

Interview With Bernard

Bernard are a punchy and heavy 5-piece from Surrey, and are growing in stature as a nationally (and internationally liked band). With their EP "The Poetic Justice EP" recently released, and their debut album "Trail of Tears" nearing completion, The Gig Reviewer caught up with them in their studios. I arrived in Odiham following what can only be described as "hidden" directions. Situated in an old hop kiln (used for brewing beer) was the recording studios currently holding the creative talents of 5-piece Bernard. Frankly it was the most gorgeous recording studio I could imagine. Situated out in the middle of the countryside a few miles outside a small town, it was fully furnished with a couple of lounge areas, tv, kitchen and bathroom. No wonder I was greeted with tales of the previous night Rock and Roll-esque shenanigans. They all felt that the place was nicer than what they had to go back to! Firstly, I would like to apologise, as after an opening spiel by Andy about the relative merits of Bernard and what they stand for, we realised that my f***ing Dictaphone was on the blink! Nevermind, eh? Whoever said I was a professional anyway??? What follows is a mixture of email conversations and the hazy memory of the interview on a gorgeously sunny day at Bernard's Studios. A brief history of Bernard They were formed by Steve Dowling (guitar) and Andy White (bass) in September 2000. Steve and Stuart had been in bands before, with Andy joining after seeing an ad in the paper. Donna Warillow (lead vocals) joined in the October having been previously in a band with Andy (an Audioslave like rock n roll in-breeding type thing). After some initial doubts (if not prejudice) about female singer, all were won over after hearing her sing (aww). January 2001 saw Rob Tobias joining on guitar. The first gig was in March 2001, and with the second gig, came an offer from an Indie label. Hard as it may be, after an internal power struggle, and the band near to splitting up, they decided that the deal would not be right for Bernard. They turned it down, confident that they would be given a second chance, and at least if they didn't they would still be together and more importantly, would have creative control! 2001 and 2002 saw few gigs, with Bernard focusing on honing and creating their distinctive direction and sound. In December 2002, they headed into the studios to record their first single, with Les Carter overseeing the production. Wedding Bells Steve married Donna in 2002. You can ask them more about that yourself, I'm not that nosy ;-). Recording Contract In January 2003, Bernard were approached by Les Carter's label, Spinach. Bernard accepted this deal, with the offer of recording their first album on the horizon. The rest in brief: May-June 2003, UK tour (in huge Rock n roll type touring bus) July 2003, Performed at Guilfest Aug 2003 released single "Poetic Justice EP" October 2003, started recording debut Album "Trail of Tears" December 2003, Stuart left to pursue other stuff, and Darren Oliver joined on drums. March 2004 Video shot for "one last breath" May 2004 Album recording finished June onwards, conquering the world! The interview: (oh have I forgotten that bit?) No - here is the question and answer bit: Can you describe the attitude and sound of Bernard? Attitude, in your face I suppose. We write songs which actually mean something on the whole and as Donna and I are quite vitriolic about stuff a lot of it is dark and moody, and about death and social injustice. Writing music that is trying to say something leads you to play it with that attitude so I suppose live we do come over as very confrontational maybe. The sound is based around various things. We have a huge range of tastes in the band from metal to indie stuff, we tend to do very vocal led verses, cos Donna's voice is so strong and unique we like to use it in that way. Choruses are usually fairly heavy cos we can only keep Bob away from his overdrive pedal for 2 minutes at a time! What do you think of your debut album, Trail of Tears? Don't know yet cos we ain't finished it! No it's really strong I have to say, there's no fillers on it and the initial mixes are sounding big and phat and powerful. Between us we have been doing this long enough to know exactly what we want, so it's easier to get the sound we want cos it's in our heads already. That's why we only record to tape, it sounds all anal, but tape does sound different AND BETTER IN OUR OPINION! What was the defining moment of Bernard to you? Going on tour last year as a support band in a big big BIG bus, we learnt to play as a band on the road, honed our stagecraft and learnt how to perform. It was always going to make or break the band, and for the four originals left it led us to want more. For Stuart however it proved he didn't want it as much as we did, so he left. Cheers for the beer by the way! Give us a few Bernard anecdotes. I don't really do anecdotes. Now there was the drinking game on tour where Donna left us with two cases of tiger beer and came back 45 mins later to discover no one could talk. There was the time Bob played so loudly his amp fell off his cab with the vibration and no one noticed. Steve climbing to the top of the stack at Guildford civic only to discover he had accidentally unplugged his guitar but continuing to rock out anyhow. Bob asking what a mirror does was quite funny. Stealing another band's guitar on tour and not realising until they phoned us. We pinched it in Nottingham and it went to York and Glasgow before they turned up in Sheffield to reclaim it. There's loads and loads of really good pissed ones, but I was pissed so can't remember them. Has there ever been a time where you thought the whole project was doomed? Yeah, we got offered a deal really early in our career and really wanted to take it, but the contract was well iffy. Not only that but the bloke started telling us how to write the songs and like plums we tried to do it his way. It led to loads of arguments! Then a mate of mine said "it's cool to say you were offered a deal, it's even cooler to say you blew it out!! we blew it out and the weight was lifted this was in 2001, and the week after we wrote Spiderweb which is on the album, and stuff started flowing again. It was a close call though. That could really have been the end. Looking back we were probably a month from canning the whole project. Oh yeah, I came close to leaving when Donna and Steve didn't invite me to their wedding! (a running joke between me and them seeing as I introduced them!) How the hell did you stumble upon that studio? It's got a 2 inch tape machine and very few places do! I'd been there before and so had Donna. Good studio and the engineer is ace. As an aside we were the first ever band to get a complaint from the neighbours over noise levels ... now that's ROCK! Who pays for all the beer? Everyone.... it's a job lot, and we do get through lots! Who has the most expensive guitar? My Rickenbacker 4003 bass is the most expensive and by far nicest guitar. It's about 1400 quid new. I've got a VBA 400 all valve Marshall Head too which is about a grand new but we have artist support from Marshall (THKS PAUL AND ALL THE MARSHALL BOYS) so I'm laughing. Lovely tone and I use 2 four by 10 cabs so it's a punchy setup. The ricky is a leftie so no one ever asks to borrow it. Steve's got a Gibson Les Paul Studio which is over a grand so I think so he ain't far behind me. He uses a TSL100 Marshall head and a 1960 4 by 12 cab. Bob has an Epiphone Explorer that looks like a coffee table or a surf board. I don't have that much wood in my house! He uses a DSL100

Marshall head (see the marshall thing) and he has a vintage Orange 4 by 12 and a custom built 4 by 12 cab. Lot of speakers there 20 between the three of us! Ever been any Bernard squabbles or punch ups? Steve and Donna Squabble all the time but they are married so i suppose its there job! Steve and I have had a couple of nose to nose you F in this you f in thats about stupid stuff really, but its over as soon as its started, and no one holds a grudge. When me and Steve barney however everyone hides cos the old testosterone goes thru the roof! Why the hell did you choose Bernard as your band name? Did you have a big dog once? Did I have a big dog once, more than once but I was drunk! (no dont put that!). I really dont want to talk about the name thing cos it was just that, a name. I think Steves brother came up with it years ago and we just took it on . Well theres been an Arnold and a Bob and a few others (Franz Ferdinand!!) so we arnt the first. My dads called bernard and so is Steves uncle, and thats good enough for us. Its quite cool we are girly fronted and called bernard. No one forgets it , they all go "weird name" but it sticks in there. I think! Talk us through the title "Trail of Tears" of your debut album. Well the whole album is based around death and dishonesty. Trail of Tears is a line from "Red Jacket Seneca" which is one of the album tracks and explains how the Seneca indians who were native to the USA were basically ethnically cleansed by White America from there own lands. I had just seen the news and that gimp Bush had been on shouting his mouth off about how USA was saving the world from this and that and I thought how hypocritical. At the end of the day the massacres of the last indians was only 120 years ago. So I wrote Red Jacket Seneca which is a dig at America and is quite vitriolic. This is a pet subject of mine. The US needs to look closer to home! Trail of tears was the name given by the Indians to the forced marches when they were cleansed from their land so white farmers could have it. Search on the net by trail of Tears,, its a fucking disgrace! I really liked the idea of the tears however cos a lot of our stuff is about injustice and death so trail of tears fitted. Why..... dont you like it? Who in the band is the hardest to wake up in the morning? Steve.... bloke could sleep thru a nuclear war! Who is the last one to go to bed? Dunno bout Oli the drummer cos he is quite new, but its me and Bob who take turns being last although if you have to pick a winner its probably me. Who sometimes doesn't go to bed at all? Definatly me! I dont need much sleep which is why people get e mails from me timed at 4 am. I rarely go to bed before 2 am and Im usually first up. Who's pregnant? (I got some insider information here ;-) Yes D is knocked up by Steve (I hope!!!) Im chuffed for em really cos they have been trying hard (We heard em on the tour bus! God they were trying hard!) Seriously its great news. Put the cybosh on a tour this year though! (only joking guys) Plug your website etc... its a website, we are on it, it has a forum , we talk about all sorts of shit! you can find out a bout gigs and stuff !! hurrah! How did it feel to turn down a record contract? Scary but great as it freed us up as discussed above! How did it feel to get a new one afterwards? Better! We know Les anyhow (of Carter USM fame) and he lets us do what we want within reason. And finally, a question to get your ambitions rolling; what does the future hold for Bernard? What do you see the band being in a few years time? Well we would like to be musicians. You cant tell what the future holds. With Mainstage at Guilford this year on Saturday its a springboard, and then weve got the album due soon , its a big year. The most important thing is our families however, Donna is expecting so we probably will go on hols in October and take a few months off whilst she and Steve take some quality time out to get used to littleunIm not worried though cos i know they will be back, its in both there bloods and we have worked our knackers off to get this far/ maybe Euopean tour next year and Japan (no im not joking) We believe that given a chance to get out our stuff people will get it and buy it, only time will tell however. Andy (bassy) Bernard

About the Author

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Source: <http://www.gigreviewer.com>