

Doing this interview taught me a few things. First, it reminded me that most interviews should never be longer than an hour, and it is important to be prepared and to direct the conversation (not let it stray way off the point or linger on one point for too long), so that the discussion moves along and doesn't drag out for a couple of hours. If you can't make your point in an hour or less, well.... This is a short excerpt of the beginning of the conversation which was quite lengthy.

It also drove home the point that interviews need to be edited, and that it's OK to print an interview which has summaries of what was said instead of literal transcriptions of what transpired. (In some ways, the whole "real journalism" versus "punk journalism" argument all over again.) Even though I summarize a lot of what is said at the end, you get a good idea from this excerpt of who these people are and how they interact.

**Boy Sets Fire** is one of the few bands who's live set interested me enough the first time that I saw them that I went out and bought their record. I like them because they have set out to change the world. Maybe you disagree with their methods or their strategies, but they have the will and the motivation that a lot of us need. They are often lumped in with emo/hardcore bands, though they play with a more intense, harder sound usually. The lyrics are political and they talk a lot between songs. This interview took place after their show at Gilman Street this summer. **Boy Sets Fire** is Josh: Guitar, Darrell: Bass, Chad: Guitar, Matt: Drums, and Nathan: vocals. Questions by Ramsey Kanaan and Jen Angel. Photos by Leah Urbano.

The interview started out with introductions and the most predictable first question of them all.

Jen: I want somebody to give me a really short history of the band.

Josh: Three years... this is our fifth tour. We wanted to start a band that had something to say and was fun to do musically, and what else would you like to know?

Jen: So, what do you have to say?

Nathan: Do you really want to know what we have to say?

Jen: Well, Yeah. See, I know what I want to ask you guys about, but I want to know what you guys think is important

about...

Nathan: What we say?

Jen: Yeah, and I'll ask questions after that.

Nathan: I think one of the things that we've tried to do is get out there, is for .. number one for people to get over their lousy scene, the hierarchies that cliques and go on in the scene, and hopefully work more toward unifying as opposed to separating. A lot of bands say that but....

Matt: But we really mean it...

Chad: We're just a rip off...

Nathan: I don't want it to seem as if we're the only ones who do this coz we're cool. Another message that we try to purvey is

Chad: Communication.

Nathan: Yeah, communication...

Chad: We think it's very important.

Ramsey: OK, then I have a question about.. all of you guys... except Matt.. play with your backs to the audience.

Nathan: That's not really on purpose. It just sorta happens.

Chad: Well, for me personally...

Jen: You even put the mic stand facing away...

Chad: That's coz I ... honestly I used to face forward but I felt really uncomfortable. Just like, if I fuck up, people are going to be staring at me, and all of that. I just feel much more comfortable staring at Matt who I find very attractive... and, seriously, basically feeding off of him..

Matt... Coz I blow kisses to him...

Chad.. I just feel a lot more comfortable in the immediacy of playing, and opening myself up, coz that's a very raw sort of feeling for me. I just feel more comfortable... actually, I feel like I'm standing naked. And I kind of am, emotionally.

Nathan: I guess I just find singers who stare at the audience sort of pompous, it's a little weird.

Ramsey: You don't think though, you're saying you want to communi-

cate, that it's almost a very bizarre way to communicate with someone? See, if we're having this conversation, and I turned my back, that would be fucking weird.

Chad: Well, personally, I'm not communicating with my eyes, and my face at the moment, I'm communicating with my hands, and my instrument.

Ramsey: If they can't see you, Then why shouldn't they just listen to your records?

Chad: Well, you an listen to what I'm doing. What I'm giving out at that specific point, aside from my emotional little sphere that I have, is a feeling of music. and that is faced directly at people, and they can here that, and it's basically me playing, and it's not necessarily that people need to see my hands or see my face, they just need to hear what I'm trying to get across.

Nathan: I may have totally misunderstood this, but you said something like, 'people are paying money to come see you, and you're turning your backs...' Did you mean that we have a responsibility to turn around because they're giving us money?



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Ramsey: No, I think you have a responsibility to... well, you really don't have a responsibility to do anything, but... people pay money and have a certain set of expectations, and that's fair enough. One is to be entertained, ie to enjoy the experience,

Nathan: Well, see, I don't feel that we're a commodity...

Ramsey: Right, so if you're not entertainers, it's more important that you're communicators, so the initial question was with you're backs to the audience the whole time that is not a very effective tool ...

Josh: But there's more to communication than eye to eye communications.

Ramsey: I'm not saying that it's a contrived thing, in I think there must but... there's a certain house style among

emo bands that only the ones... like all of the ones who came together tonight they all had their backs to the audience. Just the same as there's a certain house style amongst hardcore bands that go on about the crew or unity or whatever. That can't just be entirely coincidental.

Darrell: I don't think the... I think it's counterproductive to separate into hardcore bands and emo bands and punk bands

and it's completely counterproductive. And it's even more to take emotion out of what we're doing if we're consciously thinking "OK I have to face these people, I have to look at this person." I think it would really take a lot out of it if I had to think about all of these other obligations

I had instead of just playing and putting my heart and soul into what I'm doing. I think it would really take a lot out of it. Emotionally, for me.

Matt: One of the things, also, is that I know I hardly ever look up when I play, and when I do it's at the people that are on the stage with me that I'm playing with. And the reason for that is that I concentrate very hard on what I'm doing, and I want it to sound good, and I know if I was just kinda looking around and ...you know what I mean?

Ramsey: I mean, no one really gives a fuck about the drummer anyway, let's be honest. (laughter and yelling)

Jen: Anybody how do you feel about being

labeled and emo band? And, you said earlier that you think it's counterproductive etc to separate or label, but how relevant do you think that garage is to what you do, or what different kinds of punk ... how in touch are you with what they're doing?

Josh: The way I feel about that, and I've had a couple of discussions about this, is that I really depends on band to band. And how they conduct themselves

and how they feel about their music and sort of their ethics, and the way they do it. We played with a "punk" band the other day, somewhere, and I shouldn't mention their name but basically they were a rock band with piercings, because they could talk the lingo, they discuss opening the

market to further music research, a lot of... moving units. Business talk, and they dedicated a song to all the chicks in the crowd, to me they have as much to do with me and the music that I do, as Bon Jovi. OK? But they're also bands like, the one that's always brought up, Rain Like The Sound Of Trains, who are 100% DIY in the way that they conduct themselves, and they pretty much play funk. But I have more of a connection with them, than I do a band like the one I won't mention.

Chad: I've been playing music since I was about in third or fourth grade, and I think I was banging on pots before then or doing whatever, and, I mean, naturally there are certain styles of music I prefer to play, but it don't think that music or the style of music should be the defining aspect of what this movement is. I think rather, the ethics and the ideas, and the mindset should be the defining aspect. So when you guys say, "Oh this is an emo show," or whatever, if this is all being done through the same movement with the same ethics and the same ideas, and generally with what would appear to be the same goals, just redefined often, I really do think it's counterproductive to do that. Because it only further separates things.

Ramsey: What exactly is "The movement?"

Chad: The movement? When I refer to that I guess you could use a lot of words for it...

Ramsey: Can you be more specific, though? You've mentioned before that it's important to have unity, and to build community... build community with whom? and for what?

Chad: What I would say is the hardcore movement, or the punk movement. You could label it whatever you want...

Ramsey: You just said that you no affinity with the punk movement or the hardcore movement, that it depends on the message or the integrity or intentions of those involved.

Chad: I use terms like "punk" and "hardcore" and "DIY" pretty much interchangeably, because I think they all represent the same movement. And I feel an affinity toward the ideas and the ethics which are presented in that movement.

Ramsey: Can you capulate what are the ethics?

Chad: I think that there's an inherent questioning of learned social values and of higher ups and hierarchies. I think there's also a questioning of traditions, things like that. Certainly an effort to tear down boundaries between people. Between nations, between genders, and things like that. And also a rejecting of the sort of cold, daily turning of society. And really looking at things from more of a human perspective as opposed to a dollar perspective. That would be my...

Ramsey: So, good natured liberalism, basically.



Nathan: Yeah, basically.

Josh: Remember, the word liberalism comes from liberty and we shouldn't put down liberalism all of the time.

Ramsey: No, but you said you have a sense of community with certain people with certain ideals.... we're part of movement or we want to build a movement to communicate...but to do what and with whom?

Nathan: We are not ... we are a group of people who have several opinions on different things. We are a group of people who have come together and, we do have a message, and that message, basically, as generic as it wants to be, is that we would like to see more communication, and we'd like to see more community evolve out of what we're doing. Now, I don't see that as being a horrible thing or a generic thing because it's not happening. IT's not meaningless at all because it's not fucking happening. And what we're doing is we're getting up there and

Ramsey: What isn't happening?

Darrell: Social values aren't being questioned...

Ramsey: What social values?

OK. At this point the talk degenerates into a discussion of why people came to the show that night. Was it just for the movement? Is it only music bringing everyone together? And Ramsey stresses the point that it's generally accepted to be against racism and sexism, but it's not very common to talk about what you are actually.

Chad: But who among those people acts on that? And doesn't something about it? Which is something we're very adamant about - communication. Not just within our walls, but communication, period. I talk to say, my parents about this stuff. My parents couldn't give a fuck about hardcore. But I think it's important to talk to them about ideals which I feel are important. It needs to grow and get out of "if you're not punk rock you're not my friend."

Jen: So how much do you think what you do and say is preaching to the converted?

Nathan: This is something we've gotten a lot and it's understandable. My answer to that is always, who's converted? Maybe a couple of people...What is the converted?

Ramsey: Well, if you're in the community isn't it assumed that you're converted?

Nathan: No, that's not true. We've played several shows were people start beating each other up and shit, and they're not fucking converted. Converted to what. Not what we're saying. Racism, sexism, homophobia, rape, everything of that nature... they still go on in the scene! If you go to a show, you can see it. Watch how guys converse with other guys and with girls. It's amazing, the difference. It's so unconscious. We just look that over.

Josh: Even we are converted, we can all

grow.

Darrell: And we all grow through discussion, that's how you foster new ideas.

Ramsey: What are those new ideas?

Chad: Our ideas aren't particularly new.

Next we enter a discussion of class issues, and what they role they play in the community.

Ramsey: Well, a lot of politics is based on class.

Nathan: There should be people from different classes...

Darrell: What are you trying to say?

Ramsey: Well, you talk about community, and community means a shared interest, a shared goal, as shared vision, and for me personally, I suspect that my interests and goals are very different from the upper class, the ruling class, and what most Americans call themselves, the middle class.

Nathan: Do you have any of our records? Because we do address class issues. We absolutely believe that there is a class based system in America and it's wrong.

Josh: Whether there's people who come from different class who can be part of a

revolutionary movement, we feel that they can. But they need to renounce their class based assumptions and beliefs. Just because I came from a middle class white background, and Nathan came from a lower class white background, we can both see that there's a class based system that needs to be destroyed.

Ramsey: I have very little in common with - well, the class system has a lot more to do with than just economics. It has to do with power, and control, access, potential... as well as the obvious wealth, health. etc.

Jen: I wanted to go back to something you said about revolution. What do you

think about punk being revolutionary. There have been a couple of very influential people within punk and hardcore who have said they don't think punk is a revolution or that it could ever be. That it only a catalyst.

Nathan: To tell you the truth, I don't think that terms like "punk" or "hardcore" are revolutionary in and of themselves. Titles are not and they won't be. Playing music in a club is not revolutionary.

The discussion goes on to talk about how punk can be used as a catalyst for discussion or hopefully for change. It doesn't come from a singer's monologue

on stage, but from the conversations that happen afterward, and as Nathan says, one of their goals as a band is to be approachable and to be able to discuss things with others, and their ultimate goals are to work toward or build a society where where people do not have power over each other and can be able to work to their full potential.

After this, the conversation gets more argumentative and we dis-

cuss passificism which Boy Sets Fire supports (you can train people through fear but it's not something they really believe) and Ramsey decries (in America, all of the advancements, like the eight hour day and the existence of unions, have come out of intense violent struggles), and move on to violence and nonviolence and historical background to all of these movements. This discussion is way too long to reproduce, so to find out more about what Boy Sets Fire thinks, you can contact BSF at PO Box 303, Newark, DE 19711. They have a new LP out on Initial Records, called "The Day The Sun Went Out."

