

# An Interview With: Coolie Ranx and the Toasters

On March 23, 1996 we drove down to Alfred University to visit some friends and to see the Toasters. Minutes before the show, and seconds after finishing off a bottle of Bacardi, we sat in an upstairs room with beer, soda, cheese, coldcuts and the Toasters.

HOI POLLOI: Where were you born and when?

RANX: Oh my God. I was born in London, England.

HOI POLLOI: What's your birthday?

RANX: 3/9.

HOI POLLOI: Which year?

RANX: You can guess the rest.

HOI POLLOI: You look about 24 maybe. Am I close?

RANX: Hell no. It's a good thing you said that.

HOI POLLOI: What's your real name?

RANX: Obie Agila Abama. Nigerian son.

HOI POLLOI: How did you meet the Toasters?

RANX: I was kidnapped from the island of Guam.

HOI POLLOI: That must have been a very traumatic experience.

RANX: It was, man. They made me speak English.

HOI POLLOI: Did you have any musical experience before you joined them?

RANX: Just leaves and things

HOI POLLOI: Leaves?

RANX: Palm trees, you know? We used to hit them on the legs like a drum.

HOI POLLOI: What's your favorite album?

RANX: Oh man...Dub 56. And Alannis Morissette. I'm in love with her.

X: (singing) "I've got one hand in my pocket and the other is stroking a penis!"

HOI POLLOI: That's not a bad thing tough.

RANX: She's bad I like her

HINGLEY: She sucked cum out of my ass.

HOI POLLOI: How did the cum get in your ass, Buck?

X: I heard she was the queen of shag in high school.

RANX: For real?

X: From a very reliable source.

HOI POLLOI: Someone who went to school with her?

X: Yep.

HOI POLLOI: Did your source learn that from first hand experience? I would believe that judging from her looks.

HINGLEY: I'd believe it judging by her lips. She has that slackness of lip.

HOI POLLOI: Which bands do you enjoy playing with, Coolie?

RANX: LGB, Pietasters, Mustard Plug. Spring Heeled Jack, Murphy's Law.

HOI POLLOI: What is your favorite city to play in?

RANX: There's a lot of them. I can't say just one.

HOI POLLOI: Are there cities you don't like to play in?

RANX: Jacksonville, Florida.

HOI POLLOI: What's bad about Jacksonville?

RANX: There are Nazi's there. I was performing there once and it was really dark and one of them was trying to do something to me. He was giving me signals with his fingers. Saluting. So I just waved at him and blew him a kiss and he was getting upset because I wasn't acknowledging him in the manner he wanted me to. He wanted aggression and I didn't have it to give. He was disappointed.

HOI POLLOI: That sucks. Is Jacksonville always like that?

RANX: It's been like that. Not all the time, but it's been like that. My last experience was like that.

HOI POLLOI: On the Thrill Me Up album, is that you singing "Haitian Frustration"?

RANX: No I'm not that old. I am actually, but...

HOI POLLOI: How old are you?

RANX: I'm 24 like you said!

HOI POLLOI: So who sang on that cut?

RANX: That was Lionel

HINGLEY: Lionel Bernard. Although singing is not the word I would use.

HOI POLLOI: Chanting?

HINGLEY: Intoning maybe.

HOI POLLOI: How do you feel about all the third wave ska music, Coolie? Would you rather stick to the roots of the music?

RANX: I think everything should progress. If it doesn't, then we're not doing anything. Life is just passing us by.

HOI POLLOI: Do you think that ska will become the next grunge?

RANX: Ska is not grunge, but in terms of popularity, that's good. It should be the next big thing. It's more of a music that unites people so I feel that if it moves in that direction and gets widespread and recognized, maybe people will get the idea that they should get behind it.

HOI POLLOI: Are the Toasters planning to record a new album?

RANX: Just did.

HOI POLLOI: Really? What's the release date, Buck?

HINGLEY: May first.

HOI POLLOI: Does it have a title?

HINGLEY: Hard Band For Dead.

HOI POLLOI: I can't wait. Is it going to sound different from your past records?

HINGLEY: It's kind of like Dub 56. It has a wide range of styles because a lot more of the people in the band are contributing their writing. If you take ska from A to Z,

we've got a little bit of everything.

HOI POLLOI: I've got a big question that I've always been wanting to ask. What is the deal with the Dancehall Crashers?

HINGLEY: They were very hard people to deal with and they couldn't get it into their heads that Moon is an indie label and not CBS so they always felt that we weren't doing enough for them. They were giving a lot of misinformation out to the press in terms of what had been going on. I mean they said we'd sold 30,000 records when we'd only sold 8,000. So it's kind of like those guys got too excited and started to believe what they were telling other people. And I didn't feel that they believed in what they were doing in terms of the music so we just released them and now they're off doing their own thing which is cool and we can just get on with life and work with bands we like. So that slams the lid on that one.

HOI POLLOI: So now they're off your back and working with Sony?

HINGLEY: It's MCA I think.

HOI POLLOI: 510?

HINGLEY: They're on 510 and they can do whatever they want. I mean it's up to them. With Moon, we have limited resources. We prefer to work with people who are cool and who basically share our vision of what ska music is. We get behind the bands who believe in what they're doing and people who don't believe in ska music need not apply.

HOI POLLOI: Coolie, there's been a lot of lineup changes with the Toasters and we were wondering if you're planning to stick around.

RANX: Good question! (he laughs) Very good question. Life never knows. One never knows.

HOI POLLOI: Are you living day by day?

RANX: That's exactly how I live it.

HOI POLLOI: When you take a shit, do you crumple or fold the toilet paper?

RANX: I just take the paper off the wall and wipe my ass like a normal human.

HOI POLLOI: That sounds like a crumple.

RANX: Crumple.

HOI POLLOI: Is life on the road fun?

RANX: Yeah. You get to meet new people, new experiences, goods and bads and weirds and way outs and normals and extremely weirds, extremely normals and they all have one thing in common.

HOI POLLOI: What's that?

RANX: They love.

HOI POLLOI: Except for those guys in Jacksonville.

RANX: They love too. They love to hate.

HOI POLLOI: At the telemarketing company I work for, we call to get donations for the special olympics. We call Jacksonville all the time and they don't give shit. Would you rather tour or just have one home?

RANX: I do have one home but I love being on tour.

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HOI POLLOI: Where's home?

RANX: I live in Brooklyn.

HOI POLLOI: Does anything weird or wacky ever happen on the road?

X: You should ask if anything normal ever happens! How about Coolie getting left at a gas station in Texas?

HOI POLLOI: That sounds juicy! What happened?

RANX: I was left at a gas station in Waco, Texas.

HOI POLLOI: Did you meet David Koresh? You could have been on "Hard Copy" if you had performed for the Branch Davidians.

RANX: He was already dead.

HOI POLLOI: So you went in to take a leak or something?

RANX: I was on the phone because it's 25 cents and I'm calling around the world for 25 cents and I usually sleep in the back so nobody really sees me anyway so they just drove off.

HOI POLLOI: Be more visible. Sit in front next time.

HINGLEY: We left him as a sacrifice to David Koresh.

HOI POLLOI: Would you like to say anything in closing to the readers of **Hoi Polloi**?

HINGLEY: Support your local ska scene.

HOI POLLOI: Rochester doesn't have much of a ska scene. We've got one band.

HINGLEY: One band is better than no bands.

X: Chuck played his first show in Rochester.

HOI POLLOI: When was that?

CHUCK: about four years ago at a place called Club X.

HOI POLLOI: How did you become a Toaster?

CHUCK: I came in as a sub. I was recommended by Mike Christianson who used to sub on trombone in this band. He called me up and said "I can't do this ten day tour, do you want to do it?" I said yes and I started subbing. It worked out well.

HOI POLLOI: Buck, are you ever ill tempered toward the rest of the band?

HINGLEY: They're fairly well behaved as far as musicians go. I just withhold their food and drink for a couple days and put a chain on their asses and drag them behind the van for a couple of gigs.

HOI POLLOI: Either that or leave them in Waco.

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