

Keep on Moving: Spin One and Call in the Morning: There's nothing funny about Sick Pills' latest

Sick Pills — *Nothing's Funny Anymore* (75orLess Records) — Take 2 Because They Are Good for You

As a hockey junky it is really amazing that I get anything done this time of year. I've referenced the debut album of The Blood Moons as one of my favorite local albums many times. Before that, there was Chris Evil & The Taints who they turned me onto Roky Erickson with their cover of "Night of the Vampire" many blood moons ago. So now in the virtual podcast format of Keep On Moving, I was stoked to chat with Chris "Evil" Guaraldi, or as I like to call him, Dr. Evil. Dr. Evil and I met in 2002, drinking homemade red wine at the New Wave Cafe in New Bedford when The Taints were playing with the Midnight Creeps, whom I was mis-managing at the time. I could go on, but this column is five days late and exceeded its word count (*Ed: I can't even...*). So Dr. Evil's Band, Sick Pills, have a great new album called *Nothing's Funny Anymore* that I love. Let's cut to straight to the Doctor cause it took 17 years to make this interview happen.

Marc Clarkin (Motif): Is there any backstory that inspired the tunes on *Nothing's Funny Anymore*?

Chris Guaraldi: When it comes to themes, I do usually like to have some sort of "theme," mostly because it's easier writing lyrics if I know what I'm trying to say. *Nothing's Funny Anymore* has a few different themes going on. The year 2018 was a little bit of a bummer. It started off with my dog Rocky [the adorable cover dog for Sick Pills *Under My Skin* album] dying suddenly, and that pretty much set the tone for 2018. Our drummer, Bob, was also going through a fairly rough personal event so that kind of worked its way into some songs. I write a lot of love songs/break-up songs, but they're all pretty much friends' experiences where I try to put myself in their situation and talk about how I would feel.

The current political climate crept in there too ("American Virus"). It's a little overwhelming seeing how openly racist, sexist and homophobic people have become because they feel emboldened by the current state of the country. As a fairly progressive person, I don't think it's all on one side either. "Watching the World" is definitely about that. I wrote more political songs than were on the album, but I really loathe the idea of writing too much political stuff because, really, who am I tell you what to think or believe.

MC: Musically, songs seem to have another dimension to some of the previous Sick Pills releases. From the winding paralysis '60s Kinks-esque rock of "Watching the World" to the stripped-to-the-bones feel of "No Good," what were some of the different things you worked in compared to past Sick Pills albums?

CG: I don't know if it's that much different from the past few albums. The first Sick Pills album (*Sickening*) was kind of an "I don't know what I want to do but I want it to not be what I've done with *Taints* and *Blood Moons*." I really wanted to make an '80s-college-rock sounding thing, but after that first album I just started writing songs the way I normally would and a little more toward the rock 'n' roll side of things. *Under My Skin* is our "rock" album I guess; *Mettle* is kind of back to punk rock. I pretty much just plug my guitar into the computer and play along with some drum beats and hope to be

inspired, or I program some bass lines and then work from there. We did add some keyboards/organs from our friend Ethan Weiss [he plays in space-y prog metal band Lazertuth]. He played keys on all the *Blood Moons* stuff and I asked him if he would like to play on some of the new Sick Pills songs. You can hear him on "Remind Me You're Gone," "No Good," "Fix Me" and the re-recording of "Be My Girl." Overall, it's our fourth album and we wanted to try and be a little more dynamic.

MC: The album gets its title from a line in "Life's a Joke," which, despite the title and lyrics, is one of the most infectious pieces you have written. Between the breakdown and post-breakdown "Free Bird" surge, the band has a lot of different dynamics clicking. What is the backstory on that song coming together?

CG: "Life's a Joke" started with the main melody line/guitar lead thing, which I thought was kind of catchy, and the chords just kind of wrote themselves. The whole song was pretty standard structure-wise, but I wanted to do something a little different for the middle. I thought going "heavy" for the break would be a cool change for such a poppy song, and it fit with the downer lyrics. When I started writing the lyrics, I came up with the chorus first and came up with the verses/pre-choruses from there. The verse and chorus music was so poppy I thought it would be nice to write some bummed-out lyrics.

MC: "Fix Me" kind of reminds me of Zuma-era Neil Young meets Stax Records on a dive bar jukebox. Any influence there?

CG: With "Fix Me," I had to look up that era of Neil Young. I definitely know *Cortez the Killer*, but I don't know anything else off that album. It was definitely not an influence for that song — at least not by me. I can hear it, though. I'm sure there's a Stax influence there, too, especially with the '60s sounding organ! When I started writing it, I was trying to make the slowest, most depressing song I could possibly write. I believe this is the longest song I have ever written. The original demo was about seven minutes long, so we definitely sped it up and trimmed some fat.

MC: What are some of the places people should check out for music in New Bedford?

CG: In regard to New Bedford, I still host a weekly open mic at Pour Farm going on nine years now, I believe. I've been doing shows/running open mic night at Pour Farm for a long time, and it's a great place. They gave me a chance to do stuff there when there weren't a lot of options, and that means a lot to me. No Problemo has a decent amount of shows, too — usually on the heavier side (punk/metal/hardcore/etc). It's an awesome restaurant and good place to see bands. There are a few more places, but a lot of it is mostly cover band/bar band music. Next to No Problemo is a newer place, Greasy Luck, which seems to cater mostly to '80s hair metal bands (not my thing). Greg Ginn's Black Flag is playing there, though, so maybe they'll start booking more stuff like that. Also in the area is Purchase Street Records. It's a pretty decent record store with lots of old and new stuff — lots of metal/punk/hardcore records. New Bedford isn't perfect, but there's a lot of great stuff going on.

Sick Pills will celebrate the release of Nothing's is Funny Anymore with shows at The Pour Farm in New Bedford with Baluchitherium and Jake Perrone on May 10th and at O'Brien's in Boston on May 14th with The Cretins.

Six Shows that Do Not Blow:

Murder By Death and Sarah Shook & The Disarmers will be at the Columbus Theatre in Providence on May 1.

Johnny Marr is at FMH on May 3. If you were making a list of the signature British post-punk guitarists, I'd start with Keith Levine of PiL, then William Reid of the Jesus and Mary Chain, I guess Robert Smith of The Cure is somewhere in there, too, but Johnny Marr of The Smiths is a staple.

Insane Clown Posse are at FMH on May 5. As the number one juggalo music column in New England, I am contractually bound to include this.

Steve Smith & The Naked8 are at the Met Cafe on May 5.

Cursive and The Appleseed Cast are at The Met Cafe on May 18.

Nashville Pussy, Guitar Wolf, Turbo A.C.s, She Rides are at Alchemy on May 19. This bill is just ridiculously awesome.

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