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EXCLUSIVE

ALL THE HYPE, HYSTERIA & MADNESS OF...

THE BLACKHEARTS

INTERVIEW



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BORN TO BE WILD

by Randall Thorpe

My relationship with The Blackhearts began long before the band was even formed. I met their manager Karen Reed long before she made her way to St Kilda back in 1980. Fast forward eight years and Karen is now managing The Blackhearts, the hard-core rock band founded by her younger brother, Joel Reed.

Fuelled by toxic cocktails of contraband, lead guitarist Joel Reed, drummer Billy 'the sticks' Butler, bassist, Tommy Roberts, rhythm guitarist Angus Batt, and frontman Harry Engel, are raw, hungry, savage, emotional, and dangerous. They've got the kind of drive to succeed that's both obsessive and unnerving. Countless other young hopefuls flock to the bayside suburb every year chasing their dreams of becoming rock stars; however, the harsh reality is only a handful of the wannabes who make their way to this promised land will ever going to make it to the top of the country's distinguished rock 'n' roll ladder. Only a rare few become household names.

Like most fledgling outfits, The Blackhearts has its fair share of woes in locking in a steady line up. A few short weeks before the band was scheduled to play a crucial showcase gig for a raft of music industry execs, front man Chris Kessler secretly auditioned for The Dead Jellies, a hard rock outfit that crossed the boarder from Adelaide a couple of years ago. When Reed got wind of Kessler's betrayal, he sent the singer packing. It was a nail-biting time for The Blackhearts; however, Reed has since described Kessler's departure as a "blessing in disguise". Reed quickly replaced Kessler with the enigmatic Harry

Engel whose blistering vocals and hypnotic performance helped the band secure a lucrative deal with Deadset Records. Shortly after that, drummer Shane Hafner was given his marching orders (for undisclosed reasons) and for the second time the future of the band took a serious turn. Despite that latest bump in the road, The Blackhearts secured Billy Butler, ex-House Arrest drummer, to team up with Angus Batt on the back line.

So, in the wake of bands like Midnight Oil, The Angels, Rose Tattoo and AC/DC, what exactly makes The Blackhearts different? What precisely makes them the cream that will undoubtedly rise to the top? All five of them are dirty, brash, and nihilistic. At the same time, all five members have a distinct 'presence', an unmistakable sense of 'cool', and an unforgettable air of 'star quality'. Their music is an absolute reflection of their lives. Raw and uncensored, their blues-influenced tunes are built on driving beats, emotional melodies, and thought-provoking lyrics. They are songs from the trenches, songs of experience, paeans to sex, drugs, and the fine art of rampant debauchery. All are deeply personal. Currently working on their first album, I joined The Blackhearts at Empire Recording Studio in Richmond to find out exactly what makes these guys rock. What follows is a personal, revealing, and, at times, brutally honest interview with the band.

The Blackhearts self-titled debut album is set to hit the stores just in time for Christmas.



JOEL REED

LEAD GUITAR

You and Karen grew up in Western Australia, right?

Yeah, in a town called Mongmong. Not much there except scrub land and kangaroos.

Who were your musical influences growing up in Mongmong?

My parents loved music and had a massive record collection. There was always something playing on the stereo... Jazz, classical, rock, soul... I guess my biggest influences were Bowie, Aerosmith, Sabbath, Zeppelin, AC/DC, the Stones, Thin Lizzy, Alice Cooper, Queen... You know, the same stuff every kid was listening to in the 1970s.

When did you start playing?

Oh, s**t, I must have been twelve. Or maybe thirteen. Everyone at Mongmong High School was forced to take music—at least for the first couple of years. I thought I'd hate it, but I didn't. For some reason, I chose guitar, I don't know why. It was a battered old acoustic that belonged to the school. Was played by a thousand disinterested kid, you know? But as soon as started playing... It just felt right. Like it was what I meant to be doing. [Laughs] That's when I started hounding my parents to buy me a proper guitar.

Tell us about SaxonSoo.

Bloody hell, I haven't thought about them in years.

It was your old high school band, right?

Yeah... It was Brett Saxon's band, him and Leon Soo. Brett was a kick ass drummer. Leon was a keyboardist. There were a couple of years ahead of me... I couldn't believe it when they asked me to play guitar with them.

How long did you play together?

Oh, s**t, it must have been about a year, maybe eighteen months. We weren't old enough to play in pubs or clubs, so getting a gig was hard. It was mostly birthday parties and stuff.

You played covers right?

Yeah, mostly. Though we did write, or attempted to write, a couple of originals.

So, what happened? Why did you stop playing?

As soon as Brett turned eighteen, he joined the army.

What happened to Leon?

Leon and I stuck together for a while, but his parents were pressuring him to get a 'real job' so that was the end of that.

What did you do then?

I washed dishes. Delivered pizzas. Got wasted. You know how it is in a small town.

So, when did you leave Mongmong?

As soon as I f**king could.

Did you come straight to Melbourne?

Yeah, I did. My sister was here so I just rocked up and crashed on her couch. She knew a lot of people, had a lot of contacts... It made the most sense.

Is that how you met Tommy and Angus?

Nah... Tommy rocked up to audition. He saw one of our ads in Juke and thought he'd give it a try.

Lucky for you.

Yeah, man. He's a great songwriter, too.

What about Angus? How did you meet your rhythm guitarist?

Oh, man, we auditioned a string of guys, but couldn't find 'the one', you know? None of them had that spark, that fire. Then one day we were in the rehearsal room when Shane rocked up with some bloke I'd never seen before. I didn't give it much thought. I just thought it was some dropkick

mate of his. But then this guy picked up my spare guitar and started playing.

He got your attention.

[Smiles] Yeah, he got my attention. I had no idea he was a session musician. He had the day off, so he decided to tag along with Shane. A couple of days later, he turned up again, so I asked him if he wanted the gig.

And he said yes.

It surprised me.

What about your drummer, Billy? How did he come on board?

It's funny how things work out... You think on the brink if disaster then all of a sudden something happens. Something totally unexpected. And you're back in business.

You're talking about Shane Hafner's departure. There's a lot of rumours about that.

Yeah, well, you know what they say about rumours—don't believe any of them.

So, what really happened?

Look, Shane's a great drummer, but I'm not going to get into details. Let's just say our drummer troubles are well and truly behind us.

You've had your fair share of trouble with singers, too, haven't you?

[Smiles and nods] I must have been a real arsehole in previous life.

Can you tell us what happened with Chris?

We gave him the arse.

What led you to that decision?

It's a boring story and I'm not going to waste time re-hashing details. But I will say this: The Blackhearts is a five-piece band, not a five piece band featuring someone's ego.

What do you consider your greatest achievement?

Signing to Deadset Records. Thank bloody God.

Thank God?

If we hadn't have signed to Deadset, there's not telling what we'd be doing now.

Sounds serious.

Life is serious.

What's your current state of mind?

I don't know. Good, I guess. I suppose it depends on what time it is and how drunk I am.

Are you happy?

Right now? Yeah, I am.

What's the happiest you've ever been?

[Thinks] Signing that contract. Falling in love...

Are you in love?

That's a bit personal, don't you think? Next.

Are you romantic?

[Smiles] Sometimes.

What's your idea of perfect happiness?

[Laughs] Swimming in a pool of Jack Daniel's. What else?

What about your greatest ambition?

That would be waking up tomorrow morning.

What about treasured possessions? Got any favourites?

Oh, s**t, um... I've never really thought about that. My guitars, I guess. I don't need a lot of "stuff" to make me happy.

Have you still got your first guitar? The one your parents gave you?

[Laughs] Wish I did. It was the last thing my father gave me before he died.

What happened to it?

I hocked it.

Hocked it?

You know how it is.

So, what's your favourite journey?

Journey? I guess that would be to the nearest bar. [Laughs]

What do you most dislike?

Arrogance. Or pretentiousness. Arrogance and pretentiousness. Same goes for what people think about music. Oh, you like Mozart? That's great, he's not my cup of tea and that album he made four hundred and something f**king years ago didn't really float my boat, but I'm not going to s**t on you for your musical tastes and you shouldn't s**t on me for mine.

What's your greatest fear?

Going back to washing dishes. Or delivering pizzas.

What's your greatest experience?

Music wise?

Anything.

Well, musically, I'd have to say it was the gig at The Corner Hotel where we Nicolas Fein from Deadset Records. We played a killer set and the energy in the room was mind-blowing. It was an insane experience.

And got you a record deal.

Yeah, it did.

What's your greatest experience outside of the music scene?

You're not going to let that go, are you?

Okay, what about your greatest extravagance?

[Laughs] If I can drink it, snort it, or hit it, then it's on my list.

Who do you most despise?

The Reverend Fred Nile. I don't know about you, but I think the attempt to appoint himself as the moral yardstick for a whole country reeks of vanity and pride.

What's your biggest regret?

Oh, man, just one? I've got a list as long as your arm.

How do you deal with that?

[Drags on his cigarette] How do you think?

If you hadn't started playing guitar, what would you be doing now?

I don't know, maybe working in a petrol station somewhere. Probably still delivering pizzas.

Apart from playing guitar, is there another talent you'd like to have?

I'd like to be able to write. Or maybe play a sport of some kind.

Do you follow the football?

Not my thing.

Footy's a way of life in Victoria.

I noticed that.

If you could live anywhere in the world, where would it be?

I don't know. I've haven't seen enough of it to make that kind of decision. Maybe Europe, London or Germany.

Has anything ever taken you into the depths of misery?

Jesus, man. Who let Debbie Downer in? Next.

What is the trait you most deplore in yourself?

My lack of patience. Next.

If you could change one thing about yourself what would it be?

My lack of patience.

How would you like to die?

Happy.



HARRY ENGEL

FRONTMAN/VOCALIST

You're a country boy, right? From Wanane in country Victoria?
Up past Gippsland, that's right.

Do you miss it?
[Thinks] Sometimes things seem so big they're insurmountable... But then you finally let them go and when you turn around to look back at them, you realise how small and insignificant they were. You know what I mean?

Yeah, I think I do.
It's best not to dwell, right?

The first time I saw you play I was blown away. You've got an incredible voice, arguably one of the best in the business. So, when did you realise you had this immense talent?
I guess always knew, but there was no point in telling anybody. There's not a lot of opportunity for vocalists in Wanane, unless you're in a church choir and I wasn't going anywhere near God.

You're not a believer?
I can't understand how a supposedly benevolent god can allow bad s**t to happen to good people. I mean, some people deserve the bad s**t that happens to them. But the good people, the God-fearing people... He's already got their love and their faith, so what more does He want?

Was the lack of opportunity what brought you to Melbourne?
I wasn't really a conscious decision. One day, I just hopped on a train and ended up here.

Did you know anyone when you moved to the city?
Not a soul.

But it was a turning point, right?
[Smiles] If I hadn't taken that chance, I would be here playing with

The Blackhearts and talking with you.

So, what prompted you to just get up and go?
Restlessness.

Just like that?
I like the idea of living each day like it's my last.

That's a great philosophy, but it must have been hard when you first arrived here.
Well, I didn't have any money, so I spent the first few nights sleeping on the beach. It was cool... Staring at the stars, listening to the waves. A few days later, I scored a job washing dishes at The Prince of Wales. After that, I started auditioning with a bunch of different bands.

And that's how you connected with the guys from House Arrest.
I saw their ad in Juke... Or RAM... I can't remember now. But I rocked up to the audition and got the gig.

That was what, four weeks after you arrived?
Three.

That's a testament to your talent. Some people go months before scoring a gig.
I think it was more about being in the right place at the right time.

You play piano too, right?
We had an old piano in the house. No one ever played it. When I was little, I used to sit on the stool and bang on the keys. I loved the sounds it made, even if they were bad sounds. The sounds the piano and I made together. I'd sit there for hours doing that. Till my dad got s**tted off and smacked me in the head. (laughs)

Do you play anything else?

I play some guitar. Enough to work out basic chord structures and stuff but that's about it.

Who were your musical influences growing up in Wanane?

Floyd, Sabbath, Zeppelin, Deep Purple, Queen, AC/DC... But I also loved The Beatles, The Who, The Doors, The (Sex) Pistols, Depeche Mode and a few German artists like The Scorpions, Klaus Nomi and Nina Hagen. I loved, still love, a lot of different stuff.

You started writing songs when you were a kid, is that right?

Yeah, I guess. We didn't have a record player but my friend who lived on the next block did. I'd be at his place all the time playing his records over and over again listening to the different instruments and trying to figure out what they were playing. I'd keep it in my head then I'd run home and bang it out on the piano. When I couldn't figure out exactly what they were playing I'd make it up. It was hard trying to do that with the radio 'cause it could be days before I'd hear the same song again. When my friend left town, he took his record player with him, so I just started making everything up.

Apart from singing and writing songs, what else do you like to do?

I like painting and drawing and watching movies. I'll watch anything. Doesn't matter if it's good or bad, I'll always watch it till then end.

Even if it's bad?

[Laughs] Yeah, man. Someone went to all the trouble to make that thing. The least I can do is watch it all the way through, you get what I mean?

**What's your idea of perfect happiness?**

Is there such a thing?

Can you remember a time when you were happy? Really happy?

I don't think I can come up with specific moments... I guess I'm happiest when I'm connecting with someone. I mean, really connecting with someone. Physically, emotionally, spiritually. When I feel like I understand them, and they understand me. That's when I get it. That's when I get what life is all about.

Are you happy now?

[Smiles] I am.

So, who or what is the greatest love of your life?

[Smiles] When I was a kid, I used to have a dog called Brutus, which was great 'cause everyone thought I was a weird kid. Me and Brutus... We were tight, we did everything together, went everywhere together.

Man's best friend?

Until he disappeared.

Disappeared?

Yeah. One day I woke up, and he was just... Gone. I still have no idea why or what happened.

Wow, that's sad.

Yeah, it is.

What about possessions? What's the most treasured thing you own?

Things are like people. As soon as you start tying yourself to them... It makes it harder when you lose them.

What about your favourite journey? Can you recall a favourite?

The drive along the Great Ocean Road. I mean, have you ever seen anything more spectacular? Or driving through the Black Spur. Mother nature, man. There's nothing more awe inspiring.

What is it that you most dislike?

Conformity. And boredom. Boredom is the enemy of the people.

What's your greatest fear?

Dying alone.

You didn't even have to think about that. So, how would you like to die?

In the arms of loved ones. [Smiles] And I kinda like the idea of watching my own funeral. Hearing people talk about me, how great I was—or how sh**ty I was. Either way I'd be the star of the show.

What's your greatest experience?

I've had a lot of great experiences.

Can you tell us about them?

[Laughs] No.

What's your greatest extravagance?

[Looks at his bare arms] My tats, man. Works of art, each and every one of 'em.

What do you despise? Or more importantly, who do you despise?

Despise? That's a strong word.

Yeah, it is. So, is there anyone in your life who makes your blood boil?

Not anymore.

What about your greatest regret?

[Laughs] Not getting drunk enough before this interview.

Where would you like to live?

I'm happy here.

Has anything ever taken you into the depths of misery?

Most people hate being miserable. They do everything they can to avoid it. They were happy once, and they felt great. And they remember how they felt and how good it made them feel, so then they crave it and spend all their time trying to get it back, trying to recreate the moment that made them happy. But what they don't get is that there is beauty and value in misery, just the same as there is in happiness.

That's quite profound.

Only because it's true.

What do you like about yourself?

[Thinks] That I'm not like other people.

What do you dislike?

That I'm not like other people.

You've got a great voice, but apart from that, is there another talent that you wish you had?

Oh, s**t, I have no idea. I've never really thought about that. Sports maybe. But not just any 'ol sport like footy or cricket. Something beautiful. Like gymnastics or kung fu.

Last one: If you weren't singing with The Blackhearts, what do you think you'd be doing?

Oh, man, I don't know. Still washing dishes at the Prince probably.



TOMMY

ROBERTS

BASS GUITAR

You're originally from Brisbane, is that right?

I was born in Hong Kong but grew up in Brisbane. My parents moved to Australia before my first birthday.

So, how long have you been in sunny Melbourne?

[Laughs] Sunny doesn't really describe it, does it?

It's sunny during the summer months.

Yeah, I guess. I've been here a few years now, you know? Almost three.

Are you planning on staying?

Oh, yeah.

So, how come you made the move?

Ha! I wasn't coming here, you know? I was going to stay in Sydney.

What happened in Sydney?

It wasn't really my scene. It was okay, you know? But it was a bit too 'American' for me. A bit too polished. I wanted something raw and real, you know?

So, you decided to try your luck in Melbourne?

A couple of friends of mine had moved here the year before. So, I bummed a ride from some bloke I met in Kings Cross and made my way down.

Did you have gigs lined up when you got here?

Nah, mate, not a thing. But my friends were working, playing a few gigs. They hooked me up with Alan Slaughter.

From Spunk System?

You know Alan?

Not personally. But I know he didn't achieve the success he was looking for.

Nah, he didn't. It's a shame too. Alan was a great guy, they all were. Old school punks and whole lot of fun to play with, you know?

So, how'd you go from playing with Spunk System to auditioning for The Blackhearts?

[Laughs]] Bands in this town... It's like a revolving door. One minute you're in this band, the next minute you're in that one. I knew about Joel and that he was auditioning for The Blackhearts. I didn't think anything of it 'cause I was happy with Spunk System. Then I get a call from Alex Manson...

Spunk System's bass player?

I could tell there was something wrong when he was talking to me, you know? I could hear it in his voice. Finally, he tells me that Gary OD'd.

That was a sad day.

Yeah, it was f**king terrible. I couldn't believe it.

And Spunk System dissolved shortly after that.

Yeah. Gary's brother Alan was shattered. Gary was the lifeblood, you know? Alan couldn't do it without him. I was totally bummed... He was my friend, you know? Thought about going back to Queensland for a while until I saw Joel's ad in the paper. Joel's an amazing guitar player, and a really cool cat... The moment I walked into the rehearsal room I felt at home the minute I walked into the rehearsal room, like I'd known Joel and Karen all my life. It was surreal.

You and original drummer Shane Hafner worked closely... How did you feel about his sudden departure from the band?

It was crazy, man. Me and Shane were the back line, the architecture for the whole thing. We were tight. I mean, really solid. But when you're working together, day after day, you've got to have respect for each other, as people, as human beings. And we're all really different guys. There was s**t going on, s**t simmering beneath the surface.

You mean there was stuff going on between you and him? Or him and the rest of the band?

If you've got s**t with one of us, you've got s**t will all of us. Sometimes you just can't make things work the way you want 'em to, you know? You can't force that s**t. People have to want to work stuff out. But if you can't... Sometimes the only way to deal with it is to end it. And that's what happened.

How did you feel about Billy's arrival?

I love Billy, he's a really great guy. He's been around the traps and he doesn't buy into any bulls**t. We get along great. We just get down to business and get the job done, you know. It's bloody brilliant.

You play drums as well as bass?

I play a bit of everything, man, drums, bass, guitar, keyboards...

That's a lot of talent.

I'm no good with words, but music. I can say all I need to with music.

Who are some of your musical influences growing up?

Oh, s**t... I got a lot of Frank Sinatra and Dean Martin and Sammy Davis Jr. when I was growing up. My dad loved those old crooners. He'd play 'em over and over. (Laughs) But I was right into punk—The Clash, The Ramones, New York Dolls, (The) Velvet Underground, The (Sex) Pistols... Anything that was loud and angry.

What do you consider to be your greatest achievement?

Being in this band. I knew we'd do well, but this, where we are now is... Surreal.

What is your idea of perfect happiness?

Being alone with someone I love in peace and quiet.

That's an odd answer from someone who loves their music loud and angry.

[Laughs] Oh, don't get me wrong, man. I love the noise. But I also appreciate the quiet. Just zoning out and enjoying the peace. The Japanese call it Zen or something. Is it Japanese? Or maybe Chinese. You'd think I'd know that. Whatever...

Is there someone in your life who shares your interest in Zen?

Yeah, kinda.

Care to elaborate?

Nope.

So, what's your current state of mind?

Oh, you know? Some days are better than others. But most days I'm pretty focussed and on the ball.

What is your most treasured possession?

[Eyes light up] My 1956 Black Beauty. All original.

Wow.

I know, right?

How'd you score that?

A friend of mine had been hanging onto it for years. He knew I wanted to buy it, but that I never had any money. I finally took it off his hands a couple of weeks ago.

Is that your greatest extravagance?

[Smiles] Definitely.

A dream come true. Congratulations.

Thanks, man.

So, tell me about your favourite journey.

What? Like on a plane or something?

Yeah, a plane, train, boat. Have you got a favourite trip that you could do over and over again?

Not really. Although I do like hiking. Used to do a lot of it in Queensland. I guess it goes back to that Zen thing. I can start walking with a whole lot of s**t on my mind, but by the time I get back I've usually got it sorted.



Have you done in hiking since you've been in Victoria?

Nah, mate. No time. Been too busy. One day, though...

When and where are you the happiest?

[Smiles] When I'm with a girl. Of course.

What do you most dislike?

Small dogs. I'm mean, what's the point of them?

What's your greatest fear?

Disappointing people. Disappointing fans. Disappointing those who love me and look up to me.

What's your greatest experience?

Of all time? Phew, that's a tough one. Maybe scuba diving on the Great Barrier Reef. Seventy percent of the planet is covered with water.

That must have been amazing.

It was. There's a whole other world down there. Everyone should try it at least once, you know?

Good to know. So, who or what do you most despise?

Arrogant people. I f**king hate 'em. People who think they know what's best for you and tell you what to do. I just want to tell them to go f**k themselves. Nine times out of ten I do tell them to go f**k themselves.

I bet that's got you into some trouble.

[Smiles] Oh yeah.

What's your greatest regret?

Regret? Nah, I don't get caught up in regret. If you make a mistake, learn from it, and move on.

You're a talented musician, but is there another talent you wish you could have?

I wish I was good with money. Maybe I wouldn't be so broke all the time!

Where would you like to live?

Right here, in Melbourne. This is my home now.

Are you parents still in Queensland?

Yeah, they are. I haven't seen 'em for a while. I guess I should think about that.

Has anything ever taken you into the depths of misery?

The lowest depths? I don't know, maybe feeling alone in a crowded room. But that doesn't happen very often. Usually, I'm the life of the party.

What is the trait you most deplore in yourself?

[Smiles] That a I can be a little flirty. It gets me into trouble sometimes, you know?

If you could change one thing about yourself what would it be?

[Looks down at himself] What are you talking about? This is the picture of perfection right here.

How would you like to die?

Choking to death on a pair of women's panties that I pulled off with my teeth. [Looks around sheepishly] Did I just say that? Maybe don't print that.



BILLY

BUTLER

DRUMS

So, you're the new guy.

[Smiles] Yeah, I'm the new guy, ey?

How did it feel coming into the band after Shane?

I know Shane. Our paths had crossed a few times. This business is kinda inbred. Everyone generally knows everyone else. I thought he was an all right bloke, but you know, his loss is my gain. I'm sure it was hard for the other guys; it's always hard losing a regular member, but I didn't have a problem with it. I'm stoked to be playing with these guys.

You grew up on New Zealand's South Island, right?

Te Waipounamu, that's right. On a farm, down past Christchurch.

So, how did a farm boy get into playing drums?

My family wasn't all that keen on music... We didn't even own a record player. We had a radio and the TV, but school's really where I learned about music and instruments and stuff. I was one of the only Maori kids there... It was a bit hard making friends, so I started playing drums in the music room at lunch time. It gave me something to do, ey.

You kept playing after you left school?

As soon as I quit school I moved up to Christchurch. I got a job and moved in with some cousins. They had a stereo and stacks and stacks of albums.

Can you remember some of them?

Oh, yeah, they had all sorts... Marty Robbins, The Beatles, Joan Baez, Elvis Presley, Dragon, Mamas & the Papas, Johnny Cash, Split Enz, Hello Sailor, Grateful Dead, Loretta Lynn, Max Merritt, the Beach Boys, Canned Heat... They had a lot of records.

So, how'd you get into playing with bands?

One of my cousins played guitar, didn't he? He knocked around with a few blokes who got together every now and then. Nothing serious, just a bit of fun. I tagged along and played with 'em a few times. I finally bought my

first kit from one of the old blokes who was in the group. He was the one who introduced me to his son, Kevin Kerehoma. Do you know him? He's pretty big back home. He was putting together a rock band and needed a drummer... I had a kit and plenty of time, so it all worked out okay, ey.

How did you hook up with the boys from Desolate Martyr?

They'd been playing around the traps in Auckland since the mid 1970s. They had a pretty big following for a punk band. I'd seen 'em play a few times and really dug their stuff. They were totally wild. When their drummer took off, I auditioned and got the gig. Later, we thought we'd try their luck in Australia, but I think we left our run for the West Island (Australia) a bit late... Punk had had its day and we had a bit of hard time finding an audience, ey. Eventually, everyone but me went back home. I stuck around for a bit. Waited to see if something would turn up.

Is that when you got the gig with House Arrest?

Yeah, bro. Just in time, too. I was just about to get on a plane to go home.

Seems like it was meant to me.

Yeah, I've been lucky, that's for sure.

So, what's your current state of mind?

[Laughs] My mind? Oh, hung over, man. We're gonna have to wrap this up pretty soon, ey.

Just a few more questions, is that all right?

Yeah, mate.

What's your most treasured possession?

My signed Bernie Fraser football jersey.

Bernie Fraser?

Rugby union. Wellington and All Blacks.

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Very cool. What do you consider your greatest achievement?

Being good enough to play in this band, man.

What is your idea of perfect happiness?

[Smiles] Making great music. And getting laid. Even better, getting laid while making great music.

So, who or what is the greatest love of your life?

I think know the answer to that.

That would be beer?

[Winks]

She's going to send us all to hell.

[Smiles] I'm already damned, ey.

What is your favourite journey?

Journey? What, you mean like travelling and s**t? I don't know. I haven't done much travelling, but I hope this band is going to be doing a lot of it.

When and where were you the happiest?

Right now, man. Right here. This is the greatest time of my life.

What is it that you most dislike?

People who don't know how to use merging lanes. Drives me spare, ey.

What's your greatest fear?

That one day it's all going to end.

What's your greatest experience?

The Springbok tour in '81. I know the tour was controversial but watching the Springboks go down to the All Blacks was unbelievable. History in the making.

Who do you most despise?

[Laughs] Are you causing trouble, mate? You are, aren't you? You know I can't tell you that. But there is one person... I can't say too much, but the second he steps out of line it's good night Nancy.

Is this person in the band?

No way! I love these guys.

What's your greatest regret?

F**k regrets, mate. Just live your life, enjoy it while you're here. If you're unhappy with something, change it.

Which talent would you most like to have?

Playing rugby, of course.

Where would you like to live?

Anywhere other than where I'm living now. I'm currently sharing a flat with wino and a family of cockroaches. Several generations of them actually, and they are straight up d**ks.

Has anything ever taken you into the depths of misery?

Misery? Nah. I've been sad and hurt and disappointed, but nothing that's driven me to the point of wanting to slash my wrists or anything like that, ey. I'm not a fan of unnecessary conflict.

What is the trait you most deplore in yourself?

Deplore? What?

Is there something about yourself that you don't particularly like?

[Laughs] What are you talking about? I'm perfect, mate. Nah, really, I can be a bit thick sometimes. I'm not as smart as I'd like to be. Not like the blokes in this band! I probably shoulda stayed at school.

You dropped out early?

Yeah, mate. Grade nine.

That's early.

I wasn't really one for book learning.

How would you like to die?

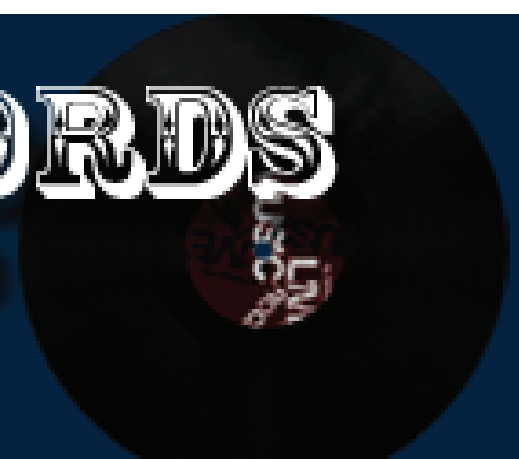
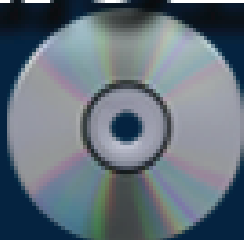
Oh, that's an easy one—drowning in a pool of beer after scoring the winning try in the Bledisloe Cup. [Smiles] Yeah. That'd be cool.

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BATT

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What were you doing before you joined The Blackhearts?

I was doing a bit of session work. I wasn't really interested in joining a band full-time. I was more interested in making a name for myself as a session player.

You did some sessions with Ian MacKaye from Sonic Downfall, right?

Yeah, I worked on a few tracks for his solo project, four or maybe five. How'd you know about that?

No one can keep a secret in this business. Was Ian the one who told you about The Blackhearts?

Bloody hell, I better be careful about what I say! But no, it was actually Shane Hafner who told me about The Blackhearts. I knew he was playing with them, and I'd heard about Joel...

So, if you weren't looking for a full-time gig, what made you change your mind about joining The Blackhearts?

[Laughs] Are you kidding? Have you heard Joel play? Not only that, he was really easy going. The whole thing just clicked. It felt like we'd been playing together for years.

You and Shane Hafner worked closely together providing the backline for band... How did you feel about his unexpected departure from the band?

He made his choice.

Do you still see him?

Every now and then I'll run into him round the traps.

How's he doing?

No idea. You'd have to ask him that.

Do you feel any sense of loyalty to him? After all, he was the one who introduced you to Joel.

Look, I'm sorry for the way things turned out but shit happens. Egos, values, priorities... Sometimes these things just don't gel the way you hope they will. Better that we got s**t sorted now and not when we were on the road or something.

You grew up in Melbourne, right?

Born and raised.

Ever thought about moving?

Nah, mate. I'm happy right where I am.

You've worked with a couple of high-profile bands.

It's one of the best things about being a session player.

You haven't always been a session player though.

Nah, I've been part of a few bands as well. Nothing really steady though.

You formed Children of the Corn when you were still in high school, is that right?



LISTEN UP
who's hot, who's not

Yeah, that's right. How'd you know about that?

How did Children of the Corn come about?

Me and Ronny Tiller thought being in a band would be a great way to pick up chicks. We coned a couple of other blokes, Blake Daley and Frankie Lord, to join in with us. We couldn't play for s**t, but we thought we were cool. Eventually, we started playing actual gigs, birthday parties and stuff. It was nuts. I couldn't believe people wanted us to play. That's when I realised I had to get serious.

Who were your musical influences growing up?

I was pretty lucky. My school had a really great music program that introduced us to a variety of different styles, everything from Mozart to Manilow (Barry) to Motorhead. [Laughs] Our music teacher idolised Lemmy Kilmister, which was fine by me, but appreciation for Mozart was kinda lost on a bunch of unruly fourteen-year olds.

What do you consider your greatest achievement?

I don't know that I've had any achievements. I've had some great times and done some cool s**t, but I haven't really set a specific goal and reached it if that's what you mean. Apart from being a professional musician. I guess that's an achievement. But it was never really a goal, it was... A given. I don't know. I don't think about that s**t too much. I just get out there and play and go wherever it leads.

What is your idea of perfect happiness?

Zoning out with a good album. Just letting go and getting the music to take you away. It's bliss man.

What is your current state of mind?

My state of mind? Wow, okay. I'm good. I think.

What is your most treasured possession?

I don't know. My guitars, my books, my record collection... I don't know. I guess I'm not really into "things".

What or who is the greatest love of your life?

You know my girlfriend's gonna read this, right?

So, you're seeing someone.

Yeah, I am.

That's it?

[Nods]

Fair enough. What about your favourite journey? Have you got one?

The internal journey. When you think you know something really well, but then a piece of information, or a bad trip, or something random completely changes your point of view. A lot of people hate that, but I love coming to new realisations.

When and where were you the happiest?

When I was a kid. No cares, no responsibilities.

That time flies, doesn't it?

Yeah, it does.

What is it that you most dislike?

Watching strong people that you've known since childhood become seriously ill, mentally or physically. I come from a pretty tight family and, yeah, seeing that kind of stuff with people you love... I hate it.

I know the feeling. You know someone who's seriously ill?

Two people actually. My brother committed suicide and my mother's got Multiple Sclerosis.

Wow, I'm sorry to hear that.

[Nods]

What's your greatest fear?

That I'll end up with the same kind of weaknesses.

What about your greatest experience?

Playing music in front of a crowd. It's like a drug, man. Once you've had a taste...

What's your greatest extravagance?

[Laughs] After guitars? Books. And making time to read.

Who do you most despise?

Malcolm Fraser. I'm glad the motherf**ker's gone.

What's your greatest regret?

Not being able to help my mum.

Which talent would you most like to have?

I'd really like to be good with money. I'd like to be able to turn one dollar into ten. When you've got money, you've got freedom. Right now, it just burns a hole in my pocket.

Where would you like to live?

In the world?

Yeah, anywhere in the world.

Well, I haven't seen it all so it's kinda hard to say but maybe the UK. Or somewhere in Europe.

Has anything ever taken you into the depths of misery?

Have you ever blacked out right in the middle of your favourite song?

Blacked out? Can't say I have.

Well, I have. Too often. And it really bums me out.

What's the trait you most deplore in yourself?

Being an introvert.

If you could change one thing about yourself what would it be?

I'd like to be smarter.

How would you like to die?

In my bed and off my face.



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