

## **Interview with Peter Damage – Bass player and singer of 1980s punk band Extremes**

**So, Pete, you were in punk band Extremes, right? When did you get into punk? Was it around 1979/80? What was the pivotal moment?**

I first heard it back in the day it would have been 1977 or 1978.

**Sex Pistols?**

Yeah. Saints. Sex Pistols and then all the ones that followed on from there.

**On Countdown?**

Yeah. I saw the Saints on Countdown. I remember that day. That was cool. Molly was carrying on and he said "This band from Brisbane. They're called the Saints." And 'Stranded hit' and I was like "Wow. What's that?" The hairs on the back of my neck stood up. It was like "Fuck! This is what I've been waiting for." Before that it was metal, Kiss, stuff like that.

**And you didn't relate to that? How old were you? Seventeen?**

No, no. I was 13, 14.

**So, it was new and exciting?**

That's what it was. It was like...I used to like all the old '50s rock and roll. The rule breakers and all that sort of stuff.

**So then, how did you start going to gigs? What was your actual introduction into the punk world?**

A mate of a mate who I used to work with was into the same stuff. Went to the John Barleycorn and the Ballroom. This is 1982 maybe 1981.

**The John Barleycorn was having punk gigs back then?**

Yeah. I think I saw Depression there. They didn't have a drummer. It was just...It might have been with John Feedback, I don't know. I didn't know anybody, I just went with a mate and all I remember is seeing these guys with Mohawks and shit and I still just had a fucking normal '80s sort of haircut and asked him "How do you get your hair like that?" Because I didn't know, and one bloke told me. "Oh yeah" and then "Put some soap in it. Put some soap in it mate." And then I went to the Ballroom and saw a couple of bands... I remember seeing Corporate Body...And later I went on to the Corpse Grinders and stuff. I lived out in Baysie (Bayswater) and I just fell away. I didn't go back until Dead Kennedys and that sort of spurred my interest again. We used to always have records and go to Missing Link and Pipe Records and take a drive out from Bayswater to the City on a Friday night with some beers in the car.

**So, what were the record stores around?**

Missing Link. Pipe Records. They're the only ones we used to go to...So yeah, we'd take the trip in, buy some records. Not just punk. Anything that was different and new. Go back, chuck it on. Watch **Rock Around the World** because you'd get a bit of punk on that now and again.

**The Dead Kennedys was that the one with Depression at the Venue?**

No, it was at the Ballroom with Corpse Grinders and Depression. Yeah, it was chock-a-block. A good night.

**Ok, how then did Extremes happen? And what year was that?**

We started doing shows on PBS back in about 1982.

**That was the Real Punk show?**

**Granite Injection with Michael Spate**, that was 12am to 2am. We used to take live stuff from the desk at the Prince of Wales and then race upstairs and do the 12am to 2am show and play what we'd just heard downstairs.

**What year was this?**

That would have been 1982/83.

**So how did the Extremes start? You were doing Granite Injection.**

I think we all just met at the gigs.

**So, you were recording the gigs and going back and playing them.**

Yeah, then a bit farther on down the track I ran into Paul Waste and met him or Phil MacDougall. Phil was still playing in **Human Waste** back in those days. Phil left. I joined Human Waste and that would have been around 1984.

**And what did you do in Human Waste?**

I was just doing vocals.

**You replaced Phil on vocals?**

Yeah, and then I think we changed to **Extremes** and then Stan left, and we became a three piece.

**So, Human Waste was Paul obviously.**

Originally Paul Waste on guitar. Stan on bass. Phil Mac on vocals and Simmo on drums (Jeff Simmons). And then Stan got the arse. I think we said he left, but he got the arse.

**How did you get the name Peter Damage?**

Everyone goes "Oh Peter Damage. Who was he? Was he tough and rough? What did he do? Did he smash things up?" I got Peter Damage because I liked, like everyone else did, loved fucking Black Flag and I had this jacket, and I wrote '**Damaged**' across it, which was their first album. And people would go "Oh, I had a beer with that Peter bloke, Peter Damage." And that's how that happened. "And he still owes me 10 bucks".

**So, how did the name of the band come about? Extremes in particular, how did it go from Human Waste?**

I remember **Human Waste** was a project that Paul did at school about the First World War and just liked 'Human Waste' and we took **Extremes** because we wanted to change the name because everyone was saying that sounds like shit, so we changed it to **Extremes** which was one of our songs. It was about a geo-political viewpoint which talks about America and Russia, left and right.

**So, Peter what did punk mean to you? What was your definition of punk?**

Punk was never having to say you're sorry. No one expected anything from you. Punk was fun. I don't think there is a definition. Everyone's got their own brand.

**Did you think that punk was like a family? Did you feel like that's where you belonged; that it was a sub-culture that you fit into?**

Yeah, definitely. Yeah, like coming all the way from Bayswater to go to the gigs on the train and stuff. It was like fucking you used to be on your guard all the way in the outer eastern suburbs and as soon as you got into St. Kilda it was like "Oh, fuck." But as soon as you got into the venue it was cool.

**So, when did Extremes, actually change the name? Was that 1983/84?**

Late 1984 or early 1985. The first record. Yeah, the first record was released June or July 1985.

**And what was that called?**

*Extremes from Both Sides.*

**Was it a single or an Ep?**

No, it was an eight track. It had 8 songs or 10 songs.

**Was it vinyl or on a cassette?**

Vinyl.

**And what was your second one?**

It wasn't released. It had been recorded. It's been released since on **Just On**. Paul Waste did that but it's only internet based.

**What about fashion. How important was the punk aesthetic to you personally or to the crew you hung out with?**

I used to get around with my hair spiked up in the early days but when I got in the band, I just grew it long.

**Did you think that punk was more an attitude than image or did you think it was both?**

I think at the beginning it looked cool. I liked the way it looked, and I used to get around with my punk t-shirts on, studs and all that. Borgie gave me my first lot of studs. At the Ballroom one night when I first started going. I must have been 18 or something and I had this leather jacket and Borgie comes up. I'd met him and he walked up and said, "Ah you should get some studs for your jacket man." And he said, "Yeah I've got some" and the next week I was there he comes up with a pack of studs and says, "There you go". I went home and got the hammer and the hole-punch out and put them in and started writing shit on the back of my jacket. Look, it's what separated you. It's like you used to get "You're just doing it to be different." Fucking no. You're doing it because you are different. Whether you're coming from out of places like Bayswater, everyone was the same.

**Your jacket was like your tag, your own personal identification. Everyone had different artwork and it meant something to them.**

My original one got pinched but I had all autographs on the satin lining...

**Was it black though, the lining?**

No, it was sort of crimson. I had all bands and all sorts of shit. I was spewing. For a month or so I used to go around with a texta getting people to sign it, but it got pinched in Sydney.

**So, you can spend a lot of time and energy into creating the perfect jacket and it means something personal?**

Well Jimmy Lynch's one is in, he donated it to the Melbourne Gallery. I saw it there at some exhibition there. It was like "Fucking look at that jacket". you know what it's like when you see something from your past. Then down the bottom it's got '*donated by James Lynch*'. I thought "Fuck yeah".

**So, what about the divisions? What was your take on the divisions within the hard-core punk scene, the more political parts like the vegans, the animal liberationists? What was your take on that and from your experience, were there any issues, any aggro within the punk scene with each other?**

There's all that chat about it but I think you just gravitate to what and where you were most comfortable or what you were into. Some people, there was the animal liberationist vegetarian side of things, but that crossed over because Hardcore House were vegetarian. End Result and Murder, Murder, Suicide, I think some of those guys, Nigel and those guys were into animal liberation. There were skaters and Civil Dissident they sort of crossed over into the animal liberation as well, so it was all a bit blurred...but then there were these bloody little in-fights which you get in any group. Depression and Civil Dissident had some falling out for some reason, who knows. Then Smear used to do flyers, I think I saw one at your exhibition, slagging off Dave Ross about something or other, so there was all this sort of bitchiness. I suppose looking back on it we were all just kids, so it was snotty and nitty, like "Fuck you." Like I said, we were all kids and no-one knows how these things work until, you know, this was like our community and because it was brand new, because we were all growing up, there was always going to be friction here and there and people trying out and testing their arm with different ideas. It was growing up.

**Did you have fun?**

Oh, fuck yeah.

**And would you think it was probably the best time of your life?**

Every day's the best day of my life. It was good because it was all new and we were all growing up. This was new. This was ours. And were very protective of it.

**You felt ownership of that punk culture?**

Oh yeah. It was ours. We'd spent, a lot of us had spent a lot of time not fitting in anywhere, feeling what we did and not having anything that we'd grasped onto, so we found this, and we fucked anybody who was trying to exploit it.

**Did the punks from the 1970s influence you?**

Nuh. That was sort of older stuff and I'm sure we must have had roots in there somewhere but we, as a band or as a fan, I liked the American stuff more than that Brit stuff. You just evolved and moved on.

**So, the US hardcore punk had a huge influence on Melbourne?**

From where I stood, yeah.

**Was your music? Were the Extremes more US hardcore based?**

Yeah, it sort of evolved that way. It was more metal influences with Paul's guitar, but we mixed it up with country and western. We had a song with a disco bass line and shit to it. So, we didn't subscribe to how we were going to do it, it just happened that way. It just naturally evolved or de-evolved whatever.

**And how did you end up leaving the punk scene? Was it just a natural progression or did you just start moving onto other things in your life?**

I left Extremes.

**How long were you in Extremes for?**

I don't know, 1984 or '85. Three and a bit years, or something around there. And we used to tour a fair whack. I think I felt the band had run its course and I moved to Sydney for love pretty much. Met a girl on tour and we kept in contact and used to catch up with each other here and there. I dunno. I moved to Sydney and played in a couple of bands up there. Came back in 1991 with Legend Killers with Geoff Sick and Paul and a guy called George on drums.

**Legend Killers was a Melbourne band? And that was in the early '90s and you guys did quite well didn't you?**

Well, I was only in the band in the middle. They had the first singer, and I came in after the first singer. I don't think I was in the band that long. Half a year, nine months, I don't know why I left or what happened. We played...we split up. The last gig was at the MCG hotel, I remember that. I'm not sure if they reformed after that.

**What would be your fondest memory from your punk days? Is there a party story or did something crazy happen one night that you'll never forget that defines...**

As a fan or a band member?

**Just as a punk in general.**

There are four stories that know no end that... I guess something that was specific to Melbourne, you know, very much a Melbourne memory of being part of the punk community in Melbourne. Overall best memories were of being a fan. I fucking loved seeing bands and I just used to revel, in the early days I'd just love fucking running around and seeing bands and doing shit.

**Who was your favourite Melbourne band?**

It used to change all the time. I think looking back I used to fucking love **End Result**. They were fucking good. Depression was good. They were all good...I can remember one particular gig at the Sydenham Hotel they did 'Helter Skelter', the Beatles song...Wow...I still remember that and it was tight as...I picked up a tape of **End Result live at the Ballroom** at the South Melbourne market about two years ago, just this little old lady with a table. It had the photocopy of the original Johnny Feedback artwork on it...but End result was great. **Civil Dissident**. I remember seeing **Permanent Damage** in their first gig down at the **Helter Skelter club** and I'll never forget MacDougall, everyone's coming up to him "Are you going to sign them up Phil? Are you going to sign them up?"

Phil was there with a cigarette going...you could just see the numbers ticking over...Each band had its appeal. Those later bands that came along **SIC** and all that. Fucking loved SIC. I thought they were the best thing going around. They were just a lot of fun. They had that energy and enthusiasm because they were all young guys, they were mostly the skaters...and they had this killer demo cassette where they actually make mistakes on it and they abuse each other on the cassette in the studio and they decided to keep it on, leave it on as it was. It was fucking hilarious.

**Do you have any skinhead memories?**

Oh, avoiding them at all costs in the early days and then there was like a crossover bunch like Pricey and Vinnie, all those guys. Well Pricey came from Bayswater and I was in the same class as his brother and we got to know all those guys, Wingy and Pricey, Vlady, Big Vinny...I don't know. I never had any trouble with them. Avoided them I suppose.