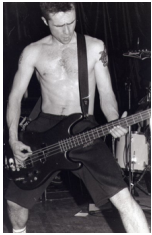


Interview with Ian Glasper

Written by John Eager

Sunday, 02 May 2010 13:21 - Last Updated Wednesday, 19 May 2010 08:27



Ian Glasper, 'Slug' to his friends, has been playing bass guitar in some of the top UK punk bands since the 1980s. He is an author of three books on the subject of punk and once had his own record label.

Where did the nickname 'Slug' come from?

Damn, it was an age ago now, and the mists of time have clouded events, but I seem to recall Jamie Cartwright dubbing me 'Slug' because of how I walked! Not quite sure how a slug walks, but that's what I reminded him of - go figure!

How would you best describe your music? Punk, Thrash, Hardcore... something else?

It depends on which band we're talking about - Suicide Watch were pure thrash metal... Stampin' Ground metallic hardcore... but everything I've been involved in has been defined to an extent by punk rock, so I guess I'll go with punk! More specifically anarcho punk, but let's not split hairs...

What were your early defining musical influences?

REALLY early on, I loved the Antz (still do - 'Dirk Wears White Sox' is the greatest album ever) and Killing Joke (again, still do - they're verging on being a religious experience live!)... by about 1982 it was all about Discharge, GBH, Exploited, Varukers... then soon after that, Crass, Conflict, Flux Of Pink Indians, The Mob... if you had to tie me down to the three most influential bands I'd probably plump for Discharge, Crass and Dead Kennedys.

You've played with Decadence Within, Burnside, Stampin' Ground and Suicide Watch. Which band has given you the greatest satisfaction? Why?

Before Decadence Within, there was also Ammonia 77 (originally featuring Ledbury punk legend Graham Silver on vocals), and a few years ago I also did a stint with Flux Of Pink Indians... and nowadays I'm plonking away with Betrayed By Many. Just to complete the musical CV! They were all extremely satisfying in different ways... to play bass with Flux Of Pink Indians was amazing, 'cos I was a huge fan of that band in the Eighties, and it was very surreal walking out and playing the bass intro to 'Tube Disasters' onstage at the Shepherd's Bush Empire with them, having virtually learnt to play bass strumming along to that song back in the day... Decadence Within was the first band I released vinyl with though (3 albums and 4 singles), and the first band I got to tour Europe with, so that was a lot of fun, and will always have a fond place in my heart... but Stampin' Ground got all over the music press (it was weird - but nice - to get Album Of The Week in Kerrang and stuff) and we toured America twice - and we played with Iron Maiden at Castle Donnington too, which was pretty satisfying, haha! I'm very lucky to have had these opportunities, but I have to say we worked really, REALLY hard as well!

What is your take on Internet filesharing and web piracy? Do you agree with greater protection of your work or would you prefer an electronic free-for-all?

The electronic free-for-all sounds good to me - the more people that hear any of the music I've been involved in the better. We're not thinking about the royalties when we write this stuff, we're just expressing ourselves and hoping people will hear it and dig it and take something positive from it. Copy it, steal it, borrow it, burn it, it's all good.

What's the favourite song you've written? Why?

I've written a lot of songs I'm proud of... but I'd probably choose 'Pain Is Weakness (Leaving The Body)', that I wrote for Stampin' Ground. I was in a really dark place mentally when I wrote it, and it's a really intense lyric; what makes me especially proud of it is how many people it's touched around the world. I have had people come up to me in Athens, Iceland, Poland... I've had letters from people locked up in prison... literally from all over the place... telling me how much that song means to them. Some of them even said it helped save their life, and if that's not reason to be proud of a song, I don't know what is.

In Ledbury you grew up in the vicinity of the Ledbury Hunt and Toxical Laboratories (now Sequani.) Without bloodsports and vivisection on your doorstep do you think you would still have formed punk bands and written songs about these subjects? How much of an influence were they on you?

Yes, I would have still ended up in punk bands, for sure; there's more to punk than animal rights, but it did inform an awful lot of my early lyrics. Actually, I still hold the same beliefs now, and even recently have written songs like 'The Devil Rides Out' about fox-hunting and 'Hell In Reverse' about vivisection. Like most rational people I abhor sexism and racism, and I just include speciesism in that list of nasty 'isms' I'd prefer to avoid, because I don't believe we should discriminate against other species either. It's hard to condone vivisection when there are more humane and cost-effective alternatives

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out there, and my idea of 'sport' is besting someone in a fair contest, not debasing my humanity.

Other than writing and performing songs about animal cruelty, have you ever been tempted to take direct action yourself?

Yes - but it was a long time ago now!

'Keep the Temple Pure' - you don't drink alcohol or take drugs. That's not very rock n roll is it? Haven't you ever been tempted?

I was a really crap drunk, what more can I say? I just couldn't take my drink and got fed up of spewing up in the alleyway of the Seven Stars! It's not very rock 'n' roll in the traditional sense of the words to be teetotal, but most tradition is bullshit anyway.

You write reviews for Terrorizer magazine, so you must get to listen to many new and rising bands. Who takes your fancy at the moment? Who should we be looking out for?

So many great new bands, so little space... but amongst my current crop of faves would be Bloodclot, Jello Biafra And The Guantanamo School Of Medicine, Behind Enemy Lines, Beginning Of The End, After The Bomb, This System Kills, The Bomb, War Prayer, Hangman's Chair, Abadden, Bullet Ridden, SSS, Black Breath, October File, War/System, The Rejected, Battalion, Rot In Hell... and Betrayed By Many! The list is endless; there's always great new music out there.

You created your own record label back in 1988 - Blackfish Records - what happened to the label? What were the high points of the label?

That was 1998, actually, and I put out 20 CDs between then and 2003. I'm very proud to have helped along the way some really great bands like Knuckledust, Decimate, Unite, 50 Caliber, Underule... but funnily enough, my favourite release was probably the Subhumans tribute/covers CD I did in '99. I always loved Subhumans, and their bassists really informed a lot of my early playing, and although tribute albums are kind of a redundant concept, this one turned out great - all the bands did great versions of my favourite Subhumans tracks, the artwork was killer, and it had the blessing of the Subhumans themselves, so it was just a great one to put my name to.

CD, Vinyl or MP3?

CDs, because I don't have a turntable that works right now, but I like to be able to see and hold my music in the real world.

When you're not listening to punk and hardcore, what do you listen to?

Thrash metal. You know: Slayer, Metallica, Megadeth, Testament, Exodus...

Being a lyricist does it bother you that in your particular punk genre it's almost impossible for live audiences to follow your lyrics?

No, it just means people have to work a little harder - punks have never wanted anything handing them on a plate, haha! This isn't written for Radio One, it's not about an instant superficial fix; it's much more of a commitment than that. We like to go searching for obscure music and research the bands and find out what makes them tick... and at the end of the day, the live environment is more for enjoying yourself, and you can sit and ponder the lyrics when you get home with the CD you bought at the show.

Your last band Stampin' Ground were very popular in Europe - I understand you toured there frequently. What do you think makes punk/hardcore so popular over there?

The scene was HUGE there when SG started touring there in '96, but Decadence Within had been out there loads of times as well prior to that, in the late Eighties/early Nineties... everything was very well organised, by collectives of truly wonderful, sincere people, there was a real sense of unity at the shows, there was a lot of interaction between towns and scenes, kids travelling from all over... we kept going back because we actually got paid and fed and put up after the gigs as well! We played everywhere, including some of the big open air festivals, and loved every minute of it - even the bad stuff like mass brawls and van crashes, haha!

You've written several books on the punk scene (post 1980). In Burning Britain describing Thatcher's Britain you write: 'the police force... seemed increasingly concerned with oppression rather than protection...'

How would you describe the police force circa 2010?

I was specifically talking there about the part the police force played in breaking the miners strike and ending the free festivals at Stonehenge... that was some pretty in-your-face strong-arm tactics right there, but that's how Thatcher liked to roll! Nowadays things are a little more subtle and insidious - as long as you don't wear a baggy jumper onto a tube train.

Some people would say we're living in a fascist state, albeit a relatively benign one. How do you see it?

I guess we are, aren't we? There's a choice of three political parties to choose between, but they're all much of a muchness. Instead of being beaten down with tanks we're kept in line by a heavily biased media that perpetuates insecurity, paranoia and greed. Things could be so much better, but then again I can definitely think of far worse places to live. We enjoy a lot of creative and cultural freedoms here, and that's why we have to defend those freedoms from those that would seek to remove them.

To date what has been your favourite gig? Why?

Probably the Castle Donnington one with Iron Maiden. We were on the main stage in

front of 50,000 people, and we went down a storm - what's not to like? It was a real buzz to play CBGBs in New York as well, seeing as it's such a legendary venue in the history of punk rock; even though we didn't have the best of shows there, it's still a special memory for me. We did a lot of memorable shows though - Berlin before the Wall came down, Belfast while the army were still on the streets, Warsaw during a skinhead convention...

To date what has been your oddest gig?

We played a vegan cafe in Poland once with a gay punk band called Homo Militia (they were a total riot, and had a tour manager called 'Violence'!) - we just pushed all the tables to one side, ushered all the people in and went for it, haha! Great food too! We played a short set in the high street of Dusseldorf once as well - there was some rock band outside a department store, we pulled up in our van, talked them into lending us their equipment, and blasted through a few songs, much to the horror of the Saturday morning shoppers walking by. We played on a boat once, that was a lot of fun... all sorts of stuff, there was a time when we'd give anything a try!

You recently reformed Decadence Within for a one off gig in Ledbury after not playing together for fifteen years. How did that feel?

It felt great. It was a real spur-of-the-moment thing - we were asked and then decided we'd play Tracy Greatwood's party about two weeks before the event, had one rehearsal together after fifteen years apart, and then knocked out a nine-song set the very next night. It was crazy how easy it felt really, as if we'd just had a few weeks off instead of a few decades! Probably testament to the chemistry between the four of us as well. Great to see some old faces come out of the woodwork too... so thanks to all involved for making that happen.

Did you sell your soul to the devil to play bass like that?

If I did, I got short-changed on the deal, because my playing is limited at best. Les Claypool... now THERE's a bassist.

You still live in Ledbury; you haven't been tempted away by bright lights or continental flavours. What keeps you in Ledbury?

I like the fact that Ledbury is nice and quiet and a fairly safe place to raise our kids. A lot of my friends couldn't wait to get out of the place, but as soon as I could drive, I realised it's as good a place as any to be based - 30 minutes from Gloucester, Hereford, Cheltenham and Worcester, an hour from Birmingham, Cardiff and Bristol... so, plenty of gigs to commute to... I mean, you can be in London or Manchester in just over two hours. And the internet just made everything more accessible no matter where you lived as well.

How could Ledbury be improved?

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I guess I could move out.

Many thanks to Ian for giving the Ledbury Community Portal this interview.