

## Never Mind The Gimmicks... Here's the Riverboat Gamblers

By John B. Moore

**H**ipster music scribes and label scouts from across the country cram into every conceivable concert venue in Austin every March, pretending they've been drinking PBR since they were teens, all in hopes of saying they knew about the next big thing a year before anyone else.

The result is usually a four-page spread in Rolling Stone, Spin or CMJ, with a slew of photos of some pouting keyboard New Wave band from Manchester or a Swedish brother/sister folk duo, accompanied by lines of gushing praise claiming to have witnessed the next coming of Christ, etc. A few months later a glowing CD review or three will show up, then nothing. Until next year, when the new "next big thing" is showcased.

It's refreshing, then, to see a band like the Riverboat Gamblers — a crew stripped of pretension and gimmicks — being talked about by nearly everyone who managed to hitch a ride to town. The Austin (by way of tiny Denton, TX) boys are taking all the adulation and ass-kissing in stride.

"It was great. It was a good mix of hometown friends and out of town friends," says Mike Weibe, the long-haired frontman of punk-rock's latest face-saving band. "We sneak in whomever we can," he adds, explaining their strategy for keeping the shows as "locals only" as possible.

Weibe and his bandmates are no strangers to back-slapping and free drinks from major labels. It was just days after their blistering show at 2003's SXSW that A&R folks were clamoring to sign them. It was a bit of a shock, then, that they released *Something to Crow About* on Gearhead Records.

Their latest, *To the Confusion of Our Enemies*, was put out yet again by another punk indie, Volcom Entertainment. Why would a band that has admirers at just about every big label decide to stick with the indies when a relationship with Island or Epic would mean more money, better tour accommodations and higher profile marketing?

"Well, it's a double-edged sword," Weibe explains. "We didn't want to give up some of the things that are important to us as a band. We didn't want to be told how songs need to sound. We didn't want to have our releases based on how other bands records were doing. If the whole deal is right, we wouldn't be against it. It just hasn't been right yet."

Weibe, like his band's music, seems nostal-

gic for punk-rock's roots. For him, being in a band is not about endorsing a trendy clothing line in the pages of AP, a tour bus with flat screen TVs and a PlayStation 360, or the sound of the moment. These guys still hold onto their day jobs, but spend their vacations and weekends playing the type of music they want. In fact, Weibe took part in this interview from the back office of the coffee shop where he just spent eight hours washing dishes. Ah, the life of a rock star...

The Gamblers play ol' school cock-rock, with fast guitars and thundering drums. But when drawing comparisons, you may want to avoid bringing up the AC/DC reference. "I'm down with AC/DC, but I think that might be a bit of lazy music journalism," Weibe explains. "Then again, maybe the journalists are writing for people who don't have a lot of music. I'm not bothered by it, but I am not excited by it like when someone notices a more obscure influence, like Scared of Chaka or the Dictators."

Though the Gamblers draw from just about everything old and new when it comes to influences (including the Wu-Tang Clan), it helps a great deal that they've made Austin their home base. "The punk scene (here) is great, and has been for many years, starting with the Big Boys and the Dicks in the late '70s. The garage-punk scene in the '90s helped define the Gamblers as a starting point, and there is still a lot of great shit starting every day here."

Ask Weibe if he owes allegiance to that other former Austin alum now living in the White House, and he's as emphatic as a Dixie Chick in front of a packed London audience. "Bush was born in Connecticut, therefore is NOT a Texan! I don't apologize for him. I voted against him," Weibe says. "I apologize for my parents voting for him, though. They never listen."

Though they are often cited by some of the more mainstream headline-grabbing bands of today, Weibe and the others don't really have that much in common with radio-friendly punk-rockers. "(Punk) is still alive and kicking, but it's weird to see it so commercial like that Chips Ahoy punk cookie commercial (referring to the TV spot where a pierced cookie sporting a Mohawk chants Oi!, Oi!). Never in all my days did I imagine that," says Weibe. "I don't think one can accurately grasp a scene until a few years after the fact. Although things have gotten lame and commercial, there are still a bunch of real and vibrant punk bands keeping it alive."

The Riverboat Gamblers will be playing aside a number of those bands, like Valiant



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Thorr and Against Me!, at this year's Warped Tour, an outing the guys have been on plenty of times before. "Tour Pros: kids who don't get to go out much, a few really great bands, and good food. Cons: heat, long drives, heat, fields, rain, heat, lots of bands I'm not into, heat and the uncomfortably warm weather."

They'll have plenty of time to get used to the heat, as much of their foreseeable future will be spent crammed in a van roaming the U.S. "For now it's just lots of touring," says Weibe, a man content with his fate. "We have a bunch of cool shows, but we are waiting to see if they come together or pan out. I hope they do." **AV**

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