

# BANGKOK ROCK!

VIVE LE ROCK'S PAULA FROST WITNESSES AN INCENDIARY SHOW BY CANADIAN PUNK LEGENDS **D.O.A.** IN BANGKOK AND CHATS TO JOEY SHITHEAD ABOUT THEIR KILLER NEW ALBUM 'FIGHT BACK'.

**W**E'RE in Bangkok, Thailand at midnight. There's a rush on the street as crowds of punks are ushered onto the side of a busy, noisy and filthy road with cars, vans and tuk tuks flying by. Scores of police are pulling up in their patrol cars, descending on a venue and shutting down hardcore Canadian punk band D.O.A.'s concert. Luckily the gig is already over. As the police frenzy to stop the gathering of people, who've done nothing but enjoy a night of music, the Thai punks begin to peacefully sing a protest song in French, baffling the cops.

"That was a crazy show, that's for sure" tells Joe Keithley (aka Joey Shithead), when we catch up a few months later. "It was all fun though!"

I'd spent the majority of the concert at the front, pushing people back into the crowd and off of the band, as mics and equipment struggled to stay upright in the freedom of no security and people throwing themselves towards the stage. Most of the punks were Thai, but dressed much like the UK punks at Rebellion festival. Jackets covered in band patches, piercings, tattoos, spiked up coloured hair and ripped jeans were everywhere. I grabbed a beer and stood a few paces from the stage. I'd already been warned by a tall, mohican punk from New York: "You don't want to be standing there when the band comes on!" Almost insulted, as I've been going to gigs for 15 years and never been knocked out or hurt, I moved back a bit. As the band took the stage I was grateful for the advice, as the room erupted in a chaotic, intense Thai boxing match between about 30 people. This is how they mosh in Bangkok.

"That first show in Thailand led me to write the song 'Time to Fight Back' – which inspired the new album title, 'Fight Back!'" told Joey. "I thought the way those punks protested by insulting the cops in French was genius because they didn't get beat up!"

Known as a pioneering band of hardcore punk, D.O.A. started out in Vancouver, Canada in 1978 inspired initially by the first wave of punk from the UK and New York. "I always liked The Clash, The Damned and The Ramones, there's tons of bands that came out of that era but that was the very first wave. The second wave came along and that was us, Black Flag, The Avengers, Minor Threat and the Bad Brains. I love all those bands too." D.O.A. and the second wave of punk kicked things up a gear just as many of the first wave bands were getting

signed, selling out and splitting up. "There were bands from DC; Minor Threat and the Bad Brains were part of the original hardcore scene in North America. With most of the West Coast bands, people would try and look like they were from New York or imitate a New York band, or try to sing with a British accent because those were the cool bands at the time and we were just kids getting started out. Then it seemed there was an angrier, harder hitting style emerging with our group and that's where the idea of hardcore came from. We dressed down. There were no leather jackets with tons of studs: it was anti-fashion, anti-rock, anti-corporate. We thought 'Yeah, this is hardcore. Straight forward and to the point'. The band have always stayed true to their roots, wearing black band t-shirts and jeans onstage, playing aggressive punk and being completely down to earth and approachable with fans.

In the band's career, D.O.A. have impressively played over 4000 shows across 5 continents in 44 countries. They're now celebrating their 40th anniversary with a tour and their 17th studio album 'Fight Back'. Travelling as much as they do became necessary for the band to reach the extent of their punk fans around the world. "I never really envisioned it," Joey explained: "It wasn't premeditated but it started happening and we thought it was great to go to different places. Why stay in the same place you've been all your life? You've got to be adventurous!"

Over the years the band has gone through a few lineup changes, with Joey being the only original member as guitarist and lead singer. For the past 4 years Paddy (drums) and Corkscrew (bass) have been in the band, with 'Fight Back' being the second album they've done together as a 3-piece. "Yes, we did the album 'Hard Rain Falling' before this. These guys are great, a real talented pair. They live in a small town up in the mountains, far from Vancouver but they practice the songs together and we work on new stuff when they come to Vancouver. They're easy to get along with, the 3 of us have played over 400 shows together."

Joey took us back to his humble beginnings as a drummer. "We had a band in high school and would trade instruments. I would play drums and my drummer would play bass and we'd switch. Eventually by the time we were 18 it was obvious my friend Dimwit was a far better drummer than I'd ever be! I thought: 'Okay, if I want to keep hanging out with these guys and ▶



D.O.A. back in the day.  
Joey Shithead far right

◀ playing music I better learn the guitar'. So it was a happy accident. The first song I ever learned was an old folk song from 1860 or something like that. I had a difficult time playing that because I had been drumming since I was 11. But it doesn't take long before you catch on." Soon Joey, Dimwit and their pals formed a band called The Skulls in 1977. "I don't know if we were ahead of our time but we didn't do very well. Actually we just broke up!" Most of the members of The Skulls went on to be in groundbreaking punk bands, so Joey is looking to release some of their early demos. "It was a really good lineup. I'm hoping to put out a Skulls album with some of the studio recordings and demo tapes we did. We were an interesting bunch because it was myself and Dimwit who was the drummer from The Pointed Sticks, D.O.A., The Subhumans and Four Horsemen. There was Jim Walker who was in The Pack from the UK and then Woody on bass who played with D.O.A. and Subhumans. We ended it about 1978 so I flew back to Vancouver from Toronto and then started D.O.A."

Learning from his first band, Joey was ready to drive D.O.A. to the next level. "We started almost right away. We put out a four song, 7-inch EP called 'Disco Sucks' and that came out in 1978. I just started mailing them out to magazines and clubs all around North America. Pretty soon we got an offer to go to San Francisco."

This was the band's first experience of travelling and touring, with a lot more to come: "We didn't have a van. I took a train, two guys took a bus and one guy hitchhiked. We all met there. It kind of caught on pretty quick. We got to the UK in 1981 and played a big show with the Dead Kennedys. It was a total fluke. D.O.A. playing with the Dead Kennedys at the Lyceum in London, a big 3000-person place and we weren't even meant to be on the bill but someone mistakenly put us on there. So we got our way onto the bill, saved our money and flew over there! That set us up for going to Europe in 1984. We played a ton of countries there, it took 2 months."

Hardcore is a simple merging of punk and metal, and D.O.A. made having metal in your punk music cool, much like Motorhead did. Being a legend of hardcore, Joey admitted he was always more of a punk than a metal head: "Totally a punk! I didn't know much about it but at high school we wanted to start a rock band and be like Led Zeppelin in 1974-1975. Then we had a lousy band who did covers of popular songs. We started hearing about the Ramones, bought the first album and thought it was really weird. We'd never heard anything like it. Shortly after that we saw stuff on the TV about The Sex Pistols and The Clash and The Damned. So we got the idea of punk rock and the key thing was that in July '77 the Ramones came to town and put on a free show. About 100 people turned up and everyone there ended up being in punk bands. It was a great show and a total education!"

Protesting is a big part of D.O.A. and punk as a whole. Joey was 19 when he started the band and it wasn't long before they were tagged as a protest band. Standing up for environmental rights, women's rights, condi-

tions for prisoners and the legalization of marijuana are just a few of the causes they've pushed for over the years. "A Greenpeace protest against nuclear weapons testing near Alaska was my first protest, in Vancouver. That was the first political thing I ever did in my life. I was aware of politics. The Vietnam War was going on when I was in high school. So that had a big impact on the consciousness of people. We started getting into protesting and people started saying: 'D.O.A. are a protest band'. So we played a lot of events for good and just causes."

The album, 'Fight Back', is a protest against inequality. "It took me 6 months to write and the central theme is basic inequality; economic inequality, gender inequality and racial inequality. That's what's going on in our world. These things are going on and it's not right. Secondly, if people do band together with a good idea and work together they can end these kinds of problems or at least lessen them. A good example of fighting back is high school students in the United States fighting back against the NRA and assault weapons being bought at Walmart. Hopefully that has a great effect in a country that's incredibly prone to gun violence. How many students do you need killed? How many people killed at work who had nothing to do with the disgruntled person? It's not a matter of terrorism from afar. It's homegrown people doing these things. They're well-armed. What happened in Las Vegas was sick. This guy had 53 guns in a hotel room."

The album is filled with anarchist anthems from 'State Control' to 'Wanted Man'. But there's also heartfelt songs like the poignant lyrics of 'The Last Beer'. "That's a song about 4 of my friends I used to play music with that are not alive anymore," Joey said, before explaining the meanings behind some of the other songs: "I really like 'Set You Straight' - the anger of saying to someone: 'I'm gonna fucking set you straight. I don't care if you're stinking rich'. I was kind of thinking about Donald Trump and about rich people and how they can be so entitled just because they have money. That was the first song I wrote for the album. The other song I think is really true, is 'Killer Cops'. It's a harsh sounding, violent song. Basically we're getting shot by trigger happy police. I try to come up with lyrics that have a concept. Once you got that you try to write the music to suit the mood. Back to 'Fight Back', we're a lot stronger together than we are apart."

That notion was certainly felt on the night of their Bangkok concert: "The kids didn't provoke the police, instead they started singing a protest song in French. That night I couldn't stop thinking about it. It was incredible the way they handled their resistance. That was a great way of fighting back."

The band have an extensive tour of America booked for the rest of the year and Joey's proud to be celebrating 40 years of D.O.A., "We were pretty young starting out. We had 3 goals. 1: to change the world. 2: to have a good time doing it. 3: play some really loud music. I guess we achieved all three!" **VLR**

'Fight Back' is out now on Sudden Death