

JEFF DAHL: A LOCAL ARIZONA MENTOR

Some might regard Jeff Dahl as an international punk rock and roll indie artist with a very prolific recording and touring resume dating back to the mid-to-late 1970s and they recall the legendary lineups and guest appearances that show up on You Tube nowadays. Guys like Stiv Bators, Sammy Yaffa and Cheetah Chrome. After moving to Arizona, he was still releasing albums where he played all the instruments and he toured with pickup bands. While he was in Arizona, he gradually became more of a local icon and a mentor to young musicians. Locally he had and still has a reputation of mystery. Random people at the shows heard that is he is a big deal. They are not exactly sure why in all cases but they understand he is influential, important and legendary. A few people that don't get it have scoffed and called bullshit on that. Jeff always gave his standard courtesy non-response. He generally always stood near stage right with his earplugs to protect whatever hearing he has left after seeing really loud bands like Mountain and Motorhead in his early years. He doesn't drink. He wasn't a scenester here. He didn't say much or socialize a lot. He comes alive a bit when you talk music gear though and he always showed up early and caught every band on the bill. He is religious about respect for bands and music.

Tales of the old days and tours in Japan and across Europe aside, Jeff Dahl's biggest legacy as a local artist in Arizona was encouraging young people to play and release their music. In fact, it's how I got here. I went into Devil's Tree Studio as an inconsistent intermediate pony-tailed bass player that

lacked confidence and seasoning. There are no auditions for Jeff Dahl. You show up, you want to do it and he'll book the show. He doesn't post "musicians wanted" ads which often results in a revolving door of knuckleheads, egomaniacs and people who are already rejected by all the other bands. You don't dance around it. You just do it. He also helped other budding young musicians learn about the business. He is quite adamant about shit getting done right and he tried to steer bands' away from making stupid business mistakes and half assing. Many ignored his



advice at their own peril anyway. The young often disregard solid advice. He knows that and he never gets angry or overly disappointed when they fuck it up anyhow.

Early on, he championed The Peeps, an all-girl punk band featuring Paula Monarch, the wife of Sonic Thrills frontman Jim Monarch. He continued working with them as they morphed into Les Hell on Heels and signed with Bomp Records. His other major protégé band were The Slash City Daggers, a highly derivative New York Dolls inspired band that were quite cool. Jeff is a huge fan of vocal pipes of Abe Ruthless who is one of the cooler Jagger/Johansen style frontmen that passed through the Phoenix. Dahl also recorded and played drums on Abe's solo material. Dahl's opinion was that Abe could probably easily slip

into a project with Slash and maybe some other Guns n Roses all-stars and be a very huge deal if he tried. Abe moved to Hollywood to pursue acting. He helped Labor Party get re-released on Steel Cage Records.

As a live act from about 1999 on, the lineup was yours truly on bass and Andy Madison (Johnny Ace, The Wrongsiders) on drums. You couldn't find a greener couple of inexperienced shaky players that lacked confidence than these two to back a seasoned pro in a power trio. We played a somewhat short-lived Phoenix answer to CBGB's called The Blue Ox quite often. We were playing a lot of shows with The Peeps and Sonic Thrills. After the initial nervous shows of shoegazing and looking at the frets while Andy's drum set slid out from under him. Jeff didn't worry about it too much. He always appreciated when we gave our best effort and didn't fret too much that he could easily have a more experienced backing band. He was having fun and we'd each go home with 50 bucks. He was very adamant that we did not drink more than one beer at shows. Of course, we'd hide in the corner and drink a second one. I'm sure we didn't fool him though. Then Street Fightin' Reptile came out. We were not up to snuff to actually play much on the record. I played on The Ballad of Mott Part Two and Halo Moon. Andy played drums on Better Days.

Andy went on to play with The Wrongsiders with Aaron McCollum, a Charvel playin' Nu-Metal guitarist who would later resurface as a twangier and sexier Bubba Ray type called Ump with me in The Earps. The Wrongsiders were in the Jeff's genre and I recall laughing at Ump's pentatonic metal wanking on Dead Boys songs. Andy also had a short stint with The New Romantics, which featured Lucky Dagger from Slash City Daggers, Brian Stylz from Johnny Ace and Neal Impossible from The Impossible Ones. He is currently writing material for a new band to be called The Suicide Lovers.

Russ Covner was the second drummer in the local Jeff Dahl Band lineup. Russ was about 40 years old and he came from a heavy metal background. Russ had a history of scattered projects but he was still somewhat novice as well. It just goes to show that you don't have to be young to be a really enthusiastic young musician that is hungry to play rock n roll. Russ brought a lot of zeal and excitement about the band as he began to investigate Jeff's influences and learn about Dead Boys and the genre in general. With Russ, we played a lot of shows at The Rogue in Scottsdale, the heir to the closed-down and sold off Blue Ox. We also played shows at Hollywood Alley, opened for X at The Marquee Theater and played the Confederacy of Scum Supershow in Vegas.



Sometime around 2003, a website and community sprang up called AZPunk.com. They embraced Jeff and in turn, Jeff championed their cause. We only played the AZPunk-affiliated Jugheads bar on two occasions but through the site, we met like-minded punk n rollers Labor Party, which featured the husband/wife duo Frank and Sharon Labor from

Hubcap. Jeff was very impressed with Frank's blues-based Hendrix-y licks within a punk rock style, which was very different. Frank is not a Johnny Thunders player. Frank has solid chops and a lot of background in music from the UK, American blues and 60s garage. Frank was asked to join Jeff Dahl Band and added another dimension to the band. Jeff already has the trashy Thunders licks down and Frank brought live energy, the blues and the soul. The gigging started to slow down a bit by then. We played out more sporadically with our regular clubs in town switching formats or going belly up. We always had Hollywood Alley and the shows were great when we played. We backed Texas Terri Laird from L.A. a couple times and even recorded two songs with her that will probably never be released.

I received an invitation from The Earps to play a 4-city weekend warrior trip through the Rocky Mountains states in late 2005. I had seen The Earps in Scottsdale and they were a wonderfully entertaining gimmicky train wreck. The sounded like fun and it was. When I was asked to stay in the band, we began writing material for an album. I thought if Jeff can put out indie music and I have already established good work habits from the tenure with him, The Earps could definitely make a big mark in town. We starting writing songs for The Earps debut and I would ask Jeff for advice and connections which he gratefully provided as well as donating some free studio time to record "Christ on a Crutch." The Earps were a bit of a hard sell initially. They had already burned some bridges in the punk community that embraced Jeff and I found an altogether different audience for The Earps. The Earps have a following of mostly divorced women that want to party where Jeff has the mostly older and predominantly male old school punk vinyl collector fanbase in the U.S. Very little crossover between these two audiences. Once crowd called me Jason, the other called me Georgie or Buckshot George. One of the big things I think The Earps benefited from was in the stage presence department. Having seen Jeff and played with Jeff, I learned a bit about putting on a show. If you were around Phoenix or LA in the 90s or saw him in Europe, you recall the massive afro, the cowboy boots, ripped sleeves, bangle bracelets and seeing the guy leap all over the stage and tear shit up. It was high-energy stuff (not necessary sexual in natural) but it definitely drew blood from your fingers and hands when it was all over and it was passionate. Jeff had always put me in center stage. This was probably more accidental since he was really trying to maintain a safe distance from crash cymbals to protect his hearing since he is also a home recording engineer. The benefit of this arrangement for me was being forced into a prominent place on the stage. There is a huge responsibility to entertain people when you're standing right in front of them.

While there were at times some mutual annoyances with coordinating schedules between Dahl and The Earps, I planned to continue playing and recording with Jeff until he either canned me or packed it up and moved back home. Loyalty is a very important thing in the underground network that Dahl and I were part of in the 1990s. Sioux City Pete refers to these scattered yet connected individuals as "the tribe." I find that younger musicians lack this sense of community and appreciation for friendships and networking. Fewer musicians are as willing to share (if not donate all of their show cut) to bring a pack of hungry stinking musicians into town for a show. This sharing attitude is dying off in our new American Idol-era paradigm where everyone wants to be a star, make all the dough and receive shallow praise from people who won't give a shit about them in a year's time.

THE FINAL DAYS

We'd been informed a few years prior that Jeff would eventually be returning to Hawaii. The ranch began to be encroached upon by local cookie cutter developers. The desert

home and studio that he shared with the vultures and the rattlesnakes were slowly turning into Scottsdale North which brought Target, sushi bars, yuppies, the affluent elderly, yoga centers, Hummers and people who wanted to move in and kick out the wild pigs, the snakes and the scorpions. We worked with Jeff Dahl on a mostly live studio album called "Monkey City Rock n Roll" which I believe is his crowning achievement or at least, he is going to have a hell of a time outdoing it later on. Good luck to him. Seasoned drumming from late bloomer Russ, great tunes from Jeff, my bass playing was pretty damn refined from road work with The Earps and the guitar work from Frank even outshines his Labor Party output.

We played two farewell gigs, the first one at Knitting Factory in L.A. That show was a hilarious logistical disaster for me. A misplaced cell phone that contained flight info, I was hungover and trying to figure where I had to be. I joined two very nervous Labors and an equally worried Jeff about five minutes before the plane was taking off. I had to fly off to Denver to play with The Earps the next day. It turned out to be a pleasant trip, hanging out with Jeff in Hollywood talking shop and sharing our anxieties about where the music business is going and how much things have changed since the 1990s.

The official farewell gig took place at Hollywood Alley. This show was like what my friend Shauna refers to as the "severance pop." The last night of incredible passionate sex before she's gone for good. This show could have been nothing other than magical and with our plan was to have guest performers and just generally enjoy the last night of an 8-year local tradition. Several Dahl fans flew in from out of state to catch the show. Three bearded ruffians from the Bay area and a guy from Minnesota. Both opening acts were picked from the family tree. The Earps opened, followed by Labor Party. This local Jeff Dahl show was a bit different from the previous ones. People were dancing and the crowd was up front in a club that is known for kicking back in a booth and watching a band. Jamie from Blanche Davidian performed on Alice Cooper's Eighteen, JR from local hardcore band BYOW sang the Angry Samoans covers and Hotwheels McGregor from The Earps sang Dead Flowers. A few other guests joined us. We played nearly 25 songs. The night left us sweaty, exhausted and ready to hit the bunk. Incredible night of rock n roll.

Many of Jeff's overseas fans are probably only vaguely aware of Jeff Dahl as a guy in a local band that plays bars on Friday and Saturday nights. Yes, over 500 people may show up for him in Germany but in Arizona, it's more like 100. The folks overseas probably also don't realize that he helped out many anonymous local musicians and bands, some that never lasted long enough to release anything. If you, the reader, have a particular skill then I would recommend sharing your skills with young people and beginners. Then encourage them to take what you've taught them and do great things. It could be music, sculpting, painting or writing. Have the patience, take the time to support your peers and wear your earplugs. That was the message of Jeff Dahl in Arizona.

Sincerely,
Jason Allen Smith
(aka Buckshot George)

Q&A with Jeff Dahl Band

Jeff Dahl

1. What are your future musical plans/goals?

Move to Hawaii and set up a new studio. I'll see where it goes from there.

2. Your favorite show memory?

Too many... maybe having Stiv & Cheetah play with me the last time they were ever on-stage together. Touring Europe acoustic with Freddy Lynxx & Nikki Sudden was a trip too. I've lived a charmed life.

3. Your favorite albums or songs?

Too many... Stooges, Funhouse. Stones, Let It Bleed. Silverhead, 1st album. Alice Cooper, Love It To Death. Cockney Rebel, The Psychomodo. Mott The Hoople, Brain Capers. Rory Gallagher, Irish Tour. Dead Boys, Young Loud & Snotty. David Werner, Imagination Quota. MC5, Back In The USA. Jet Boys, Larger Than Life. Thunders, So Alone. Blue Cheer, Outside/Inside. Johnny Winter, Still Alive & Well. John Mayall, Turning Point. Long John Baldry, It Ain't Easy. Anything by Savoy Brown, the Trash Brats, the Pirates, the Yardbirds, Dion, Robert Johnson, Muddy Waters, John Lee Hooker, Black Crowes, Little Richard, Esquerita, James Gang, the Vibrators, the Adverts or Sioux City Pete. I could go on & on...

4. Your best studio moment?

The new album, Monkey City Rock N Roll. We nailed it. It'll be out in May & June. I've always been very, very careful to never say "This is my best album ever" about any of my albums. But this album is the best one I've ever done. Period. But I'm also really proud of the single I did with Poison Idea. We recorded 2 Stiv Bators songs and I think the version we did of Open Your Eyes is dead on. I'm really proud of that and working with those guys was an honor & a pleasure.

5. Funny gig story?

At the big Farewell Show last weekend I've never been kissed by so many drunken guys with beards. I don't know it that a favorite or funny or just plain creepy. But those bearded drunk guys were kissing the hell out of me!

Jason Smith (aka 'Buckshot George') - bass

1. What are your future musical plans/goals?

I will continue recording and performing with The Earps until we either are so old that we look silly doing it or I finally pack up and return to Kentucky as I've been threatening to do for about the last 5 years now. Then I will probably end up in a classic rock cover bands that plays gigs at bowling alleys in Bullitt County. I am working on material for a debut solo album and I will eventually learn to play the banjo.

2. Your favorite show memory?

In 2003, I was physically attacked by a jealous husband during a Jeff Dahl show. The story I later heard was that he told her I was a 'spoiled rich kid' and a 'Johnny Thunders wannabe.' Only the latter was true. Jeff was completely in the zone that night and was entirely oblivious to the fact that I was being attacked.

3. Your favorite albums or songs?

Monkey City Rock n Roll although I played the hell out of Jeff's Wicked album back in late teens in Kentucky too. I wore out two cassette copies.

4. Your best studio moment?

The Earps by "Christ on a Crutch" with Jeff Dahl wearing the studio engineer hat. That was the first Dahl-engineered session where I ever nailed a song correctly in one take with no fixes or punches.

5. Funny gig story?

Pretty much all the gigs were comedy for me. I'd always forgotten something, was barely able to make it in time or something bizarre happened. Fortunately it always worked out.

Frank Labor – lead guitar

1. What are your future musical plans/goals?

I'll continue to work with Labor Party. Our fourth full length CD will be released on Steel Cage Records May 15th. We will be recording our 5th record around the same time. This one will be a live record and were hoping to release some vinyl copies along with the CDs.

2. Your favorite show memory?

We recently did a show in L.A. where a bunch of Jeffs old friends showed up. Some even came up on stage and performed with us.

3. Your favorite albums or songs?

Monkey City. By far the best record I've done with Jeff. We recorded all the instruments live which gave it a very high energy, passionate sound. But really it's the songs. Jeff wrote a bunch of great songs for this one. I'm really looking forward to the release.

4. Your best studio moment (best drum track, best nailed solo, etc.) on a Dahl recording?

We did a recording with Texas Terri on vocals. Like all the recording done in Jeff's studio it was done pretty fast. One take it pretty much all Jeff ever lets me have. The way it comes out instinctively is the way it goes on the record. I think I spent about a total of 15 minutes in the studio. When I saw Jeff about a week later he said that was the best lead I ever did and after hearing the playback I agreed. Strange because I really don't even remember what I was doing. I never heard the song again after that.

5. Favorite show or funny gig story?

Once, for a photo session Jeff was taking us to his favorite Mexican restaurant. Right in his own hood in Cave Creek. We were all really excited about eating some of what Jeff said was the best food in AZ. When we got there the place was gone. Out of business.

Russ Covner – Drums

1. What are your future musical plans/goals?

To continue recording and touring.

2. Your favorite show memory?

Opening for X at the Marquee theatre and having DJ Bonebreak tell me I kicked ass.

3. Your favorite albums or songs?

Atlantic Crossover w/ The Diamond Dogs

4. Your best studio moment (best drum track, best nailed solo, etc.) on a Dahl recording?

Doing Dense Pac 1 take for both records.

5. Favorite show or funny gig story?

Lisa falling on my kit during Cherry Bomb after Jason clocked her with the headstock of his bass.