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# Fad or Peril?

## *The Crowd still goes wild*

by Chris Ziegler

When the Crowd hit their first power chord way back when at some Huntington Beach house party, gas cost only 63 cents per gallon. A stamp went for 13 cents. Electric guitars had just started taking off, but you had to crank them for 20 minutes to get them to play. You'd ride your mom's dinosaur to the Starwood or the Santa Monica Civic to see the Jam or the Buzzcocks. If you wanted a band T-shirt, you couldn't buy it at the mall—you'd have to hunt and kill the saber-tooth tiger yourself, scrawl "The Damned" across it with a marker and rip the sleeves off.

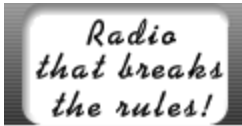


These were the caveman days of punk in Orange County, and the Crowd were right there when it started. But that's not the important thing. The important thing is that they're still here—and, excepting a five-year catch-your-breath-and-stretch break during the mid-'80s, that they never stopped.

"We're cheating 20-year-olds out of their place in rock because we won't give up our spot!" says guitarist Jim Kaa. "We're dug in, and we'll keep playing until we start to suck!"

"Yeah," deadpans singer Jim Decker. "Or suck more."

This is Orange County, of course: the land that trends forgot. Punk couldn't die here if it wanted to, at least not as long as Hot Topic cheerfully accepts parents' credit cards. But the Crowd are a world apart from any nostalgia acts or summer-of-'78 rehash. Their newest album, (released on Huntington indie Unity Squad Records and negotiated at—of course—a beach party), is just one song shy of being all 21st-century material, penned by the band between their kids' Little League games and their own nine-to-five day jobs and then polished to perfection during Tuesday night rehearsals in a Huntington garage. When you knock at the front door, you're met by someone's wife instead of someone's mom—but listen to that bass and drums rumbling out over the driveway, and it sounds like nothing's changed.



"Some people are in a bowling league, some people are in a softball league, some people skin-dive," explains Kaa. "We happen to be in a band."



"Yeah," says bassist Cory Stretz. "You gotta have something to do besides go to work. And that half-hour or 45 minutes onstage when all the other shit goes away makes it all worthwhile."



But some things changed, and in some ways, that's the best part. With a core lineup (Decker, Kaa and drummer Dennis Walsh) fundamentally intact for most of their career, and with scene vets Stretz and guitarist Jeff "Boz" (pronounced "Boze") Milucky—"Not to be confused with Boz Scaggs," says Milucky. "Or Boz-o the clown," adds Decker—fleshing out the edges, it would have been easy to keep hammering away at onetime Rodney-on-the-Roq classics like "Modern Machine" 20 years after the fact. That wouldn't be very much fun, though, says Kaa. And if the Crowd was ever about anything, it was fun.



"I loved those times," says Kaa. "But we're not living for them—we're living for now. And I don't want to go back."



Instead, captures a band based on personality, not pose, a snapshot of a bunch of punkers who've grown up but not necessarily grown old. They're not trying to be the beach boys they once were. They're just trying to be themselves: a quintet of guys currently boasting more kids than chords—and loving it.

"People from my work will see a picture of my band and be like, 'Don't you guys play punk rock?'" says Kaa. "You don't look very punk in your picture.' But if we were trying to sell ourselves as, like, a 'we'll-kick-your-ass-we'll-kick-your-ass-we'll-kick-your-ass!' band, people would look at it like a joke: 'Those guys are going to kick our asses? Those guys party hard?'"

"They look like they need to lie down!" laughs Stretz.

So, yeah, the Crowd made their mark hard, fast and early—1979's compilation still gets the kids revved-up. And they pioneered that seems-so-simple SoCal formula of pop hooks with punk bite that launched every career but theirs. ("My ex-wife thought she heard us on the radio," sighs Walsh, "but it was the Offspring.") But you're not gonna find any old-man crankiness in this band.

They still hoot over the time the then-ran a picture of them under the headline, "PUNK: FAD OR PERIL?"—and that was in 1980. "I guess the answer after all this time is 'peril!'" Kaa says with a laugh. They still bounce around onstage. "You couldn't make me stand still!" says Stretz. And they've got no plans to stop playing any time soon.

"We're the nicest guys in punk rock!" says Walsh.

"And in the end, nice guys finish last," says Kaa.

And then the whole band chimes in at once, like they've been practicing this line for years—and they probably have.

"But it's a marathon," they chorus, "not a sprint!"

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