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Pinback's Rob Crow pleases many fan bases with his beautiful, fragile music

BY MICHAEL COYLE

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While you were reading this, Rob Crow (left) formed another band. Photo by Drew Reynolds.

Rob Crow is tired. He sounds it, and he says so.

It's not surprising. After all, I could use half my allotted word count just listing his current projects. Here's an abridged version: In the three years since he and fellow Pinback member Zach Smith released their recent and most-lauded studio album, *Summer in Abaddon*, Crow has released a solo record and a batch of Pinback B-sides, ventured capably into metal territory with the wryly named *Goblin Cock*, gone experimental with drum savant Zach Hill in the *Ladies*, played with the *Other Men*, weirded around with a toy organ in *Optiganally Yours*, lent some vocals to *Team Sleep*, got married, had a kid, and maybe found a minute or two to read

a comic book or eat lunch.

"I have to," Crow says of his relentless musical activity. His curt answer could be a profoundly concise Zen statement, but more likely he's waiting to go back to eating his sandwich and watching Mickey Mouse cartoons with his wife and 20-month-old son.

"When I write, I never know until the last minute what it's going to be for," he explains. "It all depends on what it is. The different bands are different collaborations with different people. The *Ladies* is two people. The *Other Men* is three other people. *Optiganally Yours* is two other people. It's all different. I don't focus on one thing. I just get really tired," Crow admits.

Asked if he thinks he could make his life easier (and Pinback fans happier) by putting out more Pinback records and less of everything else, Crow quickly responds that his projects aren't hindering his work with Pinback whatsoever. "It just takes three years to make a Pinback album. We go over every little nuance over and over again."

The San Diego-based musicians of Pinback still pore over the sounds in their respective rooms the same way they did nine years ago when they first realized how well Smith's warm, guitar-like bass playing could hold together Crow's wispy, skip-along guitar lines and breathy voice. The only difference is that home-recording technology has caught up to their level of talent, making it easier for them to hear and manipulate the fragile pieces they create.

"There's no reason for us to go into a studio," Crow asserts. "Pinback's the only project either of us have that makes any money, so we don't want to waste that money on going into a studio and paying a million bucks to sound about the same as we can make it sound," he reasons.

While hardly a household name, Pinback is garnering an ever-growing and unconditionally zealous fan base. It's hard to find a passive fan. Their unique sound of stumbling, almost melancholic, ethereal melodies can fit just about any mood; they can make you skip down the street when you're happy and cry into your pillow when you're not.

Crow's flattered by the devotion, of course, but says the best comment he's ever gotten from a fan is when he was asked if he was in the avant-garde band the *Residents*. "That was just the best. To have someone think I could be that good," he says, laughing.

For this upcoming tour, Pinback will debut songs from their fourth studio album, *Autumn of the Seraphs* (due Sept. 11 on Touch and Go). "We don't know how many new songs we'll play," Crow says. "We've been practicing them all, but this will be our first show in a while, so we might want to play some other songs."

A quick listen to *Autumn of the Seraphs* finds Pinback playing at a faster tempo than before. Since people often complain about the band performing songs much faster live, Crow explains, they recorded this album as if they were doing just that. "I guess it was different, making this record. It felt easier," he adds.

"I had a kid since the last record. That definitely makes things different," he says. "He likes to hang out in my room while I work. He learns from me, and I learn from him."

Any plans for a collaboration? "That would be great," Crow says, with only the slightest laugh.