

Consummate Pop



Somewhere in the boom of post-Nirvana guitar bands, Everclear have managed to carve themselves quite a serious little niche, standing out from all the angst-ridden guitar wielding boys. The songs on the band's major label debut, *Sparkle And Fade*, seemed to have the perfect balance of pop and punk, and they struck a chord with the rock kids. A lot of this can be attributed to guitarist/vocalist Art Alexakis, who takes his rock 'n' roll very seriously. After a nightmarish life that was dominated by substance abuse (Alexakis began dabbling at 8, and was fooling with heroin by the time he was 13), he cleaned up and began pouring that intensity into his music. Alexakis is not just an adept songwriter — he's edited the band's videos, has a frightening understanding of the business side of things, and on their new album, *So Much For the Afterglow*, he proves his production skills are pretty sharp too. It's a surprisingly lush, melodic excursion, after the hyperactive buzz of *Sparkle And Fade*, and that's all part of the Everclear masterplan, as Alexakis, bassist Craig Montoya and drummer Greg Eklund took time to explain.

Alexakis: "I'd say *Sparkle And Fade* was the consummate 'rock' record, while this new one, for Everclear, is the consummate pop record with rock influences. That's what I wanted to do, it's guitar pop and that's what we grew up listening to, like Elvis Costello or whatever."

RipItUp: It struck me as being really dense and symphonic, sort of like a Beach Boys album or thereabouts.

A: "Yeah, this time we had more time to work the songs out, and on *Sparkle And Fade* we made a pretty straight up punky, rock record, so with this album it was fun to do a more produced record."

Montoya: "So you felt like you were listening to Yes or something?"

A: "Oh stop! Maybe the new Radiohead album is like Yes, or Queen without the pop songs, but we're not that bad."

RIU: Well, you've certainly avoided that recidivist trap of remaking your last album, or failing that someone else's good album.

A: "I think a lot of American bands can escape that because America, like Australia and New Zealand, is much more of a melting pot of ideas. It's weird in England, very fashion-dictated so a jingle can become Number One overnight, then disappear, which makes it hard to work out what's going on. In America, a band who basically copy another band, like Bush who sound very much like Nirvana, generally don't have any real lasting success.

In their case they've done well, but you can't build a career on it. You can sell records to kids but most of them will grow up and get wise. Our thing is more that we have so many diverse influences, and some cross-reference and some don't. Everyone is going to be influenced by somebody, but you've got to let it sit in your gut a while. It's fun though, you can take a sort of trip-hop beat then throw a heavy, Led Zeppelin style riff over the top of it like on 'California King', and not even really realise it until you back and listen to the finished product."

RIU: It really seems like you were deliberately screwing around with the standard 'rock' sounds and using more unusual rhythms this time around.

Eklund: "We definitely focused more on rhythm this time, in terms of

drums and bass it was more fooling around to get interesting sounds than anything else. We had 2 full kits in the studio and 14 different snare drums, and we just keep putting stuff through effects and distortion."

A: "No rules basically. This time these guys took more control and wrote vocals and keyboards, and I think it opened up the sound. We're more like a band record to record."

RIU: Well, having a big hit and winding up on the huge tour supporting it either seems to make or break a band.

A: "Yeah, right now with that whole sophomore jinx thing, everyone's waiting for you to fail. You just can't get caught up in it though, you just have to do whatever it takes and fall into that trap of getting real reactionary and trying to be something you aren't. I mean, it's

just pop music we're making here, we're not doing serious art. We take it seriously and love doing it, but it's still just pop music. If we can entertain without resorting to fluff then that's all we want to do. It's great to be able to touch a few people with our music."

RIU: Do you think being not only a family man, but a successful guy as well, has tempered some of the bile in your music?

A: "No, when we recorded *World Of Noise*, I had a four month old baby and I was pissed off! I was coming off of welfare, I was having to be responsible and my whole life was changing out of my control. Now, some things have changed, I'm a lot more patient but I have all these new fears — I'm scared for my daughter. I think about the world she's walking out into and it still upsets me. I guess I'm just an angry person and music helps displace this.

RIU: So aside from the obligatory tour, what's the plans for the future?

A: "Oh man, I'm already thinking about the next record, I have really big ideas. I want these guys to write, I'd like it to be a double album — we're really ambitious. We've talked about this stuff, and I don't see us doing more than five records so we want to make the most of it. We should do it and get out before we're burnt out and horrible. Like the Police, they were great and they quit after their best record and before it all fell apart. There were fist fights involved in that, but they got it done and got out of it before they turned horrible, and that's what we need to do."

M: "Then we can do the reunion tour and really get the Yes thing going, maybe we'll even get Roger Dean to do the cover!"

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