

# FLIP SIDE



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## Witnesses

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**Krk:** What did you think of your show the other night with Janes Addiction?

**Tom:** Not bad, a little uninspired. I don't think we were sabotaged, that was my initial thought, but I think it was the combination of total ineptitude and bad timing. I don't know if you could actually see what was going on. The

monitor people actually left the board. We did this kind of sound check and they got the monitor mix right but then when we played the sound was just completely mixed wrong.

**Krk:** What caught me by surprise was that you guys played a lot of upbeat stuff as opposed to your records which are a little slower.

peoples styles and where we were going at that point in time.

**Ethan:** What happened to James?

**Tom:** James went to school, he went back to study mathematics.

**Krk:** Tell us about Caroline records? What about Homestead?

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all photos by Krk



**Rich:** As opposed to "Positraction"?

**Krk:** No, "Positraction" was pretty upbeat...

**Rich:** That's cause that's all we played was "Positraction" and the newer songs... the tempos have definitely been picking up on every record, even before "Dusted".

**Tom:** Last night we played twice as fast as we recorded the songs.

**Rich:** We consistently play things faster live. If there's any trend it's definitely speed. High speed!

**Tom:** It's not like we're shooting to be one of the fastest bands around, it's just what suits the material best. We're still pretty much playing as much as possible with extremes. When we do slow things they do tend to be slower. Even on something like "Caleb" where Thalia does the Clarinet on our so called etherial number. That's something we tend to do faster live, but that song can't be decked out, or as the guy from Spin puts it "totally barbituated".

**Krk:** Do you think the member changes had anything to do with that?

**Tom:** Oh yeah sure. I mean all the way from when Rich started playing with us... it's like... well, the direction was happening anyway. It was more of a rockin' thing happening, you know, it was a meeting of four

**Tom:** Homestead still exists as far as I know... we're not really allowed to say anything bad about them...

**Thalia:** We're stopping all the bullshit right here. We're not talking about it. We did two contracts with them and we finished them, now we're doing something else.

**Al:** How many records did you do with Homestead?

**Tom:** The two 12 inches, one live album and three studio albums. Then "Positraction" and "Snuffer" with Caroline. Caroline are amazing, it's like a real label.

**Thalia:** They call us up all the time. It's almost too good to be true. The people that work there are just so nice, what I mean is you call them for business and they're like "How are you doing?". It's weird.

**Al:** Is this basically a club tour playing places of about this size (200 people)?

**Tom:** This tour is just anywhere. We seem to put ourselves in other peoples hands. What ever seems right. Like in Frisco we're playing in a large club the I-Beam. This is an example of a three day period: the next day we are playing in a record store in Utah, the night after that we're playing a 3000 seat open amphitheater with Fishbone.

**Krk:** Do you like playing with a band like Fishbone?

**Rich:** It's really absurd!

**Tom:** It's good to help us cross over with our audience.

**Al:** Weren't you supposed to play "Club With No Name"?

**Tom:** Yeah, we still don't know quite what happened, it seems like there was a political dispute between Dale of C.W.N.N. and our booking agent and we were sort of caught in the middle.

**Krk:** How did the show at the Scream go last year?

**Tom:** Ok, but really the only L.A. show we played that went over well was the Al's Bar show. I think that show went really well in terms of feeling. The first time we played L.A. was at Club Lingerie which is a bonifide disaster. It's like the Cat Club in New York, it's a music business showcase - 50 year old record company guys with white shoes and big belts with 16 year old girls 2 feet taller than them and 100 pounds lighter. So Al's Bar was good for us, the Scream Club was even better, but that whole gothic, gloom doom stuff is so strong there. There are some misguided people. Like that guy that wrote that Spin review, nothing can be further from the truth... We've been touring ever since that last Scream show. That was a 2

month tour, we took less than a month off and went to Europe for 6 or 7 weeks, took 10 days off and now we're doing this.

Krk: Where does recording come in?

Mark: It doesn't.

Thalia: We haven't done anything, actually we did a John Peel session for the compilation.

starting to get behind us and some people were starting to buy our records, the English press were going crazy. It was like if you had a drummer, that was two strikes against you, and if you had original instruments then you had to hit them with tools. The fact that Live Skull was playing traditional instruments with tradition-

even heard that didn't come up with a schizophrenic product. Drummer A, Drummer B...

Krk: How do you like Thalia as opposed to Marty?

Tom: Same similarities when Thalia first started singing with us. Thalia's voice can be

*Live Skull, being around for a helluva long time, have a stack of releases that among certain crowds are considered, "Kinda Neet." Well, fuck those certain crowds. Live Skull wail the hammer of audio hell and have little if any care of where it lands. I make an effort of being on the receiving end as often as possible.*

Tom: The main problem with touring is that all the rumors you hear are true. Psychologically you become less than human and there's no time to write at all which is a rarity for us. I mean this band has never even toured and we've always put out a record a year. So now for the first time we're touring like non-stop.

Krk: Are you making money off the tours?

Tom: We're breaking even. If we lived in Athens, Georgia we'd have the money to pay for our bills, but we're living in New York so we've got expenses up the ass.

Al: Is the touring paying off as far as you getting a bigger audience every time you go back some place?

Thalia: We haven't played that many of the same clubs so it's hard to tell.

Tom: In some places it does look like it's paying off and others it seems the least little thing can mean the difference between a really great show and a show played in front of 10 people. This time we haven't had that many lulls, the last tour we did have a low attendance. It was odd, we played a city like Seattle where the time before we did a show with Sonic Youth and it was a whole adoring crowd screaming for encores and...

Thalia: Let's just say we're not even going back this time.

Tom: There might have been 40 or 50 people the second time we played. There's always this excuse "Well, we had five or six murders down here last week" or it's raining or it's finals week...

Krk: Everytime I read an article about Live Skull it mentions Sonic Youth. How do you feel about that?

Tom: Well you just did it again...

Thalia: Everyone gets compared to something.

Tom: At this point yeah.

Thalia: It's like everyone's heard of Sonic Youth so if you want to describe a band that's hard to describe then the closest most general, as far as everyone knowing Sonic Youth's sound, they compare us to.

Tom: Personally I feel for as many people that may peek in curiosity to come and see Live Skull, it scares off as many people if not more.

Krk: I think if anything that Sonic Youth sounded like Live Skull when they released "EVOL".

Tom: The main thing that kinda struck me as ironic about the whole thing is the whole aspect of songs. I mean we took incredible flack especially from the English press. I mean even from the first few years Live Skull were together, '83 or early '84, even when the American press was

al tunings... the English press flipped out, they would have none of it at all. In fact they invented this term that was specifically designed for us... which is "Rockest". Which is like the worst insult. The ironic thing to me is like it's 3 to 4 years later and "accessibility" is the key word of the year. It's like the basis of a good band in 1989 is the song, which is how it should be, but like all of a sudden that's why people are opening their eyes and ears, like with "Positraction".

Krk: On your music credits it just says "Live Skull". Hasn't the music changed with the new band members?

Tom: Yeah, but it's the same process-everyone writes. I don't think we've had a situation where someone has come up with just a song. It's never been a thing with us when someone just comes in and says "Hey, learn this".

Krk: With all the member changes is the feeling of the music staying the same? Like with "Dusted" and all the different people I didn't know what to expect.

Tom: Yeah, that one surprised me. "Dusted" was where James Low played on one half and Rick played on the other. It's really odd, it's one of the few records I've



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continued

very chameleon like in some ways and on "Dusted" when Marty sang like on four songs, Mark sang one song and Thalia did the rest, there was like a common denominator, a meeting focal point. Thalia had her own sound before. She sang in Dangerous Birds and Uzi, two really great bands from Boston. I think it took awhile to incorporate her own style into Live Skull and to make the whole thing crystalize, which I think "Positraction" shows.

Krk: What happened to Marty?

Tom: She went to school. She's a licensed masseuse. Actually she works in a health club in the Upper West Side. Essentially Marty sang in a sort of a flat way. Mark spoke and I screamed. Those were the essential ways. Vocals were used as more of a textural thing more than any lyrical content. Now with Thalia singing there's much more for me, when I play I use the void as something to react to. With Marty it was just a constant, and with Thalia there's spontaneity and unpredictability which is great. Especially live, well even in the studio it's loosened up the sound and is a different sort of chemistry.

Rich: I can work off of Thalia's vocals as sort of riffs and Marty was a flatter...

Thalia: She wrote lyrics with the music (bass) so it was together. I just kinda listen and sing to change.

Krk: Did you feel you had to live up to her?

Thalia: No, because the band was together a long time, we get along well and I never felt too out of place. At first it was weird when they just asked me to sing but...

Tom: Then she realized it's a lot easier to just sing than plug in amps and stuff.

Krk: Why aren't you singing as much Tom?

Tom: We wanted to change the band a bit and let the musicians be free to work more with their instruments.

Thalia: To me I can't imagine not wanting to sing. I play guitar too but to not sing! I could never not sing!

Krk: Adding another member didn't bother you?

Rich: We didn't think about it at the time.

Tom: We were in a slightly transitional time, James was going back to school and we had 4 or 5 songs that weren't exactly together so they were close to being songs. But we hadn't done any vocals yet. Usually the vocals come last but in this case it was... no one was approaching the songs at all and around the same time, well we had just come back from Europe where we heard the Uzi album for the first time. We were actually torn between various people to ask to sing, just as a love project and we met Thalia. At the last few shows we did with James we discussed it. It wasn't really a conscious decision to just start playing with each other.

Thalia: We did it via mail.

Krk: You were talking about being stuck with a gloom image, why do you feel you are categorized as such?

Mark: We have a couple of black leather jackets.

Thalia: Because we're from New York.

Mark: The name "Live Skull", they relate it to death.

Thalia: I can understand where someone can think that without hearing us but I can't understand them saying that after they've heard us.

Tom: There are a few things that someone can hear this or that and think...

Thalia: That music is so depressing, down, down... I mean a million times more depressing than us.

Krk: "Bringing Home The Bait" album cover, who's idea was that?



Tom: That was a calfs brian, an unfrozen one actually on the cover. On the back it's frozen. When it's frozen it gets like this glossy coating, that was a fresh frozen.

Krk: What brought that on?

Mark: Marty had this dream of a brain on fire, and the trophy idea just popped out of nowhere. Tom: Actually in terms of the album, I think a lot of people heard that album and never heard anything else from us and that might contribute to the doom/gloom tag that people associate us with. That record is... if anything would earn us that type of reputation, the subject matter was pretty painful. It was not a particularly good period in our lives.

Thalia: Why do we even have to explain why we're not something?

Tom: Todd was making a point today that either you're a joke band or you're Joy Division and there's nothing in between. If you're any type of feeling thinking human being, you are going to think and feel. That's why with the titles of the songs we try to make it obvious, like "Haircut For Pigs", some of the stuff is meant to be funny. So people can look at this and...

Thalia: Whenever anyone writes anything I think it tends to be inspirational and those things are usually deep and dark thoughts. "Even-junkies and the depressed need music", that was what the Spin review said.

Tom: He knew what the point to the review was even before he wrote it. He said he liked the music.

Thalia: Like he's into something we're not in on and I just didn't understand where it came from.

Tom: It's questionable whether it is meant to be negative.

Thalia: Like when you include a lyric sheet with the album, how can you be misquoted? But I

look at the quotes and it's not even anything I wrote. People always say "I can't understand you", so here's the lyric sheet, shut up.

Tom: Especially when they alter it in a way to prove their point. One of the main reasons for putting in that lyric sheet was that there's always sort of an internal kind of consistency. On "Positraction" all the words/lyrics were written by one person and that's the first time that has happened on any Live Skull album.

Al: Do you like it better that way?

Tom: Well, it really worked... I read the words and they don't seem as a barrier to me as a listener and the person that created the words. To me it's really direct and stripped down. That's

why that Spin review really ticked me off because it's this guy talking about this icy remote world with no emotion.

Mark: I feel like he didn't even listen to the record, he was just determined to do what he did.

Tom: These are not like Art School lyrics, they are words to songs.

Rich: They seem to be more with the music, as much as I like the old lyrics, it seems they were harder. They may make really great, interesting reading, but they didn't really work as songs.

Thalia: My lyrics were written for the music, that's why they work.

Tom: I wish "Snuffer" had a lyric sheet but we didn't want to make a big thing out of it, like here's the "LYRIC SHEET!"

Thalia: Then we said, "Let's show these people who we really are".

Krk: What are your plans for the future?

Mark: We're going to get into industrial.

Tom: But we're going to be sensitive about it.

Krk: So after this tour are you going to do more writing?

Tom: After this summer yeah. That's the only time we have.

Mark: I don't know if we can keep doing these same songs anymore.

Tom: There's a couple of new songs already. One of the 3 guitar songs have already been recorded. We may record again but that debatable.

Krk: What about the John Peel Sessions?

Tom: The standards for the Peel Sessions seem to be dropping, but I was very pleased and flattered to be on them.

Mark: The Peel Sessions were great!

Thalia: They made me change my lyrics.

Tom: There was a couple of "fucks" in the new stuff. It wasn't really Peel, the producer and a couple of the technicians there are all BBC Associates.

Krk: If it's recorded with Peel, it's going to be played on the radio, right?

Tom: Well, yeah that's a major step. It's gets played about twice unless he really likes it, then...

Thalia: Then they save it for when we get really big so then they can use it.

Krk: So it's not like that will be put out on a record in a month?

Tom: Yeah it just sits.

Thalia: The BBC owns the tapes, we don't own them.