

LAUGHING

HYENAS

Frank FOE interviewed Laughing Hyenas drummer Todd Swalla (ex Necro drummer) and vocalist John Brannon (ex Negative Approach vocalist) in their van outside Philadelphia's Khyber Pass, before their winter 93 gig. Wow, who would have thought that one day I'd be sitting in the same van with these two guys!

The Hyenas live are amazing. Swaggering, bottle in hand, head lowered, John Brannon, looks as if he's ready to fall asleep standing. The rest of the band (Larissa Strickland on guitar, Todd Swalla on drums and Ron on bass) blast their version of angry-post-hardcore-blues-psycho-music. Then as if someone poked John with a pitchfork from hell, the demons inside of the singer are awakened as he barks out the lyrics of pain or whatever he's screaming about in a voice that sounds as if it originated from some cat who's been cornered and has the ballsy roar of a lion, ready to kill some fucker who slept with his wife.

Seeing the Hyenas is a moving experience to say the least. Half way through their set two yahoos were moved to try and beat each other up. They weren't successful because the Khyber Pass was packed so tight they could barely lift their arms to slug each other. Decadence, aggression, wanting. The Laughing Hyenas are real.



LH What is this interview for?

FOE FOE. It's out of Bethlehem, about an hour and a half from here.

LH You guys drove up from there?

FOE Oh sure, it's the third time I've seen you here!

LH The last time we were here was almost a year ago, with the Cows. I didn't know it was that long ago. That was a wild show. We always have a good time in Philly.

FOE I'm amazed everytime I see you here cuz everyone just goes nuts. Most of the times when there are shows here, people are pretty sedate, but when you play, forget it!

LH It's fucking hot in there, I was sweating after the sound check, and it's fucking December! So what's up?

FOE First thing I want to know about is all the comps I've seen you on recently, as well as the Negative Approach stuff on the Rhino thing... Faster and Louder Hardcore Punk.

LH Touch and Go called and asked me about the Negative Approach material and I said ya go ahead and do it. It just finally came out recently I guess. I don't even have a copy of that.

FOE Are you gonna get any money from it?

LH Ya. Actually not a million, it wasn't a million selling record. It might sell over time.

FOE What's the next thing coming out from the Hyenas?

LH The reissue of Merry, Go Round, which was our first record. That's gonna come out on cd, with a bunch of extra songs, the Sub Pop single, and some live stuff from Germany. That will be the last material released from the Hyenas last line ups. The new band is writing songs for a new album. It's about half written, and we're gonna record real soon. This line up has been together for a while. Todd played with us on Crawl, and Ron hasn't recorded with us yet, but he's gonna be on the next record and he's been touring with the band for over a year now.

FOE Did you let Merry Go Round go out of print?

LH It's never been out of print, just never on CD, and if it's not on cd, well then people are like well, it is out of print. The vinyl's always been there, but the stores don't stock it.

FOE How many units do you guys move?

LH Hard to say. I really don't keep track. Crawl did like 8,000. But that was just an ep. If it was an album, it would have probably done better. I think people are waiting for an album. We are itching to get a new full length album out... We did this tribute on the Scientists record called "Set it on Fire". Mudhoney and a bunch of other bands are on it. Foetus put out a compilation of all his favorite bands, we did a song called "Candy". It was on a flexi-disk, and we remixed it, and put it on this punk rock comp. A couple of bootlegs have been popping up, which has been kinda weird. Really shitty recordings of our demo tapes.

FOE You know you have a fan base when that starts happening.

LH It was kind of weird. It makes me think that I shoulda had something so much better to put out.

FOE Do they send you copies or do you sorta stumble upon them.

LH I have to buy them in record stores. No one ever sends you this shit, you always gotta buy it. They don't want you tracing the address, they don't want to get caught... Touch and Go just put out Negative Approach on disc, with everything on it and it sold 5,000 copies. It wasn't really advertised. It was just word of mouth.

FOE Have any majors been talking to you?

LH No offers have been made. I think people have come to our gigs, but nobody waived money in our face.

FOE You're a bit more aggressive than what they're looking for.

LH They don't talk to us after the gigs so I don't know. Somebody told us after our gig in Cincinnati that two guys from Reprise were there.

FOE If they were interested would you consider it?

LH Anything is possible. You gotta look at the situation.

FOE I was just wondering cuz I think you are a step above, more aggressive than a lot of the bands out there signed to majors.

LH They'll sign anybody.

FOE Maybe they just think you're too angry, and don't want to come up to you after the show. They think, this guy's gonna hit me! You have the reputation, of "One day John is gonna die from a heroin overdose". What do you think of that reputation?

LH I don't even worry about it, and just try to keep going. Can't let shit like that bother us. We're still doing this. Everyone says so much shit about us. They try to use it, not in a bad way, more of as an image. I don't wanna create a mystique, because that is bullshit. But any publicity is good publicity.

FOE Yeah, you do have this mystique, or whatever, they see John Brannon, and you say hey, he's a normal guy off the street.

LH They take what they see on stage and they say that's our personality 24 hours a day.

FOE You've just been doing the band for the last couple of years and nothing else?

LH 7-8 years. This is all we do, we don't have day jobs. Weekdays we work really hard, trying to finish up our album, weekends we do shit like this. We come and do one-offs. Last week we did Ohio, Michigan. We can't get jobs, with our touring, so it's just this. We have no money, so we do this to survive. We really wanna just kick back and be writing right now. We're gonna play a lot of new tunes tonight.

FOE How's the monotony of touring?

LH I love to tour, it's the only thing that keeps me going. I know I'm going to eat every day. At home I starve, we need to gig to survive. I like to stay busy, I don't like to stay home. I'd like to play every night.

FOE So what's your back up career after the Hyenas are over?

LH We're gonna play forever man. Maybe not as this band, but we'll all be jamming forever. We've given up our lives for rocknroll. Khber Fucking Pass, man this place is great. Man our last gig was a lot of fun. What's the deal with that place up the road, that starts with a T?

FOE The Trocadero?

LH Where the Jesus Lizard are playing next Friday.

FOE Yeah, the Troc. It fits like 1500 people. They have two stories, a balcony for over 21 and a downstairs for all ages.

FOE How are the shows in your hometown?

LH Good, that's the best place to play. Not only is it two blocks from my house but it's a good PA and stage. Ann Arbor is good to us. We get a good crowd.

FOE Any wife, child etc.. in anyone's future?

LH Not really, we plan on touring for the next few years. I'm (Todd) engaged, but I have been for a few years.