

JUST to GET AWAY*



A Brief Guide to Going on Tour in a DIY Band

Cover art: Glyn Smyth (scrawleddesign.blogspot.com). Design originally used as a shirt for The Endless Blockade 2010 tour of the southern US.

The image represents the onset of Ragnarök; when the old gods die and the Earth is born anew.



Photo from some squat in Germany, I forget which one it was.

This work, like most things of note in my life, is dedicated to the memory of Jonathan Shaw; the gap you left in the world will never leave me.

Some of the bands I've played in:

Joshua Norton Cabal (1989—present)

Sawn Off (1993-1996)

Ebola (1995-2000)

Shank (1998-2003)

The Endless Blockade (2003-2010)

Slaughter Strike (2008-2011)

Column of Heaven (2011-????)



A Brief Introduction

There's a more comprehensive "who I am" at the end of this 'zine; one that puts my motivations for producing this work on squarely on the table.

But here's the relevant outline that'll do for now.

I'm a wrong side of 35 year old man that's balanced a double life of social justice work (i.e. paid employment) on one side with a twenty year involvement in playing in intentionally obscure hardcore punk and grindcore bands (with some forays into death metal and a long history of involvement in unpleasant experimental electronics, or "noise" if you will).

At a conservative estimate there's around 100 releases in my discography at this point.

I've probably been on tour about twenty times in my life now, playing in North America, Australia, Europe and Japan.

Time has a cruel way of playing tricks on a person. As a much younger man I was mentally unprepared for touring and as a more, ahem, mature man it's physically hard work for me to go on tour these days.

Who This is For

Ignore what some say, the best days of your life aren't your school days, the best days of your life are being stuck in an overheated transit van with a bunch of other reprobates zipping about different continents playing your own soundtrack to the end of the world. You'll probably learn a lot more than school could ever teach you as well.

At the time of writing the last time I was on tour was exactly a year ago, when I'll go again

is uncertain at this point; most of my musical activities are intentionally restricted to the studio and occasional local show these days.

I guess in a sense I'm probably writing a part of this to the person I was fifteen years ago.

This isn't for hardened road warriors (I certainly wouldn't consider myself a hardened road warrior either by the way) and this isn't for people playing in twee indie rock bands. Not out of any sense of cultural competitiveness, but out of the fact that I don't know the realities of other scenes and cultures.

This is for bands that play basement shows and barely scrape by financially. This is for people that have stopped answering questions from their co-workers about where they play locally or if they ever think they'll make it big. This is for people whose co-workers probably don't even know of the double life they lead. This is for the people who make an unapologetically hellish noise for the benefit of a select few who see the beauty in that same hellish noise.

This is mostly written for straight white males (and is written by a straight white male), that's just the reality of our scene.

And like everything in life there is a hidden agenda at play here. Find the secret message and win a prize (instant illumination). The how to stuff in here is actually the least important information contained.

This is just a quick navigation guide to being out on tour.



This is not “the complete idiots guide to booking a tour” because it would go out of date too quickly.

A number of years ago Maximum Rock and Roll produced a yearly compendium called Book Your Own Fucking Life (BYOFL), a world resource directory for show promoters, DIY bands, fanzines, info shops etc etc. All listed by region.

And a few things became apparent very quickly, one, the info became out of date very quickly and two, most of the people in it were either total chancers, utterly clueless or just not worth contacting (bad bands, crappy promoters).

Booking tours had been going on for years, so people that were good at it, because they’d worked hard, didn’t want to have to field endless requests from people not looking to learn for themselves and just piggy back on others hard work.

And the big thing? The internet made BYOFL irrelevant.

A few years ago I would’ve extolled the virtues of booking a tour, or at least filling blank spots via Myspace (with some caveats attached), but now I wouldn’t recommend that at all. Myspace is a dead concern and quite probably doesn’t even exist by the time you’re reading this.



The Endless Blockade, final show.

July 2010

A List of Some of the Things I Don’t Talk About in this Guide

- How to make a demo to sell on tour (well covered by others and could take up a whole zine in and of itself)
- Why you shouldn’t focus on taking CDs with you at the expense of other formats (in a nutshell, no one buys them in hardcore)
- How to make shirts whilst on tour if you run out
- Whether you should rent or buy a van
- The benefits of mailing merch to yourself on tour versus taking it all with you
- What to do if your new record doesn’t come out in time for your tour (get used to this one)
- How to deal with a physical injury on tour

And a whole lot more. Most of this stuff, can and should be discussed amongst yourselves before you go. Just like everything in this zine I guess.

That Old “You Will Need” List

- Transportation.
- Musical equipment that works.
- Shows that are confirmed as being booked and that are routed in a way that makes sense and are easy to get to in the allotted time frame. For example, New York on Tuesday, Chicago on Wednesday and Boston on Thursday is a stupid routing.
- A sleeping bag.
- A change of clothes (my first stop on tour is always Target where I buy myself enough clean socks for the entire tour. New socks is that tiny luxury that stops me losing my mind).
- Maps to shows.
- Phone numbers for promoters and friends in cities you’re playing in
- A way for people to contact you would be useful (if you have a cell phone give the number to the promoters ahead of time), but (goes into old man mode) “I remember the days of going on tour without phones or GPS or the internet” (and those days could be hard at times, so there’s no romanticisation on my behalf there).
- Any ID you might need (passport, drivers licence etc.)
- Painkillers (and any daily medication you might need to take).
- A bunch of other stuff that you should think about before you leave.



Photo taken in some cave in Belgium

On Tour Etiquette, AKA How Not to Descend Into Hating Each Other by Day Three AKA How to Not Get a Terrible Reputation on Tour

OK, you're basically never going to be more than about 30 feet away from anyone else that you're on tour with every minute of every day for as long as you're away for; whether that's a quick one week getaway or a marathon coast to coast three month jaunt. So get used to having no privacy whatsoever.

When you're on tour you will have bad days. You will have days where you miss your dog, you're fed up with having no alone time, you'll lose your book when you're only one chapter from the end, you'll have a headache, you won't have slept properly in days, you'll be broke, someone ate your vegan burrito and the one left had cheese in it.

You get the idea.

Anyway, the people that you're staying with/ are booking your show/ lending you their bass amp because your tubes blew on the third show don't know this and nor do they care.

If you come across as bitchy, even if you have the best reason in the world for it, the only thing that person is going to take away from your interaction is this: **"man, that band were a bunch of ungrateful dicks."**

They won't even say "that singer was a clown" or "the bass player seemed to be having a bad day", they'll just tell all their friends that you guys were a bunch of idiots and they won't ever book a show for you again.

If things are really bad and you piss everyone off your entire tour will get cancelled, I could give you a number of disastrous examples of this, including three separate American bands suddenly stranded in Europe when their drivers decided they'd had enough of being baby sitters.

Some Basics

Whoever's driving gets to choose/ change/ disregard the music you're listening to at any time and you just have to accept it.

If you're not driving and you're sitting up front you have two jobs, one to give driving directions; two to keep the driver awake on crushingly boring long overnight drives.

Thus, if you're up front then you don't get to stick your iPod on and fall asleep.

Driver gets the choice of sleeping spot. If there's one bed, the driver gets it, the rest of you are on the floor.

Don't just expect that you can bring your girlfriend along if she's not in the band. In fact, even if you ask everyone if it's OK, people generally don't want to say "no" to you as they'll feel put on the spot. So don't do it, no one wants her around, they all really like her, think she's good for you and love hanging out with her, they just don't want to be around a couple for the entire duration of a tour.

This is because getting individual needs met on tour is difficult without having to navigate around a couple's wants.

Don't steal from every single gas station you hit on the road. When you get caught everyone has to wait for you whilst you're charged with stealing a bag of Onion O maze snacks and a freakishly strange colour of Mountain Dew you just had to try.

Tell someone if you're going somewhere, waiting for hours in the parking lot of a 7-11 whilst you go check out the medical curiosities museum is a drag. Also, other people wanted to go.

If there's no time to go to the medical curiosities museum then deal with it. This isn't your personal vacation.

If there's even one vegan/ vegetarian in the band then "we'll just stop at McDonalds on the highway for breakfast" is not an option.

Drugs, hmm, come up with your own boundaries and in van guidelines here.

Learn to set up and take down equipment quickly. Also, if you leave your fancy drum kit on stage and I'm in the band after you, you probably want to be the one breaking your kit down. I'm liable just to throw it off the stage to get it out of the way.

If you need something to go into the van, make sure you bring it out of the venue at load out yourself.

If you're too busy drinking beer with HipsterDezstroyer91, who happens to be your best e-buddy on ROFLviny.org to load out, don't complain that your cymbals are still in Pennsylvania when you're in Ohio.

Don't play for longer than anyone wants to hear.

Don't steal from people you stay with.

SEX

Like I said, you're never really very far away from anyone else at any given time, so on tour sex is not nearly as likely to happen as some people would like to believe.

But here's some quick stuff to remember.

Putting a guitar on you does not make you instantly desirable.

No sex in the room everyone else is trying to sleep in. I'm no prude, but seriously, fuck hearing your fumbling and grunting whilst I'm trying to sleep under a table in the kitchen next to the

cat litter box.

Condoms. Make sure you have them. Walking around a terrifying area of Chicago at 4am looking for a 24 hour drug store sucks. Make sure you use them.

Don't be a sex-pest. Flirting, sure, whatever, I don't really want to watch anyone doing it, but it's fine.

However, hitting on every single person that walks past you or asks you if you have any shirts in youth sizes is not cool. And see above about not getting a bad name on tour. I could easily share stories of bands that can't get shows because they're seen as predators.

You see that totally wasted girl that's a bit weird and has been hanging around all night, seemingly on her own? Don't sleep with her.

A former band mate referred to guys that sleep with obviously very drunk women as opportunistic rapists.



Crimson Ghost; Your Sensual Guide to on Tour Frolicking.

How to Cross a Border

There are some things specific to certain countries, but here's the general how to cross a border script.

First, if you don't have a passport don't even bother to try and cross. If someone in the van has a criminal record and you're trying to go between the US and Canada, the one that's not your home country probably doesn't want you.

Personally I'd say don't even bother, but sometimes it works out if they don't ask you anything (it happens)

There are a lot of variables in crossing a border, and I'll deal with a few of them later on, but here's some universal stuff.

- Smile and make eye contact when required. Appear engaged but not overly keen. Border guards look for people clearly squirming to get away and people who try too hard to be nice to them (it looks like you're hiding something).
- Have your passports ready, fumbling around for them is just going to annoy the guard who will then send you off somewhere else on site to get processed where they'll ask you more in depth questions.
- Border guards almost always ask you repetitive and stupid questions. What they're trying to do is see if your story changes or if you start showing signs of being under pressure. It's a rather ham-fisted psychological technique, but that's what they do and the repetition and seeming inanity is a part of it.
- If you're pulled to another area for questioning don't worry about it, it happens to me every single time I cross into the US.

What You Look Like Matters

I'm not suggesting you put on a business suit for a crossing, but it's best to reduce the amount of things a border guard might hassle you for.

- I always wear a button up shirt and jeans to cover my tattoos. Though in this day and age you might get the "cool" border guard that wants to show you their tattoos and talk about nipple piercings. This is something that appeals to me about as much having a conversation about sex with my grandmother, but perhaps that's just me.
- Wear some non-descript t shirt. Your cool Plutocracy shirt with the Sniping Pigz cover on the front (assassin on a building) and back print of a cop in a target with his brains being blown out might not be the best thing to wear.

Drugs

I would say don't even have them in the van, but... make sure everything's been consumed long before you hit the border and no one dropped a bag of weed in the dark after load in that they can't find (because those little dogs they have will certainly find it).

Also, don't smoke weed in the van, everyone can smell it when you open the door even if you last smoked days ago. This means that the bored traffic cop pulling you over can smell it as well. A band we were supposed to play at SXSW last year missed the label showcase because of this exact reason (and spent a night in a Texan jail).

Going to Europe

Too many variables for me to deal with here, but fly into Amsterdam, no one gives a shit if you're in a band. Going to the UK is tricky for non-EU citizens if you don't have paperwork to perform.

My quickest advice is to contact your show promoters and get their advice; people in the UK are used to it and generally have a sense of what's going on at the time and will instruct you accordingly.



Americans Crossing to Canada

There's a lot of disinformation about this but basically, if you're an underground band you can easily cross into Canada to play. You have to be playing all ages shows that aren't held in bars, but there are ways around that too.

Whenever I bring bands into Canada I provide paperwork that contains this phrasing:

The Venue is a "for hire" venue adhering to the rules and regulations outlined in the Citizenship Act, (the "Act"), making the foreign "Performing Artist" eligible for work permit exemption status R186(g). The Performing Artist and Agent agree to the rules and regulations of the Act and agree to not enter into an employment relationship outside that which is outlined in the "Agreement" with the Concert Promoter (who has contracted for their services). In addition the "Performing Artist" agrees not perform for the production of a movie, television or radio broadcast while in Canada.

Here's an explanation from a local promoter I know:

This explains to border officials that you are playing a "concert venue", not a "bar". The difference is that at a concert venue, people are going specifically to see your band play (and they are paying a significant cover charge) as opposed to a bar where somebody would walk in off the street and watch a bar band. In this instance you are actually creating jobs because the upstairs part of the venue is not normally open. [venue we use] is a "for hire" venue, they are open solely to allow your band to perform and will close approximately 45 minutes after the headlining band has finished performing.



Please keep in mind that laws change, so check with your show promoter and ask about the exemption clause R186(g).

Canadians Crossing into the US

Well, this one is the single most stressful thing about going on tour for me; "will we get over the border?"

And the quick answer is that if you drive up to the border in a van full of equipment and proudly proclaim that you're in a band but have no paperwork then no, you're definitely not getting over the border.

Here's the legal way to cross into the US: Apply for a P2 Visa. Currently I think it costs around \$500 per band member and you need to apply for it 120 days in advance. It'll last you one year, then you have to reapply.

So, if you're a four piece band you're looking at around \$2,000 to get your visas for one year, meaning that unless you're planning on touring the US a lot and you're going to make a lot of money at those shows (in a year you have to make \$2,000 before you even start covering tour expenses) it's probably not worth it. Also, I'm not really writing this information for you if your band is in that kind of a position

Also at the time of writing this (early 2011) the IRS is writing to all venues on foreign bands tour lists demanding they keep back 30% of their payment for tax purposes, thus making it even harder to break even on tour.

So you need an excuse for why you're crossing the border and you might need some way of travelling separately from your equipment.

Here's how I always cross a land border and this is not necessarily going to be feasible for you, depending on where you live and who you know. Other bands have their own ways of crossing, but I've never used any other method.

- I have someone from the US (usually friends from either Buffalo or Pittsburgh) drive to Toronto before the tour and pick up whatever we're taking over.
- We cross the border as tourists separate from the equipment.
- We pick up our equipment in the US and start the tour (in an American vehicle)

My stories to the border security are always 100% the truth, I just neglect to mention I'm playing shows; this way when they repeat the same dumb questions I'm not caught in my own lies and dragged off for questioning and eventual denial of entry.

So it goes something like this:

Border guard: where you going?

Me: Pittsburgh

Border Guard: Who are you going to see there?

Me: my friend xyz

Border Guard: How long will you be in the US for and what will you be doing?

Me: Probably about two weeks, planning on taking a road trip and driving up the east coast and will return to Canada via the Québec border

And none of this is untrue, it's just that my friend (the cunningly named xyz) is driving us on tour and our road trip up towards Boston will involve stopping every night to play a show.

So Why is This Even a Big Deal?

Well, it's not, but you have to treat it like one. Authority figures in general aren't very good at seeing incremental distinctions. They see that you have a guitar and in their eyes you're basically Metallica or the Rolling Stones; on your way to play huge arenas and get paid thousands of bucks every night and coincidentally you don't have the paperwork to allow you to work in the States. Or they think you're going to take lots of drugs and try staying permanently in 'merica (musicians apparently all love cocaine and having no legal status...).

But really you're just a small group of people that are going to play shows in basements and VFW halls and your music is of very limited appeal to most people.

You're going to barely make your daily costs back (if at all) and you're certainly not going to be able to pay your rent based on the money you're making whilst you're away.

In fact you're going to spend more money on the US economy (in gas prices alone, never mind food, drink, occasional lodgings and record shopping at every single city you stop at) than you're going to take from it.

But none of these assholes know that and it would be impossible to even explain it to them. Guitar = Metallica = millionaire (or guitar = layabout = drugs). The difference between Crossed Out and Marilyn Manson will forever elude these people, so don't even bother trying to explain.



Design for US east coast tour shirt 2009,
Justin Bartlett.

How to Deal with Money on the Road.

There are lots of different ways of doing this, mine is basically to:

- Keep merch and door money separate.
- Work out how much you owe for your merch and make that back first.
- Pay everyone out of the merch money once costs have been covered (so if your merch cost \$500 to make you have to sell \$500 of records, shirts and whatever else before you can start paying everyone).
- Pay gas and van expenses out of the door money.
- Always try and keep a float of 2-300 bucks in case you break down. Someone should have a credit card with them for this exact reason.

Like I said, every band has different way of doing this. Have one person in charge of money, keep a running tally of daily costs and expenses on a piece of paper/ notebook that you keep with your money. Try not to encourage the “can I take \$45 out of the merch to buy this rare Death Side 7” I just found?” mentality, that shit becomes a drag to deal with on the road very quickly.



Boston (the city, not the terrible band) says “don’t give up the day job just yet boys.” We laugh heartily and continue testing our audiences patience.



How to sell merch

Well, first, if people don't know you have anything for sale, they won't buy it.

- Find a decent spot to sell your stuff, ideally not right next to the "stage". It gets moshed on (and broken) and no one can see it.
- If you're a new band the old "we have shirts and tapes for sale at the back" thing between a few songs (not all of them, then you just seem desperate) works wonders.
- Remember to announce your name if you're that new so people know who to buy stuff from. This isn't as stupid or obvious as it might sound.
- You will find yourself constantly at the mercy of poor lighting, buy a travel light that you can put over your merch and remember to pack it up every night.

Displaying

- Some bands make fantastic foldable displays of all their available stuff using cardboard, duct tape, sharpies and a lot of ingenuity. I wish I had the skills to put these things together; they display your stuff well, are easy to set up and take down and if done right make amazing use of limited space.
- Separate one or two of each item that you're selling and use those for display purposes. People will rest beer on your merch table and they will knock it over, thus ruining your stuff. Keep your actual merch supply within reach but away from people who are going to spill beer (or vomit) over it (under the chair you're sitting on is a good space)
- Put shirts on the wall if you can. Again, same caution as above, one of each design for display purposes, use a size that isn't going to sell super fast (2XL or YL for example).
- Roll your shirts and use painters tape

to keep them rolled. Write the size on the tape. This makes it easier to store them in the van (either in a box or in a large kit bag), thus giving you more space for other things. It also makes it way easier to find sizes/ do shirt inventories. Plus, when you're bored out of your mind at the first show you can feel good about yourself by taking on the task of rolling and labeling the shirts.

Selling

- Have someone at each show be your dedicated merch seller. If someone's not pulling their weight during load in/out, volunteer them for the position.
- Someone should be able to take over to give them a break if they need to go to the bathroom, watch a band, go to the van etc
- Use a dedicated container of some sort for your merch money. It's usually a good idea to keep show money and merch money separate. I still have the same skull decorated pencil case that I've been taking on tour with me for over five years now. It demanded I buy it in Newbury Comics in Boston on the first day of tour one year. When it's quiet I whisper incantations into its open pocket and leave good luck spells in there.
- In general merch should be the first thing out of the van and the last thing in. There are always keeners hanging around that want to buy your stuff as soon as you arrive and never underestimate the power of the last minute impulse buy at the end of the show.
- And if it's the first thing out of the van, go secure yourself a decent table in a good spot. If some band turns up late to the show and you can share your table do it, you need to bank good karma on the road (otherwise your transmission will blow and kill the rest of your tour)
- After you've played if no one's selling

your merch (i.e. you didn't bring a friend along to do it) have someone go over immediately to get behind the merch table. When you've packed your stuff up go and relieve them so they can pack their equipment up.

- Make eye contact, smile, be polite, don't be a douche bag (see other section about getting a bad reputation as a band)

Why Doing Merch is Great

- If the show is packed, having a table to stand behind as a buffer zone is the best spot to be in.
- Doing merch is pretty much the main place where you interact with people you don't already know when you're on tour. It's where you get free beer, drugs, food, tips on who's selling their collection of rare records, spaces to sleep and stories for the next day's long drive.
- It gives you something to do on those super boring nights where you're just sitting around waiting to play.

Why Doing Merch is not Great

- Get ready for the same questions every single night from most people at the merch table.
- If you aren't a people person, this is not the tour job for you.



Shirts, you will start seeing them in your sleep and have nightmares about 3XLs

How to do a Band Interview

OK, this one's easy.

Personally I prefer to do interviews by e mail as I can edit anything I say that makes no sense, but sometimes someone armed with a recorder and a sense of eagerness pounces on you at a show

Setting

If you've just stepped off stage and need to pack up, ask the interviewer to wait a few minutes so you can take care of what you need to take care of

Find somewhere where there isn't a band playing or a horde of shouting drunks in the background.

Questions and Answers

If your band has a platform like veganism, feminism or any other ism then you can guarantee you will be asked questions on this. Not always particularly well thought out ones, so be prepared to be diplomatic or explain things in a way that doesn't make you sound hostile or stupid. Of course you might want to come across as hostile, so go nuts (and learn to laugh about it ten years down the road when you're embarrassed at some of the dumb shit you used to say like I have had to).

Have the most sober/ least idiotic band member answer questions.

If there's two of you answering the questions don't start arguing about each other's answers.

The quickest way for no one in the world to care about anything you have to say is for the interview to be in-joke tour related bullshit and frivolity.

Unless you're a rocket scientist and you have some amazing deeper insight you can go into, keep to the question being asked.

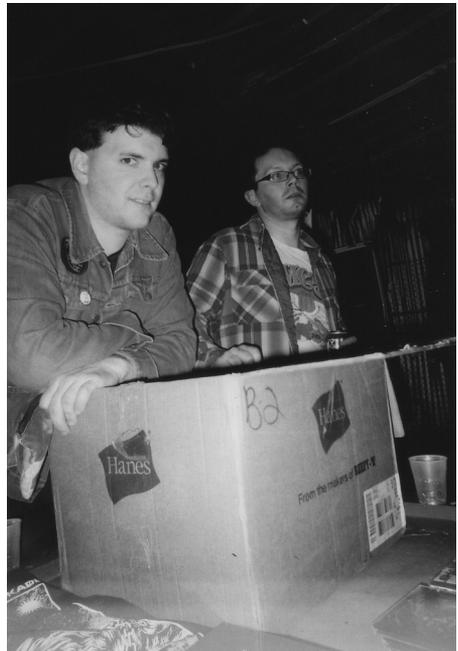
Don't be drawn into saying unpleasant things about other people unless you want to cause some kind of long term hassle. The printed word lasts a lot longer than you think.

You may start getting noticed outside of the tiny underground circle you play in and you may attract the attention of mainstream

glossy music magazines who may want to speak to you. Use a totally different tactic with these people; basically stick rigidly to what you want to talk about. The end feature will be edited to death and your stupidest sound-bites will be used.

All "music journalists" (as opposed to people writing zines) want to ask you if you have any Kerazy tour stories. This just demonstrates either a poverty of thought or they don't know anything about your band. I'm just putting this on the end here because the quickest way to disengage my interest in an interview is to ask me this kind of a question.

And my "hilarious" tour stories involve either an elderly relative of a guy we were staying with and human shit across every single surface (walls, furniture, floor) or a dead crusty in a Belgian squat or fearing that I was going to die on the Donner Pass in February a few years ago.



Fellow band members selling shirts in Texas, feel the excitement!

How to Deal with the Police if They Turn up to Your Show

This tends to happen a lot to me. In 2008 on our east coast and mid-west tour it felt like every single house show we played had police presence at some point in the evening.

What to do if the Show Might not be Getting Shut Down

- If you're playing, stop what you're doing, put your instruments down and turn your amps off.
- If you're not playing and you're inside the building cover your merch, hide your alcohol and be quiet.
- If you're outside the show, leave the area (sit in the van), or go inside the venue and round up as many people as you can. Hide any alcohol that may be visible.

This is the stage where cops are trying to suss out how much of a threat to world peace your show is. If everyone is relatively quiet when they show up it's usually an indicator that it's not an out of control free-for-all.

At this point you're in the waiting game stage. Nine times out of ten the police don't come into the space the show is happening, they inform the house/venue owners about a noise complaint and say they'll stop the show if they have to come out again.

If this happens, wait until they've left the area (give them ten minutes), then finish your set quickly (no extended encores tonight!). The game is to get through making a noise before the next noise complaint goes via the dispatch room to the patrol.

Of course, this is all based on the noise complaint occurring towards the end of the evening, not the start.

If you're not the headliner/ main draw/ band that's travelled the furthest then don't carry on playing, let that band finish the night.

When/ if the police come back again the show should be over and if it's not turning into a house party most people will have left.

What to do if the Show is Definitely Getting Shut Down

If police enter the show space, there's a good chance it's getting shut down. If there are hordes of under age kids clearly drinking outside then you may as well pack up and go as soon as the first cruiser rolls by.

In 2009 during an all day show in a warehouse space in Washington DC police arrived to shut the event down. Lots of drunk crusty punk under agers all over the outside area of the warehouse, kids pissing in the neighbours bushes at 3 in the afternoon, dogs running around, empty 40oz bottles of malt liquor everywhere.

This was a textbook case of what a show that will get shutdown looked like.

Anyway, we were selling our merch in a garage in the alley leading to the warehouse so we got to watch the arrival of Washington's finest. As I said, I've been at a lot of shows where the cops come, I suspect that most of the time they hang around longer than you want them to because the longer the spend at a punk show means they're away from being potentially shot on another call out.

First cop on scene is Officer High Blood Pressure, screaming at everyone to leave the area. In his fist is a king-size Mag Light, which he's using to smash on doors and walls, obviously looking an excuse to smash it on someone's head. His equally angry pals were not too far behind.

This was definitely not a "go inside, be quiet and wait" scenario. We put our merch away immediately, loaded into the van and drove away from the venue. Don't bother with a regular precision van Tetris clear up; put the heavy stuff in the back, then expect to sit with a drum on your lap and an amp on your foot for ten minutes until you can get somewhere (like a grocery store parking lot) to repack.

Due to the wonders of the electronic era a replacement show was quickly reestablished for the four touring bands that had yet to play. We moved the show to an arts space in Baltimore (not particularly far away from DC), put the word out to as many people as we could and had a very successful (and police free) show.

If you're in Europe and you're playing in a squat the "show not getting shut down" steps do not apply. Expect a riot between police and anarchists and if you have a chance to escape, take it, otherwise just hold up for the night in the venue and hope for the best (be prepared to cancel the rest of your tour). This happens incredibly infrequently in Europe and there's usually at least some inkling that police pressure is increasing and shows for touring bands will frequently be moved or cancelled.

We narrowly escaped possible deportation in April 2007 when leaving a show in Copenhagen. Police were on high alert after the December 2006 riots during the eviction of Ungdomshuset squat and were antsy at any gatherings of young people with tattoos and black t-shirts. We drove away just as several vans of riot police screeched up to the youth centre we had just played and started arresting people for heinous crimes like wearing Discharge patches on their jackets.



Right: Chief Wiggum asks if you have a shirt for his son and requests you play an Air Supply cover

Below: Robocop's prime directive is to stop your little get together in as brutal a way as possible.



Throughout the text I use the terms hardcore and punk fairly interchangeably. Hardcore is just a contraction of hardcore punk.

My True Motivations for Writing This

In 1988 I was involved in setting up a pirate radio station with a small group of friends to play underground Hip Hop and various sub-sub genres of this new thing called Techno. We did it out of a sense of necessity; mainstream radio wouldn't touch the music we were into and none of the other pirate radio stations in Leeds (where I grew up in England) would play much beyond Reggae and R&B.

We were arrogant fifteen year olds that felt like we had just discovered the meaning of life. Every weekend for three months we would set up and play the records that we owned to whoever would be listening. We didn't just own these records in a physical sense, we *possessed* them and in turn we were utterly possessed back by them. This wasn't just music; this was a strange code that unlocked doors to cultures and ways of operating in the world that our parents and school friends would never be able to see, no matter how hard they looked.

Playing *our* music on air was just another step in the culture we belonged to, as vital and unexplainable to outsiders as writing Graffiti or Break-dancing. This is what we were supposed to do, transmit (no pun intended) our ideas beyond ourselves and see what other people were doing.

Our culture was not passive. Involvement did not end at owning the most amount of expensive import 12"s. You had to do something to benefit both yourself and the wider community.

Eventually the Powers That Be deemed us enough of a threat to kick our door in and impound all our equipment and that was the end of my personal foray into pirate radio.

I still admire underground Hip Hop, but shortly after these experiences the culture that really grabbed a hold of me was hardcore punk and its various offshoots.

It's hard to explain this without it sounding like some awful reminiscing of a faded old has-been yearning for a better day. These were very much pre-internet days and no easily obtainable publication covered the things I was interested in. Hearing music was something you had to work on. Networks were developed and pen pals traded tapes fanatically; I was trading C90s full of harsh, righteous noise with people from Australia to Venezuela. I was regularly obtaining US currency (the currency of the international underground) and mailing off five bucks here and there to various people all over the world in the often vain hope that a record or demo tape I'd seen mentioned in a fanzine was still available. If you were lucky you'd get some new life changing work of art in the mail two months later. If you were unlucky you'd either get nothing or you would receive total crap, in both situations you'd be slightly more cautious about sending your money out blind next time, for a month or so anyway.

What This Means to me Now

What this process was doing was making me work to stay involved. What this translates to at this point in my life is that I've put so much effort into this thing that it's nigh on impossible for me to walk away now. When things irritate the hell out of me about our scene, and sometimes they do, I can't just up and leave, I've spent too long in this world to give up so easily.

What This Meant at the Time

Unbeknownst to me I was learning the codes and symbols necessary to participate fully in our scene. All movements, cultures and identities have symbols attached to them that serve to maintain the boundaries and demarcate who the Insider is and who the Outsider is. It helps to (sometimes incorrectly) quickly get a sense of where someone is coming from when we're on our own cultural terrain.

Anyone who has ever been sneered at by some middle aged loser with the remark "I used to be a punk" can tell in an instant that that person is lying; they were never a punk to begin with.

Maybe they owned a Sex Pistols record once, but that's a different world altogether from the one we live in.

We laugh like drains when we see punks on TV shows or in films. The "punk" episode of Quincy M.E. (or *Next Stop Nowhere* to give the episode its actual title) is still funny to me 25 years after it was originally aired.

"I believe that the music I heard is a killer. It's a killer of hope. It's a killer of spirit."

I can still quote that garbage.

All this goes towards proving my point that our scene is constructed around very specific symbols, language and rituals that define Insider and Outsider status. When Outsiders try and claim their observations come from a place of knowledge and experience we can instantly see through this as the bullshit it is. This is not exclusive to hardcore by any stretch, thus it's worth remembering this during those times when we (and the "we" here means straight white males) are intent on liberating all the poor and oppressed in the world.

So, because I see our scene as a living, breathing culture and because I've spent so much time involved in it I have a vested interest in its continuation as a viable alternative to mainstream society. This 'zine is really just my own propaganda in keeping hardcore as a living, breathing culture and one that stays relevant. I'm attempting to pass on some of the fire that has kept me active in our scene, I do it in all my punk related writings, band interviews and promotional crap for my own releases.

What do I mean by viable alternative to society? Well, it's not always easy for me to express this part, so go easy on me if you disagree. A large section of punk culture has always been founded on bold ideas around changing the world and society. Sometimes the discussions of these ideas have been cluelessly naïve or even completely offensive at times, I have to acknowledge that. Consequently, there has always been a negative reaction to politics and ideals in some quarters of our scene. This is entirely healthy and to be encouraged, it keeps us in check.

When I still lived in Europe and life was a total struggle, hardcore was my refuge from the sectarian violence and general mental poverty I was often confronted with in my daily life.

Q. And children?

A. And children.

A.K.A.

Q. How many punks does it take to change a light bulb?

A. Punks never change anything.

Well, maybe punk never will change anything, for every concerned white guy screaming about the injustices of war it still goes on in the world. But punk managed to change my life. Punk opened up horizons and opportunities for me that I would have never been able to take had I followed a different path in life.

Punk has given me a value system that constantly informs and is constantly being informed by other areas of my life.

Like I said at the start; I've lived a double life. But these twin lives have only been separate for the sake of easier interactions on my behalf. These separations have only been external, internally I am informed by both lives, in fact there isn't a "both" internally, and it's all just how I interact with the world.

The problem solving skills I use when dealing with cops at shows is pretty much the same set of skills I use when working with homeless crack users in encampments underneath the motorway bridges of downtown Toronto.

The organizing skills I use to book a tour are the exact same ones I used to plan my way into (and through) a graduate degree at age 36.

I could go on, but I don't have to, make the connections in your own life.

There is one part I feel compelled to return to in this 'zine and that's the part on women. On the one hand, all I really want to do is say a simple "don't be a dick" and leave it at that, I tried not to come across too much of a blow hard in the section on sex.

But now that we're here, with me showing you around the workings of my mind that gave birth to this project, I have to come back to it again.

There's too much stupid shit in the world, what I said about punk being my refuge a few paragraphs above and an earlier reference to making a viable alternative to mainstream society was said for a reason. I can't really change the useless shit that I hate in the world, I'm largely resigned to that notion, but I can damn well call people on it when it's closer to home, when it's something I've worked hard on and feel a sense of co-ownership (or stewardship) with everyone else active in our culture.

I'm not perfect, far from it. I frequently fall short of the high ideals I set for myself; I'm not deluding myself into thinking that my shit doesn't stink, but damn, some people need to at least try not to be completely reprehensible human beings.

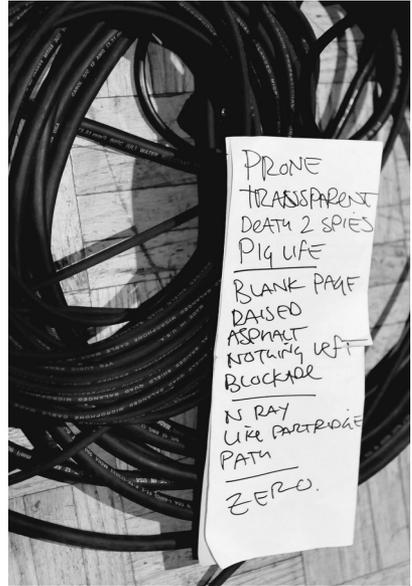
I'm not going to go into some hand wringing white guy that says he's a feminist thing here so all I'm really going to do is use swear words and just remind men not to act like fucking idiots towards women. I wasn't kidding when I talked about being respectful and I definitely wasn't kidding when I talked about bands getting lousy names through on-tour shenanigans.

Everyone in hardcore knows what the expression "coat rack" means in our scene; don't even use that shit in irony, or at least have the decency to say it in a closed van driving down the highway to the next show if you really can't contain yourself.

I sort of skirted around this before, but here it is again; if you're generally unfuckable, for whatever reason, in your regular Joe life, sticking a guitar on is not going to change that. Being that creepy guy that tries it on with every woman at every show follows you. And whether you realize it or not we all laugh at you. Constantly.

So, in sort of summary (because this never ends); hardcore is a culture, not something to passively drop in and out of or use as a stepping-stone and please, remember to be respectful to women.

Going on tour has been both incredibly fun (and occasionally frustrating at times) and has taught me a lot about the world and my place in it.



Go on tour and meet interesting people.

This guy cut his head open for me and offered to set himself on fire.





Playing a gallery opening in Victoria 2010. Two notable things happened at this show:

1. The neck of Ben's guitar was snapped by the audience mid-song.
2. For about five minutes I thought me and Ryan were going to have to fight half of that same frenzied audience.

Surprisingly the cops did not show up to shut this one down.



This guy caught a microphone to the head at one particularly boisterous show in Toronto in 2009. I remember a ridiculous amount of broken glass and blood everywhere by the time we'd finished.

Bizarrely the bar owners were more than happy with our performance and both audience members with visible head wounds stood around posing for photos and telling us how awesome it was that they were bleeding.

Go figure...

All photos from various Endless Blockade tours 2007-2010. I had some much older photos, but jesus, bad hair...

Actually, scratch that, here's one of Shank playing in the Czech republic in 2001.



A rare sight, a guy on tour holding a wad of bills.



Many thanks to the network of friends all over the world that have allowed me to do this for many years.



Steven Verschilde

This 'zine should be considered an extension of my blog (survivalist-deathcult.blogspot.com), where I mostly say "buy this record that I play on" and occasionally try to sneak in stuff about the importance of the cultural mechanics of our scene.

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JUST to GET AWAY* - Jerry A.

QUIT MY JOB, TOLD MY BOSS TO STAND ASIDE
GRABBED A GUN, A FIFTH OF BOOZE, JUMPED IN MY RIDE
I GOT MY GIRL, SHE'S SIXTEEN AND SHE'S REALLY SPECIAL
I CAN'T SLOW DOWN, I GOT A DATE WITH THE DEVIL
TWO TONS OF STEEL, ONE HUNDRED MILES AN HOUR
NO LOOKING BACK, GROOVING ON THE POWER
RESPONSIBILITY MADE ME QUIT
I'M SICK OF THIS MOTHERFUCKING GODDAMN SHIT
THERE'S A ROAD, BEYOND IT LIES, I DON'T KNOW
I JUST GOTTA RUN, JUST GOTTA GO
I NEVER SANG A LOVE SONG
AND I NEVER OWNED A CAR
BUT I'VE NEVER MET A MACHINE WHO WOULD DRIVE ME THIS FAR
I'M NOT GONNA LISTEN TO A WORD YOU SAY
I'M LEAVING IN THE MORNING, JUST TO GET AWAY
I CAN'T STAND MYSELF FOR ANOTHER DAY
I'M LEAVING IN THE MORNING, JUST TO GET AWAY