Guilt Parade Interview

Guilt Parade were a punk hardcore band from Fredericton, New Brunswick from the mid 80's. They self released 2 demo tapes and then moved to Toronto where they put out an LP on Fringe Records. An often overlooked band when it comes to Canadian punk history, but never the less an important one which still has influence today. The following is a recent (Nov 2010) interview I conducted with Jeff Beardall – the main songwriter and vocalist for the band. As he stated to me…this looking back 25 years so some of the details may be a bit fuzzy. Complete discography at the end! Enjoy!

Can you talk about how the band started and what the scene in Fredericton, NB was like then. What year would this have been? What was the lineup for the band at the start and how did that evolve over time?

Jeff: The year would have been roughly 85-86. There was not much of a scene in Fredericton at the time, though there were quite a number of artists and musicians and the city had a pretty rich artistic community, but not much at all in the way of punk bands or live original music at all – it was all cover bands – top 40 crap and the like. The University did have a college FM radio station and that became a focal point for Rich and myself. We had a show on-air called the Journey Through a Body show (named after a Throbbing Gristle album). Oddly, I was not a fan of hardcore at first. We hung out with some punks who were listening to stuff like Suicidal Tendencies, Metallica and I really didn't dig the somewhat brainless lyrics of those bands – ha! We were Dead Kennedys fans at the time, but I didn't really consider them to be hardcore. I remember though, buying a BGK album around that time just on a whim (Jonestown Aloha) and totally loving it. Then Minor Threat and "Boom!", I was hooked on the energy and the scene.

The line up at the start was myself on guitars and most vocals, Richard Bird on bass and some vocals and Todd Merril on drums. I had played with Rich in a punk rock cover band that played a few shows in Fredericton…stuff like The Damned, Sex Pistols, PIL, etc.. after that band broke up Rich and I decided to try playing original songs and that's when we started The Beach Psychos. That band had Rich on vocals, myself on guitar, and a local rhythm section. Basically the drummer and bass player hated the music and Rich and I really felt limited working with them so we ditched that band and decided to try something new. Todd had been the guitarist in a St Stephen, New Brunswick band called The Lads…they did covers of post-punk stuff (Joy Division) along with some originals. Rich was great…he was a truly committed indie music lover and had hundreds of obscure records. Though we played punk rock covers and had started a hardcore punk band called The Beach Psychos, we listened to all sorts of stuff…obviously The Birthday Party was a huge influence (The Guilt Parade is one of their songs), we loved anything that was fucked up, challenging and loud.

I will say however that our world sort of changed when the Life Sentence 12″ single by The Dead Kennedys came out…the A side was cool but the B side was Hallowe'en…when we heard that we knew something really powerful was happening…when Plastic Surgery Disasters came out…that was it…that album reset a lot of my thinking…suddenly we had a loud, dark, sinister, political, highly intelligent album to listen to that also had a wicked sense of humour…it remains one of my favourite albums of all time. That really changed my musical direction and it wasn't long after that that we decided to start a real hardcore punk band that did original music. We were hanging out with Todd at UNB so we asked him to drum for us…he wasn't really a drummer, but by that time we had been through playing with non-committed musicians in The Beach Psychos and none of them had been able or willing to keep up with the speed and none of them were really committed to being in a real band

with ambitions to record and tour. So the three of us got together and played some hardcore and punk covers to get the juices flowing and then rich and i started writing original songs…that came pretty quickly..I'd say in a few months we had enough songs to record the first tape – An Irrational Fear Of Clowns. The first songs were certainly influenced, if not in sound certainly in vibe, by bands like Minor Threat, 7 Seconds, BGK…

After we got to Toronto we lost Todd, went through another drummer, Mike and then hooked up with Chris Lee. Rich left for Montreal and we got Brad to play bass, Brad went to BC and we got Steve on bass, then we finally found Jim Field who stuck with us for some time on bass. Near the very end we had Dallas Good on second guitar and the Brent Ruddy on bass. Then the band ended.

How were your first 2 demos received? Was there any backlash from Americans about the the song Let's Be Honest (the lyrics say America sucks a lot)? did you ever release anything else besides the 2 demos and LP? i know you were on a few compilations.

It was always a surprise to find out that other people actually enjoyed the music we were creating. I remember being very encouraged by Tim Yohannon's review of the first tape, An Irrational Fear of Clowns. When the really positive review came from MRR for the second tape, I knew we had something going on that could probably get pretty popular. That review gave me a lot of confidence to head to Toronto and try our luck. As far as back lash goes, I don't think most of the people in the states who would have bought our tape would really have been too angry about our comments. I do remember one young kid from California who I had corresponded with having some negative comments about the song but I also remember that he had mentioned in the same letter how happy he was that America had 'kicked Libya's ass' when they bombed Tripoli and Benghazi, so I didn't really worry about his

opinion that much. Later when we toured with MDC and Forced Anger through the States there were a couple of ‘close calls’ mostly with national front style Americans, but we never got into a fight once.

We never released anything beyond those 3 recordings. We were on the It Came From Canada comps and a few others and probably a few I never knew about! We did record some other demos for a second album. Some of which were pretty good, but we basically ran out of energy and motivation and Fringe was not that interested – they were a strange bunch, but I’m thankful for the help they gave us for the Coprophobia LP.

Did you tour much around the Maritimes? Ever make it to Halifax and if so who did you play with there? What about elsewhere in Canada or even the States?

We did a little touring of the Maritimes when we we were based in Fredericton. This would have been the first version of the band – myself, Todd Merril on drums and Richard Bird on bass…the same line-up that did the first two tapes that were reviewed in MRR. I think we went to Halifax twice but the one time I can remember for sure was with The Nils. We had put on a show with the Nils in Fredericton and we played with them there. Then we were able to book a show in Halifax with The Nils, The Jellyfishbabies and us. I’ve talked to Chris Murphy from Sloan about this show and he says that this was the show that convinced him that he could start a band. The Nils were great…Eloit Bertholet from The Dub Rifles was still drumming for them..this was before they got Jean Lortie. Their Sell Out Young EP had just come out and we loved them so it was a great privilege to play with them. Touring was really tough at that point…we were totally green and we were just not prepared for it. I remember our van was just an abominable piece of shit…it was really acting funny on the way back and when a mechanic looked at it, he said we’d been running on 5 out of 8 cylinders. He may have been lying, but it’s entirely possible…it’s a miracle more bands don’t die while touring in

beat up old vans. So that was the extent of touring for that line up. After we moved to Toronto and the band reconfigured as myself, Chris Lee and Brad…that was when the touring began. We put out the Coprophobia record and then toured across Canada…first out to Fredericton then back out to BC…there are some crazy stories from that tour…you only tour across Canada for the first time once and it really was a fantastic experience…it was totally diy…i remember welding the rust holes in the tour van before we left…building the equipment bunker/loft in the back of the van…learning how to clean the carburetor…all that fun stuff that indie bands do. we had great response across Canada…pretty well everywhere…the Sault, Winnipeg, Calgary, Kelowna…lots of great shows and great times.

Let's talk about Ode To An Asshole…probably the first song i heard by you guys. Whats the story behind that song? hahah

Well we were in New Brunswick which is a bit of redneck enclave – there was always a bit of friction between the punks, freaks and the rednecks. We used to call them Grebs, after the tan work boots they all wore. I didn't get hassled too much by them but I knew people who did. So we thought we'd write a humorous song about an absolute caricature of one of these rednecks. Around that time, we opened for Deja Voodoo at a gig at the University of New Brunswick and I can remember Gerard Van Herk running up to us after our set and saying 'you guys are really, really good and you should come to Montreal to play and maybe send a song to be on one of our compilations'. That really took me by surprise because we had existed in this absolute vacuum of acceptance in Fredericton and really didn't know if we were good enough to tour to the bigger cities like Montreal, but Gerard made it seem like it might work out. I don't think we ever got to Montreal at that stage but we did get that song on It Came From Canada Vol 2, which really was a great step for the band. We also put a song on Vol. 3 but for some reason we gave them one of our weaker

songs. I think we were told not to give away our best stuff by someone whose opinion we trusted. I can't really remember. In any case, Ode was a song that was easy to like and helped open some doors for us so I'm grateful for Gerard's early encouragement.

Why the move to Toronto? Did the whole band make the move? How did you get hooked up with Fringe with the release of the LP?

Rich had decided to go to York University and I was fairly fed up with the insular and conservative nature of Fredericton so I figured, what the hell, I should go to Toronto also. Our drummer Todd went up as well but things soured pretty quickly with him. He was more interested in being in a Joy Division style band and he was a bit challenging to deal with in general. We ended up hooking up with Mike, the drummer from Todd's old band, and he played with us for a while. That eventually didn't work out. He was an ok drummer but he didn't have the chops to really play the sort of technical hardcore we wanted to pursue. He left the band and Rich and I even thought about using a drum machine. At the time I was sleeping on the floor of Rich's York U apartment. I did that for quite a few months. I still remember how hard that floor was. Anyway we somehow found out about this drummer Chris Lee who had played with Groupoem and a couple of other Toronto punk bands so we met with him, gave him a tape and he was interested and away we went!
I'm a little fuzzy on the Fringe hook up…somehow we got out demo tape into the hands of Brian Taylor from Youth Youth Youth. He worked at the Record Peddler, which was owned by the same gang that ran Fringe. Brian was really enthusiastic about the demo and basically convinced Ben and Angus, the owner and manager of Fringe to sign us. I still remember going down to the old Fringe office on Brant Street to sign the contract. At the end of the day, Fringe didn't really provide much for the band beyond pressing and distributing the record..no real tour support at all, but they were one of Canada's biggest punk

labels and distributors and being on Fringe really opened doors for us as far as touring.

When did the band break up and what lead to that?

All bands that have significant energy behind them eventually end up at a point where the tensions of being in a band can tear the band apart. It's just human nature. Some bands survive and some bands don't. Guilt Parade didn't. We'd been through a lot – one of our bass players had died – we didn't find out until well after it happened. He had played on one song on the album. We found being in Canada frustrating after touring through the States and seeing really awful bands with tons of tour support. I think a lot of the problem was finding another bass player who had some chops and was able to provide musical input. It never really happened. Also Fringe wasn't interested in putting out any of the new material. I just ran out of steam. It takes a huge amount of energy to keep a band propelling forward and I just couldn't muster it anymore. The scene was also changing a lot….bands like Soundgarden and Sonic Youth were starting to arrive and the whole idea of continuing to play what we played seemed a little stagnant. Chris Lee left town sometime in the very early 90s. I took some time off from playing and then started The Satanatras with Dallas Good who was in Guilt Parade briefly near the end which is another story completely!

The band Propagandhi lists you as one of their influences…how does it feel to have one of today's major punk bands say this? do you still keep up with the punk/hardcore scene today? What is everyone else in the band up to now?

It's a great honour to be recognized for our music by them. I have a lot of respect for Propagandhi. They are doing what I wish I could have with Guilt Parade. I don't keep up so much with the hardcore/punk scene today but I never really did even when Guilt Parade was going on. We used to listen to the more 'challenging' music of the day whether it was punk or not. I

did really enjoy a lot of the 80s punk though, Bad Brains, Dead Kennedys, The Crucifucks, The Freeze, Seven Seconds, BGK, The Descendents… anything that was well written and well played whether political or not. I have always liked when people are motivated to please themselves and not some big machine and that continues to this day.

The main folks in the band I have very rare Facebook correspondence with. Chris Lee, who I was pretty close to, moved to BC with his wonderful partner Laura and have a couple of kids. He works in the movie industry out there and is doing well. He is not playing anymore, which is a shame…he had the greatest kick foot of anyone I've ever heard. Rich is in Montreal and lives an apparently shadowy existence. I haven't really spoken to him in years. Todd is in Florida and working as a nurse, I think. Brad (who toured the album with us on the first tour on bass) is most likely in BC. I saw him years ago when the Satanatras toured out that way. He was supposed to be in wheelchair from arthritis by the time he was 30 and he was touring with us when he was that age and looked great when I saw him. Steve, who played on one song on the album, died when the van he was living in, which was propane powered, blew up. Jim Field who played for a long time on bass and toured North America with us is still playing as far as I know and in Toronto. Me, I have two kids and a busy job in media production and I have not had time to play for some time though my wife, who is a singer songwriter, might cajole me out of my complacence. All in all we had a good time and got to leverage some fast little tunes into the great experience of touring across North America. Honestly, some days I think the best thing about the band was being able to tour. I know it gets tedious after a while. I have friends who had major international bands and the novelty wears off pretty fast. Nothing, I mean nothing, beats the experience of touring across Canada the first time in a shitty van with a few good friends and playing for new friends in new places. I'm glad we had a chance to do it and leave some kind of minimal legacy

behind.

The Guilt Parade discography