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BY BRETT CALLWOOD

Bad Religion

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L.A. punk band Bad Religion has always been known for its socio-political lyrics, openly questioning authority at any opportunity. That's the band's bag; super-sweet melodies contrasting with Greg Graffin's deadpan delivery, dressed up with often deceptively intelligent lyrics. So just imagine what the guys are making of the current political landscape as we charge towards the end of the most divisive and hate-filled presidential campaign in recent U.S. history.

"The election cycle just started getting so bizarre that I called everybody and said that we need to go out on the road," says Jay Bentley, bassist and co-founding member. "We can't just sit by and let this happen without at least having some sort of vent."

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So Bad Religion has joined forces with Against Me! and Dave Hause of The Loved Ones for the Vox Populi tour, which hits L.A. at the Hollywood Palladium on Nov. 4, just four days before the election. The aim, according to Bentley, is to get people involved in the political process who just don't seem to care

get people involved in the political process who just don't seem to care anymore.

"Greg [Graffin] had made an interesting statement, that some of the songs we're playing were written years ago with the hopes that we wouldn't have to play them anymore because the lyrical sentiment was distressing," Bentley says. "It's a sad statement that here we are playing some of the same songs with the same message, because nothing's changed."

Bentley is 52 now, and most of his bandmates are in their early 50s as well. They're not kids anymore, but the same issues that inspired them in the 1980s drive the lyrics in 2016.

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"It's about how incredibly intolerant one man can be of another," Bentley says. "I wake up in the morning, and any sort of news item that catches your attention can inspire. I think a lot of people have thought of Bad Religion as a political band, but I've always thought that we're a socio-political band. We're not really about politics, we're about people, and humans. What it's like to be a human on the planet is sort of our underlying theme."

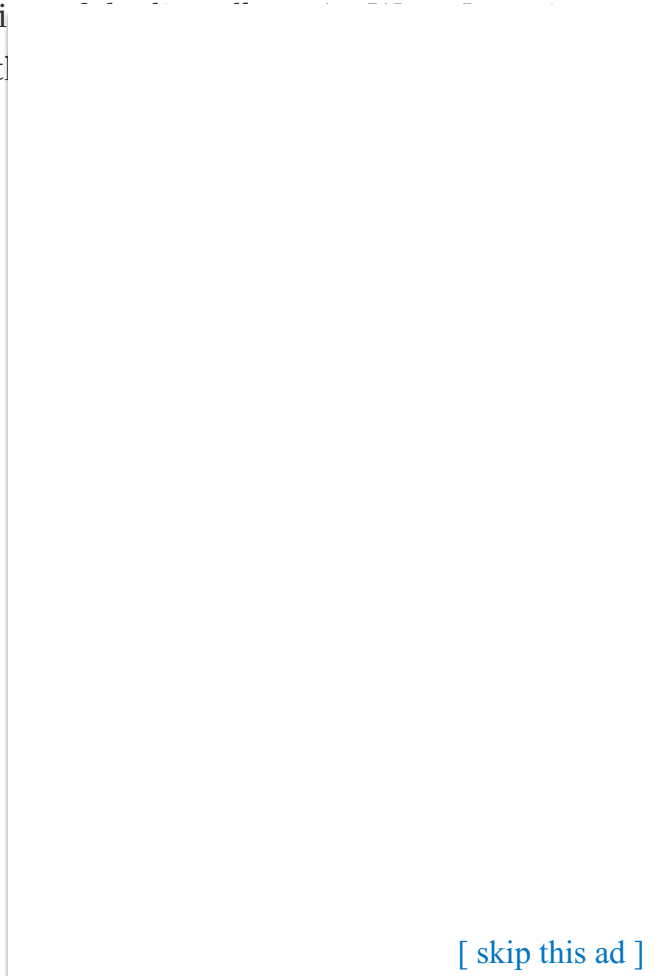
It is disheartening that Bad Religion's early songs are still as relevant, if not more so, today as they were when they were written, but it's also impressive that they've held up so well. Bentley says that was the original intention: to write songs that would have some level of credibility ever many years down the road. That those young punks had the foresight to think like that as their careers were just kicking off is admirable.

Bentley says that there are plenty of other things that haven't changed for him or his bandmates, either. "There's part of me that has the same cathartic release on stage that I had when I was 15," he says. "I like to scream at the top of my lungs, and I like to jump around and get lost in the moment."

The biggest difference is the amount of work that the band members feel is necessary at this point, or that they are contractually obliged to do. They're in the rare and luxurious position where they can pick and choose their gigs, and release a song or album when they feel the inclination. Some would say that it's the early desperation, the fire of youth, that fuels the best punk rock, but Bentley says they're simply now able to enjoy the fruits of their labor.

“Right now, the day to day process of Bad Religion is actually quite simple,” he says. “We’re all really comfortable where we are. We don’t really have any specific drive to go and do something other than things that come up that we think are important. I know that’s a weird thing for a band to be like, ‘We’re just hanging out.’ It seems like working is what a band should be doing.”

On the subject of picking and choosing their projects, Bad Religion just put out the first vinyl version of their new album, *The New American*, after it was first released. Why do t



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“Vinyl is having a resurgence and we didn’t really have a physical manifestation of it,” Bentley says. “When we did it, we said we’d do a ‘best of’ live album, but we wanted it to not really be the tracks that we’ve already put out on other collections. So it was a nice selection of songs that most people haven’t had the opportunity to hear live.”

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Whether they're performing familiar or unfamiliar songs, Bad Religion always bring it live. And despite the fact that they don't have to work to the degree that they once did, there's still fire in the old bellies. The balance between "professional" and "punk rock" is always a treacherous one, but even if Bad Religion clearly know what they're doing, don't mistake that musical togetherness for complacency. These guys will still kick your ass from the stage, as we'll see at the Palladium.

"It is a politically driven message, and we went through the catalog and chose the songs that have important meaning," Bentley says of their current live set. "We have political statements like 'Man With a Mission' or 'You Are (The Government),' which point at things as they are today, and we close the show with 'Fuck Armageddon, This is Hell,' which is us just throwing our hands up in the air and going, 'I don't even know what to think anymore.'"

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