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PLUGGED IN: DIARRHEA PLANET

Written by **Mike Duffy** on November 28, 2014



A band with the name Diarrhea Planet (DP) makes you pause. As in, who would have the audacity to adopt that moniker?

A group of tatted-up horror-core thrashers that binge on Taco Bell and drink 40s until they're lying in a pool of their own vomit. Or perhaps a weird art collective that splatters paint—and other things?!—on a giant blank canvas?

Not quite. The six dudes of Diarrhea Planet are writing some of the most melodic punk-influenced rock songs out there today.

With an unprecedented – and downright silly – four-guitar attack and a relentless rhythm section, the Nashville unit masterfully ushers shredding and feedback into the world of pop. This is a planet that more people need to live in.

But first ... that name. Really, it's a great marketing tool; you're simply not going to forget the scatological reference.

"It's definitely a memorable name," guitarist Jordan Smith said with a laugh. "Once you see us and ask who we are, you'll never forget."

The current iteration of DP is probably the third. It first began with Smith and friend Evan P. Donahue while at Nashville's Belmont College. They were looking to just make noise at parties, and offered experimental performances that challenged the senses and often ended up with Smith getting naked.

Smith was also playing bass at the time in a band called Big Surr, along with guitarists Emmett Miller and Evan Bird and current DP drummer Casey Weissbach.

Smith eventually put together a DP show at the Music City haunt Springwater, which Miller charmingly describes as a “wretched hive of scum and villainy.” Smith wanted to make the outing epic, so he invited along a few extra players.

“Jordan thought it would be hilarious to see how many guitars could be in a band,” Miller said. “He told me about this show and gave us a couple demos. We sat down with them in our dorm room and said, ‘Alright, we know what we have to do. We have to write some parts that are so over the top, like Avenged Sevenfold ripping off Danny Elfman. They’re going to hate it so much, and we’ll ruin the show as hilariously as we can.’

“There was tapping and all these harmonized parts. We thought it was going to be a joke, but Jordan said it sounded badass. The show was rough, but it eventually clicked.”

Thusly, the current version of DP was born, featuring Smith (vocals/guitar), Miller (guitar), Bird (guitar), Weissbach (drums) and fellow Belmont students Mike Boyle (bass) and Brent Toler (guitar).

Since then, it’s been all strings go, with each guitar player bringing different approaches to their instrument and another layer to the DP sound.

* * * * *

A place like Belmont is a haven for aspiring musicians and served as the connection point for the band. But, their influences couldn’t be more diverse.

Smith, for one, grew up on worship music, as his mother was a pastor. While he remembers hearing Smashing Pumpkins as a young child, it was mostly artists like Michael W. Smith spinning on the family’s turntable.

“I wasn’t really allowed to listen to rock and roll,” said Smith. “I guess the first rocking thing that I got was an MXPX record when I was 11. I remember a song called ‘KKK Took My Baby Away,’ which was interesting to try to explain to my mom.”

Smith picked up the guitar at age 12, and dabbled in the blissful simplicity and aggression of punk and hardcore bands throughout his teens.

“When I went to college, I didn’t really know how to play the guitar aside from hardcore and punk,” he said. “The theory kind of went in one ear and out the other, but I learned how to actually play just jamming with other people in Nashville. I think those punk tendencies still come out when I write though.”

That noisy background – think Dinosaur Jr. or even Bucket Full of Teeth – continues to influence his growling vocals and violent chords.

“I love the way that noise envelops you and can be really unpredictable,” he shared. “I always enjoy trying to figure out how to turn noise into something musical, something that’s pleasing to listen to. I like muddy tones, and texturally, noise is just interesting to me. If you use it right, it can be a very cool thing.”

On the other end of the spectrum, Miller is a classically trained guitarist who readily admits to cribbing licks from music’s greatest composers. Although hearing Jimi Hendrix on his father’s car stereo led him to sign up for guitar lessons, he was more interested in practicing arpeggios and scales.

As such, Miller’s shred-tastic efforts can be heard on DP tracks like “Babyhead” and “Kids,” which come off the sextet’s 2014 album, *I’m Rich Beyond Your Wildest Dreams*.

“I started out in the commercial music program,” said Miller, who credits Belmont professor and guitar zen-master Stan Lassiter for much of his development. “Once I switched to classical, things changed for me. It’s such a cool tool to have in your belt. I don’t know if I could make it as strictly a classical player, but it helps make you a fuller player.”

According to Smith, Bird is a jack-of-all-trades, which makes sense considering the fact that he dabbled in playing drums, piano and bass before a friend who was taking guitar lessons led him to the six-stringer.

“I think the guitar was what I was most excited about,” said Bird. “That was early middle school, and that’s pretty much all I did throughout middle and high school. It was all over from there.”

As for Toler, he brings an Allman Brothers-esque sensibility to the table, even though he joked that he was originally motivated to start a family band at age 9 in the form of pop act Hanson.

“Needless to say, that didn’t last very long,” he said of recruiting his brother. “I got back to playing music in middle school when I was really into rap. I wanted to be a producer, so I thought I should learn something about music first. That’s how I picked up a guitar, and I eventually fell in love with classic rock and learning those songs.”

One might imagine that meshing all four guitarists would be a nightmare in the studio, and that was certainly an issue early in the game. Additionally, there were questions as to how to recreate their complex arrangements in a live environment.

2014 Governors Ball Music Festival - Day 2



Jordan Smith of Diarrhea Planet.

Eventually, they found that magic formula.

“We just wanted to be able to do everything we do on a record live,” said Smith. “I never wanted to compromise the power that you can get on a recording. It all fits together so we’re not jumping over each other. We had everything modded to live in a different space in the mix. We’ve all played together for so long that we all know each other’s styles pretty well and we can play off that.

“It was a challenge the first handful of shows that we did, but something clicked. We used to have to write out every part of every song, but now we can come in with a skeleton of a song and everybody naturally does their thing.”



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With *I’m Rich* and recently released EP *Aliens in the Outfield*, which was recorded with Justin Francis (Anti-Flag, Kenny Rogers), DP is leading a charge of gritty Nashville rock bands that includes the likes of Pujol, Jeff the Brotherhood, Natural Child and Those Darlins.

It’s a scene that that has been building for a while and poised for more national attention.

“Ever since I moved to Nashville, the rock scene has been strong, but in the last four or five years, it’s been getting more national attention,” he explained. “I think there’s something about Nashville where you absorb the music scene by being around it all the time. It seeps into everything you do. Just watching people who are really good, you’re constantly learning more about how other musicians do something.

“And you have to write really strong songs in Nashville, because nobody will pay attention to you otherwise.”

These guys don’t take themselves too seriously, but they are all-business when it comes to the music. Although the band may have started as a college gag, Diarrhea Planet has developed into a rock monster, offering up waves of guitars that produce surprises around every corner.

In fact, in an era where electronic music seems to rule the world, Diarrhea Planet proudly places the guitar at the forefront of everything they do – a noble banner to wave.

“We definitely want to bring guitar heroics back into the mainstream,” Miller said. “I think everybody loves a great guitar solo. My favorite *Onion* headline in the last year was ‘Nation Demands More Mind-Bending Guitar Solos.’ They had a great picture of Yngwie Malmsteen with it. Man, I loved it so much.”



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