

REEL BIG FISH

INTERVIEW WITH VOCAL GUITARIST AARON BARRETT
2nd December 1998 at The Funhouse Buffalo, NY.
Conducted by Thom Nicolette for Hoi Polloi!

This is Jeff and I'm Thom. Can we have a brief history of the band?

Aaron: Brief history? Well..I met these guys and they played instruments, so I asked them to play some music with me. And here we are. That was brief.

Okay.

Why, you want more?

Sure.

Uh.....boy, I don't remember a thing. One day, I got a guitar for my 16th birthday and then the next day here I'm playing in Buffalo NY. I don't know what happened in-between. It's crazy. I must have met some people though.

How do you feel about the fact that everybody's here to see you and your band, we're here at the merchandise table, and they're all trying to grab t-shirts and they don't even realize it's you?

It feels pretty good 'cause I can listen to what they're saying about me. It's the hair man. It's the long hair. They don't realize it's me. I don't have a Hawaiian shirt on. If I had a Hawaiian shirt on it'd be "Heeey! What's up Aaron my man?"

Yeah, what's wrong with you? You don't look all ska now. You look more like Weezer today.

I don't look all ska? Hawaiian shirts aren't ska, kids! Where did you get that idea?

What makes something ska?

What makes something ska? I don't know. I think you gotta have a tie on, or maybe wear a suit.

Can you describe your music in 5 words or less?

I'll describe it in 3 words. Rock-And-Roll. Or maybe that's one word. Rock-n-roll? Wait, that's 3 words. Rock-N-Roll. Big Rock!

"She Has A Girlfriend Now", is that social commentary, or is that maybe based on a personal experience?

Social commentary? What do you mean by social commentary?

Is it about girls going out with girls nowadays? Or was it that YOU who got dumped by a girl for a girl once?

I dunno. It kinda happened. I kinda made it up. I like to write songs with the word "girlfriend" in it. Like, "I Want Your Girlfriend To Be My Girlfriend Too" girlfriend girlfriend. "She Has A Girlfriend Now" girlfriend girlfriend girlfriend. What?

How'd you hook up with Coolie Ranx?

We like The Pilfers and we always go on tour with 'em. So we told 'em "Hey! Come and sing on this particular song." Cuz it was like an instrumental, and I thought it was really boring and dumb, and it needed to be good, and I knew the only way to make it good was to have someone that was really, really good and cool and great on it, coolest guy in the world; Coolie Ranx, and that's how! And we just called him and he said yeah, sure. I'd love to. Plus, he was always buggin' us before, "Hey! we should do something together!" This was our chance.

Why 'Song #3'? I remember looking at the CD in the store and it says Song #3 and I thought you went and did a cover of Blur's song.

Heh heh heh. No, that's "Song #3". Ours is Song #3. Theirs is "Song 3". Actually, our single now, "The Set Up", used to be called Song #3. But I changed it to The Set Up. But I liked having a song called Song #3 because I always wanted to a joke were you have like track 10 as song 3 and then people get all confused. I dunno.

Does it mean something to have the song title in parentheses? You know, It's like, "The Set Up" but then in parentheses, "You Need This"

I don't know. The record company made us call it "The Set Up (You Need This)" We called it "The Set Up". And they're all "Well it needs to have some words from the chorus so we can recognize it" So I picked that. I dunno.

How often do people ask you "Why do you rock so hard?"

Everyday. But I don't ever let 'em know how

because if I told you, then everybody would be rockin' this hard.

Do you get pissed off when they ask you that all the time?

I'm pissed off anyway.

You seem like a very angry individual. I look at you and I just see the hatred toward mankind in your eyes.

Do ya?

You should go gothic.

Tryin'

Ska is not your thing.

Dan's goin' gothic. If you see him, (pointing) look over at him. He's got dyed black hair, painted nails and all

Oh, he's just an evil motherf---er.

Yeah. We were all supposed to go gothic, but I didn't get to go shopping.

Go to Hot Topics. They have some trendy goth stuff you can pick up with your credit card.

Yeah.

Now what were you expecting from that first album? You have an album called "Turn The Radio Off" and yet you're getting airplay. Do you get called hypocrites? How do you respond to that?

They just don't get it. They don't get the funniness of everything. That's why we called it "Turn The Radio Off"

So you expected it to be on the radio? Well we were hoping it would be. We thought it could, and then it would be really quite funny.

How do you feel when you turn on the TV and every other movie commercial, its your music in the background?

It's pretty funny. It's all a joke. I'm all about the joke. THE joke.

You're a goth with a sense of humor then, huh?

Yeah.

Do you have any other interests besides this ska/rock-n-roll tour thing? Would you like to try anything else? Perhaps a side project or something?

Yes.

Like what? "Aaron Barrett Sings the Blues"?

Maybe

At a Rochester show, this 13-year old girl crowdsurfing that took off her top! Do you get that exposure from fans alot?

Actually people don't take their shirts off very much for us. It's pretty sad. Sometimes we get bras up on the stage. But it's not the good old,

like, back in the good old days when there were metal bands and girls would always take their tops off and show their boobs. There's no groupies. There's no sex and drugs.

Life is pretty boring.

So what would you say to her father?

Aaron: I didn't touch 'em. I didn't touch her at all. I was in the back.

How is your newest record doing?

Aaron: Oh I think it's doing pretty good, but they're probably gonna call it a failure cuz it didn't sell half a million like the last one did. But I think, selling more than 2,000 is pretty good. It already sold like 50,000 units now.

How were you first introduced to ska music? What was your exposure to it?

Aaron: I always liked The English Beat and The Specials and stuff, but I didn't know it was Ska. I heard it in the '80s, and I liked it. That was probably my first exposure. But then, we had this other lead singer and he's the one that told us what ska was and what it meant, and so he learned us all about it.

Now would you say that you're a full-fledged rude boy?

Aaron: Hell no! At first when I first heard about ska I thought I was all rad and I'm all "Yay! I'm gonna BE ska! I'm wearing ska clothes and rude boy yay yeah!" But I soon realized that that's lame cuz there's too many other kinds of music and too many other clothes that are cool to wear. I don't wanna be one thing. I wanna be a person who likes music.

Do you have anything interesting to say? Any funny anecdotes? Tour diaries?

Aaron: No. Unfortunately, nothing cool ever happens to us. There's never any stories. Like, "Oh one time there was this fire and, oh and these girls came on the bus and they were like..." You know, there's nothing. I have nothing. I sit around and watch satellite TV.

What are your favorite shows?

Aaron: My favorite shows on TV? I like that "Dexter's Laboratory", its good. And "Cow & Chicken"

Oh you a cartoon guy?

Aaron: Yeah! I love cartoons!

What venues do you like to play?

Aaron: I dunno, I like to play anywhere – Sometimes really big shows are very cool 'cuz there's like tens of thousands of people singin' along and jumpin' up and down, it looks really cool, feels good. But sometimes I like small shows cuz they're right there and you don't

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this is pre tim burton obi-wan-skinhead meets-daddy-warbucks fish movie.

Yeah. I wrote that song like, remember back when the Dance Hall Crashers came out with "Lockjaw"? (it was 1995) They came back, and they got back together but they didn't have any horns. And everybody was calling 'em sellouts and "Ooh look! They're trying to get in on the punk thing and trying to be punk now and blah blah blah oh sellouts aaahhh!". I thought that was lame, 'cuz I liked their new album. Their old album was like made years and years ago and if they wanna try something new, that's fine. So I wrote the song "Sell Out" to make fun of the people who were calling the Dance Hall Crashers sell-outs. Way back in ninety-whatever, four? five?

So we have the recently boot-ed from Moon Ska Dance Hall Crashers to thank for indirect inspiration behind that?

That's right. And I also wanted to make a song that sounded like the Dance Hall Crashers on that new album. Not that it sounds anything like them, but, you know. That's what I was going for.

Can you really play glam-rock solos on a double neck guitar like on the cover of your new album?

Sure! Of course! Totally!

What was the worst injury you ever got at a concert? The big rock show?

It was at the last Suburban Rhythm show. I accidentally slit my wrist and bled all over the whole crowd. Some guy, well... There were always these guys at the Suburban Rhythm shows and they always made a pit, and they were always tough, and they always beat up everybody, and they ran around in a circle, and they really sucked. So I decided "I'm sick of this crap! This is the last Suburban Rhythm show and I'm not gonna be scared anymore!" So I went to Suburban Rhythm's show and proclaimed "I'm not gonna be scared anymore!" So I went out in the middle of them and I punched 'em all in the face. They kind of were scared and they kind of stopped doing it, so it was good, so then all the kids could dance. It's all you gotta do when you don't want 'em to mosh, you gotta mosh back harder. Then they get all scared and all like "Whoa! Whoa, they're getting too violent! This sucks!" And then they stop. Maybe, in most cases hopefully. I don't

even have to talk in the mike you could like yell at someone standing in the back "Hey what's up!". I dunno. I just like to play. It's fun.

Boxers or briefs?

Pajamas.

When you take a shit, do you fold or crumple the paper?

Fold. That's a good question. I never got that one before.

What kind of toilet paper do you like? Do you like the quilted two-ply?

That's nice. I like that kind.

Do you get that kind of toilet paper on the road?

No, we usually just get the one-ply.

That's a bitch! You guys are rock stars! You deserve better toilet paper!

Definitely not rock stars. We're only slightly well-known people.

Do you think it's kind of funny that you didn't start as a big band, yet a song about selling-out was your claim to fame?

know.

So it's survival of the fittest?

It's fight fire with fire! Why don't you just be nice and dance. Why you gotta push? And punch? Man?

What were you like as a kid? In school did you do any sports or drama?

No, I really liked to both draw and not talk to anybody. I didn't talk to a girl until I was in 9th grade. I was SO shy. I still am.

When was the first time you kissed a girl?

The first girl I kissed, I think I was in like 10th grade. My sister had her friend over and she never kissed anyone either. So, my sister decided we should learn how to kiss on each other. It was pretty cool. My sister set me up.

So, then were you the loser when you were a kid? You weren't popular? Or did you have a lot of friends?

Definitely not popular. I wasn't a loser, I just didn't talk to anybody, so nobody could be my friend. I mean I had friends...

Did you sit alone at the lunch table?

Uuuhhhh...sometimes, yeah.

Aw, poor guy. Well look, hey all the girls wanna sit near you now.

(sarcastically).....Yeah. I showed them! All these girls coming up to me right now. Look at 'em all. They're all over me.

Hey, there are people coming up that recognize you now.

Yeah, but they come up and are like, "Here - will you write on this?" Oooh, Elton John! And then after I write on it, then it's "Okay, bye"

Do you prefer it if people stay and hang out with you then?

Actually, you know I probably wouldn't have anything to say. I really don't know what to say to anyone. I'm not very talkative.

I think you're pretty good company. We've been hanging out and talking here for about an hour.

Well turns out, some people I can talk to and some people I can't. It's just weird.

Here's a question on behalf of my friend, Jeff. How do you feel about laser pointers?

I fucking hate those things! They're SO annoying. Especially in the movie theaters. Especially those ones that say stuff like "I love you" with a cupid AGHH!!!

What was the last movie you saw when people broke out the lasers?

Uh.....oh, what movie was that? I can't remember. I see alot of movies.

Movie guy, huh?

It's all I do.

What else do you do in your spare time when you're not working on the music at all?

I go to movies.

Yeah and watch cartoons too, right?

Yeah. I'm not any fun.

Kind of an intellectual one: What does the future hold for Reel Big Fish?

The future? I hope there is one. Nah, I don't know what we're gonna do. Keep making more crazy albums. We'll be like Frank Zappa and make like 50 albums, in like 30 years?

Any final thoughts?

Final thoughts? Words of wisdom.

Some points to ponder. Something we can take with us through life.

Uuuuhhhhhhh.....uuuuhhhhh..... Well I don't know. I always just try not to expect anything or look forward or hope for anything, 'cuz then when good things happen you're pleasantly surprised.

That's pretty good. Okay, thanks alot.

Yup, thanks.

THE END

>Ok here's the second interview with Aaron >Barrett, I hope you like these. I'll try and get >the pictures out to you by Monday. I would like >to do this again for the 'zine if your not pissed >at me. If you'd like me to be of service again, >please let me know. Again my name is Thom >Nicolette. Matt Wong plays bass, Barrett is >vocals and guitar. Show was 103.3 The Edge >FM Shredd & Regan's Misfit Christmas Show >held at The Funhouse Buffalo NY on 12/2/98. >I also have pictures I can send and cartoons >that Aaron and I drew that might look cool. >Send me your address where I can mail them.



Found packed away in some crate along with 8 x 10 photos of the band RBF fall '98 with Spring Heeled Jack USA and Pilfers maybe at R.I.T's Clark Gymnasium? It wasn't until their Reel Big tourbus caught fire late Sept '02 that Eddie won free tix to a sold-out show here in Rochester. It was ok. Travis read a copy of The Specials issue 006 up on stage before doing "Monkey Man".

To this day I have never met Thom Nicolette.



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