

# Warped Sense of Humour

## Blink 182



**Blink** 182, the current torch-bearers for the punk rock style that burns with a sunny Californian pop pizzazz — and is more concerned with girls and butt jokes than any more serious issues — are in the midst of their second *Warped* tour.

*Warped*, a travelling punk rock roadshow, this year features Social Distortion, the Vandals, Mighty Mighty Bosstones, and the Descendents, along with the usual array of skaters and BMX riders. It has already hit New York when I speak to Blink's two vocalists, guitarist Tom de Long, and bass player Mark Hopper. Having played their set, they're heading to downtown Manhattan for Italian food.

"I've got a little bit of trivia for you guys," Tom is telling the rest of the band, "Down in New Zealand they don't know what a dude ranch is — they think it's some sort of homoerotic thing!"

Well, actually, I hadn't finished asking the question. But no problem, *Dude Ranch* — apart from being a place where cowboys live — is the name of Blink's new album, the more proficient and polished follow-up to 1995's *Cheshire Cat*.

"Well, the first one was done in three days, and we were working out of a garage. This time we recorded for five weeks," explains Tom. That additional effort shows in the better performance and more realised songs. And with San Diego stalwart Mark Trombino producing, the sound is less rudimentary and more refined.

"He was great", Mark Hopper says of Trombino. "A lot of producers will change your songs and say you need a different chorus or things like that, but he let us take our own direction with the songs and worked more trying to get good sounds on tape."

What hasn't changed much on the new record is the lyrical direction — a pervasive loser-in-love theme, embellished by embarrassing tales of being caught out in degenerate acts. The hi-jinks and deviant antics described herein, like being caught drunk and naked in public, spying through girls bedroom windows from trees, are, according to the band, 100% true (including, presumably, the album's closing skit of encouraging a dog to drink from a recently peed-in toilet).

"The things we write about are either autobiographical or are things that have happened to people we know", says Mark.

"Some of them are light-hearted fun songs, but most of them are true experiences. We're just stupid and can't get girls. I have a girlfriend now, and I'm going through problems," Tom tells me in a resigned tone. Asked if his girlfriend was the one peeped at in the song 'Voyeur', a firm "No comment," is the reply. Whether or not she was is unknown; however Tom's mother is apparently no fan of the lewder side of the lyrics.

"She does not condone it. And recently, there was a pretty gnarly interview that came out in San Diego with us on the cover, and all it talked about was how toilet humour we are, and I'm sure she's gonna be kinda bummed when she sees that."

Does that sort of press, concentrating on the novelty aspects of Blink 182, bother the band?

"That kind of annoys me, because I think our band is just as valid as any band that has a real message that they wanna put across in their lyrics," Mark says. "We obviously don't write songs about politics or government or anything like that, but I

think a lot more people can relate to the things that we write about."

Asked how they see those differences impacting on the punk rock scene, Mark looks on the bright side.

"I know there's a lot of division in the punk scene in the US, but there's also a lot of unity going on. It seems like bands are not competing so much, everybody's working together. It's really positive where we come from at least."

"Overall, it's pretty open-minded," adds Tom, "and on the *Warped* tour at least, there is a good sense of community. We're all hanging out barbecuing every night, and having fun, gambling, and that crazy stuff. All the hardcore punk kids that don't like it don't go to the *Warped* shows. There's only been a couple of times when there's been a few people not into us, but what can you do about those people anyway?"

Mark elaborates on those elements of the audience. "Some places you get little pockets of people who are punk elitists, and they have their own little ideas about what punk rock should be or whatever. Punk got so big with Green Day or Offspring, and I think that helped out the scene a lot. It still has its roots in anger, but a lot of people are coming to realise that you can have a lot of fun with it — it can be a great time also."

They now have the opportunity to spread that sort of message to a lot more people, as the new album is out on a major label. But before you jump to any conclusions about a possible loss of autonomy, Mark explains the way they worked it.

"What we did with our contract was we took Cargo Records with us when we went to the major label, and we have a fifty/fifty joint venture, half Cargo, half MCA. The

people that believed in us from the beginning are just as involved now as the major label."

While Tom is "... stoked that we've got better distribution", and that MCA got them on a movie soundtrack ("It was a porn movie, I think"), Mark is just as happy with the way the album artwork turned out.

"The art department has done great things for our band. We came up with the idea for the 'Greetings from the Blink 182 Dude Ranch', and they put it together. The ideas we had, they took them way further than we ever thought possible."

Which is approximately the same distance further than they envisaged going when they first formed the band, five years ago. Mark always thought they had the potential to go far, but never expected that they actually would.

"There's so many great bands everywhere you go. What separates us from any of these other great bands that aren't getting the exposure we are? We are blown away every day by how far things have come."

Tom agrees. "Sometimes you take it for granted, you miss your home and your girlfriend because you're gone so much. When you stop and think about it, we're on a pretty good thing here, I guess."

There is a possibility the *Warped* tour will reach New Zealand in the near future. Mark, after stating emphatically that the tour was on its way, is suddenly less certain when he discovers that New Zealand isn't somewhere in Australia. It remains to be seen whether we will bear witness first hand to the Blink 182 experience — toilet humour and all.

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