



## Random Rules: Dave Pajo of Dead Child

by [Jason Heller](#)

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**The shuffler:** Guitarist Dave Pajo, a founder of post-rock legend Slint; his lengthy résumé over the years includes Tortoise, Will Oldham's Palace, Billy Corgan's short-lived Zwan, and a stack of solo recordings under the names M, Aerial M, and Papa M. Pajo's new project, Dead Child, is going to throw many of his longtime fans for a loop; the group's self-titled debut EP is a set of thundering, ride-into-battle heavy metal, and the new Quarterstick Records full-length, *Attack*, is equally mythic. Pajo isn't exactly a quick draw with his iPod, but he still had plenty of opinions about music—and a certain bald ex-bandmate—to share with *The A.V. Club*.

**Dave Pajo:** I'm kind of embarrassed of what might come up in my iPod.

**The A.V. Club:** That's partly the point. We want some guilty pleasures.

**DP:** Oh, man, I've got a lot of guilty pleasures. Jimmy Buffett is one of them. [Laughs.]

**AVC:** Jimmy Buffett seems like one of those guys who's due for some kind of critical re-evaluation.

**DP:** Yeah, totally. If you just like having a beer on the beach, Jimmy Buffett's your man. He's mastered that vibe. There aren't too many other people who've made a career out of trying to capture one particular moment.

**AVC:** And his songs are really clever. He's kind of like this beachcombing John Prine.

**DP:** That's what I like about him. I know Will Oldham likes him, too, and we'll talk about him when we get together. I don't really have anyone else to talk to about Jimmy Buffett. [Laughs.] I do think that he writes good lyrics. But God, the Parrotheads that worship him are unbelievable. There are certain bands that I don't want to admit that I like, mostly because their fans are so repulsive. [Laughs.] The Grateful Dead are a perfect example. I could never get along with the Deadheads, but I actually went to see The Grateful Dead one time, just to see what the big deal was. It wasn't bad; they were just jammin' out. But I didn't feel any connection or anything.

**AVC:** How long ago was that?

**DP:** Gosh, it must have been the early '90s. It was back when all the hippies in Louisville drove Saabs and dressed really nice. I learned a lot from going to that show, because it made me realize that I don't like music that doesn't have an edge. The Grateful Dead is good if you want to be coddled by music. [Laughs.] But I like to be prodded a little. I don't like music that's totally soft around the edges.

**AVC:** Had Slint broken up by then?

**DP:** Yeah, I was doing Palace with Will, and I think exploring stuff like The Grateful Dead fit our whole mentality then. Grunge

was huge at that point, and it seemed like me and my friends went the opposite route. We went deeper into folk music and country music and blues. When I was in Zwan, Billy got so mad at me when he found out I didn't know any Smashing Pumpkins songs. He would say, "You haven't heard '1979'?" But I didn't listen to any of that shit when it was breaking. Delta blues was way more exciting to me than the Pumpkins and that whiny voice. [Laughs.] I knew that one "rat in a cage" lyric, but that was the only Pumpkins I could recognize for the longest time. But, yeah, Billy would get really mad about that: "How can you not know 'Tonight, Tonight'?" [Laughs.]

**AVC: But Zwan didn't even play Smashing Pumpkins songs, right?**

**DP:** No! But that's one of the reasons I initially liked the guy—he was so arrogant, it cracked me up. He would constantly bring up the fact that he sold 25 million records, or that his hit song was played at the Super Bowl or something. It just made me laugh. You know that character Alan Partridge, the one Steve Coogan played? Billy reminds me of Alan Partridge if he'd made a hit record. But after a while, the joke wears off.

**Cryptopsy, "Faceless Unknown"**

**DP:** This is off an album called *Whisper Supremacy*. I get these metal albums and put them on my iPod in the hopes that I'll listen to them at least once. Unless they strike me right away, I won't listen to them again. I think Cryptopsy is one of those bands. They're a death-metal band; I remember being not that into it.

**AVC: Is Dead Child a stab at regaining your lost metal childhood?**

**DP:** Yeah, exactly. Everybody in the band is going that direction. We're all ex-metalheads who had the craving to play that way again. I don't really want to play or listen to anything but metal right now; I don't know if my attention span is just getting shorter the older I get, but if it's not metal, I'm super-bored. [Laughs.] I still love drone music and instrumental music, but except for a band like Sunn O))), I don't hear a lot of new drone stuff that gets me excited. That's just good music to fall asleep to.

**AVC: What's some of the music that's been keeping you awake?**

**DP:** When I first started embracing metal again a couple years ago, I pulled out the old records I listened to back in the day. Some of it held up, and some of it didn't. I was way more into that New Wave Of British Heavy Metal stuff from the early '80s, but now I'm trying to catch up on all the progressions that metal went through while I was off doing other things. The Florida death-metal scene, the Gothenburg scene, I missed out on all that stuff. Metal has evolved a lot and broken into all these subgenres. I went to see this band Rotting Christ last week; man, some of these fucking metal shows are too much. I can't sit through all those opening bands. The show started at 7:30, and there were eight bands. By the time Rotting Christ came on, I was like, "Fuck, I can't take another blast-beat." [Laughs.] But Rotting Christ is really interesting. They started out as a black-metal band, then they became more death-metal-sounding. But they're Greek, so they started adding in this Greek folk influence. [Laughs.]

**AVC: What was it specifically that got you back into metal?**

**DP:** For the last decade, it seems like I've been telling all my friends that I wanted to start a metal band. No one took me seriously. When I was a kid, I learned to shred, but by the time I figured it out, no one was playing like that any more. [Laughs.] I remember feeling so proud when I figured out all these fancy arpeggios and stuff. [Slint drummer] Britt [Walford] would just point at me and laugh in my face when I played like that. He actually helped me unlearn how to play guitar, to break things down to their most simple phrases. But I wanted to get back into metal, keep my chops up. [Laughs.] Then when I was in New York a few years ago, I played bass for Early Man for a couple months. It was right around the time the Slint reunion was happening, and I couldn't do both. But playing with them made me decide to start Dead Child for real. It reminded me of that enthusiasm I had for playing metal when I was younger. I totally know this is part of my midlife crisis.

**AVC: Do you think reverting to metal was also a reaction against your experience in Zwan?**

**DP:** Yeah. Zwan really did put a sour taste in my mouth, as far as music goes. I don't want to talk too much shit about Billy, but... He really does know how to beat the sound and life out of music. I just wanted to do something that wasn't money-oriented

or art-oriented. With Dead Child, we're not trying to make poetry. We just want to play a party and knock the windows out. That's the spirit that got me excited about music when I was younger. Hardcore has that same thing. Hardcore was the whole reason I got out of metal in the first place: It was so much faster, and it seemed so much more intelligent in a lot of ways. The band I was in before Slint, Maurice, was kind of a metal-hardcore crossover band. It seemed to me like a natural shift: First you listen to metal, then hardcore, then the whole world of music opens up.

### **Xero, "Cutting Loose"**

**DP:** Shit, another bummer. [Laughs.] Well, it's not really a bummer. It's from a New Wave Of British Heavy Metal compilation I have. The band doesn't suck or anything, they're just kind of a one-song wonder. I don't know what the rest of their stuff sounds like.

**AVC:** "Cutting Loose" is a pretty good name for a metal song.

**DP:** Totally. In '80s metal, there wasn't a lot of lyrical inspiration beyond "We're psyched to fucking lose our minds!" [Laughs.]

### **Exodus, "Scar Spangled Banner"**

**DP:** I just saw these guys play the other night, too. [Laughs.]

**AVC:** Were you into thrash as a whole in the '80s?

**DP:** I was really into the early Metallica stuff, some Anthrax. I really liked S.O.D. a lot. I didn't know it was called thrash metal or anything like that. When you're a kid, you just like whatever you like. But I remember getting [Metallica's] *Kill 'Em All* when it came out. I was really young, but I remember thinking, "This is fucking badass!" I played it for a friend of mine who was really into Dead Kennedys and stuff, and he was upset with the back cover. He said, "Look how ugly these guys are! Look at the fucking zits on these guys!" [Laughs.]

**AVC:** The punk guy calling the metal guys ugly—that's kind of the pot calling the kettle black.

**DP:** [Laughs.] Yeah, totally. But that photo on the back of *Kill 'Em All* is pretty homely. We kind of aped that idea with the Dead Child record. On the inside of the booklet, we have a band photo, and I asked Dave Yow [of The Jesus Lizard and Qui] if he would retouch it. He works as a graphic designer now, and he's really good at Photoshop and stuff. He did these really mild distortions on our features so that we look like a really ugly band: One guy's eyes are too far apart, another's features are too small for his head. [Laughs.] It's really subtle, though. You'd look at it and think, "Wow, this Kentucky band is really inbred." I hadn't thought of the back cover of *Kill 'Em All* for a long time, but I'm sure that's where the inspiration came from. That was the cool thing about Metallica when they started—they didn't even seem like a metal band. They just looked like fans, the guys that would go to the metal shows, not be onstage.