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NO AGE HAS ARRIVED



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NO AGE





Here's what happened: Two kids from the suburbs of Los Angeles got way into skateboarding and punk rock. Big whoop. But after years of cutting their chops in various punk bands while dedicating themselves to the old school D.I.Y ethic, they form a boundary-smashing band called **NO AGE**. They make a ton of noise, they spend next to no time recording their songs, and, wouldn't you know it, after years of over-produced "punk" music, everybody freaks out about their band. Here's why.



In late August of last year, a record called *Weirdo Rippers* was released in the U.S., ushering a band called **No Age** into our collective conscience. Rare is the record which East Coast elitist hipsters and the skaters of Southern California (let alone the *New Yorker's* Sasha Frere-Jones) all deem cool. Better yet, no fancy haircuts, make-up, or regrettable fashion tactics—the typical accoutrements of today's bigger bands—were involved. As a matter of fact, the do-it-yourself, all ages ethic of hardcore and punk rock's heyday was considered pulse-less, dead, *no mas*, on our national stage. It's funny how two harmless kids from L.A. resurrected all that in under 30 minutes.

Now, being your typical born-and-bred New Yorker—a fan of deciduous trees, an appreciator of seasons, and sadly unable to turn my brain off at night—I hate Los Angeles. The architecture is harrowing (whose idea was it to gentrify pueblos?), I can't wrap my head around painting a building blue and yellow, and you can't walk out your door in the morning to grab a cup of coffee unless you're downtown (and we all know there's nothing to do downtown). My Seth Rogenian analysis: Los Angeles gargles my balls. Nonetheless I was beyond excited to get over there to interview No Age.

On a rainy afternoon in January, I made my way to a large warehouse on E. 7th street that has been remodeled to provide rehearsal spaces for L.A.'s fledgling artists. Oh, it's the barrio all right. It is flanked by US 101 (another source of misery in Los Angeles), some railroad tracks, and Los Angeles's water basin—the triangular water flow where all the exceptional graffiti lives.

On the way to No Age's rehearsal space, I had to stop to use the restroom at a nearby McDonald's. It cost a quarter to get in, and somebody was smoking something in the stall adjacent to the urinal I was using. When I headed back to my rented car, I was accosted by a rather grimy, toothless man—in broad daylight, mind you—asking me if I wanted to buy a 24-

hour bus pass or something. He was clearly trying to do anything to keep me from getting into my Hyundai. Then it dawned on me: I hadn't experienced a situation like this in New York City for close to 14 years. Perhaps those gritty, non-gentrified aspects of Los Angeles are the perfect launching pad for punk rock's 21st Century revolution. If not, where else? Arkansas?

Shortly thereafter I meet No Age. After some brief instructions on how to get to their room, which, despite their burgeoning status, they can only afford by sharing with two other bands, I rise up in a self-operated freight elevator to meet guitarist Randy Randall. He's smiling, blonde, sorta tan, wearing straight-leg jeans and an oxford blue button-up shirt. I can hear drummer Dean Spunt banging away from down the hall. As Randall and I enter, Spunt pauses then rises from his drum stool to shake my hand. He's rail thin, wearing tight black jeans and a striped hoodie. He is undoubtedly the source of No Age's nervous energy, contrasting Randall—who swigs a beer during our time together—and his quiet calm.

Their room is jam-packed with equipment, including the machine they used to record most of *Weirdo Rippers*. It's clear they're both 26-year-old music fanatics, and it's no small wonder they, along with Mika Miko, became the epicenter of The Smell, an all ages, community-oriented punk rock venue in Los Angeles.

It's just cool to catch a band like this. They're a bit stunned by the successful seven months *Weirdo Rippers* has brought to the table, they're confident if not boastful about their next record, *Nouns*, to be released this May on Sub Pop, they're in a band that is widely recognized as a force to be reckoned with live, and they're doing it for all the right reasons. They're also still a little geeky (Spunt fixes his hair in the reflection of a car window during our photo shoot, and our interview is punctuated by phone calls from his mother). Besides the spaced-out guitar jams and the frenetic pace they keep in their simple, deconstructed pop tunes, the most exciting thing about No Age is that they are a band intent on making music on their own terms. And they have a lot to say about that.

"I DON'T LIKE THE IDEA OF DIRECTIONS." —DEAN SPUNT





Randy, earlier you were talking about making a documentary for all the all ages scenes around the world. Would No Age be possible without the community you've been a part of?

Dean Spunt: I don't think so. There was a place in L.A. called the P.C.H Club. It was a weird little place in a really bad area—there was rats and urine everywhere—but it was the all ages place in L.A. where all the hardcore and punk bands would play. Basically, it's how our band came about, through the community of places like The Smell and the P.C.H. Club. Places that are, I don't know—punk [laughter].

Randy Randall: I think there is a fairly open mindset that allows new ideas and new bands to really form, and the seed that really started me playing music publicly was the Smell. I don't think I felt comfortable or even had the opportunity to play live anywhere else—

DS: Maybe a backyard house party or something but not any other concert or show we went to. That was a different league. It was like, Oh, they're in a *band*. But the first time I went to the Smell I said, "Wow, this is fucking different." This is weird. These guys are playing on the floor. They didn't look—I don't know—it was just eye opening, and scary at the same time.

RR: But it also meant you were playing a place with a name, an actual venue, versus someone's backyard, so that was really important.

DS: I remember my mom and dad went the second time I played there and they said, "Oh, this is a storefront." It's not a concert hall or a venue. But to us it was the only thing and the best thing.

"I NEVER LOOK AT US A TWO-PIECE," SAYS GUITARIST RANDY RANDALL. "I ALWAYS THINK OF US AS A BAND."

RR: It was the only place we could play [laughter].

One of the things about your band: Well, the first time I heard about you guys was through a publicist, which is always a little—

DS: Yeah we know...

And, you know, being a duo is kind of a shtick—

DS: Totally [laughter].

And on top of that they're calling themselves a punk band, so before I even popped in your disc—I mean for the past 10 years or so being a punk band hasn't been what we might consider a punk band.

DS: Right, you think punk band you think—

Paramore, or My Chemical Romance—bands that used the title as a tool to get some place. And then I put your record on and said, "Ah, they're a punk band. For real."

RR: Well Dean and I both came from Suburban upbringings in Southern California, and we found solace in community through skateboarding and punk rock music. So we developed our own small bands. And then Dean played The Smell—

DS: Yeah, I definitely played there the first year it was open in a band called Aspirin Kid, which is a Nation of Ulysses song title. It was a horrible band. It was fun, but it was 1998 so we were, you know, kind of emo.

RR: I kind of came out of this idea: I went quickly from White Zombie to Nirvana to Sonic Youth into the Residents and Future Sounds of London and My Bloody Valentine. I had a hard time playing music, so I enjoyed the sound of music, or the sound of sounds. So I went to The Smell, and I saw Mike Watt, and I knew instantly that this was a place to play. 'Cause I could imagine playing the feedback, weirdo sample stuff I was doing in high school [there]. I would go to the Community Center and play feedback with samples and drum machines. Everyone looked embarrassed for me, but it was the most progressive thing I could do. Then I went to the Smell, and it all made sense to me.

DS: My trip with music was, you know, you're into MC Hammer, Madonna, New Kids On The Block. But I went to school with this kid Tommy and his older brother was a punk. So he gave us a D.R.I. tape, a Bad Brains tape, and a Ramones tape. This was in the 5th grade, and it scared the shit out of me, especially the D.R.I. tape. The Ramones tape, too. The Bad Brains tape was *I Against I*, which is a little more metal. The Ramones, I couldn't stop listening to it. I didn't understand it.

The first time you hear it, since you are used to these big radio-friendly hooks as a kid, then you hear this arguably creepy guy singing, "I wanna be your boyfriend..."

D: [Laughter] It's fucking creepy!

RR: I remember I had [Sonic Youth's] *Goo* in the same way. I was re-roofing my house with my family, tearing up tar strips all summer long. I had it on my Walkman. I was so upset and sad and I was saying, "This is *not* music. They cannot call it music: It is absolute bullshit." Then I would put it on again, and I was so down-to-the-core bothered by it that I became addicted to it, and it finally coalesced into this beautiful—it was the smartest thing I ever heard. But, still, it angered me.

DS: My aunt had this boyfriend. I remember thinking he was a cowboy because he had really tight pants on—he had size 27 jeans and I was like,

Who the fuck wears size 27 jeans? At the time, I'm skateboarding so I had really big clothes. I had just gotten into the Dead Kennedys and The Misfits, and he gave me this mix-tape that had "skins" written on it. Later on I realized he used to be a skinhead. But the tapes he gave me had Millions of Dead Cops, the Cockney Rejects and Minor Threat, Adolescents—that tape, over and over and over, I listened to it. It was awesome. And that was my introduction. I remember I made a decision in the 6th grade—I was going to be punk and not a hesher.

Hesher?

RR: It's a Southern California term. It means metal head.

DS: This is after The Ramones tape, but before the "skins" tape. And I remember thinking, "Should I like rap?" Because my older cousin liked N.W.A. I remember it being this tough decision and going, Nirvana and Dead Kennedys—there it is! [Laughter] I remember thinking you can't like both, because I was mixing styles, and, you know, I had to pick a style.

It's funny, because when you're that young you're so convinced that your identity is rooted in what music you listen to. I remember that being kind of a tough thing about punk music, because it breeds closed-mindedness.

RR: I remember asking my friends if they liked The Smiths and they said, "That is pretty gay, man." I was like, Oh I won't talk to you about it I guess.

But you were into it?

RR: I was so into it. I also traded my Rage Against The Machine CD for a practice amp, which I still have today.

What is it about punk music and the culture that is so magnetizing and engulfing, until you are here now—on Sub Pop, touring nationally.

DS: I was thinking about this the other day. It's one of those things: once you are hooked, you are hooked. I know in both of our instances that, back when we were kids, you feel like no one else gets you. We were pretty alone in that world. Your parents didn't get it. Your friends don't get it, especially when you get so involved in it.

RR: It was a place to have a voice. What I understood about punk, as a word or a movement—what you said or what you felt mattered. And I think that got translated into a lot of other subgenres, emo or whatever you have. The feelings you had that other people don't get—they matter. You could listen to this music that was melodic and beautiful and suddenly you'd be overwhelmed by feedback and distortion. Everything was mixed. And, as a kid, I had a lot of mixed emotions. I was happy, but there was a lot of stuff going on I didn't like. There were gray areas. I felt like the idea of punk, the release I got from it—I didn't have a lot of aggression, but I had an overwhelming sense of dissatisfaction. So I saw this music that was pushing boundaries—that there were no rules, anything could be correct.

And I was set free by that, because I grew up in a very rigid household, where there were goals to be met.

DS: The D.I.Y. attitude as well. Once you start learning about these bands on tapes you say, "Oh, they put out their own records?" And that whole idea that you decide you are in a band, and then you are in a band—you don't have to convince anybody.

It's very empowering.

RR: Absolutely. I got a 4-track when I was 14, and that was it. I had everything I needed to do.

One of the best quotes I have heard about punk was from [Pogues front man] Shane MacGowan. And I do consider No Age to be a punk band, though there are plenty of people who think you are part of the hipster set. But what he said was, "It's a spirit." It doesn't matter what the sound is, and the spirit won't ever go away. Earlier, Randy was saying there is an underground current going on where bands are getting a lot of attention. I couldn't tell if you meant disproportionately. I mean *Weirdo Rippers* isn't even a proper record—

DS: No, it's a collection of EPs.

So the assumption is your first actual record is going to be fierce.

DS: It's called *Nouns*. It's our first full record, 12 tracks, about 30 minutes. We haven't talked about it at all.

RR: This is the first we've spoken about it at all.

DS: When we started No Age I decided that I wanted to play drums and sing. I'm not a drummer. So I had to learn, but when people don't know how to play stuff it always comes out cool. I think on *Nouns* the drums are more present cause I can play now.

There are more guitars on *Weirdo Rippers*.

DS: There are two or three songs on *Nouns* that have no drums. Like I said, when we started I was like, I want to play drums and sing. But when we first started playing stuff I started hating drums because I felt very unconfident about playing and singing. And then I hated guitar. So we still come up with stuff that way. Because I am always saying weird shit.

RR: Well, I love playing music, and it's really fun playing in this band because Dean comes with ideas—

DS: They are not very musical.

RR: Then I will come back at him with ideas. It's a total partnership.

DS: Mainly it is concepts. But I can't show them, I have to talk to Randy and he has to decipher it. I couldn't be in this band with anybody else. Because I'm always like, We should write a song that sounds like a train.

"WHAT I UNDERSTAND ABOUT PUNK, AS A MOVEMENT, IS THAT WHAT YOU SAY AND WHAT YOU FEEL MATTERS" – RANDY RANDALL

RR: There is definitely a third member of No Age that we don't acknowledge or credit, and it is the place where we don't think about things and let [the concepts] exist subconsciously.

DS: And there are a lot of mistakes.

What is *Nouns*, then?

DS: We recorded it in three different places, so it still has that—you know, songs sound different from each other on *Weirdo Rippers*.

RR: One of the ideas behind our records is for them to sound like mix tapes. We don't make four versions of one song. Some of our favorite records are the mixes or anthologies of bands, where you hear styles change and the recording quality change.

DS: Some stuff sounds intentionally shitty, which we think sounds good. *Nouns* is more hi-fi, though.

There is something attractive about the production quality of *Weirdo Rippers*. Can No Age stay No Age when you say it is "hi-fi?"

DS: Honestly, *Weirdo Rippers*, as I listen to it now, I think it is awesome. When we were done with it, I thought it was bad. All I heard were the inconsistencies, and the bad things about bad things. But, to answer your question, I hope so.

RR: We had fun doing it because we recorded it in a few places. We did as much as we could to destroy any sort of authentic sound and push it to make it something else. We worked really hard on writing songs, and crafting songs,

then completely annihilated them through production. On *Weirdo Rippers*, the songs weren't quite written, and the recording was to par—very minimal. On *Nouns*, the poppier parts got poppier and the noisier parts are noisier. Which, to me, felt like a step. Like, you know what it feels like to stand here, so let's stand over there. Let's go someplace not comfortable. And I never look at us a two-piece, I always think of us as a band. A two-piece implies limitations—

DS: Releases are limitations. I don't like the idea of directions.

RR: 'Cause the world changes, we change—

How does the world factor in to what you create? Because how you think is already very political.

RR: I take a very personal stance on politics. Because of the touring schedule I am an absentee voter. But I exercise that right with pride; to make the best effort I can to make my voice known. But in the way I see the world—the things I do everyday influence me and influence the world around me in such a bigger way. Look, we get a chance every four years to make our voice heard in terms of electing a leader. But everyday I have an opportunity to stand up for what I believe in and make my voice and existence on this earth felt, at least in the small community I exist in. So I enjoy exercising my rights in everyday personal politics and doing things I feel can impact the world.

As opposed to doing nothing?

RR: Doing nothing isn't an option. Doing nothing doesn't exist, especially as Americans. Existing as a human has a global impact no matter what. So you pick your battles. Ultimately, I believe in doing good, and in doing good everyday.



