



*In a punk culture that's beset by apathy, backbiting and self-fulfilling prophecy, **RISE AGAINST** have consistently maintained passion and inspiration while keeping their feet firmly on the ground.*

INTERVIEW: Kevin Raub /// **PHOTOS:** Luringa

THE LAST MEN STANDING

There’s a line some 10 blocks deep outside the Carioca Club in Sao Paulo, Brazil,

a gritty samba venue in an even trashier micro-district of the largest city in the southern hemisphere. The people waiting don’t exactly confirm the ubiquitous stereotypes normally tossed about in a conversation about Brazil. Caramel-coated samba dancers and bikini-clad *surfistas* have been replaced by the dark and downtrodden, decked out in black-on-black wardrobe against the pale-skinned shell of the urban downcast, a scene that couldn’t be further from the sun-kissed beaches and *Blame It On Rio* ethos that normally dominates superlatives here. The scene is far more *City Of God*, if Brazil’s urban slums were infested not with gangbangers and drug dealers, but punk-rock revolutionaries and teenage anarchists. It is Rise Against’s first adventure south of Mexico City, and this Brazilian subculture has come out in droves, creating a near-Beatles moment outside the venue as the band try to sneak out the front door.

The van pulls up, the kids wise up, and singer Tim Mcllrath fesses up. “It’s a celebrity moment, but it’s a fake celebrity,” he says with a laugh as he and the other members of Rise Against—guitarist Zach Blair, bassist Joe Principe, and drummer Brandon Barnes—prepare to brave the sidewalk. “For a moment we get an idea of what it like to be Leonardo DiCaprio, but we are only famous on this block. If we go one block in any direction, we’re fucking *nobody*.”

It’s true, but if the band’s sixth album is prescient, *all* of us may soon be nobodies. Mcllrath won’t go as far to call the recently released *Endgame* a concept album, despite its lyrics detailing End Of Days scenarios and fallen-empire imagery. But there’s hope here, too, if one is willing to fight the fight. When Mcllrath sings, “Can I trouble you for a light?” on “Broken Mirrors,” something tells you he’s not about to puff on a Marlboro. *Endgame* is a searing Molotov cocktail and Mcllrath is the album’s volatile protagonist, a sonic pyromaniac lobbying an incendiary call into the heart of America. It’s an unwavering punk-rock tenet the singer has vehemently worn on his sleeve since 2001’s *The Unraveling*. As expected, there are no signs of his band mellowing with age—just a little bit of compromising at the record store.

This is Sao Paulo, the third biggest city in the world. Your first time in Brazil comes as a result of the band’s wishes to book some off-the-beaten-path places to play. **TIM MCLLRATH:** Well, off the *touring* beaten path, anyway! There are very few firsts left for us. We’ve toured for 10 years—that can really get boring after awhile. It’s exciting to show up in a new city; it keeps the fire in your belly. We’ve always talked about coming down here, it just never really worked out. It’s *still* not really working out; we’re not making any money on this tour.

Six albums in and the band have managed to stick to their original punk ethic. Has that been a particularly difficult battle? Whenever we’re approached with an opportunity, we weigh the pros and cons. The pros are almost always the same: “Are we reaching a new audience?” The con is also almost always the same, too: “But is this compromising who we are? Is this the filter we want to be seen through?” The conflict isn’t there when you only know one way of doing things.

What current pressures do the band face along those lines? Finding the right support band is always our biggest issue. So much of the new scene of rock, punk or emo, I don’t really identify with, so I don’t feel comfortable being on the same stage with [those kinds of bands]. That’s one of the reasons we chose Bad Religion for this tour. Most bands look to broaden their horizons by taking out the up-and-coming next big thing: The science doesn’t say to take out your heroes. Last summer, we took out Rancid. It flies in the face of the accepted theory that you have to take out the buzz band. We’re like, “Fuck that. Let’s take out the forefathers of what we do.”

Has there ever been a time where this sort of defiant stance was slipping away? It’s a constant learning process and we are always trying to walk that fine line. As your band get bigger, it’s harder to keep a watchful eye on everything. But we are very protective of what Rise Against is, even down to something as simple as a news item on our website or our tweets. I don’t want those written by some dude at the label who has no idea who are fans are. I don’t want the “language of the industry” near anything we do. We speak with the community of Rise Against fans. Leave that to us.

What is the most pressing political issue weighing you down at the moment? The most immediate issue to my world is the apathy and cynicism that has a chokehold on my generation. To be cynical and apathetic has become the hipster currency. To have punk rock get to a place where it’s almost the scene that’s most likely to dismiss politics is sad to see. I feel that the politics of my band are more accepted in other genres of music and mainstream outlets than in my own backyard. It’s almost like punk has become a bunch of burnt-out actors that don’t give a shit.

You were recently in Wisconsin, where you stood with Tom Morello in protest of the union wars going on there at the moment. Why do you care? Unions are one of the few apparatuses in America that hold corporations accountable. Without them, who will do that? We can hold politicians accountable by not electing them, but we have corporations which, through lots of legislation and anti-legislation, make it harder and harder to hold them accountable. But I was half there for the cause and half because I just wanted to absorb what Tom Morello does. I’m not saying that from a Rage Against The Machine fanboy standpoint—I liked Rage but I was no super-fan—I say that from the standpoint that Morello is one of the most important characters in American politics, *period*. I don’t care if he has a CD or not. He’s inspirational—and I don’t know who will be there after him.

Endgame’s lead track, “Architects,” recalls an era when heroes were political game-changers. Do you see yourself as one of those architects? I hope so. I don’t think I’m on the same level as those we are referring to in the song, but I think we have a direct impact on some of the kids we’ll be in front of tonight. We may not be changing millions of lives, but we are changing some. If we had been in this band for 10 years and we had only changed one life, it would have been worth it. But the fact is we have changed more than one. We’re fighting a good fight.

That song also includes the line, “Don’t you remember when we were young/And we wanted to set the world on fire?/Because I still am and I still do.” Sounds like a pretty unsubtle diss on Tom Gabel from Against Me!—care to elaborate? I never considered it a diss. I think they are a pretty brilliant band, actually. For it to be a diss, I would have to claim I knew what Against Me! meant when they wrote [“I Was A Teenage Anarchist”]. I don’t. But I felt those lines were dismissive of the fire in my belly and in all of our fans. Those lines deserved a response from the other side. I think, too, that we sometimes write songs to get a reaction out of people. [Gabel] is an incredible writer because he got a reaction out of me. Mission accomplished!

Endgame rides a sonic doomsday scenario, and this theme is more than a little relevant to the current state of the world. Do you feel we are destined to become a failed empire? The record certainly speculates that. Part of that stemmed from a conversation I had with a neighbor of mine. He’s a very green guy, very into recycling and hybrid cars. He said to me one day, “It doesn’t matter how much we recycle. It doesn’t matter how many hybrid cars we drive. We’re all fucked!” It scared me. So, the record picks it up from there and paints a picture of the world that we would create after learning from those mistakes.

What compelled the band to tackle homophobia in “Make It Stop (September’s Children)” directly addressing the subject’s glossing-over in the punk and rock scenes? Rise Against started in a politically conscious bubble that was always talking about homophobia, sweat shops, poverty—things I felt were always on the cutting edge of environmentalism and activism—but then we grew beyond it. As the band

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Mcllrath, Barnes, Blair, Principe



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got bigger and bigger, we were suddenly playing rock festivals, and you realize homophobia is rampant and rock is a very macho, male-dominated, testosterone-filled scene. I felt like that scene could use a good dose of this medicine. I met a few Rise Against fans that were gay and were unsure how the band felt about that, which was alarming to me. It made me want to cry.

What is the best beverage to enjoy to this record?

A very strong coffee. I don't usually drink anything with massive amounts of caffeine, but I feel like you might have to [in order to] listen to this record. They go hand-in-hand.

What keeps you up at night?

Specifically? Facebook. I'm afraid of the future that my two daughters will inherit and what social networking is doing to our kids. In terms of Rise Against as a business organization, I understand that it is necessary. But I don't participate personally, and the personal aspects of it are a little scary to me in the way it is changing the dynamic of adolescence. It's like a drug that we don't yet know the effects of long-term use.

Speaking of fatherhood, you are part of the punk-rock dad movie, *The Other F Word*. What was the first punk ethic of yours that went out the window after you brought your first daughter home?

Musical taste! Someone at the label gave me a Justin Bieber CD for my daughter and I took it home and stuck it on a very high shelf. But we eventually realized we can't dictate her musical taste. That's something I'm coming to terms with. We all had our embarrassing musical enjoyments when we were kids and she needs to have her New Kids On The Block. So she listens to the Jonas Brothers, Hannah Montana and Taylor Swift—and I have to buy those things for her! [Imitates store clerk.] "Dude...You're buying Bad Religion and Taylor Swift?" Um... Yes, yes I am. Just don't ask questions. [Laughs.] **ALT**

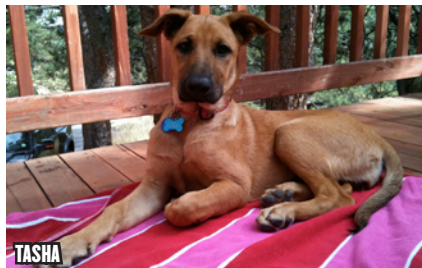
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ALTERNATIVE PETS!



RUBY SOHO

Asking Rise Against to highlight a single issue they feel strongly about is like asking Charlie Sheen to pick a favorite party favor, but we did it, anyway. It turns out, pet shops and animal breeders are high on the band's list of wrongs in the world. Both frontman Tim McIlrath and drummer Brandon Barnes sound off on the topic, while sharing stories about their own fur-kids.



TASHA

McILRATH: Last year, I adopted a three-year-old pitbull named Ruby Soho—after the Rancid song—and was surprised to learn how naive people were to pet stores and breeding. Even animal rights activists! Somewhere between six to eight million animals end up in a shelter each year, and half of them are euthanized simply because nobody adopts them. Yet you have breeders who are producing more animals and actively marketing those animals to a segment of society that wants a

pure-bred animal and selling those animals for a profit, then using that profit to breed even more animals. This whole time the shelter down the street is euthanizing animals because they can't get rid of them. I think people fail to connect the dots of how breeding and pet stores are contributing to the euthanizing of these animals. Animals aren't pieces of furniture. It's sad and grotesque that [some people] want a particular breed and [they] are willing to see another animal die because of it.

BARNES: We went to a local no-kill animal shelter in Denver called MaxFund and adopted a cute part husky/chow/German shepherd puppy named Tasha. The way we looked at it, it was just a great opportunity to help an animal and gain a friend. These places are full of thousands and thousands of animals that end up euthanized, or in the case of no-kill shelters, just sit there for months and months. You can find all breeds and age ranges at a shelter. So if you can adopt, you should.