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Life in a goldfish bowl

Affectionately known by their own fans as You Fat Bastards, hardline delinquents FAITH NO MORE are conquering the world with their brutal hybrid of rock and pop. All this success - and they're still swimming against the tide

Story by Neil Perry

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Clad in a green surgeon's outfit, his white apron splattered with vermilion, Faith No More's exuberant frontman Mike Patton sees the chance for a little art terrorism, not to mention light relief.

With the camera trained on him, he picks up a bowl of fake gore and methodically daubs 'PIG' - the calling card left by Charles Manson's murderous followers, daubed in their victims' blood - on the wall of the video set.

Behind Patton the rest of Faith No More - drummer Mike Bordin, guitarist Jim Martin, keyboard player Roddy Bottum and bassist Bill Gould - go through the motions of miming to their latest single, 'Falling to Pieces'. Half an hour later Patton is dressed in lederhosen and full German trad dress, and this time the film crew wince slightly as the singer attempts to turn a chair and table into firewood on the spur of the moment.

"It's good we have a bit of violence and horror," nods Roddy approvingly, "because it's such a poppy and horribly upbeat song."

"Okay guys!" cries the tirelessly enthusiastic producer, "one more time, let's go!"

"Er, can't do it man," mutters Jim, desperately looking for an excuse, "we've taken acid."

"That's OK," comes the reply, "you'll fit in with everything else we've shot."

Faith No More have been mercilessly pushing their last LP, "The Real Thing", on the road for over a year now. In ten months their UK stature has grown from filling London's Marquee to being third on the bill at this year's Reading Festival; hence the release of the third single from 'The Real Thing', 'Falling to Pieces', and two long and frantic days spent in a South London studio shooting the video.

There is also a live video out on August 13, shot at the band's recent triumphant gig at London's Brixton Academy, entitled You Fat Bastards: "We felt a certain warmth when the crowd started shouting that at us," muses Jim, "a feeling of affection."

Yet while Europe was succumbing to Faith No More's brutal rock-pop hybrid, the band's homeland was proving harder to crack - until now. Ask Roddy if he's learning anything new about Faith No More and he'll tell you, slowly, savouring each word.

"Yeah...four hundred and seventy one thousand, two hundred and fifty one copies!"

The news that the LP was fast approaching gold status in the US, together with the band's single 'Epic' having just sold 41,000 copies in one day, sent a buzz of excitement through the band and their manager Warren Etner (the LP has already gone gold in the UK). MTV and radio, the twin omnipotent gods of Stateside success, had finally woken up and pledged their support; the former now had the 'Epic' video on 'stress rotation' That's heavier than heavy rotation," explained a deadpan Roddy - and spiralling figures were bearing stark witness to MTV's unquestionable power.

To many bands, achieving such an aim would mean that for them the war was over; Faith No More's war could be just about to commence. There has been a classic tale of endurance and bitter struggle, at times sustained through their years on the poverty line by nothing but their comic, mutual loathing of each other and a shared musical vision.

Faith No More's debut LP, 'We Care A Lot', is still unavailable in Europe. Released in '85, the production is rough but the force of some of the music is inexorable, a lustful marriage of mutant metal and dancefloor verve that owed nothing to anybody (more solid tracks like 'Pills for Breakfast' and 'As The Worm Turns' still feature in the live set). It was that LP's title track that eventually brought the band to the UK's attention two years ago, the song having been re-recorded, included on the second LP, 'Introduce Yourself', and released as a single.

'Introduce Yourself' was constructed with piledriving rhythmic passion, the LP's highlights such as 'Chinese Arithmetic' and 'R' N' R' proving that the embryonic ideas on its predecessor were no pipe dream. But while antagonism and endless mind-games were all part of the band's internal makeup, singer Chuck Mosely's relationship with the rest of the band were fast deteriorating beyond repair. After the European tour to promote 'Introduce Yourself', it took a fight between Chuck and Bill before the singer went his own way.

As the new vocalist, young Californian Mike Patton perfectly complimented the giant sonic architecture of 'The Real Thing'. In terms of both heaviness and danceability Faith No More became ruthless matchmakers when and wherever you least expected it, and Patton's voice was the coup de grace; be it the Slayer on-ecstasy onslaught of 'Surprise! You're Dead!' or the addictive neo-pop of 'Falling to Pieces', Patton's style was and is brilliantly aligned. As for his fresh-faced, smooth-skinned Californian good looks, the rest of the band are well aware that he also comes over very well indeed on MTV.

Faith No More - this bunch of hardline adult delinquents, this gaggle of bullshit-detecting, anti-social miscreants - are now journeying into the belly of the great bullshit beast itself, suddenly decreed the quirky darlings of a media-governed public desperate for the next big name. A fine piece of subversion...or not?

"Hmm, subversive..." considers Bill during a break in the studio. "OK, we're talking about 41,000 records in one day, we're talking about the general American public, a very shielded and protected group of people. Very much like poor little lambs, and they could use a good jab with a hot poker every once in a while.

"The industry tends to reinforce things that are very safe and nice, like sex, if it's no threat people will buy the product. But if you're in the position to throw a wrench in the gears, you should do it, by all means."

Faith No More's American label, Slash, is affiliated to Warner Bros, and to add to the band's good fortune the President of Warner Bros is totally behind the band.

"I'd presumed that major record company people are all really ignorant shoe salesmen, but there are some people there who are actually into music. They may put up posters we didn't approve or something, but there hasn't been anything we've really found totally objectionable; and sometimes the most objectionable things are the best, the ones we like the most! It's great! Hilarious!

"The funny thing about us is, one day we're going to push it too far, we're going to take advantage and it's going to hurt us. I just see it, the way we are, we're going to burn a great big bridge. Things are going great and we like it, but not to the point where it's something we're going to try and hang on to. anything we'll try to fuck it off a little, just to see if we can get away with it."

The cool, laconic Roddy is feeling good. Now that it appears Faith No More might actually make some money for the first time in their career, he's beginning to take an interest in the business ("Before, we only had debts, and who wants to pay attention to that?") and is intrigued by the position the band now find themselves in.

"The other day at a soundcheck, Bill was shouting, Where's the soundman? Where's the fucking soundman? That was pretty funny - two years ago we were just glad to have a stage to play on. I'm sure we're all developing our own little attitudes, we're probably taking a little more advantage of what's given to us.

"When we started we were really pompous, pretty arrogant. We were deliberately offensive, and I think we still are. Shock value, it's always effective...and anyway, it's exciting. We've never had limitations before, but it's gotta happen sometime.

"But questioning things, definitely, that's pretty much our lives. Looking at what's gone on before with rock 'n' roll bands, and the delusions we've all had stepping into this thing and learning that, no, it's not that way at all, it never was and it's all such fucking hype. It's good to blow that out of the water as much as you can; as different as we are, that's the common bond."

Mike Patton seems unperterbed by any notions of mega-stardom, nor is he overly concerned about trying to impress those whom Faith No More might soon call their contemporaries.

At a recent European festival the band were sharing the bill with Lenny Kravitz and Sinead O' Connor: "You' re a special crowd," Patton told the audience, "so I' m going to tell you a secret. Right now, Lenny Kravitz and Sinead O' Connor are fucking backstage..." (Kravitz, watching from out by the mixing desk, was said to look suitably mortified).

Like the rest of Faith No More, Patton is still mystified by the rumour that circulated several months ago concerning his departure from the band. It made the pages of several music papers and lead to the vice-president of Slash records pulling Bill into his office, demanding to know what the hell was going on; he' d had a call from a DJ in Texas saying a girl claiming to be Patton' s girlfriend had visited him with some Mr Bungle tapes (Patton' s other band/hbby) and that he' d left FNM.

"What can I say?" chuckles Patton during a brief escape from the video producer' s clutches. "Uh, oh yeah, I was close to quitting, then they said, We' ll go to Australia. So I thought, OK, stay on and go surfing..."

Ten months ago Mike Patton wore an expression of permanent wide-eyed bemusement; is he coping better now?

"Yeah, I think so. I started out being fairly anti-everything. But I have this paranoia that people are trying to take advantage of me all the time. It' s happened before."

"That' s OK," Roddy tells him, "paranoia keeps you on your toes, there' s less chance of being taken advantage of. I' m trusting people in the record companies a bit more now, and it' s probably a big mistake."

Towards the end of the second and final day' s shooting, the band swap roles Bill becomes Mike Patton, who becomes Roddy, who becomes Mike Bordin, who becomes Jim who becomes Bill, and the way they mimic each other' s idiosyncracies so easily is a surreal sight.

Back at the band' s hotel, Jim and Mike Bordin settle around a table in front of the TV - conveniently screening a Chris de Burgh gig - and chew over the future of Faith No More. Mike, quiet, thoughtful and cynical, is the band' s loner; Jim, with his natural dude-speak, evil humour and party persona is...well, Jim just is, but in his spare time he' s the band' s philosopher-in-chief.

"We' re not doing anything like that," smiles Jim, disagreeing with Bill and Roddy' s earlier views. "I mean, they' re subversive people, to say the least."

"You mean, are we fucking up the status quo in some small way?" inquires Mike. "That this band is now getting support from the straight populace, that' s kind of erotic, kind of weird."

"I think it's nothing like that, man," counters Jim. "People listen to what they want to but their choice is narrowed by what's available. There are those that will dig deep to find what they need, and there are those that'll take what is easy, and that comprises most of the population. Now, the way it's going, they the people who don't dig deep they can find us, they don't have to dig deep, we're available. Great! We've done something to change pop music!"

Mike: "So that's subversive."

Jim: "Not at all, man. That's the workings of the business. The status quo chooses what it wants to be."

Mike: "Yeah, but if we're splashed all over the same press and TV as this (nods at the TV) we might become the disco of tomorrow, you know? If we become what is available, do we become the boring shit just as this stuff is?"

Faith No More have the inevitable accusations of sell-out already covered, having decided years ago that what they were doing - struggling to be successful - was already a sell-out, for anyone that cared to deal in such nihilism. The joy of Faith No More is that they do what they want while keeping the ability to be whatever you want them to be.

"'Falling to Pieces'," says Jim, "that song was written specifically for a purpose. It was meant to be a pop hit."

You sat and thought, We must write a pop hit?

"No, I didn't think that at all. I went in and said. Here, this song is going to make us money. Ha ha ha ha!"

What do you think of Faith No More and big money?

"Great," grins the guitarist, "big money is great. We're in among it right now. But all big money is a conversational topic, nobody comes into the room and opens the fucking briefcase. It's all swirling around us."

Mike snorts derisively at the TV as Chris de Burgh tells his audience he loves them.

"We're still learning all the dinosaur tricks," he says.

So what will happen when and if Faith No More become a dinosaur?

"We'll probably be long gone," shrugs the drummer, "too many people would push the button on it, if they got embarrassed by it or whatever. Maybe we'd get greedy like everybody else."

"I don't agree at all, man," cuts in Jim, true to form. "You never can tell, I don't see it, unless someone burns out. I think Faith No More will become a dinosaur, but it's just a fucking \*thing\*! We never really got along anyway! We're just gonna do stuff, man, and the record company's gonna put it out! This whole thing is just starting, and we're just starting to become a dinosaur..."

Life's been crapping on Faith No More for long enough, now it's payback time, and their wilful perversity, their sense of humour, their energy for the chase and their talent for making people think \*and\* move means that the outcome will probably be whatever you least expect.

"The funniest thing about the band," says Mike, "has to be all the predicting we do with each other. Like, if I leave the room someone else will say, He's gone to do such and such, and if someone else leaves the room I'll say, They've gone to do whatever...and it's always the way, right down to the second. It's true, it's a shitty, sad, black comedy."

"That's a little too dark a description for me," says Jim. "It's just these five brains desperately seeking to engage themselves. As I said earlier about what's available, we settle for simple methods of entertainment. Like, have you ever spent all your time with somebody? Lived with them, worked with them, ride the same route to work, come home with them, gone out with them at night? Well, if you did, you'd look for simple methods of entertainment, and in that way the time might pass without you noticing it so much, ha ha ha ha!"

"There's no way that any of us can swim out of this unscathed. If somebody left the band now it would take 'em years to get free of the web. Perhaps a lifetime..."

The sound of Faith No More is five worlds colliding, a one-off, a freak power surge. Whether it dies or rockets out of reach, make use of it while you can.