

CRYSTAL ANTLERS: MAYBE WHEN WE KILL EACH OTHER

April 15th, 2009 · [3 Comments](#)



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[\(from *Tentacles* out now on Touch and Go\)](#)

I A RECORD *interviewed Crystal Antlers* back before they'd even made their first EP and

with records [mentioned Crystal Antlers](#) back before they'd even made their first LP and popularized the legend of Long Beach's psychedelic chimneysweeps. Now Crystal Antlers' Tentacles will be the final new release on Touch and Go, and the band is working on a surreal film about bassist Jonny Bell going insane and killing everyone. Founders Bell and guitarist Errol Davis—who has recently rejoined the band—meet for chicken and waffles.

What happened to the bank robber who put out your first 45?

Errol Davis (guitar): He became a chimney sweep—has his own company. He does pretty well.

Jonny Bell (bass/vocals): He's still our guru. He robbed three banks in fifteen minutes. They were right across the street from each other.

What did Crystal Antlers learn from that?

E: We're fast.

Errol, how does it feel to step back into a band you helped start?

E: It's crazy to see people into the band, rather than playing to people who weren't as responsive. It feels pretty natural.

J: We always wanted a bunch of people in the band. Now that we're there, it's a little chaotic. But all these people are Crystal Antlers—they define Crystal Antlers. But there can be all different versions. Kevin [Stuart] and Errol and I, or Andrew [King] and me and Damian [Edwards.]. We've done stuff in Europe—acoustic-type things where we didn't do the entire band. Just pieces of it. There's much more space.

Do you still feel like you're a soul band at heart?

J: I feel like we're trying to be something honest and trying to put our whole selves into it, which to me feels a lot like soul. And I like the feeling of old soul music. I feel we have a lot in common.

E: It's not trying to recreate that sound as much as try to do it how they did it—a lot of passion.

How do you feel your first album came out? Did you get to do everything you wanted?

J: I'm ready to start the next thing! I wish we had more time on that. There was a lot of pressure from Touch and Go—now I understand why! I wish we would have been able to spend more time recording and mixing. In the end, all we set out to do was make an honest record, and sort of through sleep deprivation and other things we were able to do that. And basically it was all recorded and mixed in a week.

When you signed to Touch and Go, you said one of the things they liked was that you were from a different place than the rest of the L.A. bands who were getting signed then—what was important about that?

J: They didn't really look at a lot of bands that were super-hyped up. They're in the business of helping bring bands up. And at that time when we signed, we didn't feel like a big hyped-up band. We're a hard-working band playing for a while and they'd been talking to us for a long time. They bought the 7" and the EP through mailorder, so I mailed it. It didn't say Touch and Go—it was just their names. They were really excited I'd sent it personally—it had my home address as the return address. I'd always try and throw things in. A set list or something interesting. I included a piece of pizza with every order of the EP!

Do you know what their idea or vision for you was?

J: The cool thing is they didn't have a vision. All they wanted to do was help us do what we were doing already. Almost to like a fault. I always expected when you sign, they warp you into something to make you big. But they totally trusted everything about us. Even to a point—the original art for the EP was a Max Ernst painting I cropped and put on, and I didn't get the rights, and they started printing it and then were like, 'Wait, you guys don't own the rights?' And they had to have another guy make the cover. They really turned out to be the best label we could have imagined. They helped us so much. They're really like a family.

How did it feel to be the last band they'd have?

J: Actually, we found out when we were in Berlin. And a week later, we were in Amsterdam, filming a thing for FAB TV—a huge television and net webcast in the Netherlands. And they came in and told us—'We just found out this is gonna be the last episode—they're cutting our funding!' We're

like the grim reaper. But with Touch and Go, we talked to Corey—it has to do with the record industry. They're the only big indie that was left—no major involvement. Totally independent. And people aren't buying records. It's been that way for a long time. It really predated us signing them. We didn't have anything to do with it. Or that's what we tell ourselves.

The last time we talked to you, the EP wasn't even recorded—now it's 18 months later and the album is out. How are you able to move so fast?

J: This is the only thing we do. The first thing I do every morning when I wake up is just start working on songs, work on email, work on art, silkscreen, start making phone calls—and that's all I do every day. I put everything I possibly could into this. We're learning how to be a real functioning band, instead of kids playing in a garage—because that's what we really are.

What was the point of no return?

J: For me it was a long time ago. For everyone else, fairly recently. Maybe the F Yeah tour. I think after that, Andrew sold his car to buy a new guitar. And we all started basically putting in everything we had.

Henry Rollins says 'art leaves marks.' What has it done to you?

J: I was going to college before. I gave that up. I wanted to be a history professor. And relationships. It takes a lot for me to be able to keep my friends I grew up with—I lost a lot of friends. Just because I'm gone and I can't communicate all the time. Some people don't like that. I try to take a lot of time to focus on the people who have supported me and make sure they understand I still care about them. It's really stressful on relationships to be gone all the time. It takes a while to learn to navigate that. When you're with somebody, you have to really focus on them. And don't think about anything you're doing—nobody wants to hear about anything your band is doing. They don't care.

How does Damien feel about his cult following?

J: He's always had that. I don't think he can tell the difference between the people now and when he was playing Koo's Café. He's always been that way.

Why are you making a movie where you go crazy and kill the rest of your band? Are you actualizing something there?

J: Maybe when we kill each other. It's sort of a postmodern documentary. Kind of loosely scripted. We wrote scenes along the way with people. Sort of in the style of *Easy Rider*. Michael from [Videothing](#) wrote the script, and we're going to be doing a score for the film, which we've already started working on. We're working on that and a new record and a new 7".

Who's going to put them out?

J: I don't know what we're going to do. It doesn't matter. We're gonna keep making stuff. We've been on the same trajectory all this time—before Touch and Go. So it doesn't matter. It's like some aspects of Black Flag—how they were all militant about their band. Although I wouldn't want all the member changes and things. I hope we can have longevity—be productive. I like No Age—they're really productive, even though they're obviously pretty different stylistically. Maybe like Beefheart, too.

Maybe you should tell people how you scooped out that fish head.

J: I went to seventy different stores looking for all the pieces of the outfit for the cover, and I went to Chinatown and I was pointing to a picture I had of the cover. And the guy grabbed a salmon out of the tank—a live one—and clubbed it with a baseball bat. An Easton aluminum bat. I remember—'I used to have that bat when I was in Little League.' And he cut the head off and threw it in a plastic bag and handed it to me. Four dollars and fifty-six cents. I kept the receipt!

Where do you get your work ethic?

J: Partially the way we were raised, although everybody's different.

E: Everybody was in a punk band—all different punk bands. We played together—helped each other out.

J: Andrew and I were in Boy Scouts. I was a Sea Scout. I worked on a ship—delivering cargo to the Channel Islands.

What's your favorite knot?

J: Definitely the bowline or sheepshank. The bowline is the strongest. It can save your life—that's what they tell you. You can tie it real quick. If you fall off a cliff with a rope in your hand for some reason, you have time to tie a bowline.

Have you ever saved someone's life?

J: I saved my cousin from falling into a blowhole in Hawaii—a spot near the ocean with volcanic rocks where water comes underneath and shoots in the air like two hundred feet. When it comes down, it washes everything in. My cousin was younger and he fell and was getting washed into the hole, which would have dropped him like a thousand feet into the rocks. I dove in and grabbed him. And Victor [Rodriguez] saved some guy at a party in San Francisco. Errol and I were in the studio recording and everyone else was at a party on a roof, and some drunk guy fell through a skylight and caught himself with his elbows and was holding himself there with a beer—he wouldn't drop his beer! And Victor grabbed him and saved him.

So at least one life was saved during the recording of *Tentacles*?

J: At least one.

L.A. RECORD PRESENTS CRYSTAL ANTLERS WITH HAR MAR SUPERSTAR, THE SLANG CHICKENS AND MORE ON THUR., APR. 16, AT THE RELEASE PARTY FOR *TENTACLES* AT THE EAGLE ROCK CENTER FOR THE ARTS, 2225 COLORADO BLVD., EAGLE ROCK. 8 PM / \$6 / ALL AGES.

[MYSACE.COM/CRYSTAL ANTLERS](http://myspace.com/crystalantlers). AND ON SAT., APR. 18, AT FINGERPRINTS, 4612-B E. 2ND ST., LONG BEACH. CONTACT VENUE FOR TIME / FREE / ALL AGES. [INDIERECORDSHOP.COM](http://indierecordshop.com). [CRYSTAL ANTLERS' *TENTACLES* IS OUT NOW](http://crystalantlers.com) ON TOUCH AND GO. VISIT CRYSTAL ANTLERS AT [MYSACE.COM/CRYSTALANTLERS](http://myspace.com/crystalantlers).