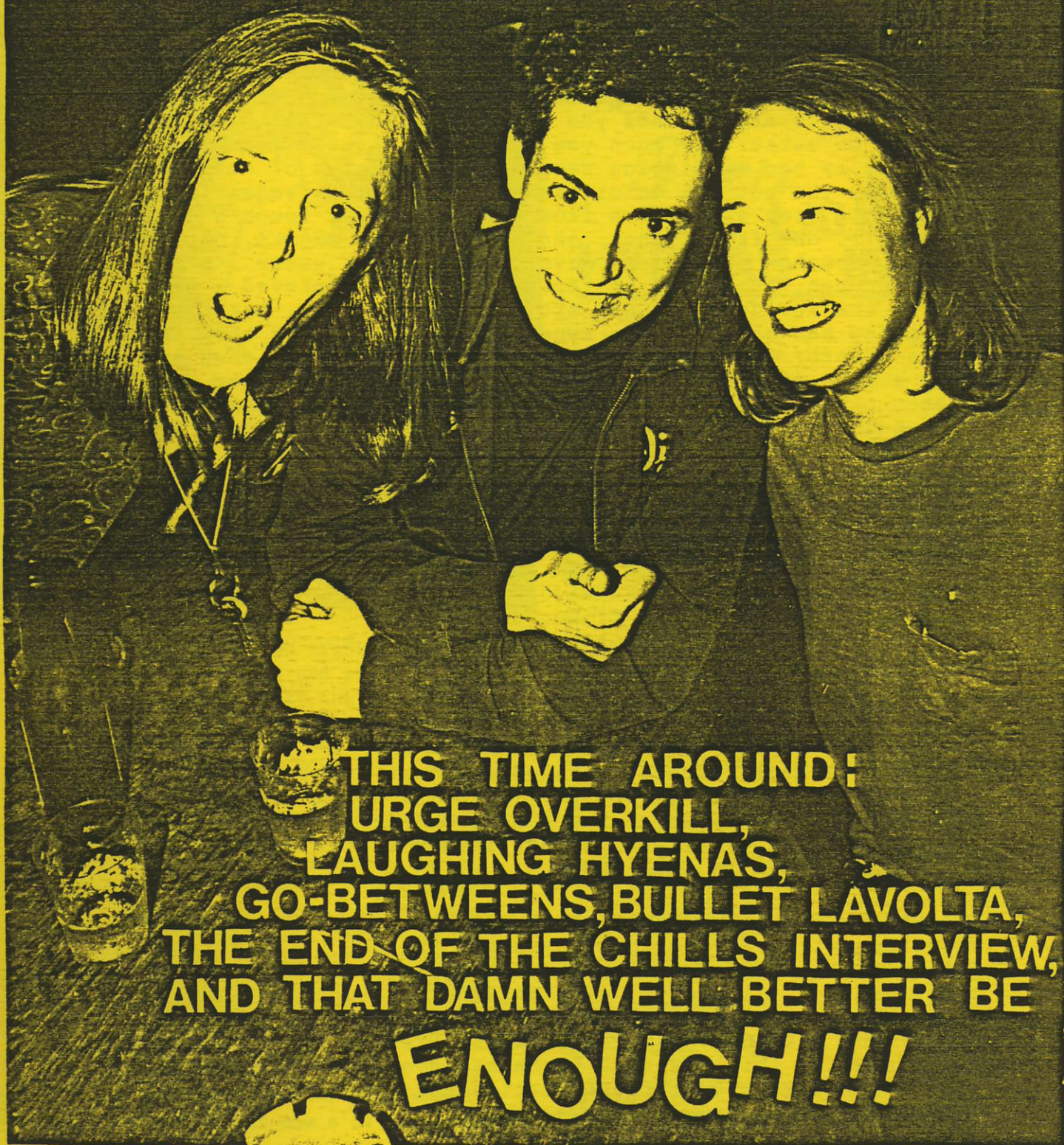


DAGGER



THIS TIME AROUND:
URGE OVERKILL,
LAUGHING HYENAS,
GO-BETWEENS, BULLET LAVOLTA,
THE END OF THE CHILLS INTERVIEW,
AND THAT DAMN WELL BETTER BE
ENOUGH!!!

NO. 10 SUMMER '89 \$1⁰⁰

Laughing Hyenas

All Laughing Hyenas photos by Ken Salerno.



Ann Arbor, Michigan might seem like a rather laid back town and probably is. You might not wanna visit the place or even think about it. As far as I'm concerned the town is good for one thing and one thing only, and that THING is the Laughing Hyenas. The Laughing Hyenas create music full of soul, power, and complete turmoil. They get compared constantly to legends like the Stooges and the Birthday Party, and now after the release of their latest LP, "You Can't Pray a Lie", mentioning all 3 bands in the same breath doesn't sound so dumb. Interview by Ken and I at the Court Tavern. Answering for the Hyenas were vocalist John Brannon, drummer Jim Kimball, and bassist Kevin Strickland. Guitarist Larissa was nowhere to be found.....

D: How long had the band been together before the "Stain" tape came out?

JB: You mean the 4-track, the demo?

D: Yeah?

JB: Probably about 4 or 5 months. We did it real soon after.

D: It was the same line-up?

JB: No, no we had a different drummer. Mike Danner. He's in a band now w/ Barry Hennsler called Big Chief in Ann Arbor. They're starting to play out now.

Popes, Nuns, and Ducking from Their Phriecks **THE LAUGHING HYENAS INTERVIEW**

D: No more Necros huh?

JB: I think they're getting back together for an album, but they don't play out as a band anymore.

D: Jim were you in any previous bands? I know John was in N.A. and Larissa was in L-7.

JK: Nothing notable really, but I just played in some jazz bands in high school. A couple outside of high school, but...

JB: He played in a shopping mall once in front of 10,000 people or something.

JK: No, when I was in grade school there's like Spring music night in Ann Arbor for like....you know, it's a really big deal.

D: 10,000 people?!

JB: They're big on festivals and shit.

JK: A basketball arena at U of M campus, the Chrysler Arena, and I was in 5th grade, and in our grade school there was like a contemporary rock band w/ all these instruments and we played like top 40 and "Wipeout", so I got to do "Wipeout" solo in front of 10,000 people.

D: Were you nervous?

JK: Fuck, I don't even remember.

JB: After he threw up on his high school principal it really didn't matter.

D: Was Kevin in any other bands?

JB: No, I mean he played in a band w/ his brother fucking around in the basement, but he never played a gig or anything.

D: Are Larissa and Kevin married, brother and sister, or what?

JB: Yeah, they're brother and sister.

D: You guys always get lumped in w/ the killdozer, Pussy Galore, Scratch Acid type bands, do you mind that or what?

KS: No their just other bands on independent labels.

JB: Just all high energy bands. Theres a similarity that were all independent bands playing around now, pretty much high energy bands.

D: Post/ punk noise as they say.

JB: Whatever, thats your job, your the critic.

D: Who writes most of your songs?

JB: Just everybody writes their own part.

JK: We just kinda jam and everyone contributes their own part. Different ideas.

D: So it's not nessecarily whoever writes the lyrics writes the music also?

KS: We bring ideas to practice and work on it continually. Jim will practice, come up w/ a great drum part that he likes, John will write lyrics, Larissa will write guitar parts, and I'll write bass parts, and we'll try to work em' together, sometimes they work, and sometimes they don't.

JK: We try to make it spontaneous.

JB: It kinda works as a layering effect, something might start out w/ one part and then just everybody will just build upon it. It's not like we just come to practice and say this is the song, this is the chord change, it's more like some-

JOHN BRANNON

one will start out w/ something and everyone just kinda layers their part on top of it. We just try to lock into a groove.

D: Did you ship the "Stain" demo to a lot of labels?

JB: Umm, when we recorded that I just sent it out to some people, then people started making dubs for other people. I sent it to some magazines, just so some people would know we were a band. But we didn't use that tape as a demo to get signed or anything, it was just like a basement thing that we made just to send it to friends and magazines to say like this is what we're doing now.

D: Was that the demo that Touch & Go heard to sign you?

JB: They heard that one, and they liked the songs, then we made a recording and it didn't turn out to good so T & G liked the songs but we ended up recording it all over.

KS: It was rushed in the studio and it became really dated, really quickly. Not the songs themselves, but.....

JK: That was the other band too.

KS: It was a different drummer, and it's a different band now.

JB: We wanted to do it fresh w/ Jim cuz you know, the new line-up.

D: When did the original incarnation of the Hvenas form, and the one now, w/ Jim?

JB: Jim has been w/ us for like 3 years now, we started in 85'.

D: Oh really? Cuz "Merry Go Round" didn't come out until like 87' right?

JB: That took a long time to come out, cuz uh.....

KS: Was it January of 85' or 86' that we formed? It might've been December 85' But we've been together more than 4 years.

JK: Ya know, I wasn't in the band then, but everybody it started from scratch so it took a while to get going and to the point where we wanted to do some recording.



KEVIN STANKLAND

D: It seems that a lot of bands these days want to record so quickly. They're a band for like 3 mos. and they already have a record out.

JB: We made that mistake w/ the 1st version of "Merry Go Round", like we really rushed it and we weren't ready, and after that Mike left the band, and we got Jim, and we just took some time and re-learned the songs w/ Jim playing and Jim's a better drummer so it came together better.

KS: His (Mike's) girlfriend got pregnant and he got married and they had triplets so he bailed out of the whole thing.

D: That's pretty much the reason that he left?

KS: Yeah, triplets man!

D: So why did it take so long for "Merry Go Round" to come out?

JB: Umm, the 1st version we were gonna put out on another record label and that kinda fucked us over.

D: Oh yeah, Adult Contemporary.

(More talk about Tom Smith/ Adult Contemporary....not worth wasting space over)

D: Who did the album jacket for the new LP? It's really cool.

JB: Larissa for the most part. I mean everyone had their own ideas, but Larissa did most of it. She had this really old book of angels and we really liked that picture, so a friend of ours who's a photographer came up w/ the idea of the wheat on the back.

KS: Unfortunately we couldn't afford to put it out in full color but it turned out really well anyways.

JB: We got this little kid and gave him a crayon and got him to scribble out the song titles.

D: Oh really, I just thought one of you guys had really bad handwriting. My handwriting is that bad.

JK: No, that's an actual little kid, we paid him a buck to do it.

D: Did you have to teach him to spell the words?

JB: Well it was like Larissa sister-in-law works in a nursery school or something so she paid the kid a buck. Like "this is today's assignment, write out the songs." But we gotta get a copy of the record to the kid. The kid will grow up one day and go "yeah, that's my penmanship man."

D: I noticed that a lot of your rhythm in your songs is similar like in "Stain" the song, and "Loves My Only Crime" and a few other songs.

JB: Yeah we like to get locked into that groove sound. You can do a whole lot w/ one riff and I like that real tribal, primitive....sound cuz it doesn't move and it doesn't let up but there's a lot of tension there.

JK: It's a bit different the structure of the songs and the change parts. We like to distinguish it as being different.

JB: If you can keep the bass line steady then you can accent it w/ the drums and guitar for like build-ups and tension, but we like to keep a real steady bass line, it's like the anchor.

Also "Black Eyed Susan" I'd say is quite a bit different than the other two. "Stain" is the one song that keeps the same bass line continually even though the rhythm on the drums goes into different directions so it makes it sound diff. in parts. The dynamics is the important part in those songs, even when the bass lines are similar, you really have to work w/ the dynamics.

D: What can you tell me about Butch Vig?

JB: Great guy. Real easygoing, he made it real comfortable for us. We pretty much told him what we wanted and he....

JK: Well he's a musician himself. He's got a band.

D: Yeah, Fire Town.....

JK: He thinks more in terms of a musician when he's engineering us so he's a drummer and he gets a good drum sound right off so we don't have to tell him.

KS: It's not like his genre of music either, you wouldn't think from the music he's playing that he'd be involved in this kinda stuff.

JB: He works really well w/ this kinda stuff, like die kruezen and Killdozer so it's not, nothing so far outta left field that he can't handle it. He had a good idea what he wanted to do, and he had good ideas. He's got a really good studio.

KS: Who was it that wrote him from Australia, what band?

JB: Feedtime. They wanted him to remix them. cuz they really liked his T & G stuff.

D: So why only 8 songs on the LP?

KS: You think that we should've recorded more or something?

D: Yeah, I would've liked to hear more songs. If it's a band I like I always like to hear more.

KS: Wait til the next record comes out (laughter).

record
already
Go
and
st

B: I don't think it's too good to put like a million songs on an album. You get real burned out w/ too many songs. I mean the time is there, theres 8 songs, but some of em' are real long.

KS: We seriously want to give people their moneys worth as far as material, but we don't want to cram material down their throat than whats nessecary.

JB: I think you should spread it out and put it on diff. releases instead of like "we know 20 songs and were going to put the whole set on our record!" I like to give it to people in doses cuz they can get real burned out on it real quick. Did you see that Bob thing we did a flexi disc for "The Bob" magazine?

D: Was that an outtake from the album?

JB: Yeah we did it at the same time.

D: Are you guys happy w/ Touch & Go?

JB: Wouldn't go w/ any other labels, it's great.

KS: They're the best label.

JB: The thing is we've known them for a long time and it's people we can trust. We know they can do the job, and they do the job. They're great people to work with, no problems at all. Everything's really smooth.

KS: No contracts, it's all word of mouth, just a handshake.

JB: They're into it because they love music, bot because they want to make money. It's pretty much just helping out people they like and admire.

D: That's really cool. Hows the distribution?

JB: It's taken them a little while, but they definitely got it together.

JK: Our records are liscensed by 3 European record labels tythrough T & G. 3 seperate labels, one in England, Southern Studios, Boodisc in Holland, and E-K in Germany.

JB: So were starting to get reviews in Europe and stuff. "Melody Maker" called us up last week.

JK: Were gonna try to go write more songs then go into the studio in August then try to go to Europe for a few months.

D: Have you guys been to Europe yet?

JB: No not yet. This was gonna be like a whole American tour we were gonna go out west but we couldn't get enough connecting dates to make it to California so we figured why should we burn ourselves out in like Tucson, Arizona when we can go to Europe?

KS: I mean we like Tucson and everything.

JB: We just really want to go to Europe. I think we really need to go over there and play. So after we do that we'll probably come back and play the west coast. We've played the midwest to east coast for like 4 tours.

D: So do you guys have a van that you tool around in or what?

JB: Yeah, it keeps us going. It just turned 100,000 miles. It's smooth, we really baby that thing. We oil change it all the time. We take good care of it, you got to, we don't want the thing falling apart in like the middle of Pennsylvania you know? The Hyenas have good auto hygiene.

D: Tell me about Ann Arbor, is it a cool place for a band to thrive?

JK: It's a pretty mellow place to live, but as far as music goes, theres really nothing going on. Nice town though.

JB: It's a college town, and it's real clean, and real laid back, and we just keep to ourselves.

D: Is there enough clubs to survive?

JB: No no we don't play there, we didn't move there for club reasons.

D: Oh, you moved there, I thought you were from there?

JB: Jim is the only one, the rest of us are from Detroit. We moved from Detroit cuz our equipment kept getting ripped off. We lived in this storefront in the ghetto in Detroit and it was just a real bad scene.

KS: I's rather live in Detroit, it's good for our attitude.

D: Yeah, Detroit sounds pretty nasty...

JB: Yeah and so are we. (sinister laughter) Yeah, Ann Arbors cool cuz we can just keep like a real low key image. We all live together, we got a house, so we just practice and try to write songs, but we don't really hang out. Theres really no clubs that support indie music, it's all top 40.

JK: Theres all kinds of music and shit coming into Ann Arbor, you can see any kind of music you want. It's a really cultural town.

JB: Yeah, there's a lot of clubs, they just don't cater to punk bands. It was a lot different in the 60's, it was more cultural, they had festivals and like the Hash Bash on April Fools Day in the mid 60's where as many as 10,000 people would come to Ann Arbor and hang out on the campus cuz it's only like a \$5 fine if your busted w/ weed in Ann Arbor. It's not even a misdemeanor, they won't even take you in for it.



JOHN
BRANNON

D: Did you guys ever think of moving, to like NYC or SF?

KS: I'd like to move someplace where it's cheap, like one dollar a month.

JB: It's expensive inn Ann Arbor, we travel around a lot and say that we want to move, but everyplace is just like everywhere else. Why move? You can base yourself anywhere but you don't have to stay there, you can travel around. We need a place to practice, we now practice at the house.

D: Do the neighbors mind?

JB: No they're hippies, grease monkeys. Theres like a half-way house next to us for like drug addicts and mental patients, and low income housing across the street. We live on the other end of town.
(More talk about University of Michigan.)

D: Do any of you guys go to school?

JB: No, it's just the band for all of us.

D: Do you have jobs or just live off the band?

JB: Jim does, he's managed to keep a job.

JK: I work in a restaurant as a prep cook.

D: So who do you guys listen to?

JK: We all have different musical tastes, but we all listen to a lot of blues. I listen to a lot of reggae. Also lately a lot of Dr. John, New Orleans r & b, and like Peter Laughner, and the Neville Bros.

JB: I like a lot of blues and soul stuff. I like Howlin' Wolf, Alice Cooper. We try to take like a lot of influence and put em' all together. Like Kevin will play a solid bass line, and Jim will come in w/ a jazzy beat and we just try to layer a lot of influeces together and come up w/ our own sound.

D: Whats the wildest thing that ever happened at your gig?

KS: Some guy rode a bike through one of our shows.

JB: Some guy made me kiss his baby in Cincinatti. I'm serious it was like I was running for mayor or something. He brought his 2 year old kid and we were like "yo why do you have this kid at this gig?" The guy was just like "Kiss my baby" He was a real freak

JK: Afterwards we asked him why he brought his baby and he goes "shit, I take him to see all the Touch & Go bands. What the fuck!" At the same gig the band that opened for us were buttfucking on stage, but they had their clothes on.

JB: It was a simulated buttfuck. You could tell that this is what these guys do when they come home from school. That was pretty wild, we weren't ready for it at least.

D: What "Desolate Son" about?

JB: That's, it's about being lonely, wanting something, just a feeling. Just based on a feeling, but nothing in particular.

D: Are any of your songs autobiographical?

JB: Umm, some of em'. We just try to strike an emotion and write about that, something we can feel. Something like, you sing something and it's gonna make you feel better. It's like our own version of the blues, you sing about something sad but it can make you feel better. People are like "oh man, you guys are depressed all the time." But we just feel a relief after we sing em', were not out to make people feel depressed. A lot of people won't even confront those feelings of depression and stuff, but we don't try to hide em'. Were saying that "yeah, we do feel that way sometimes and it's alright." The worlds not perfect.

D: Do you ever do anything to change your voice in the studio?

JB: Everyone thinks that I do, like a distortion box or something, but no, it's straight. What we do in the studio is set up a live PA and I sing through a live mike, and we put a mike in front of it so that sorta captured the live, distorted sound.

JK: We all played at once pretty much. We did a few overdubs but mostly it was just live which is where we sound our best.

JB: That's our goal is to capture our live sound in the studio, and once you see us live you'll see what I mean.

D: Does your throat ever hurt after gigs?

JB: No, I've been doing it since I was like 14, so I've had a lot of practice. If you practice a lot and you know how to use your throat you don't get burned out.

D: How old are you?

JB: I'm 26.

KS: I'm 24.

JK: I'm 23.

D: So do you guys watch a lot of tv?

JB: We like animal documentaries, thats how we got our name. It was like our salute to Marlon Perkins, we got some

money from Mutual of Omaha so it worked out. They fronted us all this money for the 1st album, and they gave us end money for drugs for the 1st album.

D: Where did you get the title of the new album, "You Can't Pray a Lie?"

JB: From a book, it's one of the chapters in "Huckleberry Finn", so it's Mark Twain. We all like that book, and we were just thumbing through it one day and it stood out so we wrote it down..

D: How about "Merry Go Round", pretty meek title for such a loud band?

JB: That's kind of a twisted thing, did you ever see the movie "Strangers on a Train?" The last scene theres this accident on it, and it speeds up and it's real demented the way they filmed it w/ the horses, you have to see it.

JK: We try to present ourselves different on our covers. Like a total contrast.

D: Yeah, like you had the angel on the new one...

KS: I don't think that Larissa when she put the LP cover together, you'd have to ask her personally but I know it wasn't my idea that it was a contrast but just things that we wanted to represent ourselves with. If was a representation of those songs. The contrast thing is what people would pick up on.

D: Is the Ritz the biggest place you've ever played?

JB: Yeah, that or 1st Avenue in Minneapolis. We did a tour w/ Sonic Youth and all the gigs we played w/ them were pretty big places, and we had really big audiences.

D: How did that go?

JB: Really good, we got along w/ them great as people and they helped us out tremendously. They're still helping us out. They give us a lot of advice on getting gigs and stuff, and a lot of inspiration to keep us going like when were down in the dumps. The whole experience was great.

(Talk strays to Woodstock)

JB: I think that Woodstock would've been great if they had like Alice Cooper, The Stooges, MC5....fuck all that California shit.

Write the Laughing Hyenas at PO Box 15253 Ann Arbor, MI 48106.



LAUGHING HYENAS