



Les Claypool's \$47,000 facial

"We suck." Hmm... not the statement you usually get from someone talking about their own band. Definitely not the statement you usually get from a member of one of America's biggest live acts, with million-selling records, headline slots at *Lollapalooza*, and a playing style reminiscent of someone hard wired to an electric cattle prod whilst inhaling large quantities of nitrous oxide. But then bands this big don't usually have album titles like *Sailing the Seas of Cheese* and *Pork Soda*, don't usually turn down offers to do commercials for corporate carbonated water, and don't usually record their latest album in a home/studio/water-slide/spin art complex called Rancho Relaxo. I can only assume, therefore, the guy on the other end of the phone trying to pass the 'Hep Enough to Gig in New Zealand' test is Les Claypool, chief executive of the Bass and Banjo Division of Primus International.

In seven words please describe the current Primus lifestyle.

"Primus have been tourin' their asses off!"

Very good. Like your imaginative combination of colloquialism and metaphor. Any

highlights you'd care to mention?

"Umm... you know, whenever I'm asked about these things I always draw a big blank."

Quite alright, I'm sure it won't affect your final score. How about any especially bizarre occurrences?

"Bizarre occurrences... well, I keep waitin' for Larry [Lalonde, guitar] to catch on fire on stage, but it doesn't happen. I think our whole existence is one bizarre occurrence."

You're doing pretty well then.

"I'm hangin' in there!"

I'd like to move on now to the 'Shameless Product Promotion' category of the interview. A few words on your new enhanced CD version of *Tales From the Punchbowl*, if you please.

"It's an amazing thing! Buy units!"

Ah, come now, Les, I know there's more where that came from.

"It's been doing really well as far as the

press goes. *CD Rom Magazine* gave it six stars out of five — can't beat that. It did extremely well at this big MacWorld convention here in San Francisco. We had a big party where we demoed it, and had a performance, and actually did a little impromptu banjo jam with the Residents. The CD Rom is an enhanced CD, which means it's a regular audio CD, but there's interactive information on it. You just stick it in your computer and you can actually drive around in the punchbowl in a boat, go to different islands and kinda trip around. It's all based upon all the artwork Larry and I did for the *Tales From the Punchbowl* CD booklet."

There's a distinct Primus sense of humour that comes through in the music, the artwork and the videos. Has that always been there?

"Well, I myself have always been a guy who likes to laugh as often as I possibly can — I enjoy humorous things. But more than anything, I enjoy things that are a bit obscure, even eerie. So, there has always been that element there, it's just always been a little shady, a little dark."

[Indeed, Les does laugh often and infectiously during the course of our conversation. Think of his voice hitting two or three high, short notes, and you pretty much get the picture.]

The 'Wynona's Big Brown Beaver' video struck me as being a bit of a childhood dream come true, with you getting to play cowboys. Was it your idea?

"The concept of the video was mine — I directed it. The idea for us to actually wear the prosthetics where you have that plastic look came from a guy at the record company. He had seen it used in commercials a long time ago, and thought that was the look for Primus. It just seemed perfect for this song, so we decided to be toy cowboys."

Was it uncomfortable?

"It was uncomfortable but it wasn't nearly as uncomfortable as that damn pig suit I had to wear in the *Mr Krinkle* video. That thing was torture. The most uncomfortable thing about the cowboy outfits was that it took four hours to put the prosthetic on because it's actually glued to your face. Then it takes two hours to get it off, and that is unbelievably painful. It was like I was havin' my skin peeled off my head! It was unreal [laughs]! I did not like that part of it at all."

Worth it in the end?

"Well, it did make my skin silky smooth for days to come. I like to call it my \$47,000 facial."

Very good. Crowds down this way like a high standard of personal grooming. Now, I understand that in your spare time you like to play the bass electric guitar. Please talk at length on the following question: Musician oriented magazines show quite a bit of interest in Primus, and I suspect you wouldn't fit into their normal mould of the highly proficient player. How does it feel to have that interest directed at you?

"Well, it feels good, mainly because the

other type of magazines, the 'fashionable' magazines, generally don't show much interest in us because we're not three good looking guys running around in the latest clothes, or whatever. That's just my take on it anyway [yet more laughs from Les]... The musician magazines have always been pretty kind to us, I guess because we overplay our instruments. I mean, I've played a lot of different music in my day, and I've played with some pretty amazing players, so it's good to have that respect. It gives me a warm feeling inside, especially when I get to meet people I respect and there's a mutual feeling there. It's a wonderful thing."

Well, Mr Claypool, we're about three quarters of the way through the interview, and as yet I've managed to avoid the kind of wounded dog of a question that results in flat, one word answers from you, and the little voice in my head telling me to keep my fucking mouth shut in future. However, this magazine does have a quota, so here we go: When you were down here last time, you didn't by any chance hear a band called *Balter Space*?

"Umm... not that I can remember but I'm a bit of a space cadet when it comes to names of people or bands."

They've got this song called 'Fish Eye' that's got a bass part that sounds remarkably like the last quarter of 'Wynona's Big Brown Beaver'.

"Really."

Yeah.

"Oh."

I just wondered if... er...

"Never heard it."

Well [I should keep my fucking mouth shut in future]... you should have a listen.

"Alright."

Yeah.

Pregnant pause (about nine months).

I'm not accusing you of plagiarising it or anything but...

"Sure ya are!"

[To my considerable relief, Les lets fly with his biggest laugh of the session, with me following close behind.]

That's excellent Les. I think you're just what we're looking for. I'll just finish off with a word for word quote from your record company bio. I'm sure you'll agree that it's an obvious and reprehensible attempt by them to promote substance use as being fashionable to the world's youth.

'Truth be known, after all that dues payin' and five records down the line, the stuff that keeps the tricky trio enthused is the same stuff that inspires countless other people around the globe...

"'Drugs,' shoots back the boisterous bassist, his deadpan ruined by a fit of laughter. "Seriously, though, it sure beats sittin' around the house."

Suck on!

DAVID HOLMES

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