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Chris Koster Interview in Support of Sex, Love and Morality by Dixon Christie

PunkTV.ca: It's Dixon Christie here with PunkTV.ca and I have Chris Koster on the line, and we are going to talk about this new album *Sex, Love and Morality*. I was watching this making of video where you commented that the differences between the paradoxes in your personality vs. others' paradoxes is that you wake up with blood in your mouth and some new music in front of you.

I suppose I did say that. I sort of came up with the alter ego of "the wolf" and try to explain where that came from and the duality of that.

PunkTV.ca: You were also sharing a tongue in cheek side of your personality. You like to poke fun at yourself.

Yeah, totally. I made that video to sort of explain it the best I could to people and encompass all the record and what I went through.

PunkTV.ca: In preparing this album I understand that you wrote most of the instruments and you were able to achieve most of the recording and writing on your own?

Well, all of the writing I did, and I played the instruments on the record as well, but I also had some help in the studio... I still usually end up playing everything myself.

PunkTV.ca: As an artist you become dependant on yourself to get the final result that you are looking for.

Exactly. You try to put a song in your head onto tape, so a lot of time someone else can bring something to it and make it better and push it in a direction that you might not have taken yourself.

PunkTV.ca: Do you feel that you might lose that sense of objectivity by being so insulated in the process, or is that loss of objectivity exactly what you are looking for?

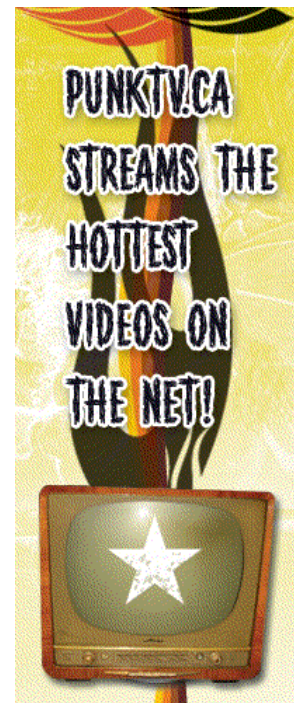
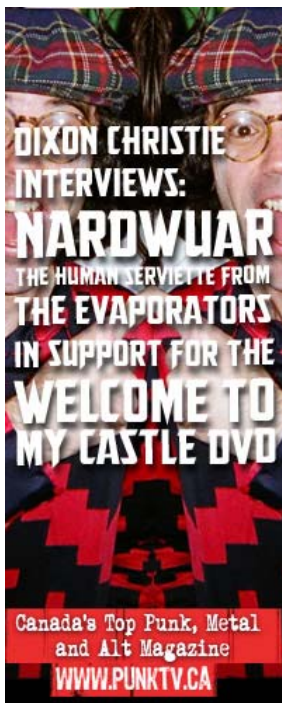
It is a constant battle for me. I think, if anything, I have a tendency to be inside myself and get lost trying to know if what I am doing is good, but at the end of the day I feel like – whether it be myself or some other artist or some other band – we know best what we want to do and I just try to put that into practice. I try to write songs that make me, if I heard a similar song on the radio by another artist, just pull the car over. That is constantly what I am trying to do: be really honest with myself.

PunkTV.ca: I understood that you wrote over 120 some songs in preparing for *Sex, Love and Morality*.

Well, I mean.... that is just sort of what I do. That is how I relax. Nowadays you can make full records in your living room; I do most of my recording in my apartment. I never really keep an ongoing inventory of songs I have done, but they pile up.

PunkTV.ca: Do you prefer to write on piano or do you prefer to write on guitar?

It depends, and I don't have a preference. It is whatever is going to make the songs. I have said this before: a lot of the time I just end up working the way I do because of the song. So if I write on an acoustic guitar and have the shell of it there, then bring it to a band... a lot of people work that way and it is a good way to do it too because you get input from other people, but I guess I ended up working the way I do because I want to hear the song and I want to



hear what it is going to sound like when it is done. Little things happen throughout the process where you put on one track and that takes it somewhere else, or the drum track didn't turn out the way you heard it but it is something else which triggered something else. That is what makes it exciting for me, and that is the process which is, like I said, how I relax.

PunkTV.ca: What about your relationship with Bob Ezrin, the producer who worked with Alice Cooper, Pink Floyd, KISS, Jane's Addiction, etc... is this someone who works regularly with mentoring you? If so, how did that all come about?

Well, I haven't spoken to Bob in a while, but it was more of a time period where I officially went into the record over the course of a year when we would have regular sessions with each other and share ideas as well; I would give him a ton of ideas to listen to and have these song doctoring sessions and stuff like that. It actually came about through the label. We talked at one point about him doing the record, but then he just felt really strongly that I was the best producer for my material. When someone like Bob gives you that much confidence that there actually is an audience out there, and that people do get it... most of the time you don't always come away from everything with that feeling of confidence, so it was a positive relationship.

PunkTV.ca: For the kind of artist that you are, tell us about the relationship that you have as a songwriting artist compared to a lot of post hardcore and pop-punk music that is coming from Toronto. You are in a thriving scene but you are not exactly like the bands that are gigging around. Does the scene support guys like Chris Koster?

Well, that is a good question, and I definitely don't feel attached to any scene at all. In fact, I don't even live in Toronto; I live in Kingston, so you can imagine how removed I am. It does make it challenging, definitely. I don't sound like Broken Social Scene and the only thing happening in that scene is that band and six hundred others where one of them is always putting out a record.

PunkTV.ca: These bands are a point of reference for guitar songwriting bands, wouldn't you say? Broken Social Scene, City, and Colour?

I definitely do feel completely removed from the scene. The word that people use most often used to describe me is "unique", and that is a not always necessarily a compliment. It is definitely a double edge sword with "unique". Everything has been done one way or another so I definitely try to be something different, and I don't always feel that I am. I draw inspiration from all sorts of things, and whenever I try to emulate something like that it never comes out exactly the same. I try not to get caught up in the head game of what kind of artist I am, whether there is commercial success, and all that stuff. I don't feel like I have any responsibility to that, and I don't feel that is any of my business. I make music, I write songs, I record them, and everything else is somebody else's job after that. I try my best to make sure that my job is writing and recording music and going to play in front of people, and, other than that, it is somebody else's job to sell it. At the end of the day you sort of have to let it go... it will hopefully find the audience, but you can't really have control over that because it is impossible and it will drive you insane. If you try to write hit songs I think people see through that really easily. I try my best just to be honest and write the song that I would love to hear.

PunkTV.ca: I am totally feeling what you are saying, but there is something to be said, however, for accidentally going through a period where you are writing your own "Purple Rain". Guys like Prince, Trent Reznor... I mean Trent has been on again off again, and I would say that most recently 150 percent on again: the very straightest that he has ever been, and also the most viscerally rawest, and perhaps even the truest and purest he has ever been. But that doesn't happen all the time for an artist. No, because it is a really tough thing to be honest and to be raw and all those things. All those artists that we mentioned are great artists. I think what it is, is that when they hit their heights the bar is so high

for anybody else. I don't think there is anything wrong with sitting down and trying to write a song that a whole bunch of people that are going to attach themselves to, or has an undeniable beat, or any of those things, but when it gets to the point of being dishonest... and what I mean by dishonest is that it sounds like you are trying. When it sounds like you are trying to write a hit song, it is boring for me to work that way. I flip on MUCH Music and listen to three songs in a row, then take bits of time and try to write a song that, to me, would be dishonest and jumping on something that is for other people, and I don't think I would do that anyways. I try to write things that get caught in my head and, more importantly, lyrical statements that I can attach myself to and are saying something. There is nothing wrong with writing a pop song at all and I love that stuff.

PunkTV.ca: Well, Prince has released a lot of albums, and only a few of them have done really well. I don't know if it is a cyclical thing there or if it comes to the point where he says, "In order to facilitate my needs to have this big studio with people around me all the time I have to make a hit..." but he is able to afford a whole band.

Well, he is his own person, and the other thing is that all these guys have their period, like from about '81 to the late '80s, where everything they did was gold and those were their biggest selling records. That happens to most people. David Bowie is not turning out *Stardust* every week anymore. I think people find a groove that they ride it out as long as it works for them, and that is not to say that at the end of that they are worthless and you do not write anymore good songs; it just means that it is not going to come to you like it did. I think I am in that groove and I think I am at the start of it right now. I am always going to be an artist, and with each record I want to develop and challenge myself and the audience, and I will never make the same record twice... that is definite.

PunkTV.ca: I got two questions that we ask everybody and the first is which of the following experiences have you had: have you seen the face of God, have you had an alien encounter, or have you seen a ghost?

I haven't had any of those. I see what I see, and I look for meaning in things, but not those.

PunkTV.ca: And the last question is what would surprise kids most to learn about Chris Koster?

Maybe that I have never seen the face of God. I don't know if anybody knows me enough to have anything surprise them at this point... or anyone who does know me, they are probably surprised by just about anything.

PunkTV.ca: Well it has been great and thanks for your time. I wish you all the best with this album *Sex, Love and Morality*.

Dixon Christie

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