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Dark
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the Crass Temptation of Christ

A pint-sized Jim Morrison, muscle-bound Glenn Danzig screams of being a walking hell, an instrument of torture, and a one-man second coming. His vivisected soul cries out for your heart; his hands drip death's blood. And that's just on *Danzig 4*'s opening track. Other sonic soufflés—"Going Down To Die," "Sadistikal," "Stalker Song," and the like—describe Glenn's desire to be

By **Jas
Obrecht**

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your misery, your fears and emptiness, and the god who kills. Oddly enough, the hell-spawn riffage behind the leather-lunged Morrisonette is played by a man named Christ.

Unlike his namesake, though, John Christ is strictly a hired hand. In his August '94 *Musician* cover story, Glenn Danzig offered his opinion of John's creativity: "As far as John's ideas, I don't know of any ideas he has." An unflinching dictator, Glenn writes every word, conceives every note, and controls virtually every swipe of John's hands across the fingerboard.

But Christ, it turns out, is savvy, self-effacing, and far more of a guitarhead than his Danzig playing suggests. He was studying jazz composition at Baltimore's Towson State University when tapped for the band in '87. John began our interview.

I'm one of the guys who sits there, puts my *Guitar Player* magazine on a music stand and works through the stuff for hours with a metronome.

You're kidding.

No. I do that. You know, like the Eddie chops stuff and Frank Gambale and the speed picking and all that. I still play along with Eric Johnson's "Cliffs Of Dover" Soundpage—it's one of my practice songs. I owe my mom a lot, because back in '78 she bought me a subscription to *Guitar Player* and rolled it over for a few years, and man, it was great. I'd read the magazine cover to cover. It was really cool. By the way, my mom's gonna be reading this, so if you could nix out any little cuss words, I'd really appreciate it.

You got it.

You know, I was a little disappointed in the last few years to see that the style of what's popular has changed. The guitar-god virtuoso players are still there and they're still phenomenal, but they're not selling records. But I feel in my soul that that style is gonna be coming back around within the next five years. If I were to speak in Ted Nugent tongue, I would say, "And I'm single-handedly gonna do it!" [Laughs.] Some guitar player friends of mine and I wanna bring back that heavy, guitar-oriented, on-top, good-time rock and roll thing. You know, like when we used to go to the clubs and everybody would be dancing and having a great time, going, "Man, this band is killer! They're jamming their *beeps* off!" That's what I grew up on. I just *loved* it. If a solo was a great solo, it didn't matter whether it was five seconds long or three minutes long—it was appreciated. Now guitar technicians aren't appreciated the same way.

What's a man named Christ doing in a band like Danzig?

[Laughs.] Uhh . . . Working hard and preparing to go out on a world tour and play my ever-lovin' you-know-what off. The guys in the band named me Christ as a joke. I was raised in a big Catholic family. When I first got the gig, I had to move to New Jersey, and my apartment was about 50 yards from the Catholic church. So I'd go over and harmonize with the choir, and the priest was always asking me to join the folk group. Then I gravitated to the masses where they had the organ and choir. I was so bored once I memorized all of the priest's lines—the Eucharistic prayers and everything! I was actually saying mass to myself. I've used my real name on a movie soundtrack and some other

studio stuff. I can't cash checks under the name John Christ!

So you don't want your real name in a guitar magazine.

Not yet.

Does democracy exist in Danzig?

From day one, it's never been a democracy. There's a misconception that a majority of bands are democracies, but that's not necessarily the case. Glenn and Eerie Von, the bass player, put this band together, and I ended up getting the gig by auditioning. It wasn't like four of us got together and said, "Hey, let's put this band together and we'll all write songs." Well, I thought it was gonna be a little more equal than it turned out to be, but there are several reasons it couldn't be. For one, we come from totally different



Picks: The Ultimate EQ?

Picks are fascinating, and when I'm rolling tape, I experiment around with four or five different picks before I start messing with an EQ. Different pick sizes and materials definitely give you different sounds. My favorite pick is a Clayton 1.52mm, which is basically a plastic rock. It's very thick. It hits the strings really hard, but it has a smooth tone. It has a soft, rounded edge with a thick matted finish, so it's fairly resilient when you do screeches and crazy effects. It doesn't get the major grooves in it like the regular Fender Heavy would. When I want a little more attack and a brighter tone, I'll use thinner picks, like a regular Fender Extra Heavy or Heavy. D'Andrea Delrex and Delrin picks are a little thinner and have a very sharp edge with the same matte finish, and they also give you a different tone and attack.

D'Andrea sent me about 25 different kinds of picks—different gauges, colors, materials, compositions, finishes—so I sat down one night for four hours with a dozen picks and an acoustic guitar and played the same progressions and picking patterns with each of them. I learned that when you're strumming and doing ballad-type arpeggios, a thin pick gives you the crispest, glassiest tone—sort of like a nice Fender Strat in one of the funny coil-tap positions through a clean Deluxe amp. A fuller-sounding pick, like the Clayton or the regular Fender Heavy, has a round tone. It has a decent presence on the top, a nice mid body, and some low end. When you go to the Clayton 1.25 or 1.52, you get power and low end. If you're playing in open G, the first two strings don't ring out quite as crispy, but it's got a nice midrange tone for acoustic single-note soloing and has enough power for a good double-stop.

Watching *MTV Unplugged*, I noticed that some guitarists have a decent tone, and some of them are like, dink, dink, dink—just this *doink* factor. So I was thinking about that, and then I pulled out these 2.0mm picks, and man, what a fat, rich, single-note tone you get with a thicker pick, even on extra-light strings! It has more impact on lighter-gauge strings than on heavier-gauge. Play a thin-bodied Washburn cutaway with one of those 2.0s, and man, it jumps! It gives you more sustain from the tenth position on up. Wow! If you strum acoustic with a medium pick and then pick up a 2.0 for the solo, it's just like a mixer going on.

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schools of thought, musical backgrounds, generations, and just about everything. Glenn was from a punk rock scene, and I was from a rock and roll/heavy metal scene.

Why did he hire you?

Because he wanted a harder edge and somebody who had a vibe and intensity and could play lead guitar. All of his previous guitarists were punk rock rhythm players that only knew how to pick one way—down. And I'd never downpicked in my life! One of the reasons I wanted to try for the gig was my own ego, because there's a style of downpicking that was so fast that I couldn't do it! My right forearm was cramping—major pain—but I just had to keep banging away at it. So I sped up my tape recorder even faster and just kept grinding it out until I got it. Then, of course, I cramped up at the first audition. It started locking on me, so I just went crazy and started smashing the cymbals on the drums, doing the whole rock and roll gonzo thing to cover up the fact that I could barely move my arm! [Laughs.] I had a definite attitude when I walked in.

How do you react to Glenn's comments about you in Musician?

Well, I'll bet if you talked to Glenn the next day after he'd eaten a good meal, he probably would have had a different quote. You know, we go back and forth. At the beginning of the tour there's a lot of stress, but that exposes the musical differences. Early on, it wasn't so much that way. With this record, Glenn wanted the songs to be a certain way—simple, nothing fancy in them, straight grooves, weird sounds, and that was it. Like with *How The Gods Kill*, my ideas are all over that record. That's my favorite Danzig record, guitar-wise. It's the most interesting. There are a couple of tidbits on the first couple of records, but on *thrall-demonsweatlive* there's nothing there, and on the new record there's not much. It's tough sometimes, because fans compliment my playing, and I just want to shake them and say, "But you don't know what I can do!"

Do Glenn's unrelentingly dark lyrics take a psychic toll on you?

Hmm. "Psychic toll"—interesting phrase. The lyrics have turned so negative. Yeah, it is strange, because people say to me, "You don't seem like you're into any of that." And I say, "I'm not." Glenn and I have radically different personalities and styles in everything except black!

How does Glenn present musical ideas to the band?

Most of the time he hums into a little micro-cassette recorder—dunn, dunn, duh-duh, dunn,

"My mom's gonna be reading this, so if you could nix out any little cuss words, I'd really appreciate it."



dunn, duh-duh. I'll pick it up and try and second-guess him and read his mind. He has an old Les Paul, and once in a while he'll bang out a few chords. But he's not a guitar player, so he can't always play what he wants to hear.

What are you forbidden to play?

Anything with a major third in it [laughs], unless it's a major third against a diminished fifth—then I can get away with it sometimes. To quote Glenn, he doesn't want it to sound "normal." Your typical authentic cadences—don't use those very often. Not many plagal cadences, a few deceptives, but most of the time it's lots of "diminished" cadences or Phrygian-type stuff. He likes anything that's darker-sounding. He likes dissonance. Anything that's too consonant turns him off, but consonance sounds good to me. It sounds right. Dissonance has its place, but other times it sounds wrong. So there are two different schools of thought working together to come up with one vibe. There's tension in the songwriting process, because I do take part as the interpreter for his ideas. He writes the

songs and comes up with the riffs, but I make it Danzig. And a lot of people say, "Aw, doesn't that bug you? Doesn't that drive you crazy that you help him do this, and you don't get publishing and blah, blah, blah, blah." And I'm like, "Sometimes yes, sometimes no." There are pros and cons for each.

One of the things I admire about your playing...

Hey, that sounds strange to me, for some reason. Someone from *Guitar Player* saying they admire my playing just hits me weird!

What's essential to the Danzig guitar sound?

A couple of things. Me—or at least part of me! [Laughs.] My B.C. Rich guitars, my Paul Reed Smith pickups, and my little EQ stomp box that gives it that chug-chug-chug type of thing. It's an old Boss GE7, a horribly noisy little thing if you stop playing, but it works. In the beginning, I didn't want anybody to know what it was, because it's a weird color, so I just totally taped it black with electrical tape. So I had "the

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little black box," which was the key to the Danzig sound.

What would a John Christ album have in common with Danzig music?

Very little. The correlation would be in grooves, because I like the laid-back, behind-the-beat, sexy type of feel, and that's consistent with the Danzig vibe. On a John Christ record you'd get more over-the-top playing. I like to play fast boogie-woogie, and then switch gears and go to the total dirge thing for a while. Then, of course, there's some ballady love songs. I love classical music, blues, and jazz. It's impossible to get everything on one record!

Whatever I can't do with Danzig, that's fine. It's gonna come out in my own time and my own way. In the meanwhile, I've put together a Nugent cover band, and now that I can afford a Byrdland, we're gonna go out and play *Double Live Gonzo* when I get off the road. Of course, instead of white pants and moccasins and suspenders, it'll be *black* pants and moccasins and suspenders. And then next year I'm gonna delve into the style of Charlie Christian. ■