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THREE DAYS GRACE

TAKIN' CARE OF BUSINESS

Three Days Grace took their job as hard-rocking party people so seriously that it almost destroyed them. Luckily, they fought their way through it.



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There's really not much to do in Wichita Falls, Texas. This small city of just over 100,000 inhabitants is most notable for its devastating tornado in 1979, and its university, Midwestern State. It's not the best place for Three Days Grace to play. They're trying to keep busy during the long, monotonous days on the road, but in Wichita Falls, boredom is setting in.

"There's not a hell of a lot here," says TDG's frontman Adam Gontier. "I'm in the bus, that's pretty much what we do, just hang in the bus."

The bus is parked outside a "pretty big coliseum" so they're not even near a golf course, a sport the group have picked up recently. Gontier and the rest of the band, drummer Neil Sanderson, guitarist Barry Stock and bassist Brad Walst, don't even want to party. All they want to do is sightsee.

"It's cool to do your homework and find out a little history of where you're at instead of waking up at 3 p.m. and waiting for your show," says Sanderson. "I like getting out there and seeing what's around me."

Three Days Grace have come a long way since bursting onto the alt-rock scene three years ago with their raucous, heavy, self-titled debut. Back then, the group were on a one-way trip around the world stopping in almost every locale. Golfing and sightseeing were definitely not part of their extra-curricular activities, but getting trashed was.

"Last time, it was our first time out so we were living it up," says Gontier. "This time around it's going to be about work and trying to do the right thing." ➤

NO SUGAR TONIGHT

Doing the right thing is something TDG also took to heart when making their new record, *One-X*. Fans will be pleased that the band have stuck to their proven formula of aggression and passion, but getting that sound didn't come as easily as it did three years ago.

The band started the songwriting process at home in Toronto. However, the city, as Sanderson says, "wasn't the right place for us." They had to retreat to the drummer's northern Ontario cottage to get the job done.

When it came to recording, the band initially recruited ex-Big Sugar drummer and the producer of TDG's first album, Gavin Brown. Hooking up with Brown was a no-brainer. He not only helped create an album that sold over one million copies in the U.S., but his collaboration with TDG garnered him a Juno for producer of the year. Clearly the band were hoping to repeat their past successes, but Gontier says the relationship wasn't as symbiotic this time around.

"There were a lot of things going on," says Gontier. "It just wasn't moving as fast as we wanted it to. There was a lack of focus when we started working on the second record in Toronto with Gavin. I think that maybe he had a lot of things going on personally and professionally, so his focus wasn't there. We could see that and we wanted to change that."

After giving Brown the pink slip the band decided to test their luck in L.A. They met with a few producers, and settled on Howard Benson, who's best known for his work with P.O.D. The union definitely worked in TDG's favour. Benson pushed Gontier's vocal abilities, trying to get him to belt out more melodies than screams.

"The whole time we were recording, Mike [Benson's engineer] was recording music, guitar and all that stuff," says Gontier. "While they were doing that I was sitting in the vocal booth with Howard coming up with crazy harmonies and melodies. That was a different thing for me."

Because of Benson's influence, *One-X* is a far more focused and melodic affair. Gontier still managed to fit in a few guttural yells, but for the most part this record is rock radio's wet dream.

LOOKING OUT FOR #1

The music is only part of *One-X*. Ever since the release of TDG's provocative first single "I Hate Everything About You" Gontier's lyrics have been the centre of much debate. Allmusic.com has called them "direct" and "blunt" while others have complained that they're too negative. This time around, critics will undoubtedly focus on how personal the record is. Although Gontier won't go as far as calling *One-X* a concept album, it's pretty obvious that the songs tell a story.

"The record's just about feeling alone," says Gontier. "There's always people around you when you're on the road and people are always pretending like they know you. You start to feel isolated by the fact that everybody doesn't really know you. Every night you're always expected to entertain people. They knock on your bus door and they talk to you like they've known you for years."

"Animal I Have Become," the band's newest single, talks candidly about this isolation and how it affected the band. "I can't escape this hell/So many times I've tried/But I'm still caged inside/Somebody get me through this nightmare/I can't control myself."

But the song's chorus alludes to something more sinister. "So what if you can see/The darkest side of me/No one will ever change this animal I have become/ Help me believe/It's not the real me/Somebody help me tame this animal."

Is this really just about feeling alone? Like "Animal," some of the other songs on *One-X* reference a change in Gontier's personality, and it's impossible to miss the band's desperate pleas. Gontier admits that being away from family and friends, especially his wife, caused him to lose sight of reality. And when he returned home he struggled to reclaim his old self.

"After touring for two years I was numb," says Gontier. "I needed to figure out who I was. I was a selfish person on the road, just worrying about myself and having to deal with the things that I needed to get done everyday. When I got home I realized that wasn't the most important thing. I figured out the hard way that I had to change and become a better person."

"Coming off the road we were pretty shell-shocked," adds Sanderson, who also had a tough time adjusting to home life. "The road can get the better of you and we definitely lost ourselves out there a little bit. You have to spend time and find your normalcy and figure yourself out."

The band are now in the middle of another lengthy tour, one that will again take them all over the world. It's hard not to wonder if the feelings of isolation and alienation will affect the band as much as they did during their first jaunt around the globe. Gontier says they've taken precautions to avoid their past mistakes.

"The main thing for me is we all have to be in the right environment," says Gontier. "Everybody in the TDG family all realize what we have to do and what's most important. Definitely partying every night on the bus is not really important."

"You can't stop anybody from having drinks on the bus, but you can tell when somebody comes on the bus and has a bad vibe about them or if they're into something a little more hard than just hanging out. You can tell that stuff right away. The people that we feel shouldn't be around, we won't be around them."

RUNNING BACK THRU CANADA

At the Sony BMG offices in Toronto, The Guess Who's Burton Cummings and Randy Bachman are waiting to be interviewed by the CBC. They're chatting with a couple publicists, cracking jokes and standing so close together that you'd never guess they used to hate each other. In a nearby room I'm talking to Gontier and Sanderson about their own band turmoil. Talking to the two, you'd never guess that for two months they barely communicated, but according to Gontier the entire band had trouble co-existing.

"When we were out last time we definitely lost the communication factor between us all," he says. "Just because we were around each other everyday we started to feel like we just didn't communicate as well as we could have. That whole communication thing lasted a couple months and then we had it out in the front lounge and that's it. Now everything's totally great."

So TDG are able to deal with their interpersonal problems a lot better than The Guess Who, but the two groups have more in common than relationship issues. Just like the aging Winnipeg rockers, TDG are seeing success across the border that few Canadian acts get to experience. The band's last album went platinum stateside and sold more than 180,000 copies in Canada. And like The Guess Who, the group don't shy away from their northern roots.

"We're pretty damn patriotic," says Sanderson. "If I had my druthers we'd be up in Canada all the time. As a band we really make a huge effort in maintaining the Canadian side of things. We are a Canadian band and we're totally proud of that. We make sure that's a priority for us."

How else are the two groups connected? Well, Gontier and Sanderson once backed up Bachman and Cummings.

"They were getting inducted into the Songwriters Hall Of Fame and they were having a gala in Toronto so they wanted to put a band together," says Sanderson. "It was Adam and I, Tom Cochrane, Thornley, and we did 'No Time' and 'American Woman.' It all came together quite nicely."

What really ties these two bands together is that TDG have that same insatiable drive that could make them aging rock survivors themselves one day. If they can be smart enough to keep toning down the party and fight their demons while still staying intact, there's a good chance they'll avoid the casino circuit.

"We want to conquer the world," jokes Sanderson. "We want to be able to continue to do this. We've been doing this since we were kids. It would be absolutely cool to be playing as long as Randy and Burton — they're still top shelf musicians too, man." ☛

Killing Time

How Three Days Grace keep busy on the road, according to Neil Sanderson.

1. Sightsee
2. Golf
3. Xbox
4. Work on an upcoming DVD
5. Play on Myspace.com
6. Update their website
7. Drink ("It is the Jagermeister tour, so there's a bit of that too.")

