



THE AUSTERITY PROGRAM

Detailed Band Biography

1997 First practice. Justin, the guitarist and singer in the band, moves back into New York City after a two-year community organizing stint in Hartford, CT. Thad, the bassist, has agreed to come up to the giant-black-roach-infested loft where Justin lives. Justin picked the spot – 7500 square uninsulated feet in the South Bronx – sacrificing comfort, cleanliness and windows for “a place I can live and play music”. After tuning up, it’s agreed that the previous band (named Polonium, after the heaviest metal on the periodic table) is over. The new stuff will also be like Bolt Thrower. But much less melodic. And louder – got to be louder. Less fun, more serious. And “turn the drum machine up, I can barely hear it over your fucking loud guitar.”

1998 First show. Coney Island High on St. Marks place in the sorta-East Villiage. The band before them has some fella wearing a billowy flamenco shirt. Justin and Thad watch them thinking “this isn’t how I pictured our first show would get started.” The twelve non-metal liking friends they could drag out on a cold Wednesday are equivocal. In what would almost become a band tradition, the most energetic praise comes from the pimpled sound guy. Also – they buy 200 lb subwoofer for the drum machine because “it’s the only way I can hear the damn drums over all that guitar”.

1999-2000 8 song demo recorded. 4 best songs are selected and sent to labels. The letter sent with it is as smart-ass as this is, so you can believe that barely any labels respond. Hydra Head says – ‘we might be interested’. There’s some fake posturing about “we’re considering other offers, but tell us a little more about you”. In reality, the band is busy buying the label’s back catalog to get a better sense of what HH is about. After hearing Keelhaul II, both band members are like – “holy shit, these guys are interested in US? Good news.”

2001 Drive to Boston and handshake agreement with the label. The whole thing is finalized with a ridiculously macho gesture – peeing in one of the label guy’s back yard. Brunch with the other label guy the next morning wraps it up. “We’ve got jobs and wives, so we won’t tour too much.” Well, ok. “We’ve got very particular ideas about the way we do things.” Fine. “There’s absolutely no sort of New York scene that we’re even aware we could erroneously claim to be a part of.” All right. “We’ve got an vision for packaging the first release that almost guarantees you won’t make any money off it.” If that’s how it’s gotta be. (And so on.)

“I couldn’t believe my luck. Fifteen years after she’d turned me down for the Junior Prom, Chessie was driving the bus I’d fallen asleep on. I took a swig and headed up the aisle, hungry for a second chance.”

2002 Recording 4 song EP. This is done over four evenings at the Fordham Evangelical Lutheran Church in the Bronx. The amplifiers and recording equipment are set up around the altar at the front of the large, neo-gothic church. The pastor is been promised “we’ll have all this stuff out of here by your Saturday afternoon service”. Although Windows Me crashes about six times during the process, the deadline is met. Later in the year there’s a week long tour in the sort of nearby states. The highlight is when unexpected kids (and expected soundguys) go nuts at shows, despite the fact that they’d never heard of us before. The low point is the jackass in Baltimore who never told us the show was canceled. Typical band-on-tour stuff.

2003 EP is released. Reviews are either very complimentary or compare the band unfavorably to a Converse All Star footprint in the shit of a Great Dane – really nothing in between. Hydra Head calls – they’re almost astounded at how few copies are sold. “Well, maybe with the next one, we won’t send out fake press releases from lawyers who don’t exist claiming that we’re going to sue the shit out of our label for a bogus ‘patent infringement’”. Hydra Head says – well, don’t stop on our account; we thought it was pretty funny. Shoulders are shrugged and more songs are written. Justin buys a house in Queens, just like Archie Bunker.

“Kensington’s analysis suggests a raw inability to distinguish Duchamp from Dali. How this fraud landed an Art History chair is a mystery on par with Roanoke.”

2003 - 2006 Construction on the studio in Justin’s back yard. The regular two or three practices a month devolve into hanging drywall, laying a hardwood floor, wiring conduit, studying acoustics textbooks, constructing a false wall, taping and sanding the walls, painting – this could go on for a while. Occasionally, the band takes a break and practices in the shoebox-sounding basement where 3500 combined amplifier wattage runs at about 2% capacity. More often, though, the band is pounding nails or over at the Brazillian coffee shop to load up on some stuff that brags – El Cafeinezhom Bom. I think that means “Caffeine Bomb”. It sure felt like it about ½ way through a cup – 12 oz. of jittery liquid paranoia. Fuck.

2006 Construction is finished. The studio is filled up with two analog tape decks, a medium sized rack of outboard gear and a few good microphones. Justin pores over a couple of books on stereo theory (boring the hell out of his pregnant wife with his conversation about that). Practices begin anew as the final pieces of the full length are written. A local film maker is fascinated with the “parents and gainfully-employed advanced-degree-holders by day, minimalist metal screamers by night” shtick and begins filming a documentary of the band. Halfway through the five-evening plan for recording the full length, Justin’s son is born. Thad suggests that they adopt a new schedule for finishing the album. Five months later, the record is done (and Thad has a second son of his own).