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interviews



Band: Bad Religion	Member: Jay Bentley
Label: Epitaph Records	Location: Edmonton Events Centre - Edmonton, Alberta
Date: Wednesday, September 17th, 2008	Interviewer: Bobby Gorman

Bad Religion are punk rock icons, they've been around since the beginning and have seen the entire scene and sound change and evolve all around them. During their recent Canadian tour I had the opportunity to sit and talk to bassist Jay Bentley for a while. I wasn't sure what to ask him - after all, what do you ask someone who has seen it all? I decided to pick on some events that had been making major headlines as of late and Jay happily went along with them and brought out new insights and ideas for the heated debate.

Bobby: I guess starting with the basics, you guys are just starting your tour with The Bronx across Canada, are you excited to see how it turns out?

Jay: Yeah, this is our first truly Cross-Canada tour where we're playing Thunder Bay, Halifax and Moncton. When we were setting up the tour, I talked with some friends of mine and decided to try and find some really, truly local acts as openers. Tonight we're having Steve from Belvedere whose new band is This Is A Standoff. Last night was Knucklehead. In Vancouver was a band called the Rebel Spell. So we're really working hard to have some truly cool local bands. So I'm way more excited to see those bands.

Bobby: Before this tour you did a few dates in Brazil and two in Germany. I read somewhere that you guys weren't really planning those dates but the opportunity came up so you said "what the hell?" and did them. Is that true?

Jay: Well, Germany was planned and Canada was planned. Brazil was not planned. That kind of came up out of the blue. We were supposed to go to the UK at the end of this tour but we decided to just go back to LA instead. This is a truly crazy tour. Don't you think Greg?

Greg Hetson: Absolutely.

Jay: Thank you very much. The best tour I've ever done.

Greg Hetson: Three continents in four days almost.

Jay: I can tell you this much, by the time we hit Portland I was a mess.

Greg Hetson: Oh yeah, everyone was.

Jay: When we were in San Francisco, I go "hey, I think I beat it" and we hit Portland and I was like "nope."

Bobby: How do you guys handle all the massive time changes and fifteen hour flights?

Jay: We don't. We don't. We just pretend it doesn't exist and then it kicks you butt for a couple of days and then you're done. I don't ever change my watch. I don't care what time it is where I'm at.

Bobby: Someone else will always tell you "okay, its time to go on."

Jay: Yeah, I just figure if I keep my watch on my home time, I look at my watch and it's like two o'clock in the morning; regardless of where I am, I just go lay down and go to sleep. Fuck it. I'm not going to be there long enough to have to worry about "oh, I'm going to be sleeping all day." I don't care. I'm leaving tomorrow anyway. What do I care?

Bobby: When you guys first formed in 1980, I wasn't even born yet. I wasn't even one when Suffer came out. Is it weird thinking that almost thirty years later you're still playing for the same people you played for back in 1980 but also for their kids and people like me who weren't even born when you formed?

Jay: Yeah, it's weird. It's surreal and humbling and completely unexpected. You can't ever plan for anything like that. I don't think we ever thought we would get out of the garage and that was okay. This was 1980, we sat down and were playing all of our songs and said "hey, we have like ten songs! Let's go make a demo tape of our ten songs." And of those ten songs, I think only three of them really survived all that. That's how it all started. One of the things I always tell young bands is to set attainable goals. We didn't start the band and say "we're gonna be the next Beatles." We started the band with the intention of just getting away from people who were kicking our ass at the mall. Then when we had enough songs we thought "hey, let's make a demo tape." We never thought "let's be big pop stars." That never crossed our mind.

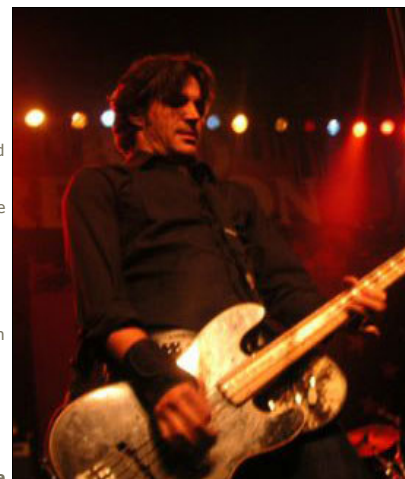
Bobby: Yeah, you never thought that twenty nine years later you'd be working on your fifteenth studio album.

Jay: Nope, never. If you think like that you're insane. I can't even plan a tour six months ahead *laughs*.

Bobby: Let alone twenty nine years.

Jay: Nope, never gonna happen.

Bobby: A few years ago I took a music history class which studied the history of music in the twentieth century. When we were studying Elvis, the teacher brought up an interesting graph which had Cultural Logic and Industrial Logic. With Cultural Logic you had some sort of rebellion against the norm, people being pissed off against with the current trends and starting something new. Then Industrial Logic will pick be up on that, take it, commercialize it and make it big. Then Cultural Logic will start all over, get pissed off that they made it big and start something new. Over and over and over again.



album streams

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THE CRASH

Jay: That's true.

Bobby: You've been in the industry for twenty off years now, you've seen ska, grunge, punk, emo, all that...

Jay: Yeah, but those are all minor players. Very minor players in that cultural backlash. The last big players were punk rock and then hip-hop. Everything since then has been a little subsidiary of it. I know grunge got huge but it still falls under the umbrella of punk rock. I don't care what anybody says. All of those people were in punk rock bands; they took all of that influence and made their own randomness. And really, those things all fall under the umbrella of rock and roll. I remember my dad was old enough to be that Elvis Presley fan. He liked Elvis and had the ducky hair and the Levi's but we were talking about that one day and he said that his dad rebelled with Benny Goodman. That fucking "take the a-train" shit because his dad before that was into something totally mellower. So every culture has its rebellion, except for this one. Except for this one.

Bobby: Why do you think this has hasn't had one yet?

Jay: Maybe all of the rebellion has been used up. *laughs*

Bobby: You gotta hope not.

Jay: I hope not either. I think there's a lot of us that are sitting around, kind of waiting, like "what the hell's gonna happen?" Because it certainly can't be Miley Cyrus and given the options of what is something new and creative - there isn't much. Emo's certainly not. I don't think you can consider that.. I don't think you should ever consider that anything actually. For a long time in the mid-nineties, with alternative music in particular, we used to talk about this. What do you think the next big wave will be? What will be the next big trend in music? The only thing that we could come up with was that we hoped it was talent. Like that the next big wave would be unbelievably talented people. It hasn't really happened but we're still waiting.

Bobby: You once said that "the best thing about punk was that anyone could do it."

Jay: It's was for anyone.

Bobby: "Now everyone is doing it and it's becoming kind of stale."

Jay: No, it's not becoming it has been. It's done. It's finished. Well, when I talked about becoming a band, putting on a guitar and thinking you're gonna be the next Beatles. No one in punk ever thought that because while we listened to the Beatles and other bands we never thought we were good enough to play like that. We'd see other punk rock bands, we'd go "we can play those three chords. We can do that!" But because they weren't successful, we never had aspirations to be successful. Now bands put on guitars and think "We're gonna be Green Day. We're gonna be The Offspring. We're gonna be Simple Plan. We're gonna be Avril Lavigne." Huge, huge rock stars. I mean not anymore but at the time they were generating all sorts of interest in what a popular, successful, mainstream band was. I knew that things had changed when we were in Hawaii at a very fucking typical beach bar and the top forty band that was playing just for the people to dance to was Green Day. Moms and dads from Kansas were dancing and I said "it's over. It's done. Everything that was ever subliminal or alternative about this is finished."



Bobby: Now it's all mainstream.

Jay: Now it's just pabulum for the mind.

Brooks (just walking though the room): its complete bull shit.

Jay: Its complete bull shit. *laughs*

Bobby: I was reading an interview you did a while ago with Ground Control Magazine and you were talking about your time with Atlantic. You said you guys became slightly egotistical and I was reading another article with Graffin in the LA Times and his quote was "If you don't have good self awareness, being in a successful band will really screw you up." How did you guys overcome that and do you think now with MySpace and things like that people are starting to feel like they deserve more?

Jay: The only that you can really overcome that is to just take the beating. You have to get called out on your shit. If you're this egotistical monster, you need to have people around you who aren't just saying "yes, yes, you're great." You have to have people around that go "You're being a dick and you need to fucking let the air out of your head." The other part is that you have to be willing to listen to them and say "I'm going to trust what you're saying because I could easily fill myself full of pride and ego and believe that everyone is just jealous." I've known so

many people that have done this. It should be easy to spot. So it's not say that we haven't, we have; but the key is to try and get out of that, to get over it. The way that I've seen it work in this band is because there's six of us - five or six of us depending on which model you want to take - people are willing to step up and say "hey, you might want to calm down. Let it go." And that seems to work. Usually when bands break up, "creative differences and they couldn't get along." That's really what it's all about.

Bobby: So you think if you can't get over it, it will often lead to the destruction of your own career?

Jay: Oh absolutely, yeah. How many bands have broken up because one member thinks his shit doesn't stink and he's gonna strike out on his own and he does a solo band that just flops. But the band can't ever come back because way too much shit was said and its like "fuck those guys." So a potentially really good band was broken up because one guy decided that all of the good for that band was because of him. It's a shame.

Bobby: Then they go out by themselves.

Jay: And they never achieve anything close to what hey had as a collective. A band is a band; it's not a solo project. It's a band because the collective makes this great decision. It's such an age old statement, two heads are better than one, so five heads must be pretty fucking outrageous.

Bobby: Or six.

Jay: Or six depending on which model you want to choose *laughs*.

Bobby: I was reading an interesting article in the Wall Street Journal a couple weeks ago that had a whole bunch of artists blaming iTunes for the destruction of the complete album, saying that with iTunes giving people the option to pick and choose songs it kind of got rid of the idea of the complete album. Do you agree with that?

Jay: No, that's pretty short sighted. How can you blame iTunes for that? iTunes is providing a service. When I was growing up, they didn't even have computers, but what they did have was radio stations that played singles; so most people only ever heard the single from the record. They only wanted the single from the record. That's how seven inches started, they went out and bought the seven inch. That seems to be the tail wagging the dog, blaming iTunes for the destruction of albums. That's pretty...

Bobby: Preposterous.

Jay: Yeah. Come on, I mean, you can say that the explosion of the internet and the ease of computers for everyone and everyone having a laptop or a home desktop, that has definitely impacted the recording industry and definitely impacted the way people listen to music. You certainly can't blame iTunes for that. It has nothing to do with iTunes. They're the one company that's trying to maintain some sort of economic balance for artists.

I wouldn't say that iTunes has anything to do with it. I do understand what people are saying. I understand that artists are saying "they're losing the impression of the album that we're trying to make" because I agree with that. We sit down and record fourteen songs and we spend a lot of time sequencing that record. What song is first? What song is second? How do they flow? You think about it as a roller coaster ride. What's the ride that we want to take these people on? How does it end? We want to make it end with people thinking "wow that was really cool." That's all you can do. Once you've made that record and let it out to the public, it's no longer yours really. People are going to do whatever they want with it.

Bobby: Even with CDs you could skip and jump.

Jay: Absolutely. You try and make the best artistic piece that you can and much like any other artist – painter, sculptor, writer, whatever – you make a collection, some pieces people are going to like. Some pieces people aren't. It's none of your business. You've made the collection that you like. For us, we can sit down, five guys – or six – in the studio and say "this is the record that we want to make right now" and we feel really good about it. Now we're done.

Bobby: Then it's out there; people can take it and do what they want.

Jay: Once it's in the shrink wrap, it's just done. You can't talk about it anymore. You can't complain about it anymore, it's just none of your business. You're content with what you made; now you're done.

Bobby: There was another interesting article in Kerrang Magazine which had the lead singer of Slipknot blaming the labels for the decrease in CD sales just because they're just putting out crap. They're not going to find the good bands that will put out good, solid CDs. They're just going for the hit singles.

Jay: Agreed. But once again, that's just a portion of what happened. It's not the overall reason why bad things happened. When Pearl Jam got popular, did every label go and find their own Pearl Jam? Yes they did. They put it out there and all of a sudden you're just inundated by guys with this low, mumbly voice. I don't want to hear this anymore. I mean, I love Pearl Jam. But you know, Offspring, Green Day, Bad Religion. Pick it. Whatever band is becoming popular, the labels just go out and find others in the same ilk. We did it at Epitaph because we didn't know how to sell bands that weren't like Bad Religion. It's pretty apparent.

The degree at which they will mimic a popular band on a major label is hysterical. They sign a thousand bands with the hopes of one of them becoming popular – just one. The rest of them are just fucking tax write offs and it sucks to be one of the tax write offs *laughs*.

So in retrospect what people are saying is iTunes, what they're saying is the record labels and all this – they're not saying anything about the manufacturers of the music players themselves. How many catalogue records are you going to have to buy before you get fucking fed up? I had vinyl, I had CD, I had mini-disc, I had DATs, I had all this shit. They make me buy all this stuff and I'm paying three hundred and fifty dollars every time a new player comes out because now I can't my music on anything but this. So that's to blame as well. Eventually people just got tired of getting the shaft from all of these people and in the end the only one that really suffers is the artist. That's a shame.

Bobby: Yeah, because people will always find a way to get the music if they really want it.

Jay: They're gonna find a way to get it if they want and if you're anything like me and the five – or six – members of this band, you have to make music. It's not like "I want to make music because I want something out of this." It's just in you and has to come out. I've been playing since I was six years old and I've tried a couple times, like "I'm just going to go get a job and be normal." That lasted about two years and I was like a heroin itchy addict going "I gotta play! Fuck!" So it doesn't really matter if you're making money or being popular and successful, you just have to do it. And you're gonna do it whether anybody cares or not.

Bobby: There was one interview you did during last year's Warped Tour when they asked you about the evolution of the tour you said "when the music is this marketable, you get a lot of really shitty bands that don't really care about the music. All they care about is we're gonna be the next big band." Do you think if bands still had that drive for the music instead of thinking "I'm gonna be the next Green Day, the next Bad Religion, the next Blink-182" that people would go out and buy the CDs?



Jay: No, no. I don't think that artistic integrity has anything to do with what has happened in the music industry. It was an inevitable conclusion giving the way that the internet unfolded, the way that the ease of recording unfolded, the digital media that made it possible to make thousands and thousands of replications with no signal loss. When you step back and look at how it really happened, it's so apparent. But while it was happening, it was kind of so slow that before anybody knew what happened it was over, it was done. "Wow, that was not cool. That was bad. That was really bad."

I remember at Epitaph, we had one of the very first Macintosh computers. We used it for bookkeeping and stuff. It was pretty primitive for what it was and we had just made the record No Control on CD. That was our first CD that we ever made and that CD was compatible with this Macintosh. Brett and I sat there and said "one day, there won't be anymore record stores. You'll just get your music from here." We didn't see it quite like this, like the way it is now; but we did kind of see that that was gonna end all of the physical records. That physical presence of CD or vinyl; at that time we were still heavily invested in vinyl but we did see the end to the physical entity of what the music came on.

Bobby: Which is somewhat disappointing too because it is nice to have the physical element. To have the booklet, to put it on and flip through the booklet as you listen to it.

Jay: I grew up with twelve inch vinyl. So I would go and buy a record and I would tear the lyrics sheet out. Read everything, look at all the pictures, check out the band members, look at what instruments they were playing, have the headphones on and just listen to one side because I didn't want to flip it over. I just listened to one side for like six months. Then all of a sudden I turn it over and it's like a whole new record. I go "Wow! I've got a whole new record!" That's me. My kids are seventeen and fifteen, two boys. They don't have lyrics sheets, they don't have pictures. It's just

Limewire and six hundred and fifty five thousand songs on their iPod and they don't know who the hell's what. They could tell you what band is what - like "oh, that's so and so." But as far as any kind of connection to that band, none, zero. They just want the music. I see that, I understand that. I can see how this has just made it so easy to be removed from the artist. "I'm not interested in what they have to say, I don't really care, I just want to hear that song."

Bobby: That's the way of the world; everyone just wants it now, now, now.

Jay: It's a bummer. *laughs*.

Bobby: Okay, just a few more questions. Your new CD, New Maps of Hell, was recently released as a deluxe version a few months ago with a bonus DVD and some acoustic songs. Why did you decide to re-release it?

Jay: Two reasons. One, I think Epitaph was looking for something to do to try and increase its capital gain structure; and two, we had done some stuff revolving around New Maps of Hell like the MySpace Secret Show and some other things. These acoustic things had kind of taken off on us. That MTV Unplugged thing had kind of come and gone and we had always said we didn't want to be a part of that because we're Bad Religion. We don't do shit like that, we're a punk rock band. But we started to kind of dabble more into presenting this acoustic stuff, maybe not as much as we are now - like tonight we'll play onstage in front of people with acoustics and we've actually released some stuff with acoustics. Maybe a big part of it was Graffin doing his solo thing, more of an acoustic presentation and maybe because the back lash wasn't like "Fuck You Posers!" maybe we were okay with this. Because really, we do sit around and play the acoustic guitar a lot; they're all over the bus and we sit around show each other songs on the acoustic guitars. So it's a big part of who and what we are. We felt like maybe people would accept that presentation. Doing the deluxe edition was kind of like let's just take all the stuff that we've done. We shot an entire show for a video that never came out so it was like let's just use parts of that. We had all this stuff that we were either going to use it or throw it away; and in this time frame, just use what you have. Just put it out there.

It was funny because a lot of people said "why didn't you just do this at the beginning? Why didn't you put this out first?" We didn't have this stuff; we only just did it now. We're still learning, twenty-eight years in, we're still willing to try new things and we're still learning about what is the box that contains Bad Religion and how big can we stretch it before we've gone into The Unknown; and people go "alright, this is just crap, we're not going to have any of this." It's like "okay, we've gone too far."

Bobby: But I was reading that people still spend fifty to a hundred bucks to buy Into The Unknown on eBay.

Jay: I know! The funny thing is that people pay for it and it's about the same ratio, some people get it and go "I think this is fantastic" and people get it and go "Now I know why, this sucks!" Yeah, it's a tough record. It's certainly not what you'd expect. It probably would have been better served to be called anything other than Bad Religion. In retrospect I think that's what we all agreed on. Maybe it would've been better of being called Bad Religion Mach Two or something other than Bad Religion.

Bobby: Lately there are a lot of bands that are re-releasing CDs a year or six months after they were originally released. You said that you guys had a whole bunch of new stuff that wasn't available when the record was originally released; but why do you think so many bands re-release CDs so soon after the original release?

Jay: Money. Labels are in business to stay in business and right now, every label is struggling. Labels that were getting by on their artists averaging forty thousand units annually are now living on their artists doing four hundred to four thousand and that's a big cut. So everybody's scrambling, trying to figure out how to do this. It's not the greatest thing. Historically, a deluxe re-issue has always been kind of cool. It's had a lot of b-sides and had a lot of stuff that you were really into getting. I think we're still in that phase where people are wary of labels. "What the fuck? You're just ripping us off." Well, then don't buy it. It's funny because Brett and I, without talking to each other, said the exact same thing in two separate interviews which was that the record's out and you can get any one of those fucking songs on the internet for free. Why are you bitching? I don't understand why you're fucking complaining? It's free. Go get it. It's out there.

We all know that Radiohead was the guinea pig band that said "we're gonna put this record out on the internet and you pay what you want." And we all sat back and said "let's see where this goes" because we know that Radiohead fans are really into the band and they're very supportive of Radiohead and ninety percent of the people paid zero because they didn't have to pay. If you don't have to pay anything, you're not going to. So don't bitch about "you're ripping us off," get it for free. It's for everyone. It's out.

It's a standoff of do you want to support the label and the band that you like? Even I'm starting to wonder if there's a way where people will feel like they're strictly supporting the artist. Even if it was something like having a little button on a MySpace page that says "if you like us, push the button and give us a dollar so that we can get gas to go to the next city because we want to go on tour." There has to be some sort of incentive for people to A) want the band to come to them but also for the band to want to go out. When gas hit four dollars a gallon down in the States, in the newspaper it was actually a front page article about how indie bands can no longer tour because gas is too expensive. That's pretty fucked. So it's not the bands' fault, and it's not even the fans' fault. The fans are doing what's expected because they should be doing what they want. The bands should be doing what they want but there should be a way for them to get together and say "we, as fans, like your band. We want to support your work."

I've noticed on certain Bad Religion fan sites that there have been a couple threads that are almost morality issues about whether or not downloading hurts the band. Some people go "fuck them, they're rich rock stars" and some people go "yeah, but they're not. They're just normal guys with kids and mortgages and they have normal lives like everybody else." So I'll usually chime in and be pretty forward about it and go "here's my financial statement, here's kind of where I'm at. I drive a 1998 Subaru and I have two kids that are going to be going to university and I don't live in a really big palace." But it's cool, I'm very happy with where I'm at and I'm very humbled by all of this but we're kind of an anomaly because we're big enough to go out on the road and not worry about whether or not we're gonna make it to the next city. But a lot of indie bands, you don't know what's going to happen when you pull into Kamloops. Are there gonna be a hundred people? Are there gonna be ten people? Our guarantee was fifty dollars versus eighty percent of the door. Fifty dollars isn't a lot of money, it doesn't even fill up a gas tank.

Bobby: No, it doesn't even come close.

Jay: Right. So I've been thinking, like I wonder if there's ever going to become a time where people are sincerely supportive only of the artist. And we're not interested in buying our records from HMV, and we're not interested in buying our records online from Amazon or even from the label itself. We only want to buy the records from the artist and therefore supporting the artist 100%. Maybe that's what in the future.

Bobby: Only time will tell.

Jay: Only time will tell at this point. It's so up in the air right now that it's anybody's guess.

Bobby: One last question, like you were saying, you guys rarely release acoustic songs because you're a punk rock band. Brett was saying that a few of those acoustic songs on the deluxe version of New Maps of Hell may appear on the next full length. "Won't Somebody," "Adam's Atoms" and "Chronophobia." Do



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you have any idea whether or not any of those songs will be released with the full band?

Jay: Nope. *laughs*. Brett also said the next record was going to be a double release, whatever it was. That didn't happen.

Bobby: So don't trust anything Brett says then?

Jay: Nah, it's not that. It's just that those things, making records – and especially the next record that we're going to make – is so far in the distant future that it's nothing more than a wavy haze. Not even an oasis yet where you can see a vision of trees. It's just out there. We've talked about making a record, but that's about it. No kind of idea of direction, no idea of what we want to do or when we want to do it. Greg's got commitments at UCLA and Brett's obviously tremendously busy at Epitaph.

Brett would say that "Won't Somebody" is the best song that he's ever written; but it's completely possible that the next time he sits down to write, he'll write twelve of what he considers to be the best songs he's ever written and "Won't Somebody" is now thirteen. Not making the record. So it's one of those "you never know" situations.

I think that one of the things that we've sort of learn in that sense is just leave it alone. It's out there now as is, what it is; and sometimes things are just better left unsaid. Just leave it alone.

Bobby: Be happy with what you have.

Jay: Be happy with what you have, because we have an awful lot.

Bobby: Okay, I guess that's about it. Thanks a lot. Do you have any finals thoughts you'd like to add?

Jay: Never. Final thoughts are too final for me. *laughs*

