

NATIONAL RAZOR

Ever seen a person get hit by a car, or overheard the neighbors exchange blows in a domestic bout. How about witness a murder? These are the inspirations for the song "Desensitized", penned by vocalist Burton of the Lehigh Valley gothic/industrial band National Razor.

The four piece band was born two years ago out of a Jam session at a party that bass player Gary Out hosted. The band released it's 12 song debut disc "Stem of Thorns" on Silent Scream records in May of this year, which has just gone into it's second pressing. The disc has garnered critical acclaim and charted #1 on college stations in New York, California, Georgia, South Dakota and Massachusetts, as well as the record label receiving a call from a fan in Serbia. The disc was recently picked up by a German distributor which will make it available in Germany as well as Italy, Belgium and France.

"The line where a guy get's shot in a bar, (from the song "Desensitized") that's from the Fourth Street Saloon (in Bethlehem), back in their punk days. There was a guy sitting next to me, with a chip on his shoulder, and he picked me out first, but I didn't prove to be enough of an antagonist, so he went on to the next guy, who was willing to fight back, and he got shot for it," reflects Burton. "It was Halloween. "Desensitized" talks about how people have become desensitized to violence from seeing it daily on television, and how a lot of weird violent things I've seen for real, how television glorifies the violence but when you see it for real, it's pretty ugly and terrible."

One begins to wonder if destruction and disorder follows Burton around like the full moon that is usually out whenever the band does anything. "I used to live in an apartment, where I would hear this guy beating his wife, who was pregnant at the time, and I would think to myself, do they have enough problems already, or should I call the police." "I saw a guy get hit by a car. He was a couple of feet away from me. He went right through the windshield of the car."

The havoc surrounding Burton doesn't just happen to humans, although still caused by humans. "Dirty Water" was inspired by the Lehigh River, where one day they accidentally had a chemical spill, and all the fish jumped up on the banks to get out of the water because the water was so bad they'd rather be on the banks dying in the air than be in the water. I remember taking a walk and seeing all these fish just flopping all around."

But, Burton isn't just a witness. He's been robbed three times. The song "Ripped Off" conveys the loss of not only material items but the memories that go along with them. "The feeling is unbelievable, when you know someone was in your home. You only have this tiny little space that you can call your own, and the rest of the world is always invaded, and yet they get in that little space. It makes you feel like shit." Burton also doesn't hold too much respect for the legal system. "Some guy broke into my house twice. I faced him in court, and testified against him, and the legal system is so crazy that nothing ever came of it. So, I wrote the song to get it out of my system."

Things also happen to Burton's friend's as documented in the song "Momen of Truth". "A friend of ours went in

for a chest X-ray and they found a spot on his lung. He had to go back for another check up and he was sitting in the respiratory waiting room waiting to find out if it was cancerous, and scratched on the wall was 'six weeks to live, thank you Marlboro' and there were three scratches on the wall, and that's all the further it went. He wasn't sure if it was because the guy died and didn't make it the six weeks or what." The spot wasn't cancerous but the friend never forgot the writing on the wall.

"Work for Food" expresses a view of the homeless situation with the lyric "will new brooms save or sweep away" questioning whether the homeless noticed the transition from the Bush to the Clinton administration.

National Razor who takes it's name from the French term for the guillotine, is just as stark in it's music as the aural paintings created by the lyrics. "He's (Burton) the literary genius and I'm the electronic wizard" boasts guitarist, computer operator, producer (who recently produced Philadelphia band Xavier Cross), and sampler guru Phil Girocco, or "Coo" for short. Burton describes National Razor's sound as being a conglomerate of sounds and feelings, "most of the time we have something real hard edged going, something earthy and something atmospheric all at the same time. Where do those sounds come from? Garage door springs, metal garbage can lids and screeching metal across metal are some of the sounds you'll hear on their "Stem of Thorns" disc as well as in their live set. "We don't rely on DAT like a lot of bands, all of the programming is done live on stage. It's like flying without a net". "We've had discs knocked over in the middle of a set, computers not boot and samples start and stop in mid song." All of the bands samples are their own creations, going out into the world with a microphone and a recorder. The band relies on a drum machine as well as a human drummer, Mike MacDonald. Burton explains, "If there's no drummer and there's drums you feel like something is going on and you're not getting the whole picture. We wanted to flesh it out. It gives a primitive element to everything." Adding a "real" drummer gives the band added power and versatility, plus as Burton puts it, "He (Mike) likes to play hard". Gary Out adds his experiences from playing with "a lot of the free Jazz people" on bass, bringing in his avant Jazz style to the band. Besides handling the vocal duties of the band, Burton works some of the delays, recorded messages and during the live sets he controls some of the lighting from his "mystery box". "I like the fact that people don't necessarily know what each band member is doing on stage."

Opening up for Suicide at the Limelight, National Razor had their best reaction, plus the extra special privelege of seeing Ric Ocasek perform with Suicide. The band was founded on a no compromise policy, we've gotten some flack for not playing more dance songs or techno, but we're honest, our sound is a melding of the members personalities, that's what makes the music. If we did anything else, we wouldn't be creating. We're not a clone band."