



“Are you restless like me?”
--“Up The Cuts”

Against Me! ***New Wave***

Tom Gabel: vocals / guitar
Warren Oakes: drums
James Bowman: guitar
Andrew Seward: bass

A decade ago, Tom Gabel began his music career as a 17-year old solo acoustic act known as Against Me!, belting out songs of rebellion in laundromats and any other venue that would have him.

Flash forward to today, and Gabel's agitation cycle is still cranked high, but not without a wild streak of optimism thrown in for good measure. For the past five years, the gravelly roar of the vocalist/guitar player has been part of a thunderous and thoughtful foursome featuring Andrew Seward (bass), Warren Oakes (drums) and James Bowman (guitar), still doing business under the Against Me! moniker. Churning out a distinctive blend of punk, rock, and even folk that is impossible to label, they have toured all 50 states and foreign lands from Iceland to Australia, forging an intense connection with their growing legions of fans.

Now, after three successful full-length records on indie labels-- *Reinventing Axl Rose* (No Idea, 2002); *As The Eternal Cowboy* (Fat Wreck Chords, 2003) and *Searching For A Former Clarity* (Fat Wreck Chords 2005), which reached #9 on the Billboard Top Independent Albums chart and featured the thumping “Don't Lose Touch”-- this Gainesville, Florida band is making its major-label debut on July 10, 2007 with *New Wave* (Sire Records). The title is tidal for a powerful reason.

“We felt like that was our mission statement, or our manifesto for the record,” Gabel said. “Instead of sitting back and complaining about how there's no good music out there, you should be energized and take things over. Be the bands you want to hear. It meant 'wave' in a literal sense, coming and washing away mediocrity... Why let someone else have the loudest voice?” asks Gabel, and with his band's new record, he most surely has not.

The album opens with a colossal, *angst*-fueled one-two punch: “New Wave” and “Up The Cuts” are driving, irresistible tracks, seething with energy and alternately pleading and snarling for change. It’s a theme that reverberates throughout the record, both on personal and artistic levels, coming up again most pointedly in “Piss And Vinegar,” with Gabel caterwauling “Just say what you’re thinking!” to the faceless pap-pushers of the mainstream.

For a D.I.Y. outfit like Against Me!, signing to a major label meant some changes in approach—namely, that the band was going to enlist a full-time producer for the first time. They didn’t mess around, teaming up with alt-rock heavyweight Butch Vig (Nirvana, Smashing Pumpkins, Sonic Youth, Garbage).

When the label was prepping a list of potential producers, Gabel and his mates were afraid the candidates would be hot-shots who “didn’t even give a f*ck about our band,” the singer says with a laugh. He confirms that a few mega-producers were indeed on the document, “but Butch was there, and I’ve been a fan of tons of his records, all across the board. I like the fact that the majority of his records are great-sounding sonically, but still sound like real bands. They don’t sound like all the life has been drained out of them.”

For his part, Vig was instantly drawn to the relative unknowns the first time he saw the band play live. “I was blown away by the way they played the intensity and the reaction from the crowd,” Vig said. “The way the audience sings all the songs, I could see this passionate connection with their fans and the way the band communicates with them.”

The veteran producer was excited to work with a band that’s not shy about sharing their feeling on any subject. “One of things I found refreshing in their music, in Tom’s lyrics, is that they give a shit, but they’re never preachy or anything,” Vig shares. “He’s saying something that makes you think about what’s going on. The songs lyrically are complicated and dense. They’re not simple pop songs, but they rock.”

The first single, “Thrash Unreal (Bah Bah),” is a perfect example. In the manner of early Tom Waits and Bruce Springsteen songs, it empathetically chronicles the damaged life of a typical college-town burnout—a 40-something female junkie who says she has no regrets—to a defiantly upbeat chorus.

Bass player Seward, who joined Against Me! in 2002, says the new step forward for the band is “not a new adventure—it’s an extension of the adventure. It’s something we wanted to do—we own this move [to a major label]. But I’m not going to lie to you,” Seward added. “I was scared shitless, like ‘Oh shit we’re going to make a complete rookie mistake, we’re going to go to Hollywood to some big-time studio and record something that sounds like...’” he trails off with a laugh. Instead, Seward is proud of their latest work, saying “Tom has written by far the best batch of songs he’s ever crafted... Everything is necessary in these songs, everything is there for the greater good. There’s no bullshit or filler in there.”

To make sure he had absolute focus on writing the record, Gabel holed up in a Gainesville motel whenever the band wasn't touring. As with previous Against Me! records, the subject matter on *New Wave* is freewheeling, as befits the mind of a 27-year old American male at a crossroads in his life. Conceived by Gabel as "in many ways, a reaction" to the "self-centered, dark and moody" terrain of *Searching For A Former Clarity*, the new 10-track, 34-minute CD covers the topics of love, lust, war, personal integrity and substance abuse, with a unique blend of attitude that Vig describes as "intense, but with a positive undercurrent."

New fans drawn by the incendiary 2006 "Jimmy Kimmel Live" performance of *Former Clarity's* sizzling screed "From Her Lips To God's Ears (The Energizer)," with its plaintive chorus of "Condoleeza! What are we gonna do now?" will find more in store. The former "Army brat" (until his parents divorced when he was 12) has stepped up to the plate and cranked out two more raucous fist-pumpers about war and national identity.

"White People For Peace" celebrates the nobility/futility of protesting war, while "Americans Abroad" rails against corporate greed with the aid of Oakes' road-rage drums and Bowman's ominous guitar tremolos, before boomeranging with a cautionary that maybe we're all part of the problem—even the band.

"I don't feel like I'm a person who has any answers," says Gabel, who self-published a 'zine called *Misanthrope* while in his teens. "But I often feel like I'm searching for identity in the world and trying to figure out where I fit in."

Wide-eyed and world-weary. Never naïve, but often idealistic, Against Me! is in many ways the punk-rock embodiment of Matthew Modine's character, "Private Joker," in the classic Stanley Kubrick film *Full Metal Jacket*. They're flashing peace signs in a seething mosh pit, and there's no place else they'd rather be.

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