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Interview: Dead Child

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Interview by Stephen M. Deusner | [Digg this article](#) | [Add to del.icio.us](#)

Start flexing your devil-horn fingers: The latest project from David Pajo-- of Slint, Tortoise, and, uh, Zwan fame-- is called Dead Child, which disinters thundering metal riffs, beastly imagery, and dramatic vocals from the strains of death metal that had preachers and parents up in arms during the 70s and 80s. Formed during a Slint reunion tour in 2005, the band-- which includes Slint guitarist Michael McMahan, bassist Tony Cook, drummer Tony Bailey, and howler Dahm (just Dahm)-- recorded a rough EP for Cold Sweat Records in 2006, then regrouped for the aptly titled *Attack* on Quarterstick Records. We spoke to Pajo about the new record, the upcoming tour, and Dave Yow's touch-up on the band photo.

Pitchfork: How did Dead Child come about?

David Pajo: The idea started when Todd-- the bass player-- and I were on the Slint tour. We all enjoyed playing together but we wanted to do [the] more aggressive, heavier stuff that we grew up on. I don't know if it was related to the type of music that we were doing at that time or what, but he actually just turned to me and was like, "You know what would be a great name for a metal band? Dead Child." We talked half-jokingly that we were going to do a band. I guess as time went on, I started writing songs that were more metal sounding, and it just evolved from there. It actually started with the name first, and then the songs came second.

There are five of us. We've all played in various bands together, in different combinations. I know that Todd [Cook] and Tony [Bailey] are my favorite rhythm section-- they're just like a unit. I guess we've all just played together in various capacities, so when the band was coming together, it was sort of like we just chose members because they had similar sensibilities and also because they're just cool. We all got along real well. It reminded me of when I was younger and bands were formed that way, out of friendships rather than anything else. It wasn't like we put up want ads, you know.

Pitchfork: How did singer Dahm come into the picture? He seems like a very different kind of metal singer than what's popular these days-- he has a howl instead of that cookie monster grumble.

DP: When we were considering singers, Dahm was confident to the point of arrogance-- this is exactly the personality we needed. He's very different than today's norm, for sure. Personally, I love the cookie monster grunts. I like how they alienate listeners. We sound the way we sound. We're individuals. We don't all like the same music. Everybody contributes their own influences, style, and history.

Pitchfork: You said this was inspired by the music you listened to when you were younger. Who are some of the bands you modeled Dead Child after?

DP: When I was really young, I was really into Black Sabbath and Iron Maiden and those kinds of bands. I was into Metallica when they first started, like when *Kill 'Em All* came out. I was young, but to me that was underground music. I had never heard anything like Venom or any of that stuff growing up in Louisville. That was sort of the only weird records I could find. All that stuff would be in the import section. And sometimes there would be some sort of goth type of stuff. But that was the stuff I was attracted to. And then, as I got older, it turned into hardcore punk. I started getting into more aggressive music. But I think it started with some of the old-school metal bands. Now since I've gotten back into it, I've been listening to a lot more of the 1990s death metal type stuff.

Pitchfork: Like what?

DP: I listen to every type of metal under the sun. I'm not very discerning. I'm looking for anything interesting in the guitar playing, songwriting, artwork, and production. If you look at the stack of CDs on my desk and in my car, you'll find a very wide range of music under the umbrella of metal. As far as specific bands from the 90s death metal era, I love Death, Carcass, Possessed, Morbid Angel, Gorguts, Autopsy, Atheist, etc.

Pitchfork: There definitely seems to be a metal resurgence lately.

DP: Definitely. It goes through waves. It's going to survive nuclear war with the cockroaches. Punk came along and grunge made guitar solos uncool. There are so many things that kept forcing metal back down to the underground. It survives everywhere on the planet. You can go to any small town in America, there's going to be a metal fan there. You can't say that about post-rock.

Pitchfork: How is *Attack* different from the EP?

DP: The EP was really different because we'd barely played together at all, and some of the songs were written really quickly. I like the EP because we were really excited to be making this music, but it was all done under less-than-ideal circumstances. We didn't know what our sound was or anything. We had a vague idea of what we were going for, but with *Attack*, we'd played together more and had done a small tour. We were sort of ironing out our idiosyncrasies and finding what our strengths and weaknesses were. So I think with *Attack*, it's a little more confident. Overall, it's a little more aggressive, and the production just sounds better. We were able to spend a little more time on it. The EP was done really quickly.

Pitchfork: Are most of the band still in Louisville?

DP: The band's based in Louisville. When the band started, I was planning on moving back there. I'm still in the Midwest, but I'm in Columbus, Ohio, so I'm three and a half hours away from everybody. That's one of the reasons we're not as active as we'd like to be-- it's an expensive chore for me to go down there just to talk or something.

Pitchfork: How does that work? Do you just make a lot of trips down there?

DP: I usually try to do it all in one go. So like for the record, for *Attack*, I was like, 'I'll come down for October and we'll just practice everyday and we'll write songs and then in November we'll go in the studio' So there were three months when I wasn't writing or practicing for them. We just have to plan everything in advance and concentrate it so that we get everything done in time. It's not as laidback as I wish it could be. I guess there's an urgency to get the most out of our time together. Everybody's in different bands. To be honest, just trying to get everybody together in one room to get our picture taken for the back of the album, it took so long just to organize that. We ended up having some drinking buddy just take a photo with my digital camera. The only way to do anything interesting with that was, we got Dave Yow from the Jesus Lizard to do some digital retouching to make us look inbred. The photo turned out really funny, so in a way having limitations like that has worked out--it's forced us to find new ways to make things cool. Not that making us look inbred was that cool. I thought we should go the opposite route: Instead of trying to look clever, we should just make ourselves look ugly as sin.

He did such an amazing job with the retouching that it just looks like five guys, but you're like, man, these guys... it's like, this guy's eyes are too far apart. We really do look like we're some weird, slightly deformed band. If there's any reason not to download the record, it's just to have that photo. It's so funny. Sometimes I can't even think about it without cracking up. Because knowing the original photo and what Dave did to it-- the alterations are so subtle and so effective-- I almost want to put the original on our web site and then put Dave Yow's next to it so people can spot all the changes. There are something like twenty little changes. Like he shriveled one of our arms slightly. It's really funny.

Pitchfork: Sort of like a before and after. Before listening to the band, and after.

DP: Our bio on the Myspace page plays on that a little bit. We talk about various prosthetics and how Quarterstick helped us pay our extensive medical bills. So that's like another aspect-- the unflattering bio. It seems like band bios are always trying to pump up the band, and we're trying to deflate ourselves. We have a link to Louisville Prosthetics Suppliers linked on our bio, and that's a real place. Michael [McMahan], our guitar player, actually wrote that bio. On his way to work he passed that prosthetic supply store, and it always seemed so grim and dark. When I found out they had a web site, I thought, we have to work that into our bio somehow.

Pitchfork: Are you touring for this album?

DP: We're going to do a little bit of touring. When the album comes out in April, we're going to do a Midwestern tour around the week of release. And then we're planning on doing a full U.S. tour and a tour of Europe as well. But I think after that initial round of touring, the idea is to start working on some more new material.

The thing I like about the band is that there's no pretense. We aren't even trying to be artists or poets. We aren't trying to make poetry or anything beautiful. It's just a rock show. We just want to enjoy playing loud. That's just about it. It's about having a good time and trying not to fuck up. It's still a pretty young band. We haven't really done that much, and we don't have any huge agenda.

Pitchfork: So this isn't a one-off project?

DP: That's the thing. I think the majority of the people in the band still play in other bands, because we're not that active. But for me, it's the only thing I want to do and it's the only thing I'm focused on. I've always played in a couple of different bands at once, but now I'm only interested in the Dead Child stuff.

Pitchfork: Does that mean any rumors of a continued Slint reunion are false?

DP: I'm inclined to say they are false but I've learned not to make definitive statements in regard to Slint. If we aren't going to do anything new, it seems pretty uninteresting to carry on.

Pitchfork: Do you feel like that band casts a shadow over all your subsequent projects?

DP: It always has and always will. In my entire life I never set out to do anything ground-breaking or pioneering, and I'm not going to start anytime soon