

MINISTRY

God knows these damn rock personalities are difficult beasts. It was painful enough having to rise to full consciousness at some ungodly hour on a miserable Wednesday morning to uphold an appointment with a 9am phone call, supposedly with Paul Barker of Ministry. But when you find yourself lounging in an office, foraging through old copies of *Rip It Up*, and studying Donna Yuzwalk's dubiously autographed Axl Rose pin-up for three quarters of an hour, anticipating a call that eventually doesn't materialize, you do become slightly devoid of any sense of reverence that may come with the thought of conversing with somebody whose work plays a major role in your CD collection. Soundcheck . . . hmph!!!

Instead of an unavailable Mr Barker (whose wife was inconsiderate enough to be in a childbearing mood the night before) I'm given a direct line with Ministry's phenomenal drum-practitioner Bill Riefelin. On a break in the Lollapalooza monster jaunt, Bill and co-producer Howie Bento are sitting around the studio not only "bored out of our fucking minds" but equally surprised to hear that Ministry's latest opus *Psalm 69 — The Way To Succeed And The Way To Suck Eggs*, has entered the charts in NZ of all places.

"In your charts? . . . I am surprised, I mean I don't really know much about what goes on in NZ . . . but yeah, I suppose I am surprised. I'm surprised that it's gone up the charts in the US as well. I don't think it's a very commercial record at all."

Touted as the next big thing to be passed from America's alimentary canal, Ministry's cathartic approach is a demented frolic into territory that budding metal-purists can only gape upon open-mouthed. *Psalm 69*'s pneumatic guitar fervour, overblown sample histrionics, imploding horror textures and semi-audible "post-tracheotomy grim-reaper" raps, is exquisite torture. Beautifully designed violence. Technology at full tilt bringing the band the recognition it deserves. However, while some of us may reserve some apprehension at Ministry escaping cult status, Bill Riefelin is adamant that any shift in popularity, if it does happen, will have nothing to do with them.

"We haven't changed anything, we haven't gone after popularity and we haven't gone after megabucks. What we've done is make the kind of records that we want to make and if for some reason they become popular then I can only attribute that to a shift in the music-listening consciousness of America or wherever we're being listened to. I think with the Lollapalooza tour we're playing to an audience that probably wouldn't listen to us and we're doing some good shows. I mean we're a really good live band, very strong, extremely loud, very abrasive, and we try to put on a very intense show so if we become accepted on a larger scale, it's not because of us but the people changing around us."

And Ministry becoming too hip for those that preferred the underground association.

"Well, why does a person listen to music? Is it because they like it or because it's popular or do they like it because it's not popular, y'know, that's really fickle. I think probably with a mass audience, people listen to something because it's popular and not understand it. Hopefully our audience listen to us because they like us and not because we're hip and groovy. I mean, I hope we're not hip and groovy."

As for being the next big thing?

"I don't know if that's true or not, I honestly can't really see the band being more popular than it is now." (laughs)

Having entered the American Top 40 with *Psalm 69* I explain to Bill that we'd heard rumours of a full-length release as far back as late '91. 'Jesus Built My Hot-Rod' was put out around November with the album supposedly being released a month later. Asked why the release date of *Psalm 69* was pushed back several times, Mr Riefelin off-loads the highly unoriginal excuse of:

"The record simply wasn't ready. It wasn't up to the band's standard. A lot of people wanted the record to come out a lot sooner than it did but it just wasn't ready as far as the band was concerned. A lot of stuff was trashed, a lot got changed around, rewriting, editing, so unfortunately everybody had to wait."

What? No stories of drug-abuse gone wrong, excessive acts of beastiality rendering a member inadequate and unable to function properly? This is the band spearheaded by notorious satanic cowboy and inflatable sheep lover Al Jourgensen. Bill dismisses any notion of deviancy.

"There's always stories about things like that. The real fact of the matter is that the music simply wasn't finished."

Oh Ok. Sadly, with the bulk of Ministry's output being lumped alongside more conservative purists of the metal genre, and the

band being adopted in excess by undying metal fanatics (Sicoff etc), Ministry have attracted the vile tag of "Metal Band for the 90's".

"To be called a metal band doesn't really do anything for me cos I don't really listen to metal music at all. I like playing in Ministry, I like the intensity and the extremism of it, and perhaps because we're using a lot of guitars on this record we're being called a metal band. But I can see the next record being just as intense and powerful and not having that type of sound at all."

An American 'zine pointed out that *Psalm 69* made it clear Ministry have less in common with Revolting Cocks and 1000 Homo DJs than the Swans, Front 242 and Neubaten. I asked Bill if he thought this comment was justified.

"Well, I don't really know how to take that 'cause in fact we are the Revolting Cocks and 1000 Homo DJs. With each project we try to define a certain sound and I don't know if it's related to the Swans or Neubaten. I can't say that any of those groups are prominent influences on the band — at least not during the recording of the album — and I know for a fact that there was no time to listen to anything except what was being worked on."

When asked for some sort of insight into the work ethic of a Ministry record, Bill divulged the basics.

"Each record's a little different and for this record Mike Scaccia (guitar), Paul Barker (bass), myself and sometimes Al Jourgensen went into a rehearsal studio to work out a little bit of music, to sort of warm up to the recording, of course by the time we got into the studio almost everything we'd done was obsolete."

"We wrote almost everything in the studio which was another reason it took so long. A song might start out with a rhythm track or a couple of chord changes or maybe I'll throw down five minutes of kick and snare and Paul may throw in some bass and Al some guitars, it's sort of sculptural. You start out with a big fat chunk of nothing and chip away at it."

With something like 'TV II' or 'Jesus Built' the guitars sound like they're sequenced — it seems too fast to play conventionally.

(laughing) "Absolutely not. That guitar on 'TV II's' all played live by Mike Scaccia, one of the most blisteringly fast guitar players I've ever met. With 'Jesus' there is a sequencer on that but the guitars were also played live. I think Al played guitar on that song."

No sampling one chord and looping it?

"Well, as I say, there's a sequenced synthesiser underneath it all. I mean we don't really care what we do when we record. If we want to sample one chord and loop it that's fine, we don't care if we play it or not because what's important is how it sounds."

We're not insecure musicians. We don't care if we play it all or not, the end product is what's important, so if I do an entire album where I'm sequencing all the drums and not playing it then I don't care cos that's what will be appropriate for the music."

Asked what kind of album they set out to make, particularly after the success of *The Mind Is a Terrible Thing To Taste* (the quintessential Ministry album that broke the band in Europe) Bill responds: "After *Mind* we all wanted to take a vacation. We make records one at a time and after *Mind* we did a Revolting Cocks record. 'Beers, Steers and Queers' was made and then a Ministry tour and live record and then a Cocks tour so I guess we went in there with vague ideas and it wasn't until we started working on it that the character of the record came through."

Speaking of character, does Bill think the new single 'New World Order' sounds slightly reminiscent of 'Burning Inside'?

(laughs) "Well Howie waddya think?" (Bill turns to ask Howie Bento), "Ah, he's not saying anything . . . I don't know, personally I don't hear it."

What were the specifics behind Ministry hooking up with a management company after years of doing it for themselves?

"A lot of the thrust behind that was Al and Paul wanting to build a studio for themselves. They'd spent all their money recording records and at the end of it all they'd have little or nothing to show for it. But if they had loads of cash then they could start up their own studio and really begin to terrorize people. They needed more of an administrator than a manager."

I tell Bill that the current *B-Side* magazine likened Al Jourgensen and Paul Barker to music's definitive odd couple and asked if he deemed this a fitting description?

"Possibly to a degree — they compliment each other in their working styles — Dionysus and Apollo. From what I've seen, when one is up the other is down and when one's down the other's up and when one thinks it's shit the other thinks it's great and vice-versa. They keep each other going."

DEE SOLOMON



Ministry's Paul Barker (top) and Al Jourgensen (below)



They're hanging from the walls at DTM, Auckland's K-Rd nightclub, with a capacity crowd of 1000+. The object of their ardour is Del — The Funkee Homosapien, fresh from his appearances in OZ and making a flying visit to NZ.

DEL BOY

Fleeting is perhaps a better description: 20 minutes after going on Del is offering a hearty "thank you Noo-Zealand!" and disappearing backstage.

He returned minutes later with Laze, from local crew Leaders of Style, and the two indulged in a bit of freestyle rapping (Laze won) before heading backstage again for some fried

buzz for my music.

"When I make a song like 'Mr Dobalina' and it's a Top 40 pop hit it's not something I expected. I didn't really want it that way but since I have it, it's cool. I just work on my own shit, work on my own style, and try to make it slamin'. Maybe it'll be radio slamin', maybe not, I don't care."

"WHY THEY GOTTA LOOK AT ME AND THINK COS I'VE GOT A RING IN MY LIP I'VE GOT A POUND OF WEED ON ME?"

chicken. (Not that he got any, myself and the Bassline Posse sort of polished it all off). Del's performance was great but brief. But what more were we expecting for \$12? I'd be happy to see more artists appearing in NZ like this for that price.

The following day at his hotel, Del explains that while he gave the audience 100% he was also pissed off. Having just flown in that evening he had been given a most-thorough going-over by NZ customs. The sort of intimate probing usually reserved for loved ones:

"I got strip searched — like I was a fucking dog coming into your country. I didn't find that very appealing. That's why my attitude is not very good — I'm sort of disgusted. I didn't look at their asses and say: "Since you're white I'm going fuck you white devils!" I didn't prejudge them like that so why they gotta look at me and think 'cos I've got a ring in my lip I've got a pound of weed on me or something? Still, I'm not hella bent out of shape, it's just the way life is, you deal with it."

Actually, Del was hella bent out of shape about it, and we spoke for quite some time about Customs Officers and the Police. After establishing I was his righteous bro' on this matter we spoke about his music:

"I have a certain style in which I do my music and the way I do my raps. I don't think anyone does it the same way in which I do. I hope I can reach a certain level of success, I ain't expecting to be no Public Enemy, but I do want more people to listen to my shit. But I want it on an underground level 'cos that is where my head is at, I want an underground

Del turned 20 the day after leaving NZ and considering his youth he can be forgiven all the contradictions he makes (that I won't trifle you with). Perhaps it was the Herbal tea (tea?) he'd had before lunch. I asked him what the Black Urban Experience was really like.

"I'm from Oakland and there ain't too much gang action. People claim streets and shit but that's just pimps, hoes [prostitution] and drug dealing. It ain't like: "I'm a Cripp/Blood and if I see you on the street it'll be like whatsup cuz!" It's still fucked up but it ain't really like you see in those gang movies. In my spare time I draw, I'm an artist, but that's like just fiddling shit. When I get more time I'll probably go to school and learn more. Learn how to Program and shit like that."

So life ain't that bad?

"I don't try to be hella negative, but I do try to point out shit that happens. I try to point out the way I feel about certain shit and I try to be positive, but then you can't be positive all the time. But also violence isn't the solution to anything. I may have to deal with situations I don't like but I know I'm not the only one. Everyone feels anger, feels happiness, feels sorrow — that's just what human beings do. You just have to deal with it and get on, and that's what I try to point out in my music."

"My only concern is to make a hip hop record that people will say: "This was the slam", that's good enough for me. I don't care if it's the world, or only 40,000 hard hip hop heads, if they say that was cool — that's enough for me."

NICK D'ANGELO

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