



photos: Shawn Scallan

interview by Sean Ingram photos by Nick Owen

Boy Sets Fire impressed me as one of the most moving hardcore bands of today. As much as I love doing record reviews for this zine, I can't help but be a little dissatisfied by the monotony of blast beat,

boy sets fire

high pitched screaming to the just plain boring off pitch singing hardcore I get. Well, this band just set a new standard. When I was asked to do this interview read their political booklet, took their ideas into consideration and then headed to the library to brush up on challenging them. Why not? A politically outspoken band is begging to be debated no matter how good they are. So there I am at the "Mind Over Matter" Festival in Detroit, to interview BSF and I was beginning to think this fest wasn't about music at all. I was bombarded with condom demonstrations, black empowerment groups everywhere and even the all too occasional insane band like Puritan. It's safe to say I was burned out after one day and felt like a jerk for wanting to approach BSF that way. So I threw out all my questions to talk about music and the lives they live in relation to their band. I think if you pick up their CD you'll agree hardcore now has a new standard for music writing.

fifty-six

I guess the first question is where did you guys come from? You hit big and quick.

Josh: (laughs) Big and quick.

Seriously.

Chad: We came from Delaware.

Josh: I don't think it's been that big and quick.

Chad: No, we've been doing this a long time.

It has been cause like as soon as the 12" came out it hit like wildfire all over the place.

Matt: Actually before the record came out...

You had a 7" out right?

Matt: Yeah, we had the 7" out about a month before, but as far as like touring and everything, the summer previous to that we did our first tour and started as a band following our first tour so I mean we've been a band probably for about 2 and a half years.

Well yeah, I guess that wouldn't be quite so quick I guess for you guys. But like I said right when that 12" came out...why Conquer the World?

Nathan: Ooh, we ask ourselves that same question.

Chad: That's the question, we ask ourselves that all the time.

Nathan: I'm not sure if we should really answer that question.

Matt: He was the first person who really gave us a chance and wanted to help us out and we wanted to help him out too, so you know we figured, "hell, a split 12 inch would be good to get our name around and he's done some records already so he has some clout."

(Someone is trying to get out the door)

Nathan: You got to turn the knob at the top.

So then you went to Initial and that's were you plan on staying? You redid that 12" on Initial right?

Chad: The 12" was on Rose Petal and Magic Bullet, put out by friends of ours...

Wait, the split?

Josh: Our side.

Yeah.

Chad: Our side of the split we remixed and put on...the dance remix actually...it always sounds funny saying remixed, but we did and put it with Rose Petal and Magic Bullet on CD. They're two really good friends of ours from State College.

Oh okay, so the CD isn't Initial...okay, I thought it was.

Nathan: He's distroing it and we have a full length coming out with him in the summertime.

Matt: And the 7" we had we did ourselves, as of I guess two weeks ago it's going to be on Initial, so it's going to be an Initial 7".

So you're just going to consolidate everything over there? You're pretty happy with the way he works for you guys?

Everyone: Oh yeah.

Chad: He's one of the greatest guys we've ever met. He's really nice...

Yeah, you're a real good match.

Chad: We've always kind of liked putting out our own stuff, we've always liked the feeling after doing that, but to be honest with you it ran us into so much debt it got to the point to where we were not in a position as a band to produce what we felt was needed. We talked

to Andy a couple times...

Matt: ...and never got anything from him.

Chad: Yeah, we kept hearing from all these people, "Andy really likes you," and we'd talk to him and get nothing.

Darrell: Yeah, he wouldn't even talk to us.

Matt: I thought he didn't exist.

Chad: We heard all these great things about him and all the good things he was saying and he seemed like a real cool guy and for over a year I never met the guy until a little over a month ago.

Josh: He's been really great.

Who's married and who has kids?

Josh: I have a kid and I'm married.

Chad: I'm married.

Nathan: I have a kid and I'm divorced.

Darrell: And that's it.

Matt: And me a Darrell are...kids! Yeah!

Darrell: "We're the kids."

How do you guys juggle that? Cause I'm married myself and I'm in a band too so when we do stuff like this it's really, really tough. I read an interview with this one band and he was saying the band comes first and the wife comes second and she understands that, and they tour 8 months out of the year...

Chad: 8 Months?!

I don't think that would work, I don't know if that's a healthy marriage.

Nathan: I don't think that's really how it works.

Exactly, so I didn't know how you guys juggle it, like when you're touring if you hit like a couple weeks here and a couple weeks there?

Chad: I don't even think it's based on marriage...

Darrell: It's work.

Chad: We have very supportive families and spouses and whatnot.

Matt: Some of us.

Josh: The thing with that is that marriage is a partnership of give and take and to me right now my life, this is a part of my life. I would be a miserable son of a bitch if I didn't do this.

Chad: But now he's a whiny son of a bitch.

Everyone: (laughs)

Josh: And if she loves me and wants me to be a whole person then she should support me doing this and she does and I think I'm a little lucky cause she's also an artist, she's a dancer so she's a little more understanding as opposed as if she was an accountant. She understands the need to create and chase your dreams I guess.

So it's not a real problem having a kid and all?

Josh: No, it's a real problem, but Jonah, my son, I think he also understands and he likes us too.

What's your take on this whole political aspect on this fest [Detroit]? Mainly the last band that played, the anti-capitalism thing...I'm not going to dive real deep into this...and don't worry I'm not going to ask you why you smoke or anything (laughs)...

Josh: Come on, do it!

Nathan: The last band that played, I thought it was really hard to understand what he was talking about. He said something about something we had said...

Was he counter-acting you guys?

Nathan: Yeah, he was counter-acting us but he was sort of saying the same thing we had said and then he kept jumbling up his words like, "capitalism is good...wait, no I mean..." I couldn't really get a grip on...I know he was trying to say where he agreed and disagreed with what we had said, but I couldn't really understand what he was saying so I really can't even make a comment.

Chad: Where did he disagree with us?

Josh: I couldn't tell. I didn't understand what the hell he was talking about.

I don't think anyone could tell a riff, I don't think anyone could tell pretty much anything.

Nathan: It was really bazaar, he was breathing heavy and talking like this crazed maniac.

Josh: I have something called Attention Deficit Disorder and that was the ultimate fucking freak out...people were asking me about t-shirts, "how much is it and what about the record?" and I was just (makes "I'm going insane" noises), I had to go hide. I had to leave, I didn't know what that guy was talking about. They have a word for it, it's cognitive dissidence, it's like "blah", total freak out. That's exactly what happened. I don't think I could answer any questions about that guy.

I don't really see where the sense is in when you're doing a band and you don't want to put out records. I don't see what sense that makes, especially if you're a political band of that nature. You're putting out records and supposed to getting your message across and here you're scoffing at capitalism cause you have to sell records, you have to make your money back. And I think a lot of people will probably think that of you guys when they get your little booklet, not necessarily that same thing, but like they'll say of these guys are quoting communism and they're quoting this and they

don't mix and I know you talked about the hypocrisy thing...

Nathan: Right, we talked about that.

...and I think that's something that a lot of hardcore kids don't understand.

Nathan: Everyone has hypocritical sides to them. Not only that but I really don't see how you can put together capitalism and big business with some dorky little kid selling his records, it doesn't make sense. They're making maybe a dollar of a record...

Josh: We never make money, you don't make money cause there's a lot of phone calls, there's postage, it's almost like a trade off it seems. "I give you a record and you help me pay off some phone bills for my band"...

Matt: I mean are they getting paid to play?

Josh: Well he said the same thing...

Matt: Cause if they're going to come here and play it's the same thing, you're selling your music.

Well, I look at it like this, you're either a musician or you're not. And I don't really consider anyone who gets up there like that and plays straight noise, and exploits noise cause I'm into noise bands, and they exploit to where it is boring and made you freak out...

Josh: Making us suffer.

Exactly, do a zine and get off stage. I think that's why I'm attracted to you guys cause you have political views and you actually have melody and know how to play and the drum sections are really interesting.

Matt: Thanks.

I think a band revolves around drums.

Matt: Yes! Thank you! You guys better remember that now.

Josh: We're never going to hear the end of that one.

I'm an honest believer in that the drums control it.

Josh: If you have a sucky drummer, it's not going to work.

Not that I'm a fan or anything, but if you guys have heard the new Slayer album...

Chad: Divine Intervention.

The mix is what I'm talking about, if you listen to that, I think it gave it a much better feel than a lot of other bands.

Matt: Hell yeah, even like...Jawbox. Sure their music has changed some since they got rid of the other drummer...or whatever the deal was, since he left the band, I forget his name, but I love them a hundred times more than I did
fifty-seven



before.

That's really good and I think that's one of the really attractive things about you guys is the music.

Chad: Thank you.

Nathan: Back to what we were talking about before, it's really bazaar cause I was trying to pay attention to what these guys were saying and I've met these guys before and they've always been pretty nice to me and stuff, honestly they've been very nice...

Chad: This doesn't mean that they hate us...

Nathan: No, I don't think they were doing it maliciously to me, but what I don't understand...they were talking about what we had said about capitalism and stuff like that and then he went on some tirade about everyone being white and totally lost me. "Everybody's white, blah blah blah," and I was just like, "what are you talking about?"

Chad: Did they mention Boy Sets Fire?

Nathan: Yeah, they mentioned us. But then they said something about how they were guilty of the same thing, they sold records and got paid for the show and stuff, and it didn't seem like he had much of a point.

Chad: I think he took a very good point and took it beyond reality. He went too far, obviously there needs to be a certain amount of range in everything, we need to make at least some money to come here.

That should be a fact. That's the weird thing about the hardcore scene...every other scene the hip-hop scene, the metal scene, it's all about getting money, and the hardcore scene is all about feeling guilty about it.

Chad: Good white liberal guilt.

You're not supposed to get paid, you're supposed to feel guilty and you're suppose to free Fred Hampton or whatever. It seems that those things have taken such a big toll on hard-

fifty-eight

core, it's just real weird, I've been in the hardcore scene for quite a while and I remember two years ago you'd come and it's all vegan warriors and before that it was the old school dancing or whatever. It's kind of weird how political things like this, at least two issues...Leonard Peltier, that was last year...it's just kind of weird how that's creating bands, those issues are creating bands.

Nathan: I guess what it all comes down to is we didn't understand a word they were talking about. It didn't really matter what they were saying cause I didn't understand it anyway.

Josh: What is it about hardcore that when a band reaches a certain level of success that we've had to sell out to get there?

We were talking about that on the way here, cause I was really excited about cause this is like...well I don't know if you guys think this...but it's a really big show, this could be you're break through show because a lot of people are going to see it. Like Earth Crisis' big show was back at the first More Than Music Fest in Dayton Ohio like four years ago and I think those are the best shows to see cause the buzz is out and the buzz is definitely out about you guys so you see that and I think that's probably their best show. Cause it's a total fact that after a band starts playing out people do think that [selling out], it seems like everyone wants that band to be theirs like, "Boy Sets Fire is mine, I'm the only one who knows about them," and as soon as a football player in high school hears them you're no good. Like the Promise Ring is a perfect example...

Chad: There's nothing wrong with football.

Everyone: (laughs)

Josh: You guys big Chiefs fans?

Dan: I'm not.

Why did you see me wearing that shirt yester-

day?

Josh: No, I just figured you're from Kansas City...

But yeah it's a perfect example, the Promise Ring last night, you saw all the people who liked them in the front and you saw all the people who liked them in the beginning in the back making fun of them.

Matt: I think maybe it has a lot to do with there's a lot of that mentality like, "I heard this band first, it's mine and I'm going to be the person who introduces you to them." "Have you heard this song?" "Oh, it's good go get it." And after they get around they don't have that anymore, they can't be like, "oh, I had that record first and no one else had heard of them before," and stupid things like that. If you really like the band, you like the band because of its music, you still stick with them unless the band totally changed in the opposite direction than what they used to be.

Josh: I don't even consider us popular, not really, but we're already starting to get that sort of questioning you know. Like, "Initial? Oh my god, he's such a business man." Good.

How many big time record labels send their owner to come out to a show? But it's like Earache, the guy that owns that sits out in his house, and that's big business to me.

Nathan: I really think Andy's a good guy and he cares about the music. I don't understand why people give him such a hard time.

Does he really get a hard time?

Everyone: Oh yeah.

Josh: Cause he's successful.

Nathan: He's successful and he has glossy covers, and just cause he's successful and his stuff looks good he gets shit, and plus he's got a good business sense, sorry.

Chad: I don't think success opens you up to criticism automatically but in unfortunately in



the hardcore community it does.

Then again, there's that scene, you're not supposed to make money...

Matt: I've heard, "you guys are playing the Detroit Festival? Sensefield is playing that, they're on Warner Bros. or whatever. I can't believe you're doing that, you're playing with them and Jimmy Eat World. Maybe not the same show but you're still playing the festival." I don't understand, it's not like we're playing the Meadowlands with fucking Pearl Jam or something.

Anybody who's seen this place would know that.

Matt: To me when bands have records on independent labels and then they do sell out...I have Jawbreaker's album, I have Jawbox's latest album...

Chad: I have Allanis Morrissette's fucking album.

I would expect you guys to have records like that cause if you're musicians you like the music you like you can appreciate other people's music and buy it no matter what label it's on instead of scoffing at it.

Chad: There are much greater evils and like we were talking about, everyone's a hypocrite, there's much greater evils than buying a record from a company...most CD's are generally produced in the United States at fair rates...

(someone else is trying to figure out how to get out of the door)

Josh: Turn the knob (laughs).

Chad: ...at fair rates and I don't think that's much of a problem. I mean yeah, I do have a problem if I go pay \$17 for a CD at a mall that some distributor hiked up \$10, I do have a problem with that, but buying CD's as far as that are on a major label, I don't have a problem with that. As a band I don't necessarily think that stands but...

Josh: I don't buy major labels, I just don't. I tape it.

Yeah that's another point though, you can still appreciate the music.

Josh: Oh yeah. On the way here we were listening to Rage Against the Machine.

I guess that's the point I'm trying to make, not so much to where the money is going as much as you're not going to scoff at the bands, you're still going to appreciate the music and I think that, especially the last couple days I've been sitting here and listening to these bands and listening to the speeches in the back and stuff like that, it doesn't seem like it's much about music anymore and I think that's what's so attractive when you get on stage, you play music, you're catchy, you've got your hooks, the heavy parts, vocals in tune, and everything just sounds good. Anyway, any comments?

Matt: Our full length should be out this summer.

Josh: Buy buy buy.

Matt: Buy it! Buy it!

Chad: \$19.99, get it at Tower Records (laughs).

Josh: I think this is a really different interview than we've ever done before. No political questions, it's kind of interesting.

Nathan: I'll tell you what, it's always nice to get a different interview.

When he [Dan] first asked me to do this interview I was like, "rad," cause I heard the songs, he played it for me, he was raving about it forever...

Josh: Aw.

I got that, listened to it and my wife got into it and we listened to it all the time and then I read the book and I admit, it was a little incoherent for me, I couldn't follow it.

Chad: Same here, and I'm in the band.

As far as like the political things, I kind of got the gist of what you were trying to say and I

understood it better...I think what you said on stage clears a lot of it up, you did a good job as far as clearing it up. Like when you were explaining about your families and stuff and Mark from the Enkindles got up there and said you guys were real, just everything between the songs...I think that does a lot better job, but then again I haven't read the one in the CD yet it looks like you added a bunch of extra stuff.

Matt: Yeah, but it's not our though.

Nathan: That's stuff that Brent and Jason wrote.

Chad: That you can read, no problem.

Josh: Are you in Coalesce?

Yeah.

Josh: Awh, I've never heard you before, did you guys play yesterday?

We're playing tonight, are you going to be here?

Chad: You're in Coalesce?

Darrell: Oh wait, you're in Coalesce? You guys fucking rule!

(at this point Boy Sets Fire decide to conduct their own Coalesce interview and someone is trying to come in the door)

Dan: Make sure they have a bracelet.

Darrell: Do you have a bracelet?

Sneaky kids: Come on, let us in, they've made their money.

Darrell: Are you guys fucking cool? Are you cooler than everyone else? Go to the front and pay like everyone else (pulls the door shut).

Sneaky kids: (mumbles something).

Darrel: Fuck off!

Josh: What did that kid say?

Darrell: "Eat my shorts."

Everyone: (busts out laughing)

Josh: You got a Bart cut! (laughs)

Matt: Did you tell him to go have a cow.

Everyone: (laughs hysterically)

Josh: Cowabunga!■