more albums in Europe right now, than in the US. Which is just mind boggling! The record company still thinks we were going to be some Stone Temple Pilots or something. I could've told them that we weren't. Like you say, you don't put it on and say "I can sing with this, right now". I'm not a great gymnast in the vocal area. I approach things more like Ozzy, you know, chunks of melody, that fit together very uniform type of way. Then I have my more, my more fear, sorta belting scream. And that's not the thing you immediately sing along with.

**FOE** You do have a very distinctive voice.

**PAGE** That's my strength. That I don't sound like anybody else except for when we double the vocals and people say I sound like Ozzy.

**FOE** You have a guy in the band who used to be in Rest in Pieces. I interviewed them in like 1986 or something in FOE. Did you ever think about doing a Rest In Pieces song or maybe a Straight Ahead song, to blow some minds?

**PAGE** We might. I wouldn't mind. I've got to realign myself with their material. I only know the live CBGB hardcore thing.

**FOE** How did he end up in the band?

**PAGE** Agnostic Front, SOIA guys connection. Rob has not been in a band for 3 years since Rest In Pieces broke up. He loved Helmet, it was like his favorite band in New York.

**FOE** I like it when old hardcore people end up in big bands. And when something like that hits Rolling Stone, maybe some of these kids will search out some R.I.P. material.

**FOE** One more question... What do you think about motorcycle HELMET laws. Making it illegal to ride without a HELMET.

**PAGE** Uh, well, ya know, in the era of increased government regulations, if someone wants to get on without a helmet, it's not the smartest thing to do. But uh, I was never one to say to someone don't take your life in your own hands. I think I'd have to support it because it does have an effect on everybody else. To save someone who becomes a vegetable and get's supported by the government for the rest of their life or you know whatever I'm sure it effects the health care costs. That's my only thing. But God, let people do what the fuck they wanna do but it probably ends up having ramifications far beyond what we are aware of outside of just personal rights. If it saves lives it's probably a good thing on the other hand maybe it'll cut down on overpopulation.

**FOE** Do you have good health benefits?

**PAGE** We have our own insurance. When we signed the contract.

**FOE** What's the extent of your schooling?

**PAGE** Bachelors in Music degree University of Oregon. Masters in Jazz guitar from Manhattan school of music.

**FOE** Wow that's great. I'm stuck with bar chords and making noises with my guitar.

**PAGE** There's a whole world outside those bar chords. There's a whole world inside those bar chords too.

**FOE** The reason I asked was, you seem very well spoken....

**PAGE** Well, I read books and stuff. People talk to me and I think trying to learn should be a goal of all people to try and learn more and talk more, better than trying to cover things up with plastic surgery and psycho therapy.