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John Christ

of

DANZIG



IN-YOUR-FACE

by Lorena Alexander

People are constantly amazed when they meet us and talk to us," John Christ notes, referring to the fearsome foursome Danzig. "But when you get us together in a group and you put our instruments in our hands, we definitely change before your eyes. There's a transformation, a vibe that happens when you put us together, and that's what I want people to get."

More people than ever before are "getting it,"

ignoring the ridiculous rumors and mostly media-manipulated misconceptions that portray singer/songwriter Glenn Danzig, bassist Eerie Von, drummer Chuck Biscuits and guitarist Christ as metal's maniacal madmen out to bludgeon the moral fiber of youth to a pulp. NOT!! Though the music may be darker, the image not quite as harmless, Danzig could easily explode wide open ala Metallica. "Our time is gettin' close," JC muses. "We're not going away."

How the Gods Kill more than any prior Danzig album is "your" album. Your playing is a lot more prominent in the sound, a lot more important, and seems to have grown and developed a real strength. Do you agree?

Yeah, I do actually. The whole band

powerful album. The guitar is more in-your-face and there's a lot more screaming riffs. I like it a lot better than the last one, so that's the most important thing; the other is to just get it out there, let everybody else hear it. When I listen to the first two albums they sound like



“It’s okay if people think I’m underrated because I still think I have an awful long way to go before I get where I’m going.”

demos, just under-produced. **What was different this time versus the last two albums?**

The big thing is that the band has come a long way from the beginning so we sort of grew into it a little bit better. The album came together pretty easily this time, there wasn't too much struggle over parts. I had a good idea of what I wanted to sound like and everybody else did too. Once we got some basic sounds together we just went with it and added to it later on. I got to do some stuff that I always wanted to do like feedback tracks and stuff like that on "Heart of the Devil," which was a lot of fun. I just went for

a lot more aggressive, in-your-face type of guitar sound.

Did the fact that Glenn was producing this album have a lot to do with feeling more freedom?

Oh yeah. I was allowed to use reverb [laughs]! We could play around with the sound and he gave me the time I needed to get the sound that I liked. [We] worked really hard to get exactly what we wanted, trying to please everybody and me at the

same time, which isn't the easiest thing to do. It's still not my ultimate guitar sound but it's a lot closer. To me it sounds more like the live sound. That's what we were striving for, to sound more live. Nick DiDia, our recording engineer, did a good job recording it, helping us get those sounds. Jason Corsaro [Power Station, Jeff Beck, Rod Stewart] did a great job of mixing it. There was an awful lot that was done in the mix to enhance the sound. So there were some extra people involved other than just the band that I wanted to mention because they played a really key part this time.

Do you think you're underrated as a guitarist?

Underrated? I don't really know *how* I'm rated. See, I'm a team player basically. Technically I'm not playing anything that's spectacularly difficult on any of the albums. In a way it may take away from the songs if there's a long extended guitar lead with all these runs and stuff in it. You get a lot more of that at the live show and sometimes there's certain things that I'd like to put in but don't work with the song. So we just go for the vibe thing. It's okay

if people think I'm underrated because I still think I have an awful long way to go before I get where I'm going.

Danzig is a very misunderstood band. Has that gotten in the way of being recognized as a really good player?

Yeah, I think that goes for all of us. It comes with the territory. That's the way we look at it. We know what we've been doing from the beginning and we didn't expect everybody to figure it out. The way we look at it, sooner or later people aren't going to be able to deny our presence any longer. They'll have no choice but to come looking for us. Like what Metallica did...nobody had heard about them and then all of a sudden here they are on the scene, at the top. And they didn't have any videos out, almost no radio play. We're going along the same route, just plugging it out in the trenches until they won't be able to deny us—we'll just be there.

There has long been a misconception that Glenn dictates all the parts that everybody in the band plays. What is your role in the creative process when you guys are actually writing the songs and then recording them and deciding on the arrangements?

The process most of the time in an average song is nothing extraordinary.

really wanted the guitar to be a lot more important—of course *I* do!—but I mean ever since the beginning. This time we were pretty much on our own; Glenn said, "We're gonna produce this one." We'd been talking about getting *the* guitar sound and we hadn't gotten it the last two records and we really wanted to get it this time. I spent a lot more time working on it and I had a little bit more freedom. When I listen to it, I just hear a bigger, more

Glenn will get an idea for a riff and sometimes [he and the band] even call me on the phone and say, "Hey, I've got this riff." I'll say, "Alright, I'll go grab my guitar" and they'll either play it to me or just sing it over the phone. Then I'll pick it up and then next time we get together at rehearsal Glenn and I will sit down and he'll hum this riff or sort of bang it out on the guitar a little bit. Then I'll pick it up and fool around with it, play it this way and that way and try and develop it into something. Then we'll try and fit another part or two to it, and then when we've got a little bit going we'll bring [Eerie and Chuck] in and teach it to them. I'll start

playing and we'll pick up a beat and if Glenn wants a certain type of beat he'll say "More like this" or "More like that." Eerie will start banging out a bass line—a lot of bass lines start as just one or two notes—and we'll go from there. A lot of times Glenn'll say, "I want a riff more like this," and he'll air-guitar it and sing it. I'll pick it up that way, so I'm getting a little bit better at almost reading his mind.

When I go in to do parts in the studio, I have a pretty good idea of the part I'm going to play. Sometimes things change at the last second; I'll be playing something and I'll hear something else and I'll say, "Well, this would mesh really good with

another guitar part doing this or that." I'll lay down a couple basic tracks. I do that just so we have something down; [the band] can listen to it and usually somebody hears something else or Glenn wants certain overdubs.

How do you constantly find new riffs?

I think a lot of 'em just sort of pop up by accident. I don't sit down and say, "Okay, I'm going to write a riff." A lot of times you're just humming to yourself, like when I'm practicing [by myself] I go through this routine every day, just exercises that I do. Or I'll just be sitting around watching TV and sometimes I'll just play along to theme songs and I'll pick up weird riffs. I try and learn something that's played on a different instrument, like a saxophone or piano, and when you put it on the guitar it works a totally different way. Then it's a matter of changing one note here and there and you've got a different riff.

Danzig's not a band that tends to bring in other instruments. Is there ever a time where you're going to do a guitar solo that maybe would be better done on another instrument?

With this group and lineup not really because the guitar is the solo instrument aside from the vocals, so a lot of our arrangements we set up for *that* specifically. We used some keyboards on this record more than any of the other ones, mainly for some harmony, maybe a little counter-melody in the background.

What does having a jazz background like yours enable you to bring to a band like this?

When you listen to the music you obviously don't hear jazz! If anything, you get blues—most of the solos are primarily blues-based lines. What the jazz training has done is helped my ear. A lot of the interplay between Glenn and me in the songwriting process is my ability to hear what he wants in a part or the type of progression. If he wants to go change a key here or change a key there or maybe go from a verse to a bridge or to another chorus or something like that, I can tell him which changes harmonically aren't going to work, which ones are going to work and the ones that will work but will have a different type of effect.

You speak the language.

Yeah, I'm sort of the interpreter. He has the idea and then I'm the ears and the hands that make it happen. That's sort of how we work. Knowing theory just helps everything 'cause it's not a struggle for me. Certain things are a little bit more of a struggle for the other guys because they're not quite as fluent in it so I just put things in layman's terms. I can do it without

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thinking about it too much. That's been a *big* help. Of course there's always more theory to learn!

Is there a signature John Christ sound?

I wish I could say that! I have spent my life trying to innovate something but at this point, no. My whole thing has been development. There's certain things that I do a lot, like I like to do artificial harmonics and things like that but anybody can do artificial harmonics and they've been around—they started on the violin. The big thing in my sound is that I like the heavy, crunchy, "chug" tracks.

Do you have any kind of little quirks to get the sounds you want?

Yeah, one thing I've been using from

almost the beginning. It's just a little EQ pedal. I guess I'd been playing a couple of years and a guy I was playing with had one and he said, "You should try it, it's really cool." It gives you a little boost and a little crunch. Guitar players use different distortion pedals and all that kind of shit but they always sounded too cheesy and this would manage to give me that right amount of heavy crunch that I was lookin' for. Feedback is a big part of my live playing and I like to control it, so this thing just helped me do that. It puts me on the edge all the time. If I just hit a note and hold my guitar a certain way it will start ringing and I can change pitches. That's my little box, that raggedy little pedal.

When I had this new switching center built, that had to be in there. I went through every music store in L.A. trying to get something that sounded better than it and I never did. They still make them but I don't know if they still make them the same way so I've pretty much got to keep this one working! I had it apart many times, soldering and resoldering, and it's broken down many times and it still falls apart at rehearsals. That's probably the unique thing to my sound, that one EQ set up a certain way.

Is there any particular player out there today that you favor?

What I'm doing in my own playing is going backwards a little bit 'cause I want to learn a little bit more traditional blues-type playing. For Danzig it's valuable. When I play, there's not a whole lot of room for "out" playing; the changes are fairly basic. You're still working on a lot of pentatonic scales and it's not too much for the more exotic type of scales. Dissonance is cool but only in certain places. In jazz you can go out and stay out and then come back at the end of the bar and things are cool. Danzig's music is a little more structured and more expressive so blues, obviously, is a good way to go for that. The guy I've been listening to is a guy named Larry Carlton. Some of his blues stuff—he just makes the thing *sing*. This tour I'm bringing out some old guitar players like old Robert Johnson stuff and Howlin' Wolf type stuff so I can pick up some of their weird tuning and slide and turnarounds and things. A lot of [those things] I've been using and I don't even think about it but it's time for me to go back and figure out where they all came from and where they used them and why they used them.

You started playing guitar when you were 12?

Electric guitar I guess I started when I was 13. I played some acoustic guitar in church when I was in grade school and that was mainly just chords and stuff like that. When I heard Ted Nugent's *Cat Scratch Fever* album I was pretty much hooked. I said, "I want to do that" and it was all downhill from there!

What was your first electric guitar?

I still have it as a matter of fact! It was a Les Paul copy of the Univox. An old black Univox Les Paul copy. I still have it but I don't play it. I look at it now and can't figure out how I played it! It still works but it's getting a little rusty. It sits in my closet as a reminder of where I came from. It seems so long ago.

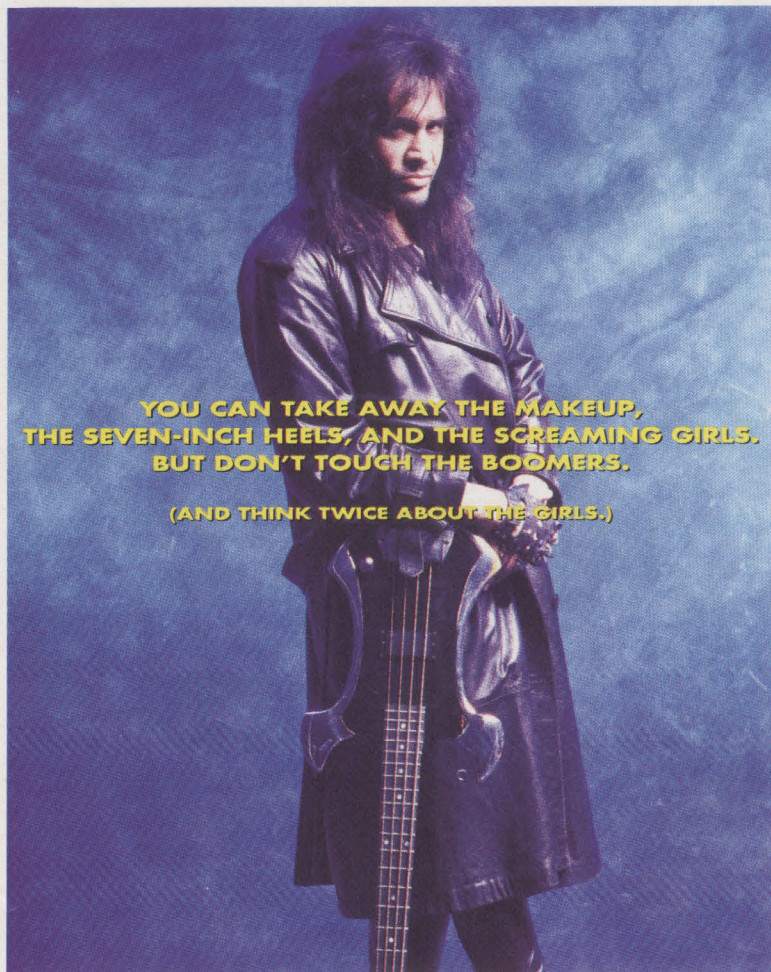
What guitars are you partial to now?

Now I've been using B.C. Rich guitars over the last seven years. The reason I got

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Photo by William Hames. Hear Gene Simmons on "Revenge," Kiss' latest release. Manufactured by GHS Corporation, 2813 Wilber Avenue, Battle Creek, MI 49015.

the first one was I liked the way it looked. I was in high school and I said, "Man, that's a cool looking guitar." They're real expensive and I worked really hard to get it and it didn't sound good when I first got it so I went through a change of pickups. I broke it in and it's been great.

Professionally, who's taught you the most?

As far as the business, I probably learned most of what I know from Glenn 'cause before this I was still in college, just a jazz comp major going to classes, then I jumped into this. Guitar-wise I'd have to say some of my oldest influences, like Ted Nugent. He kept me going through my rebellious years. We were all partying and getting crazy and every time he came out with a new album and there was something crazier and harder on it to play, I'd have to spend more time doing that. I'd say the biggest thing has been my influences on the guitar: Hendrix, Nugent, Marino and Angus Young, and even Van Halen. God, there's so many! There were the newer guys that I stole some shit from, like I stole some stuff from Yngwie and I stole some from Eric Johnson and I stole some from Vinnie Moore and from Joe Satriani. I just steal shit from everybody!

You're not alone—a lot of players admit to that.



You have to. You hear stuff that sounds really cool and you want to learn it and all of a sudden it becomes a part of you. Then you hear recordings somewhere of something that you played and you hear it come out! I'm constantly trying to get better and develop and then I hear all these guys on the radio and I go,

"Oh shit! I've got to practice harder and harder and harder—is it ever going to get easier?" It's a huge challenge to be great. I'm not even in the ballpark yet when I think about it. Put it this way: I've started. I'm to the gates of the ballpark but I'm not in yet. That's my goal, to someday be a great player. ☑

William Hammes

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PERFORMANCE: Taut, chilling, black; **HOT SPOTS:** "Godless," "Dirty Black Summer," "Heart of the Devil"; **BOTTOM LINE:** Danzig's darkest yet.

On *How the Gods Kill* Glenn Danzig is coming close to matching the pervasive evil and foreboding of his lyrics with music that is as stark, frightful and brutally visceral. With his keyboards adding a hovering pall, Danzig's band creates a brooding, harsh but carefully crafted mutant of metal, an intensely arranged, echoing, high-volume aural creature that stalks rather than rocks. With Danzig's vocal blend of Jim Morrison, Ozzy

and Paul Anka and guitar mix of dark Black Sabbath riffs, caustic Rick Rubin decibel levels and the troubled twang of Chris Isaak, *How the Gods Kill* incorporates the intended evil of metal, a religious fervor blending paganism, poetry and the very devil in rock'n'roll that reaches back to Elvis Presley. It all makes for very dramatic and powerful music. John Christ's guitar playing—controlled, turned up and honed razor sharp—is used more to create darkness in the spatially rich arrangements than to release tension with solos. He's never sounded better. Using craft rather than the usual kamikaze approach, Danzig continues to fashion its own literate world of death metal and keeps getting better at it, too.

DANZIG DEVOTEE

I've been a subscriber for over two years and dearly love your magazine. But during this time I have yet to see anything on a very influential and deserving band, Danzig. Danzig is one of the bands James Hetfield of Metallica largely cites as a major influence along with many others. I know an article, or even a transcription by this remarkable band would be appreciated by millions of subscribers, including myself. Thanks.

Corey Soria

Laguna Beach, CA