

THE ORIGINAL SINS

This is part one of the Interview I did with JT of the Original Sins... Look for part two next issue!

FOE Let's start with WLVR. I know you had a radio show, how do you feel about what went on?

JT (Ed note: WLVR is Lehigh University's radio station, and the community staff is made up of local people who dj on the station when the students are on the various school breaks. The community staff was recently dismissed from WLVR..) I think that, the hidden agenda behind that whole melee, was that the people at Lehigh don't particularly like the Community Staff and that they'll take excuse to rid themselves of the staff. There was a telling comment in one of the newspaper articles that the woman who was station manager wanted to "smooth" the differences between the community staff and the students so that the music was more easily identified with one another. Less radical differences between the two staffs. It's just a case where they don't like alternative music very much. If you listen to the students, they're not playing alternative music per se. They're playing a lot of classic rock.

FOE How'd you hook up with WMUH, Muhlenberg's station?

JT Through people I knew. Neil and John. We've done benefits for them before. We might be doing another live broadcast in January... I weaseled my way in that way. Plus I don't have a job and they need people in the daytime. Their night slots are pretty much taken.

FOE Not having a job, does the Sins bring you any income?

JT Yes, it brings me a little, but not enough to make it. So... I just lost my job. I was working for the Globe (Ed note: Two area newspapers, the Globe Times and the Easton Express combined to form one newspaper, & some people lost their jobs in the process...) and that was in November. I've been getting severance pay, but today I got my last check. So, I've really got to start looking in earnest. I find ways of doing things. The band maybe helps half way towards paying the rent. If we were playing twice as much, I could probably make a living at it. But it's pretty hard to do that around here playing the kind of stuff we're doing.

FOE You put out an lp on DogMeat...

JT It's an ep, featuring 4 tracks that were on the "Hardest Way" CD and cassette only. And also 4 tracks that were just outtakes, and the original "Just 14".

FOE How'd you hook up with DogMeat?

JT They knew about us, and they wanted to do some sort of Troggs tribute album. They put out the lp and a single "Nowhere to Go From Here but Down", with an alternate version of "Can't Get Over You" on the back. We may do more work with Dogmeat in the future.

FOE Do you have a large following overseas?

JT Well, the only way of telling, is when we were in Europe, usually people came to our shows, and people who

"Heard It All Before"

knew us and wanted us to sign their albums. I wouldn't say large, not significantly larger than the US. They take it more seriously over there, in terms of just listening value out of their records. I think they like music better outside of the US. I don't know about Australia. There probably is, because of our tendency to sometimes sound like the Stooges.

FOE Are your albums released outside of the US?

JT The last two, "Self Destruct" and "Hardest Way" were released. I don't know about "Big Soul". I don't know if anyone has that one. They're planning to release that on CD. Our next one will be released in February, and we're planning it to be a significantly larger overseas release.

FOE Have the Original Sins ever gotten a bad review?

JT I think critics are overly kind to bands that try a little. Cuz it's hard to get by in a band, and I think most critics realize that. But we have gotten a couple of bad reviews. I think one was an English review. They had originally been really supportive, but thought maybe they'd been too supportive, so they decided "let's knock them down a few pegs". They really liked the "Just 14" single and didn't like "Big Soul". We got what people told me was a good review in Spin, but seemed like a slag to me. Kind of saying, well these guys have no where to go, sounds like their wheels are spinning, they're playing music that's 22 years old or something. And that kind of hurt us, cuz it was in Spin and not some little fanzine. It was in a big, slick... It kind of depressed me when I read it, cuz I didn't think it was necessary to point out all of those things... even if they were true. I don't think we've ever really been ripped, cuz I don't think we do anything that offensive. It's not that radical one way or another, so people either are pleasantly pleased or mildly annoyed.

FOE How have sales of the albums been?

JT I know "Self Destruct"... we are entering multiple pressings. We did sell out the original 5,000. We usually sell enough to break even for the record company, which is Psonik and Skyclad, which distributes it. I've never seen any money for royalties or anything. We've never had sales of like 5 figures or anything.

FOE That's kind of surprising.

JT It is...

FOE Considering the press...

JT The press is distorted, cuz almost any band can get a review in a big magazine, as long as they have some sort of connection. And that doesn't necessarily mean that there's going to be a proportionate amount of albums sold. We've gotten a number of reviews in Rolling Stone and I don't think they've made a hill of beans of a difference in albums sold. They've helped morale in the band. But I think the real way to sell albums is to get out there and play, and make yourself known in anyway you can.

FOE How does all that effect the band. A good review helps morale, but how do you stay together for so long, and keep plugging away?

Lehigh U. students cut air time of community-based radio staff

JT The 3 of us who've been together from the start, which doesn't include the drummer, are passive guys. There was a time when we were up, and thought, oh yeah, we're gonna get signed. And it didn't happen, but it didn't effect us, but somehow drummers seem to take it harder. We've lost 2 drummers. I don't think we'll lose this one. It surprises me, with all the press & reviews and the build up, but it doesn't shock me. I just figure that's the way things are.

FOE Obviously that's not your goal then, to get signed?

JT It's a goal, but it's not our ultimate goal. Our ultimate goal is to put out the songs. To have fun doing it. If I can look back and say we put out the songs in an honorable way, then I'll be happy. It would be very nice to make a living via music, but it's difficult, unless you are playing music that can be played almost anywhere, to anybody or unless you get signed by a major.

FOE When did you go to Europe?

JT Spring of '91. We were there 6 weeks and played mostly Germany with a few gigs in France, Spain... It was fantastic. It's a whole different ballgame then here in the US. They are just more into music. They spend a lot of money. They buy your albums, t shirts. This is one of their main things, in terms of spending money... I think there's less over there to distract them from it. Where as here theres this whole machinery built around music. MTV, they have MTV but it's not as completely pervasive, to the extent that what people think of as musical people are really cartoon figures. Prince, Michael Jackson, Madonna, they're not real. Where as over there they still show old Thin Lizzy cuts. They don't have the fixation with the immediate. And I think they really do listen to the music more. I think people take it for granted here...

FOE You have a couple of videos...

JT Yes, we did "Out of My Mind" and "Why You Love Me So" and they were both played approximately three times on 120 minutes, and also on other shows around the country. We did another one, it was "If You're Looking At the Sun". We sent it to them and it was by the same guy who did the last video, so we figured they'd show it. Well, they didn't show it, they said it was too boring. I can see why they said that, it was just us standing in my kitchen for the entire song. I thought it would be funny, but they didn't seem to think it was that funny.

FOE Where were the others shot at?

JT "Out of My Mind" was shot in Lancaster at the Ramones show we did. The other one was shot at the Roxy Theater in Northampton, when there was no movie playing. We just used the stage, you couldn't really tell it was the Roxy.

FOE Wasn't the new album supposed to be out a year ago?

JT It's a double lp, single CD that was recorded in August of 90. So it was actually recorded before we put out "Self Destruct". We wanted to give "Self Destruct" a life of it's own, and we were trying to actively shop the new one around. It's 78 minutes on the albums and 72 on the CD.

FOE That's about all you can get on a CD...

JT Yeah, unless you want to pay a couple of thousand more. You could get like 80 minutes on a CD, but for some reason, they know they've got you, so they milk you for much more money. Anyway, it's neat to have a CD with less music than the albums. There's two songs, maybe it's 3 that are missing from the CD. They will be included on the ep CD that's coming out shortly called "Eat This". It just has a few of the better songs on it and those 3 songs for those who have to have everything on CD.

FOE The Sins have a lot of material. How do you write so many songs, you've only been around for like 4 years...

JT As of January 92, it'll be 5 years. I estimate after this album we will have at least 80 songs out, and we easily have 100 original songs. They're always coming. I'm the kind of person, say, if I'm driving, and listening to the radio, or something... it's not good to have me drive, cuz I'm not paying attention, I'm trying to think how can I write a song like that... while I'm driving, and I'll make wrong turns. Causing accidents. So I'm totally locked into the idea of writing songs, to the extent that I'm not sure how to get out of it. There's such a thing as too much, to the extent that you have trouble sleeping, & you're trying to work out a song, and there's no real reason for it, other than to get it out.

FOE How'd you hook up with Peter Buck from REM to produce your new album?

JT On our Southern tour, we played at his wife's club in Athens. We stayed at his house that night, and Pete really likes helping out bands, letting them sleep at his house and stuff. So he says, "Why don't you come down here and record?" We all considered it more than just a way to make ourselves better known, just a change. Each album before that had been recorded in the same studio.

FOE Does production really matter on an album?

JT I think it depends on what music and who the artist is. Pussy Galore, I don't think it would matter. It matters a lot, especially when you want to get something less than clean, and you're dealing with people who don't like that.

FOE What are some of the songs about on the new album.

JT There's one called "Watch You Dance". Which is about, how a performer feels about his audience. Trying to downgrade the idea that the only reason people join rock n roll bands is to get laid and get drugs or something. You really get a high off of watching the audience enjoy themselves. "Like an Animal", that sorta describes how we sometimes devolve and it can be fun. I think largely the songs are more pop sounding. There's some that sound like they could've been on "Self Destruct". It sounds like an amalgam of the first 3 albums, with a couple of new things. There's a lot more attention paid to song structure... there's not many straight love songs. It's just sorta bland uncertain thoughts, lyrically. Like what the hell is going on, as usual.