

## OXBOW Tour Diary: USA / 2000

Well You Know, Musicians, Those Artist Manques, Those Dirty Fucking Malingerers And Greedy Bread Gobblers That Believe That Playing Music Is Some Sort Of Sacred Calling Lionize The Touring Life Through Backhanded, Self-Satisfied Compliments That Are Functionally No Better Than 1000 Hours of Jon Bon Jovi Crooning About The Lonely Road And So We Will Have None Of That In Any Of Our Tour Diary Titles. Sorry. Move Along. There's A Website Out There That's Perfect For You. But It's Probably Not This One.

### What the Hell Happened

To tell you the truth and to paraphrase Steve Martin, "we forgot." That's right. We just forgot. Pushing our niggardly (eaaassssyyyy) OXBOWian anti-success formula to places we've yet to imagine that it could go, we just forgot... that we were going on tour. I mean you see how we might do that. We were working on finishing An Evil Heat, our newest record, and adhering to a schedule established by our new label, Neurot, and at the same time have them believe that we were not assholes, oh yeah, and keep our REAL jobs, which at least in my case seem to consist of mostly cruising porno sites.

And then a phone call.

Nick Blakey: So we got a booking agent. Tone Deaf Booking. Out of Youngstown, Ohio.

Not Nick: Booking agent?

Nick: Yeah. For the tour.

Not Nick: The tour?

Nick: What the fuck? What am I? Talking to Vinnie Barbarino? The fucking tour your band, OXBOW, is doing with MY band, The Takers, this Fall, like WE'VE BEEN DISCUSSING!

Not Nick: Let me get this straight: we've been talking to you about touring with The Takers?

Nick: (sobbing... tape ends.)

But Nick Blakey, The Takers bassist, and a fine fucking fellow to boot persevered and through the accreted and crusted narcotic drool of An Evil Heat recording session that dragged us through no fewer than all of the following narcotics:

Fetanyl  
Sustanon

Hydromorphone  
Hydrocodene  
Ketamine  
MDMA  
LSD  
Meth  
Cocaine  
Robitussin  
Red Wine  
HCG

...we understood that we would be touring. And that our tour would be booked by Greg Barratt at Youngstown, Ohio's ("if it ain't from Youngstown, it ain't slag iron" is the local legend) Tone Deaf Booking.

The deal was this:

#### THE DEAL

6 shows, 6 days, Fuck You

Well we took it and after trying to convince the mewling Chris Keene (whose all time classic quote was in response to a shared OXBOW paranoiac urge to completely unload the van after the show in Youngstown so it could be locked IN the club, screamed: "the complete and utter futility of it all just boggles the mind!") from The Takers to drive a van to Chicago for us from Boston (if you must ask for a favor, make it large, unreasonable and costly for the favor giver. Anything else you're just better off doing yourself) and having him refuse we, in a fit of pique, drove the OXBOW van.

#### MEDITATION ON THE OXBOW VAN

- a) It must first have NO stickers. Those earmarks of the untalented. We abhor them. While we don't understand Fugazi's aversion to t-shirts, which can at least be worn, we hold fast on stickers, which do NOTHING, and if you EVER see an OXBOW sticker you KNOW we didn't make it and should consequently savagely beat the holder who in all likelihood is directly contributing and benefiting from the fuckification of American standards.
- b) It must first have cardboard seats. The cardboard is to keep the duct tape from sticking to your ass. Don't ask.
- c) It must have no fewer than 3 pictures of Domonique Simone by the AM radio.
- d) And for the journey out it should include 1) OXBOW drummer named Greg Davis, 2) OXBOW singer named Eugene Robinson, 3) a large caliber automatic hand gun, 4) several knives, and 5) and a handful of the aforementioned pharmaceuticals.

## THE ROAD TO CHICAGO

So Eugene and Greg drove there, Niko and the intrepid Chris "Don't Call Me Fozzy" Holden would drive back, and Dan "First Class Only" Adams would fly both ways. I don't know why Greg chose to drive with me, Eugene - but having seen Deliverance several times I'm sure it was the comforting thought of me being armed.. hmmm... Like I said, I don't know why Greg chose to drive with me.

Anyways he was committed to tour OXBOW Euro style. Hotels and such and the first night I thought this was fine. We got to the Red Roof Inn and it WAS cool. I took a shit, shower and a shave. Midway through I ran into the parking lot wearing only a towel and scared away the only other person on that side of the building (in actual fact he just reparked his car... under some lights... and put the alarm on) to grab some more stuff. After my toilette I, half naked, began unpacking my stuff and placed the video camera on the desk, next to the .45 auto, a bottle of lotion, and the lap top computer.

"I'm not liking the looks of THIS." I look over and see Greg warily eyeing my spread and it takes me a beat to realize what he's talking about. Then it takes me another beat to realize that we could easily make this tour break even by filming as much forced anal entry movies as one man, that would ME, could foist on another man, that would be GREG.

Against Greg's fervent hopes this did NOT happen and before we could say "wake up call" we were on the road again.

## NEGROES, NEGROES EVERYWHERE AND NOT A DROP TO DRINK

We made it into Chicago with nary a single homosexual incident that we're willing to talk about and began to try to find the airport to find the rest of OXBOW. We deviated from Tone Deaf's extremely right-on directions and under my careful ministrations took several side streets, back streets, and jackleg turns.

While driving along I become vaguely aware of Greg's increasing discomfort. Especially when contrasted with my extreme comfort. And notice that possibly it's related to the extremely large numbers of Negroes we're now surrounded by.

Ah. Back to urban centers, Negro fashions, and cars stopped in the middle of intersections while their occupants converse with fellows named ReRe and Junebug, also heedlessly parked in the middle of intersections.

Genius.

As we wend our way toward O'Hare Airport I tell Greg the parable of The Chased and Beaten White Man (thumbnail sketch: a White Man, while being chased and beaten,

meditates, while being surrounded by angry Negroes, about whether this is what it feels like for Black guys when they have to, say, go to a supermarket in Los Altos, California. I mean without all of the chasing and beating). He had not heard of it.



Anyway, we get the rest of OXBOW together, despite the fact that the airport is crawling with cops freaked that just the day before someone actually made it on the airplane with 9 knives, a stun gun and some pepper spray. I don't know why this guy had all this shit or why the security check point person let him slide but if I could arrange to have my flight in from Columbia next month SIMILARLY overlooked I'd be MUY ALLEGRE! If you catch my drift.

CHAPTER TWO in which we find the dastardly Steve Albini home after he told us he'd be out of town

For the sake of the compleatists out there it should be noted that at this point I haven't jerked off (for a chronic masturbator like myself touring can be trying. Wait. I know! I'll write a song about it.) nor have I fucked anyone or anything. If I don't fuck something I'm going to kill something. Total elapsed tour time? 42 hours.

Anyways. We were going to stop by our former Producer, the estimable Steve Albini's studio, Electrical Audio, in Chicago before the show and so we do. Steve had told Dan that he was going to be in Austria but we figured we'd just show up anyway. Imagine our surprise when John Novotny, while showing us around, leads us around a corner, smack dab into Albini who says, "um. What are YOU guys doing here? Hehe."

Dan says "what are YOU doing here? We thought you were going to be in Austria."

"That's not until, um... tomorrow."

At which point I pipe up... trying to defuse things a bit... "Fuck you, you lying motherfucker!"

A good laugh was had by all.

We made plans to record the next day before we took off to our show in Lansing, Michigan and were heading out presently to our Chicago show that night.

"Where are you playing?" Steve asked.

"The Fireside Bowl. Why? You want to come?"

"Me? Oh, no. Well I mean I can't. I'll be still recording the Frenchies then, maybe. But if not for sure I'll be there."

"Wait, wait, wait. That makes me nervous. Does the place suck or not?"

"Well I always have a good time when I go there," Steve smiles.

"When was the last time you went there?"

"It's an illegal club but they have shows and it's usually fun. You'll be okay."

"No... No, we won't actually. We're doomed."

"Don't be silly. Anyway you have two really big fans showing up there. Two guys who are way bigger OXBOW fans than anybody really ought to be. You'll be fine."

The door shuts behind us and the cold Chicago wind cuts into our pants and we wander the streets trying to find the club.

Oy vey.

THE FIRESIDE BOWL: IT WAS PACKED... LAST NIGHT.



We get there. The place really WAS a bowling alley. I mean the last time it was anything worth talking about...

BAD SIGN #1: "Yeah. The promoter? Um... he just called. He won't be able to make it tonight, so I'll be handling the money."

In honor of our absentee promoter I make sure I tear down every poster with HIS band's name on it as my way of spreading just a little of the love. If I had had the time I would have taken a sandblasting kit to the whole place, to scratch off every dot and tittle of band related graffiti and bullshit. But alas no. The place was an offense to my eye, nose, mind and indeed, my every sensibility. The .45 starts whispering to me. It starts whispering things like:

- a) They never loved you.
- b) Music really is just boring without screaming and bloodshed.
- c) Didn't my friend Olivia get arrested here on a trumped up charge of prostitution?
- d) The all ages show is packed. Make them stay for the evening show. I won't tell nobody.

I ignore the gun and just load in. But first THE TAKERS.

Yeah this was the first time we met THE TAKERS. We had heard a LOT about THE TAKERS from everybody but THE TAKERS. They were thieves, suck off artists, liars, junkies, backstabbers and the like.

Didn't make a difference to us. As long as they could abide by the one tour protocol-politeness in all things - we were going to get along fine.

We wander over to where they were and say our hellos all around. I click my heels, for some reason, while snapping off brisk handshakes and say, not-too-sentimentally "let's load."

Which we begin to do. Well I mean we begin to do after the ALL- AGES show... which of course is packed. I see the headlining band on the stage and he's asking the audience "you feeling fucking crazy tonight?!?! Well mosh it up!"

BAD SIGN # 2: "Well mosh it up!"

So we load in and while we do I notice two bald, skinhead looking types by the front door. They nudge each other and stop speaking as I walk past. I take the safety off of the .45. It's just, y'know, good business.

Anyways, long story, much, much shorter: THE TAKERS play and are good (and polite too). The singer Mike C. says "We're THE TAKERS." Between every song. I think this move is pure genius. We play. Well I guess. The show is over. We've magnificently entertained 15 to 20 people. Yeah. Well mosh it up.

The "promoter" rushes up to me and shoves \$40 in my hand and says "sorry. That's it." And scurries off.

Sleeping arrangements are non-existent and then and only then does the greatness that our European tours have been strike us. Fortunately the skinheads come up to us and they are indeed the two that Albini spoke of when he spoke of the "Two guys who are way bigger OXBOW fans than anybody really ought to be." And... get this... are you ready? They're from fucking POLAND?!?!?!?! Great. Our biggest fans in Chicago are from Europe. And Poland no less. Well goddamn that's cool. They work at Southern... big distributors for a lot of the Dischord music. We're staying at their place and just checking to make sure our Euro-karma is still working I ask.

"What floor do you live on?"

"The fourth. Why?"

"Well we're paranoid maniacs and always load our equipment in to wherever we're staying and we joke in Europe that most of the rooms we stay in are always on the top floor... hahahahah... hahaha... ha... say... is the fourth floor the TOP floor?"

"Of course." He smiles his apology and I think 5 to go.

## CABBAGE ROLLS AND COFFEE

We record the next day. I don't remember anything except watching the French people at Albini's studio ("they're French. That's why they're surrendering every 20 minutes." - John Novotny)... hungrily. Not because I like French people all that much. Though I DO. But because they actually have hot bitches in their band. Well, to tell you the truth I have NO idea whether they're hot or not. I'm just feeling like Tattoo on Fantasy Island, you dig me? If she's here, she's hot. Case friggin' closed. I try to use my Sex Mind Ray on them. A patented invention, it allows the sender to transmit, like, sex thoughts to a receiver REGARDLESS of the language barriers. It's great. I invented it. I actually use it all the time and fully intend to start busting lose on the Human Potential/Motivational speaker circuit sometime in 2002.

While you might be thinking I'm joking here, I'm actually quite serious. Anyways, in this instance the Ray failed to work, but only because I rushed it, not having much time before I check back on the laptop to see if I still have a job. Which is a sub-theme for this tour for sure, since my job announced layoffs, but in some sort of weird satanic spite said they wouldn't tell us for 2 weeks who was getting the axe. So I'm checking and thinking about all the cash I'm making and about how sad I'm going to be seeing that go from full to empty and about how a year earlier I had three jobs at once and was making enough money to officially cause all of my friends to hate, loathe and distrust me and about how the Sex Mind Ray takes a lot more effort to work if you're selling oranges on a freeway off-ramp, and then next thing I know we're officially late for our Lansing show.

## MICHIGAN-GA!

We load in.

Men in overalls show up.

The promoter is actually in the house, as are a club full of people.

This has got to be a goddamned mistake.

The promoter introduces me to our contractually stipulated bottle of red wine.

And it is on.

I am in fantasy land. But it's all real. Unbelievably real.

THE TAKERS seem peeved because the crowd chats during their set. This IS peev-inducing, however, we have several anti-chatter devices on hand. They're called penises. It never ceases to amaze me... I mean place a penis into the mouth of an audience member and you can hear a fucking pin drop.

Anyways, some band plays after THE TAKERS and before OXBOW. I forget the name. They're kind of interesting in a improv/Grateful Dead/latter-day SST way. Three piece. Instrumental. But by the time they've played 50 minutes I'm liquored up and fuck them, you know?

We play. The 20 year olds in attendance, um... who the fuck cares whether they liked it or not?!?!? I liked THEM. That's what the fuck matters.

They were like good meat. Tasty. And after the show sitting, enjoying a digestif, the girls start coming up to me, shaking my hand and holding on far too long and telling me "I've been thinking about going to San Francisco." I want to quote a Russ Meyer line, first spoken by the Anal Avenger in Beyond the Valley of the Supervixens, "awwww... Missy... you don't wanna go messin' with my problem," but they're interrupted by The Drunk Girl Watusi. She's dancing, drinking, dancing, getting closer to me, as I murmur to her friends, "you should take care of her. No. I mean it." I don't think they get it, but they do and OXBOW retires to another fine Red Roof Inn for the evening.

#### GRAVEDIGGER'S BALL

The OX-VAN craps out 70 miles from Youngstown. Greg Barratt the Intrepid drives out with an alternator to help. Before he arrives a guy pulls up in a souped up flatbed with duallies and asks if he can borrow our lug wrench. Seems he was throwing nuts and almost lost several of his tires on the way in. We ask where he was coming from and he says "laying grave stones. That's what I do." I was going to kill him right there. I mean, if I was the superstitious type for sure he would have been stuffed into a tarp on his flatbed after having been bludgeoned several times with aforementioned lug wrench.

But he escapes and Barratt shows up, Greg Davis fixes what needs to be fixed and I ride back in with Greg B. My throat is thrashed but I croak through a conversation with Greg.

Me: I want you to add something in our contract rider. Something about requiring that all people who come into contact with OXBOW be as polite as possible.

Greg B.: Well I'D never sign a contract like THAT.

Me: Why not?

Greg B.: Because sometimes I like being rude. Sometimes I'm rude because the band sucks. Sometimes I'm rude because the band is good but the guy's are asses. And sometimes I'm rude just to see what would happen.

Me: Well that's fine, but I'd like it in the contract.

Greg B.: And what if someone is rude to you at a venue?

Me: Well, disrespect leads to disrespect.

Greg B.: And so what?

Me: So if we're going to fight, which is what WILL happen, I'd like them to know WHY versus just being surprised.

We both laugh. It's only several days later that I find out that Greg B. as promoter (versus Greg B. as booker) would frequently fight bands for their guarantee. Double or nothing. Greg B. also went to college on a wrestling scholarship.

Oh God, if I had known that BEFORE I would have for sure attacked him. Just for fun. Just because I've been getting my ass kicked in the pages of Grappling magazine every month at the hands of guys who were silver medallists in the Olympics. Oh God. My mouth waters for weeks after finding this out because if there's one thing I love more than fucking even, it's fighting. Really. And anybody who fights will know just what the fuck I'm talking about.

But the show was great. The barmaid was beautiful. And there was even some audience participation that night. Not enough for our tastes (he ran before I could get my hands on him) but enough for that night.

Onward.

NEW YORK, NEW YORK!

Well they had layoffs and my black ass got laid off. There goes \$175,000 a year out of the window. Don't act so fucking surprised that I was making bank. I got some heavy, heavy (in total life and death dope deal fashion) people depending on me, man. And expensive tastes... in hookers (and hear I'm speaking of the proprietarily named MUFFLERS). Oh what a difference a year makes. Last year I had three jobs, was sleeping 4 hours a night, and couldn't count the money fast enough. Now in full-blown rags to riches style, I'm busted, broke, disgusted.

But I still have my pride.

And a whole suitcase full of pharmaceuticals.

And a gun.

And an unquenchable rage.

So let the fucking fun begin.

New York is where I was born and raised. So being back is a dervish of timespacethoughtimpressions. A whole fucking hogan's alley of insoluble emotional

difficulty. I mean fuck the 5000 that died in the WTC, I have my OWN self-involved rondele of emotional difficulties being back here now.



Niko and Eugene's Sister

But we go over to Tiger Lily's, a restaurant across from CBGB's that's owned by a high school classmate of mine. So we have a mini-reunion and OXBOW present collides with Stuyvesant HS past. It is cool and several of them come to the show later. We leave their dinner partying full swing and with a gut full of saki and a groin full of semi-turgid cock (it WAS like being back in high school again... seeing everybody and all) we head back to the show at Brownies.

Despite the fact that Brownies almost called the fucking Feds on us—apparently something in our promotional materials caused them to think we had anthrax'd them... things go as expected.

Brownies: No buyouts, no meals, no drinks, no guarantee, fuck you.  
OXBOW: Perfect.

But the show is a cool bill and includes who some have described to us as the east coast OXBOW, a band called Arab on Radar, Jumbo Killkrane, and a band called Flux Information Sciences, in addition to us and THE TAKERS.

Before we play I can here my sisters screaming in the audience and I find yet another world moving in the grand particle collider in my head. New York, High School, my

sisters, my family... I love my sisters and feel pretty good about my friends from high school, but the specters of long-estranged mother and father loom large and along with the bouillabaisse of joblessness, financial ruin, red wine and rage, bubbles like lava.

I hide the .45, hit the stage and we play, my lips drawn so tight over my teeth that my lips start to bleed.

Arab on Radar play after us and they were decent guys and a decent band and I tried to do my best to dissolve that band backstage weirdness by, uh, being nice. I mean I wanted to say "we're old, you're young, we don't give a fuck. We're a wreck running down a hill, we're that last moment before that moment stops, we're finished and we know it. We won't compete with you because we can't compete with anybody." But I don't say that because they wouldn't have believed me.

But if you know those guys, tell them we love them and were honored to have them play with us. Seriously.

Flux was cool as well but with them came a slightly different crowd. The crowd I despised when I lived in New York and that I still hate: the too cool for school crowd. They're friends with Flux so they talk through their whole set, while giving each other back rubs by the bar. Pig after pig.

Nuff said.



Niko and Eugene's Cousin

## WILLIAMSBURG: FUCKED AGAIN

They canceled the show. Whose fault is it I don't know, but I'm actually glad to have the night off. I can't walk or talk without pain, so on to Boston.

## HEYA CHOWDS!

Last time I played Boston, the club was packed, the bands were kicking audience members in the eyes, and the promoter paid us \$4 and I'm hoping that a few years later things have fucking changed a little. Though in actual fact I have no reason to believe this.

But Boston was great and I also got to meet the estimable (see Newsletter No. 5) Tim Morse (former Anal Cunt drummer) and his lovely and talented girl Jennifer Strickland. Beautiful. Their band was opening and after so many hundreds of emails I was glad to get a chance to meet them in real face/voice.

But we were playing a club called the Middle East, the ironic implications of which I've only recently made the connections to.

## The Show The Way I Remember It Before We Played

1) Jennifer and Tim sneak me a bottle of red wine and we drink and since I don't drink it doesn't take me much to get liquored up. We sit and talk and have to continually remind myself to not put a move on her as Tim, while an OXBOW supporter, would probably draw the line at being an OXBOW pimp and procurer. Anyways, they play and remind me of equal parts of X and like Timbuk 3. A nice balance. I want them to be my mom and dad.

2) THE TAKERS are glad to be home and it shows. Smoking set and I grab their CD (only to find out to my great disappointment that that song I love so much... "the thing that really bothers me is your laughing... and your talking...") is not on it. Ah well. I love these guys. For many reasons, many too sublime to make mention of but I'm feeling there's some kindred spirit action and I know we're all going to die together and it seems more so than not that thoughts of dying are occupying my time and if I've had any sort of significant life drive it's been based on the principle of ALPHA, that is, if you're going to be miserably suicidal at least be good at THAT and happy that you've achieved some sort of level of base competency. So what I'm saying is, we're all going to die together here. Ah, fuck. It's the vino. I'm sorry. I must stop and sob.

## The Show As I Remember It

- 1) oh god.
- 2) Jackie Wilson died onstage. Will I?
- 3) Will I have to shoot that cop for giving us a parking ticket?
- 4) Where's Danyel??!?!?
- 5) I will kick Duane Dennison's ass the next time I see him. You can bank on that motherfucker.

#### The Show The Way I Remember It After We Play

- 1) these people ask us to play a benefit in Boston for Planned Parenthood. I say "we'll play anything that's pro-fucking."
- 2) My heart is breaking.
- 3) I am wretched.

Thanks for coming and much love to my brother Nick. Don't die.