



# Brian Perera of Cleopatra Records

**Brian Perera**, founder of **Cleopatra Records**, has been a curator of cool and aptly labeled as helping to bring in the next era of **dark alternative bands** through reissuing/releasing albums by iconic bands from the **first wave of punk and deathrock**: Gary Numan, Christian Death, Switchblade Symphony, and Ministry to name only a few. We caught up with him at the Cleopatra Records office in Los Angeles to discuss how he began his career, the state of the music industry during and after the current pandemic, the importance of vinyl as a release format, and his love of alternative music.

interview by Elizabeth Rhodes  
photographer Saryn Christina

Brian Perera has been in Los Angeles supporting artists since the 1980s beginning with a band pin and T-shirt business which grew into a larger apparel enterprise and finally into Cleopatra Records. Founded in 1992, Perera has been a curator of cool and aptly labeled as helping to bring in the next era of dark alternative bands through Cleopatra Records and reissuing/releasing albums by iconic bands from the first wave of punk and deathrock: Gary Numan, Christian Death, U.K. Subs, Anti-Nowhere League, Switchblade Symphony, The Electric Hellfire Club, Genitorturers, and Ministry to name only a few.

What fans might not know is that Perera became an innovator in the music industry by understanding the importance of compilations for introducing artists to a new generation of fans as well as being an early adopter of digital rights to license music for distribution and later through streaming services, which has now become de rigueur for fans to find new music. Since its inception, Cleopatra has diversified with sub labels or "imprints" that cover a variety of genres, always maintaining a focus on alternative and experimental artists: Cleopatra Blues, X-Ray Records (hip-hop), Deadline Records (metal/rock revival from the 80s), Purple Pyramid (psychedelic rock/prog rock), and Hypnotic Records (electronic). In 2015, Cleopatra innovated again with Cleopatra Entertainment, a film division notable to horror fans as well as music fans for its rare coverage of artists like The Damned, Johnny Thunders, and Morrissey.

I caught up with Perera at the Cleopatra Records office to discuss how he began his career, the state of the music industry during and after the current pandemic, the importance of vinyl as a release format, and how his love of alternative music (especially space rock pioneers Hawkwind) really started it all.

**You've been around and seen a lot of changes in the music industry and Los Angeles' music scene itself. I also notice you don't speak to the press often so it's exciting to have the opportunity to talk to you. Let's start here: you're from the southern California/LA area?**

Brian Perera : I grew up, actually junior high and high school, in Westchester, California. It's close to the airport.

**When did you become familiar with there being an underground or alternative scene?**

BP : There was a club called Fetish, this is in the mid-80s. I don't know if you're familiar with the people that ran that club and the record store Vinyl Fetish? They were the ones that sold all the imports and exposed the scene that was coming from the UK and Europe at the time, including bands like This Mortal Coil. So everyone that was into alternative music, even bringing in stuff like The Smiths, who were relatively still underground at the time, they were bringing in all those 12" records ahead of time before they were even on the radio, before the videos were made.

**And that was your introduction to those albums and alternative music?**

BP : Yeah, that was the introduction. One of my favorite bands was The Damned, so even though they were punk they definitely had a darker edge.

**Why did you transition out of the T-shirts and buttons business and choose to start a record label? You made a big transition from being in the scene, going to shows and then shift gears and start a label.**

BP : Well, part of that reason was financial, that I was able to save enough money to be able to start a label because it costs capital and unless you have people backing you to do that, it's virtually impossible. So I had to start with saving a lot of money. It was basically just bare bones, eating Top Ramen, saving money, even though obviously I could eat a proper meal, economically I was thinking ahead, like if I can put away fifty bucks a day and save it, not spend it, if you multiply that by seven, multiply it by four, multiply it by three hundred and sixty, it can add up. So you can accumulate something to have where you can start something else.

**And that's how you started while you were doing the T-shirts.**

BP : Yeah, the T-shirts and the clothing was wholesaling to clothes retailers like Hot Topic. I came up with this thing no one could figure out how to do; it was basically skull prints on thigh high over-knee socks, polka dots and bats. Hot Topic and a few other chains took to those and I got some really good orders.

**So, you're saying you innovated that production technique for this apparel?**

BP : I innovated, because those things could only be printed and made at the same time, so I figured out a way to print the socks after getting the finished goods. It was basically on a silk screen platform where I cut out a piece of wood and attached it where the sock would actually fit on the wood. It was a little time consuming; you would silk screen one side, put it through the dryer, then you would silk screen the other side. When you put it on as a garment, it would look like a seamless product, it wouldn't look like it was a two-sided t-shirt or whatever. It would look like it was a continuous pattern.

**That's really cool. Have you patented or licensed that process?**

BP : No, at the time you don't really think about patents or licenses. So you'd figure out how to move ahead without having to work a nine-to-five job and I had to figure it out because even in high school I was trying to get a job at McDonald's and they said we can't, you have to cut your hair, it's X amount too long. You just keep on figuring out ways to work for your style and what you want to do.

**Wow, I had no idea McDonald's was so strict.**

BP : Yeah, I couldn't even get a job. [laughs]

**When I was researching what the first releases were for Cleopatra, I was happy to learn that you were into Hawkwind, which makes sense that Motörhead was the first Cleopatra release (*On Parole*, originally released in 1977), followed by Kraftwerk.**

BP : This is really early 90s, I was also doing mail order for a hobby and a lot of these artists like Hawkwind, you can't find at record stores, people did not know. There was a following, yeah, it wasn't a huge following, but people could not find those records or CDs in stores. People want the Japanese import, the UK version of it, there can be a German version with a different track listing.

**Yeah, but you couldn't easily get your hands on those versions in the United States.**

BP : There was a guy in the UK who was running a magazine called Hawkfan so I told him what I wanted to do and he helped me out, set me up. He directed, put traffic on all the American fans, to buy mail order.

**It's easy to forget that before the internet, you couldn't know what was going on in another scene or in another country if you didn't have your local press or available publications covering it and if there weren't albums coming to you where you live. A lot of those bands at the time didn't have that kind of distribution, so it's interesting to think that now we live in a world where it's all immediate, it's a click away to find out. But it wasn't that way back then.**

BP : Yeah, it would tend to take a month or two to get information about what was going on in another country, especially in the UK. I think that's why New York was always ahead of the curve, because they were closer to the UK.

**In the beginning days of Cleopatra Records you focused on getting distribution of artists that you believed in and that's how it all began. But that's the part of the DNA, right? Your focus is on new artists that are coming out but it's also the reissuing of releases from the past.**

BP : Right, you don't forget the past to get into the future.

**And would you refer to that as the legacy part of the label?**

BP : I call it the established formats that continue to have fan bases. You can rely on and trust that they're not like a lot of artists that have had number ones really quickly and kinda come and go. These artists keep feeding their fan base; it could

be a small cult of fans, you know, sometimes it grows, sometimes it explodes, like some of these bands they really, no one cared about fifteen years ago but now they care about them again.

**Who would be one of those bands that you would say, recently, that's come around again?**

BP: I would even use The Damned as an example.

**The *Evil Spirits* (2018) album in particular? I think it's important to note, Cleopatra released the documentary, *The Damned: Don't You Wish That We Were Dead* (2015). To date, it's the only documentary that's really out there about the band, so thank you for that.**

BP: They weren't that big, The Damned, fifteen years ago. But then, if you look at how things are going out around the country, they can play in a lot of different sized venues. Before it was just New York and LA and they wouldn't really get to too many other places.

**The Damned had such a big impact on the punk scene here in Los Angeles and at home in the UK, so again they're an unsung hero. But it's really cool that you have so much to do with that vision and help give those bands a voice.**

BP: Yeah, one of the early deals we did in the mid-90s was with Rat Scabies and The Damned. He was managing the band, and with a guy called Paul Raven of Killing Joke in LA looking for a home in America for the next Damned record and we met. We hit it off and we struck a deal within the next few days.

**I think Rat's father was a businessman and helped the band understand copyright law and the rights to their music and even the band name itself, because when Brian James left the band the remaining members wondered if legally they were even The Damned anymore? Thus, the short-lived existence of "The Doomed".**

BP: That I don't know. I know that different managers tell bands different things. Rat, the only thing that hurt him was wearing a manager's hat and a drummer's hat at the same time.

**Given his personality and notorious behavior, you would not look at Rat on stage and think, "That's the guy who's actually running the show."**

BP: It's also a bad part of it, the democracy of the group. So let's say you're a band member, there's four people in the band and you're also the manager. Let's say it's a twenty-five percent split, so the manager, which could be the same guy as the band members, is going to want his fifteen or twenty percent and take his cut. So the rest of the guys are looking at it as, "why do you make more?" And then it becomes a problem. And that's why wearing two hats in a band, unless you're just the leader of the band and you put everyone on salary, it really doesn't work, unfortunately.

**It sounds like they worked out that situation for the most part.**

BP: Yeah, I think they're on better terms than they were.

**It's been a long history with those guys, but that's a whole other conversation.**

BP: Yeah, we were stuck in the middle of that issue, too.

**Was Cleopatra behind the American dates for that *Evil Spirits* tour in 2018?**

BP: No, we were just involved with The Damned in the mid-90s with *Not of This Earth* (1995), and then we bought a bunch of other stuff from Rat as he was acting as manager of the band. But they won't get their cuts on the publishing, it's all really spread out on the records.

**Going back to the topic of you starting a new record label, for that *Motörhead* release or the *Kraftwerk* release, was that about licensing it for distribution in the U.S.? It sounds like you were setting up the template for the label.**

BP: It was knowing that there was a fan base for it and that stuff wasn't available, so in the US, the *Motörhead* record was never available on CD. For that *Motör-*

head release I was sold the import that was rushed out with EMI. The band really wasn't connected to the label, it was a record that was actually shelved, the first recording was shelved and didn't come out until the band got popular. It was kind of thrown out there with a cheap cover. We wanted to put it out so the fans would really take a liking to it and we had liner notes in it from the Hawkwind fan club, he actually did the liner notes. We had photos in there.

**How would you describe what sets Cleopatra apart from other record labels out there right now? There are many labels that have sprung up but what made you different at the time you started and what's making you different now?**

BP: If we like something, we don't discriminate against it. Some people are like, "Well, I don't like that because there's a guitar player in the group," while another label, they may say they have this right wing view about, "No we don't want any guitars in any of our music," which is fine, that's what they're going for, but our whole philosophy is let's adapt and keep the fan base and the people that we follow in Cleopatra. But then, let's also expand upon that as well, because we may not be as big as a major, there are bigger labels than us, but we can be adaptable and that's how we continue to grow.

**Do you believe that labels in general are a reflection of their leader? For example, if you have a very narrow field of genres that you'll bring on, is it reflective of that leader's taste overall?**

BP: I think so and maybe also their vision and the scope of their mind. With my mind, this was similar to the philosophy of Tower Records, like you'd go in there, you could shop with your grandmother, your brother, your sister, whatever family member, and everybody would be able to find something in that store.

**Everyone comes up with records that they like. That's cool! So what is in heavy rotation for you right now?**

BP: Right now? We're doing a lot of remixing stuff. So we're remixing tracks, you know the Khia track, "My Neck, My Back" [from 2002]? So we're doing a remix of that. I actually heard it yesterday in a movie with Rob Schneider and David Spade. Ellie King covered the song, she did kind of like a reggaeton reggae version of it. Most of the stuff I'm listening to is, it's usually digital streaming or radio. It's either KROQ or KXLU; those are my two stations, my go-to stations.

**Would you say there's any artists you are listening to that are inspiring you right now? Regardless of where you're hearing them, is there anyone that you really like what they're doing?**

BP: I gotta be honest, I haven't really heard anything that makes me go, "wow this is incredible."

**Is that reflective of where we're at culturally?**

BP: I don't know if it's reflective of what I've seen and heard already. Can we make that decision?

**When I was looking back at the history of Cleopatra, I noticed that you were essentially an early adopter of licensing and streaming.**

BP: Yeah, the digital world.

**You really...**

BP: Embraced it.

**You did and you did it before a lot of other people were there. How did you get turned on to that direction of your new label?**

BP: We had so many CDs on aggregate at the time. I just said send it all, but it basically came to us from New York, not just in a few boxes, it came on pallets. Because you add like one or two thousand CDs at a time, you put it out over the last decade, it can add up. And when things add up and you try a new format, everything adds up, so that's why like that model of the record store, the small record store model doesn't really work. It worked in the world of Amazon's virtual store,

this stuff takes on even more than when I was going to Aron's Records in high school, taking the bus to Hollywood because local record stores wouldn't carry it.

**Where was Aron's Records?**

BP: It was on Melrose, yeah.

**Another on Melrose Avenue along with the aforementioned Vinyl Fetish and other notable stores like Retail Slut, Poseur, Let it Rock. All iconic shops on Melrose.**

BP: It's good to see people still, like Bruce Moreland [Wall of Voodoo, The Weir-dos, Nervous Gender] used to work in Retail Slut, he was a sales guy.

**Bruce! He's still a handsome guy now and making music.**

BP: It's almost like he's genetically very chiseled.

**And his brother, too, Marc Moreland.**

BP: I didn't know his brother. I actually saw Bruce play... I was working in a club called Part Time, this was just for fun, a strip club; so he played bass with Lords of the New Church because they didn't have a bass player.

**What happened to the bass player?**

BP: Who knows? They were coming and it was a one-off show and one-off date.

**I wonder if the missing bassist was Dave Tregunna, formerly of Sham 69.**

BP: Maybe, I dunno, he couldn't make the date.

**Is there a memory that you feel really proud of when you think back to the early days of Cleopatra?**

BP: The party for the fifth year anniversary of the label in 1997. The unique personalities that showed up at the party, it was just bizarre, so we had eEvin Key from Skinny Puppy, Rozz Williams from Christian Death...

**Already a really interesting guest list.**

BP: Rat Scabies came out.



**Okay, The Damned are coming through again!**

BP: And this is at a small club in Hollywood.

**Do you cringe when you hear people associate Cleopatra as a goth label? I know for me, the compilations, they were one of my gateways as a teenager into dark alternative music.**

BP: Well, what you just said about the compilation business we did, we definitely had an impact on a lot of high school people at the time, a lot of the Hot Topic generation. The support that we had from the record stores at the time, even the chain stores. Someone sent me a photo they had from Spectrum, it was a chain they had in Florida, they had a Cleopatra Section, it was just a big patch. At Tower Records, somebody in one city just cut out the [Cleopatra logo] eye in Styrofoam and sent in photographs with the letter. So this is all pre-internet stuff, you didn't really get to see what they were doing unless they were sending it to you by mail.

**As a punk, metal and rock n roll dude, how did you get into the "second wave" of darkwave/goth bands like Switchblade Symphony, Two Witches, and Leather Strip? This seems like a shift to show interest in this genre of bands and start releasing their work.**

BP: I was into that stuff. Even the Hawkwind shows they were doing in the UK, they were playing with Alien Sex Fiend. So there was even a drummer from The Cure that was in Hawkwind, Andy Anderson. The whole psychedelic goth thing in the UK really intertwined in the 90s. It really wasn't that unusual or different.

**Through that "second wave" you really gave a voice through this label to so many of those artists. These were the bands that were doing something interesting at the time, right?**

BP: Exactly, yeah, like Switchblade was in San Francisco and they had David Glass who was a member of Christian Death, he was the one who made that introduction. So I went down to see them in a rehearsal studio and they seemed like a couple of cool girls and one other guy was in the band at the time, seemed like they had a plan and put out the record and they did really well.

**Do you remember Die Schlaflosen, they changed their name to Sleepless?**

**They were a deathrock band from LA and in the 80s, a blip on the radar when we look at that decade of punk and deathrock in Los Angeles but when you listen to their stuff it has the passion of a deathrock band but also a shoegaze element to it. I wondered if you came across them?**

BP : I don't think I did, no.

**They're an interesting one that just makes me think of all the people that were around at that time. You put your finger on the pulse of emerging bands at that time and look at it now.**

BP : Well here's another crossover: so there was a club called the Séance Club that all the goth people used to go to, it was an after-hours club, and then lo and behold, you have Don Bolles [Germs, 45 Grave] as the DJ. What was he playing, a Hawkwind track that lasts for like twenty minutes; it's so repetitive! So he was into the space rock thing and also you know as a member of 45 Grave, so we kind of all, the connection's all there, all makes sense.

**I love that. So do you want to talk a little bit about Glenn Danzig and the Danzig Sings Elvis (2020) album? How did that all come about? I know you both share a lot of love for Elvis.**

BP : That we have. We had a similar story where he was watching a movie called *Jailhouse Rock* and it changed the way he felt about the guy's music, getting into Elvis. I have a similar story where I was sick and I stayed home. I watched *Jailhouse Rock*, didn't know Elvis but I watched this movie that was on a television set in an afternoon.

**And this is when you two were both kids?**

BP : Yeah, I think I was ten at the time. I discovered that in the 70s, so I don't know when he discovered it.

**So he approached you with the idea of recording Elvis covers?**

BP : We were working together already on some other projects, on some film projects and then he'd been working on this record for a few years. Glenn works on stuff, mentions it, but it takes years before it comes to life.

**Perfectionism?**

BP : He's his own perfectionist. I always say he's really good at his timing, but he doesn't really think about timing things, it just naturally comes out when it comes out, and it works for him. It seems like everything he does hits at the right time. You know, if he's doing a Misfits reunion show or even doing an Elvis record, nobody really knew what this record would do, but we got to the Top 200 Billboard Mainstream Charts for the first week of release.

**That success makes sense when making an homage to Elvis, you have a really talented artist covering those songs and understanding the heart and soul behind it because they have love for it.**

BP : He released it at a time when all the record stores were shut down, so we actually had a skeleton crew here doing all mail order literally shipping out hundreds and thousands of records, working on weekends just to get these records out the door. You know, obviously it was some digital but then Danzig's fan base is mainly a physical fan base. So talk about timing, like, if it was with anybody else the whole project could have been shut down. But we decided to just keep moving ahead with it.

**I'm so glad that you did keep moving ahead with it because it's a great album. When you actually have a voice like his covering those classic songs, there's a whole other element you get to hear, a dark element. But also, the longing. I feel like that's a big part of Danzig's voice, it's very emotive. It's different. When you pair that with his projects, that's what's made him different all along. So, him doing an Elvis cover album actually makes total sense. Why wouldn't he do that? He's got the perfect voice for that.**

BP : He does, yeah.

**You have Aleister Crowley releases on Cleopatra. How did that happen?**

BP : We were searching in the public domain world and I love dealing with not just occult artists but also cult, so Aleister Crowley is a cult artist. He and Anton LaVey may not appeal to the masses but there's an audience for it.

**Yeah, it's kind of impossible to not know who these two characters are if you**

**are deeply into the type of alternative music we've been discussing.**

BP : Yeah, I love dealing with iconic artists like, this was a project we put together, we found James Dean bongo tracks.

**What?!**

BP : An unreleased movie he did, well, it was only broadcast for television. He used to do these thirty-minute short films for TV. He was acting in a museum and he had the real tape of the actual movie that nobody had seen, so we transferred it and we actually got that out for people to see. So I like working on those projects. They may not sell a huge amount but at least we know there's an audience for it, and you're not making it for yourself, at least you can be a fan of it and you can subsidize being a fan by other people supporting it.

**Would you say that outside of the most recent Danzig Sings Elvis release (2020), the Wax Trax! Trax! Box (2015) of Ministry rarities and side projects as well as the Bauhaus Undead book (2018) are part of a shift in opening up a new chapter for Cleopatra?**

BP : No, I did a book, it was a space rock book and [in 1993] I did one we actually licensed from the UK, Gothic Rock. It was licensed from Drumroll Records and Mick Mercer wrote the book. I think that book goes for a lot of money now because it's so scarce and hard to find. Back then (yeah, there were still books back in the 90s) we did the *Industrial Revolution* book [in 1992] and that's how I found the photographer with all those Ministry photos that we put in the box set from having that relationship.

**And that Trax! Box contains all of Al Jourgensen's Wax Trax! recordings?**

BP : Apparently that's all the tapes. We had the tapes delivered from Texas because [Al] was living there at the time and two guys showed up saying they drove all the way from Texas with this truck full of tapes.

**Damn, that must have been a moment. In light of Bill Riefkin's recent death, his musical legacy, especially his involvement with Ministry and side projects with Al Jourgensen, this box set is significant.**

BP : As a person observing, I value his input into the band. I think he was a good balance for the band. He influenced a lot of records... for him, playing in King Crimson, I would imagine it was like a dream gig to get.

**What do you think is going on with vinyl right now?**

BP : So I did see a resurgence in vinyl when we started pressing vinyl records about ten years ago and then all of the sudden within the last ten months, literally not even within a year or eighteen months but in the last ten months, it had switched drastically to the vinyl format from the CD. Because the CD was always outselling the vinyl up until now.

**So now the vinyl is the top seller. Would streaming and then CD be the second and third-most popular formats?**

BP : It depends what style of music, so let's say...

**Well, Blues.**

BP : Blues sells more physical. If we're doing emo rap, it's going to be digital.

**Interesting, and then the dark alternative stuff?**

BP : Dark alternative depends on the artist.

**Interesting. So, if you're into Ministry and want the Trax! Box you're not going to get that digital, you're going to buy the physical format.**

BP : Yeah, if you look at streams on that, they're good but that fan wants to buy the physical.

**Yeah, it's an experience to have that set. So, for example, is the vinyl format of Danzig Sings Elvis the top-selling format?**

BP : Vinyl was the top, whereas [Glenn] thought CD was the top. He only had a release three years ago but as I said, this shift has only happened in the last ten months for the vinyl to outsell the CD for not every artist but for a lot of our artists.

**There's a big divide between putting your record out and streaming your music; it's going to be a very different experience. Vinyl lovers know what that's like to sit with a record looking at the liner notes and the images as you're listening to the album. It's a ritual.**

BP : It changes it, I think.

**Given the digital world now, it seems unusual to listen to an entire album. It's primarily playlists, like the curated Spotify or YouTube playlists. The art of listening to an album seems closely linked to the vinyl format because you are required to be present with it at least to turn the record after a certain number of minutes, so it really is about being involved in the record. I'm glad to hear that at least vinyl is not going anywhere.**

BP : It's almost like it's revived, it's like a new format for us. So things that were dead, let's say bands like The Wake or Screams For Tina, this is a new format to put these bands on vinyl. These bands weren't released on vinyl at the time because there wasn't enough demand.

**They were all originally released only on CD?**

BP : CD only, and cassette too, there was still a cassette market in the 90s. The vinyl market was dead, in the middle 90s it was the format that people did not want.

**Do you think the pandemic is changing anything? With the record label itself, with all of the imprints of Cleopatra or with the industry as a whole?**

BP : We've figured out a way to survive. When the whole pandemic hit and there were no record stores open, we started getting more hits to our website, our website even crashed because there were even more people! You can't find it on the street, you have to find it online, so I think it opened up doors for people discovering more music that we're putting out now, more than ever. Because people have that time to discover more.

**Has it inspired you or forced you to reconsider doing Spotify playlists?**

BP : We're doing that already. We have so many different parts to Cleopatra.

**Which leads me to Cleopatra Entertainment. What inspired you to do that? That's a whole other realm to get into.**

BP : Well, as you said... it's called Cleopatra Entertainment. So a movie is entertainment, it's visual entertainment. A documentary, it could be a music documentary. It all ties into what I feel is entertainment.

**How did you approach the potential headaches of the operations side of this additional division of Cleopatra?**

BP : It was intimidating but you know those challenges are different. I like going into something that's new and different without having to go to college to learn it. You learn it by experience.

**We talked about the documentary *The Damned: Don't You Wish That We Were Dead* (2015), but there's also the film *Room 37: The Mysterious Death of Johnny Thunders* (2019). Are you a big Johnny Thunders fan?**

BP : Huge.

**I've been in New Orleans walking around that area of the French Quarter and wondered about what happened in Johnny's last hours. It's not the ending I would want for a musical hero.**

BP : We feel what really did go down is what is in the film. We know what it means to people and did a lot of detective type research, even one guy I spoke to from Sweden and he was the last one that was in touch with Johnny Thunders. We even had a lady that wrote a postcard to Johnny which he actually received but he didn't



Details from the Cleopatra Records office in Los Angeles



## auxiliary LIFESTYLE .....

respond to it. Oh no, he wrote her the postcard! While he was in New Orleans, but he didn't actually send it; she got the postcard from Johnny Thunders' sister eventually.

**Wow. How hard was it to cast the actor portraying Johnny Thunders for that production?**

BP : We went through a few. First, we were thinking maybe we should have a name actor, and then we decided there would be too many comparisons.

**Yeah, I think you did the right thing. And he looked pretty fucking cool.**

BP : He did. Believe it or not, he was playing a 38-year-old, but the guy was only nineteen that we cast.

**Do you have a favorite Johnny Thunders era, whether it's his solo work or his time with the New York Dolls or The Heartbreakers?**

BP : That first record I got was around the time he came out with *Que Sera Sera*. I was doing T-shirts for him at the Roxy, so.

**For me it's *So Alone* (1978) and his acoustic album *Hurt Me* (1983). It's so beautiful to hear the emotions in his voice with such a pared-down musical accompaniment in that acoustic album. No matter what he did, as soon as you hear the guitar you know it's Johnny Thunders.**

BP : Right, he wasn't the most technical guitarist but at least he had an identity, which is important. You can hear a lot of guitar players, but you really can't say, "Oh that's so-and-so." You know, certain guitar players, they have their sound and you would always know as soon as you would hear that first guitar note, you would know it was Thunders.

**Maybe one day down the road there could be a combined Johnny and Stiv Bators documentary, going beyond what we've already seen in the documentaries Danny Garcia did about each of them? That would be exciting for fans to see because of their friendship. They were peers in a lot of ways with many parallels but ultimately were very different people.**

BP : I mean they were both not over forty when they died, they really weren't that old. At the time they were considered old, but they were in bands in their late teens, twenties. I was lucky enough to meet them both and had the experience of driving Johnny Thunders to Santa Barbara.

**What did you guys listen to in the car?**

BP : You know, honestly, I wouldn't remember. I was about nineteen at the time, it's when I was doing the T-shirts.

**You were in Los Angeles in the 80s and 90s in the heyday of the Sunset Strip and all the bands that you were making those shirts for, you must have some great stories. Do you think that when Guns N Roses came around that it represented a shift happening within the scene?**

BP : So a couple of those guys like Izzy Stradlin and a few others were hanging out in the goth scene and then there were a few other guys that were just hanging out, you know, maybe more at the Roxy and it was the first time where you would see people looking like they were Christian Death fans [at their shows]. The first year of Guns N Roses I remember being a lot darker. When it carried on, it was more the spandex crowd started coming into their shows.

**So that would have been the divide, that a diverse range of groups were showing up for their gigs versus if it was another band of the era.**

BP : Yeah, at the beginning there was another band called Tex and the Horseheads, so Guns N Roses was a part of that scene. But they had a little bit more to give a bigger audience. So then other people of the more mainstream crowd started coming in to watch them play and the shows just started getting bigger and bigger.

**I notice Izzy has very little press that he's done over the course of his career with Guns and with his solo project Ju Ju Hounds. Is there a reason that you**

**think he's avoided it?**

BP : Because it's just not important to him. He just doesn't care about fame or, he's got his lifestyle and he's able to do whatever he wants to do.

**When some people recall that era in interviews, they've said that Izzy was the epitome of cool in L.A., despite his notorious heroin addiction and general antics. He is who he is, and I think that's the intrigue he created among Guns N Roses fans and the L.A. scene in general. Which brings me to ask, what do you think is the future of live shows?**

BP : Well, there's going to be other states opening up. I think we could be going back to a stage where new music's going to grow again with smaller venues.

**More of a DIY world?**

BP : Yeah, there could be, we could go back to how the raves were when everything was an underground thing and you had to go through the back.

**Yeah, the secret shows. What does this mean for the next chapter at Cleopatra?**

BP : Well, I never did 360 deals with our orders.

**What does a 360 deal mean?**

BP : A 360 deal means we get their ticket sales, their tour merchandise, we get everything so some of these companies we were getting outbid because they would go in with a huge amount of money, manager likes it, he gets his fifteen to twenty percent cut off of it, the band sees a big chunk of change up front, there's pros and cons. It could go poor, the band could break up, you know, everyone loses. Or it could be a big gain and record companies are using that they're investing into the band and the artist so they're getting a piece of the tickets and the tickets are making more money than the records, it makes sense. But instead of going into that world, we expanded into more things like making books. We have a book by the singer of Missing Persons coming out, she's doing a tell-all book. Plus, we have more movies, like another Danzig movie called *Death Rider in the House of Vampires*. It's a rated-R horror western. I think it isn't going to be until a year from now. But it was made pre-COVID, that we know of. It's in post and he's really great about being hands-on and having a process with the editing so I kind of just let him run with everything on that side.

**Do you want to be a part of putting on secret shows or showcasing underground artists or anything like that?**

BP : No, because if I was, if I could go back in time, I was promoting shows, like we would have Bad Religion and Motocycle Boy all on the same bill. I mean it would be an underground show, but it would be a time where you're also going out to the show, you're negotiating the band's paying the money to play the show. But yeah, those were all things that you open yourself up to all types of other problems.

**I guess it really comes back to this: when artists can get back out there, Cleopatra will be behind them but they've got to find their way now. So if a band can play a show, how many people can be standing in the audience that the venue will allow, and then is it worth it to play that kind of gig?**

BP : I think what's going to happen, the artists that are really hungry to play, they'll just play, not just because of the money. We're going to see a lot of bands probably, like companies, filing bankruptcy. Bands will break up because sometimes bands only play because they're going out in these big stadium shows or these big package tours. Just because of the money even if they really can't stand each other. So if the money's not there, those bands will be nonexistent. But there's going to be a lot more chances for bands that do like each other, and they're just starting out, to create something new.

**I think that's a good place to end all this, don't you?**

BP : Yeah, absolutely.

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