



HAVING A LAUGH?

Canadian trad metallers **3 INCHES OF BLOOD** aren't here to fucking amuse you // by *Shawn Macomber*

3 INCHES OF BLOOD were a Vancouver mini-phenomenon in the process of blowing up into a hitherto undetermined larger thing, yet local shredder and heavy metal aficionado Shane Clark hadn't hit up a show. The whispers of self-appointed scene police insinuating 3 Inches (mis)used thrash riffage, dual-guitar harmonies and falsetto howls to spoof true metal, like a local improv troupe rebranding *Spinal Tap* for irony-addled hipsters, breezed by Clark's ear, initially dampening his curiosity. "Once I finally saw the band play, though, I understood pretty quickly these guys weren't making fun of metal," Clark recalls. "They just had the same taste in music as I did!"

Indeed, so kindred were these metallic spirits, Clark wound up taking up the cause and joining the band on guitar in 2004. Alas, while the unfair "joke band" rap fades with each album and subsequent round of touring, it can still rankle—though not so much so as to prevent the band from expressing their Viking-tinged *joie de vivre* via fantasy cover art, ebullient song titles such as "Destroy the Orcs," "Lord of the Storm (Upon the Boiling Sea II)" and "Rock in Hell," or a fan club christened the Goatriders Horde. "Cam [Pipes]'s voice, the higher register, it can be a little strange at first for kids who never saw King Diamond on *Headbangers Ball*, or who are more familiar with the Phil [Anselmo] of *Vulgar Display of Power* than on *Cowboys From Hell*, or who didn't grow up listening to thrash bands with fucking great singers like Vio-lence or Forbidden," Clark muses. "Without that foundation, you might not know what to make of us when we first get onstage, but five minutes into our set, you will know we're serious—even if you don't like us! It's very black and white, like Rush. You either love Rush or hate Rush because of Geddy Lee. That's cool. We're fine with that. But this is no joke to us."

Fair warning: Any wisenheimers still inclined toward scoffing are going to have a helluva row to hoe after *Here Waits Thy Doom*—a much more streamlined beast than either *Fire Up the Blades* (2007) or *Advance and Vanquish* (2004)—drops.

Ferocious, focused and diverse within the context of (very) heavy rock, the distilled-to-essence Jack Endino production ("We didn't want it to sound like Neil Young and Crazy Horse or anything," Clark says, "but we did want it to be raw") captures a band in pursuit of what Clark calls "pre-subgenre metal."

"We're big fans of riffing," the guitarist says. "Whether you're talking Tony Iommi, AC/DC, Thin Lizzy, Crowbar, Metallica or Slayer, metal is guitar-based music. Beyond that, writing metal should be a free-for-all. No formulas. Sometimes we may strip things down to really tight, tough rhythms, and then there might be a stretch where I'm listening to Rush's *A Farewell to Kings* all the time and writing bigger, more complex arrangements." He adds, "If things usually turn out to be epic and mighty, it's half on purpose and half by accident. Basically, we try to write songs we'd want to hear in the van."

Above this churning riff squall, Pipes delivers a performance to make a banshee cower, or at least leave Tim "Ripper" Owens massaging his own throat, a faraway look in his eye as he mutters, "Hot damn!"

"Writing for 3 Inches of Blood is pretty fucking sweet because of Cam," Clark enthuses. "We're able to take real musical chances. There's no fear of losing our identity. No matter how far out we go, when Cam sings over it, the song

immediately has our sound. It's kind of weird, 'cause he drinks whiskey and smokes cigarettes, and is still able to sing... *like that*. The guy is a force of nature." Clark pauses before throwing one final superlative on the barbie: "Even when I'm drunk fucking around, I can't come close to imitating him."

When Cam [Pipes] sings over it, the song immediately has our sound. It's kind of weird, 'cause he drinks whiskey and smokes cigarettes, and is still able to sing... *like that*.

—Shane Clark

Blended family of metal influences raised together in harmony + über-distinctive singer = a righteous combo, no doubt. Nevertheless, Clark holds no illusions of 3 Inches somehow metaphorically slaying the *subgenre* concept in toto. "Faction is an adolescent thing pushed by mainstream media and record labels that doesn't ultimately

mean much," Clark sighs, the ghost of a billion references to *traditional metal* in reviews and profiles still clearly haunting him. "Ask any band stuck with the unfortunate title of 'stoner rock.' A lot of younger metal fans get caught up in the 'Well, I'm into... insert subgenre here'; they dress the part, everything else sucks. I can relate. I'm 34 and love a lot of different music now, but there was a point in my life where it was Metallica, Slayer or nothing. But as you get older, you realize one man's screamo is another man's metalcore. Call us pre-industrial post-punk grind-grunge—whatever. At a certain point, it's in listeners' hands, so we just try to get in front of as many people as possible, play our songs and let them decide. We don't mind being underdogs."

The kids who pick up what 3 Inches are laying down, the ones who gladly ride a goat amongst the amassing horde, who fly great distances to wave Canadian flags during the band's set at European festivals, they are enough to keep 3 Inches pressing on despite the naysayers. "The 'Battles and Brotherhood' vibe in our songs is something we really feel," Clark stresses. "As an artist, you inadvertently express the type of person you are, and I think what comes through for us is that we're down-to-earth guys, fellow metal fans in it for the love of it. Our fans inspire us. We definitely see this as a shared experience." [db]

PHOTO BY HRISTO SHINDOV