

did an excellent job. We had no idea about the decapitated heads of the Government thing because Jeff done that off his own back and the first we knew of it was when we saw the finished drawing, I reckon it works really well though. Originally someone else did the artwork but it didn't turn out too well so I thought of getting in Jeff from seeing some of his previous artwork and being well impresses. Someone gave us his number and Jeff got to work on it."

How come the lyrics weren't in the record? Incidentally how do you feel about Peaceville, I hear Hammy's a pretty cool sort of a person? Also a lot of bands on independents are being released on CD, is **Axegrinder** coming out on CD? "Long story I'm afraid. Originally the lyrics were gonna be on the inside of the gatefold sleeve but when we saw Jeff's artwork we decided against that idea. We were then going to have a lyric bad but that meant putting up the price of the LP to £5.99 which we thought was too much. We decided that people could send for the lyrics if they wanted to but unfortunately a couple of days before the release of the LP Peaceville said it would sell for £5.99 anyway and by that time we couldn't do anything about it. Peaceville are a really good label and Hammy does a lot to get new bands on to vinyl which he's achieved admirably. It's great to see these bands coming out on CD and hopefully reaching a wider spectrum of people. There was talk of "RISE" coming out as a CD but I think Peaceville will release the next LP as a CD and put "RISE" on it as an extra bonus."

I read somewhere **Axegrinder** being referred to as 'Peace Metal'. How do you feel about that and what are your lyrics basically about? " 'Peace Metal' was a tag we gave ourselves years ago and it's sort of stuck. We're totally against all kinds of warfare so I suppose we are a peace metal band. Our lyrics are mostly against war and the destruction of our earth, but other topics like acid rain, religion, self esteem, etc. are covered."

I know this is always asked but I feel it's good that people know your musical interests and influences, so what have you been listening to lately? Any musicians you really

admire? "Personally I like a whole range of music which includes: BATHORY, VOI VOD, SONIC VIOLENCE, PROUDFLESH, THE SMITHS, JEAN MICHEL JARRE, THE CARDIACS, BAD BRAINS and many more. I don't admire a person who can play an instrument well, there's far more important things and people who do things that should be admired!"

I don't suppose the band is a full time thing is it, so I mean you need jobs to keep going. Could you ever see the band becoming a full time thing? How much practice do you do, listening to the record it's all very 'tight' sounding you must have done a lot of hard work to get it to sound so good? "We all work because if we didn't we wouldn't be able to keep the band going, it all costs money ya know. I'd love to turn professional and make a living out of the band but you need to get signed to a major label for that to happen and for **Axegrinder** that's a long way off. The tightness on the LP is fucking appalling (oops... it sounded tight to me! - JOHN) and we've got a lot tighter since then. We worked pretty hard on the songs on the LP but we've now changed some of them and made them better than how they appear on the LP. We don't practice a lot, about four hours every fortnight (that's every two weeks for any Americans out there - PAUL)."

Have you been doing much touring lately. A lot of big bands get to the U.K. and I hear some places the bouncers are really violent (e.g. The Astoria) and admission is really high so if you got offered a tour with some big band at places like this would you take it? "We don't tour at all because we're not really into playing a lot, just here and there. Maybe one day when it becomes possible we'll tour Europe and hopefully other countries but that won't happen for awhile. Yeah we get a lot of big bands here but I don't usually bother with them for the reasons you've mentioned. The Astoria is a complete shit hole, the bouncers are mindless violent bastards, high admission and the drinks cost a bomb, we've been asked to play there quite a few times but have refused due to the reasons I've

mentioned. We'd only play with a big band under the right conditions but even right on bands like **Metallica** and **Nuclear Assault** deal in dodgy areas of the scene."

Well this is about it so if there's any final comments? "Mega thanx to anyone who bought the LP, it's much appreciated. Good luck with the zine and thanks for the space. Anyone who wants to write please send a I.R.C. to: 211 Strone Road, Manor Park, London E12 6TR, ENGLAND. DIE HARD!!"

Well thanks to Trev for the great answers and all that. Also they now have T-shirts available so write OK. **Axegrinder** isn't a thrash band but man are they powerful and heavy so I advise everybody to check them out now ("RISE OF THE SERPENIMEN" was reviewed last issue), you don't pass up something this good! **JOHN**



SHIHAD

WHAT DID SHE HAVE?

Big tits maybe - I dunno, you'll have to ask Jim Collins from The Metal Cage about that one cause it was on that show I heard them ask "what did she have?". All the same Tom will inform you that it's pronounced Shi-hard, that's why this little thing is there. Anyway lets skip to a bit of an intro here. **Shihad** is probably one of the biggest growing names in NZ metal and over the last year I think their profile has gotten a lot bigger. They were on the B-side of an **Angels 7"** they've got a few videos on tv and the whole time they've managed to keep things ticking over which in the past has not been a standard practice for NZ bands - most seeming to disappear for a couple of years then shocking everyone with a major opening slot or a live album of a show no one knew anything about. But this is **Shihad** and Tom and Hamish are about to tell us all about it:

TOM: "Here's the beginnings. John and me, we were little school kids together and we got into like..." Every girl at primary school? TOM: "Ha! Ha! Just shut up here!" (I dunno how we got there but what followed was sordid tales of perversion about groupies in Christchurch - obviously deleted due to poor taste - Hamish puts things back on track) "Tom, the beginnings before Christchurch."

TOM: "I joined up with this band called **Deathwatch**, they were like the **Metallica** 'Kill 'em All' stage for New Zealand, they were good, they just fell apart - but the guy gave me a **Metallica** tape..."

HAMISH: "At school they (Tom & John) used to pass this walkman around with 'Ride The Lightning' on it and when they got the headphones on they just went mental."

TOM: "I was in the school band just playing heaps of covers, and I kept asking John to come along and plug in. It took him ages but finally he did. At first it was basically pretty commercial heavy rock, then we decided 'hey, we're all into **Metallica** and that kind of stuff - just me and him at that stage - why don't we start writing that and playing that". One of the first songs we wrote was "It". There was a stage where he just got slacker and slacker, and then he just walked in one day and said "Oh guess what I just figured out?" and he plays "Master Of Puppets" and "Battery" and I'm going "Yeaaahhh!! this is what I want to do!" And then he goes "Oh, I wrote a song last night too" and he played "It" - but in very basic forms, different structures than what it is now."

HAMISH: "We've replaced a bit in the middle too since then."

TOM: "I've still got the first tapes, it's about two minutes long - of us playing "It" and it had the thrash beat. And we recorded it. I remember that night, we went out, just me, him and this other guy and we just listened to it over and over again going "Fuck man, listen to that, it sounds just like a thrash band from overseas, we're gonna make it big!", and all this kind of crap Ha! Ha!"

"Then we got a guitarist in and a bass player. The bass player left because his girlfriend was religious."

HAMISH: "He was a fuckin dork." Whereabouts did the bass player from Christchurch fit in? TOM: "Well, the situation was we didn't have a bass player and we wanted to start playing live, and Bruce Rae had this suggestion in Rip-It-Up, this referral service. So we rung up Bruce and asked if he had a bass player. He had this guy, we got in touch with him, and he said he knew all our songs, had them all down, he was really into it, and he was coming up. He was a nice guy (except when the airport security stole his studded glove from out of his bass case!) but he didn't work out."

HAMISH: "I had a listen to some of the tapes he sent up and they

there watching this gig going "Yeah great guys, great. Loved it, really original, really original."

HAMISH: "But the funny thing is we draw more people than them now, and they got to #1 here. They charged \$10 on the door at the Car Park and drew not a single person, while we played at Rockys about 3 weeks later and drew 650 over a weekend - 450 first night - that says something about the state of New Zealand music."

650, that's a lot of people for N.Z. TOM: "Yeah it is. You should have seen the manager mate, he was so fucken pleased about that."

HAMISH: "His eyes were just like 'this' all night - just wide open man. He wanted us permanent - like residency but we said no, because that's



didn't even fit the songs. He'd put down this track for "It" and I couldn't possibly see how any of what he was playing would fit "It" at any speed."

Tom: "Anyway the first gig with the school band was at this church. The soul-funk band from school were inside cause they weren't loud and we were outside. We did this cover of "Anarchy In The UK" and the really freaky part about it was, John opens his mouth and goes "I am an Anti-Christ" and the amp blows up - in this church - can you just imagine how that looked. The school assigned this tutor to the band and he had the songwriter from THE HOLIDAYMAKERS tutoring us, so he was

not us." TOM: "I know it sounds blow-arsey and shit like that, but nowadays we're one of the biggest crowd-pullers in Wellington - not just as a speed metal band, but as a band."

HAMISH: " **Strikenaster** just released a tape and they haven't played for about 2 years, live here - 50 people each night, where we can draw five times that."

TOM: "Back to origins. Well after that school fair thing we decided to get serious and we saw this ad for Phil and we rung him up - man, you should have heard the phone call; "We're ringing about the guitarist", "Yeah, so.", "Can we speak to him please?", "Yeah, I'm him." Anyway, he spoke really thickly, and when he came

along, and we're talking about a 15 year old guy..."

HAMISH: "Blew the pants off everyone eh, just absolutely amazing."

TOM: "He came along, we jammed out and then we started practicing up for the demo. We went and did the demo over two nights. Phil did the bass tracks and when we finished that - fuck man, we were on top of the world."

So how did you get all tied up with this lot? HAMISH: "I was an 'un-official roadie'. I was the guitar technician but Phil didn't let me do everything. I was the drum technician, except Tom did everything but shift the gear - I did everything that no-one wanted to do. I carried everything, I supplied almost everything of John's gear, except for the amp - my guitar, my leads, my fuckin pedals - cause John didn't have anything then."

TOM: "Like I remember telling you that we didn't have anything except for one amp and a drum kit - that was the situation, we did not have anything. Phil had an amp, I had a drum kit, John had nothing - he just borrowed everything."

"But before Hamish we had this guy who looked like Frankenstein, seriously - without bolts mate - fuck he looked like Frankenstein. All the dudes that came to our early gigs they'd fuckin go 'Like the band mate but fuck, where'd you get Frankenstein' - and they hadn't even heard us call him Frankenstein. Anyway we kept him one for our early stuff and the first time we went up to Auckland - fuck, it was so funny - we played the Powerstation with **Anigma**, and the first time in his life he got shit-faced after the gig."

HAMISH: "We fed him 4 beers man, and he was throwing up."

TOM: "And he goes to sleep with one of **Anigma**'s weird roadies (who used to play smoke machine for **Stonehenge** and had aspirations to play smoke machine for **Anigma**!) - in the gutter."

To cut a long story short, he was sick the entire bus trip back to Wellington, not only on himself but a huge army guy that got on the bus at Waiouru - no change of clothes either, tsk, tsk.

TOM: "Then it was after that, about a month later, we got a gig at the

Powerstation the night before the **Metallica** concert and said "OK man, we gotta go up to Auckland again "No! I'm not going up to Auckland again, no way, no." So fuck, we kicked him out and got Hamish."

HAMISH: "This was about 2 weeks before the gig in Auckland, at that stage I'd been playing rhythm guitar in a punk band called **T.A.B.** - or a hardcore band. Tom borrowed a bass off Rob (Frankenstein) and gave me 2 weeks to, A - learn how to play bass, and B - learn all their songs - and... it wasn't easy!"

TOM: "And he got onto the Powerstation - 700 people and the most he's ever played in front of before is about 70. Never played bass guitar publicly before - so he drinks a fuckin flagon. Pissed as fuck, walks on stage - plays perfectly Ha!"

And you played the night before the **Metallica** show eh? TOM: "That was a fuckin good move cause heaps of people had come up from various parts of the country and they had nothing to do so they'd go to this big hardcore/metal concert at the Powerstation. You know, we played a few **Metallica** covers and stuff, cause that's what we do to break in crowds in other places - you know, play the covers so they understand what we're about. And heaps of people were recognizing it - they really loved it."

Have you had any problems getting gigs?

TOM: "Paisley Park. We played there on a Sunday and the crowd went apeshit, and cause they're such a bunch of stupid fuckin dicks and they've only had wimp bands like **CHICAGO SMOKESHOP** up there, the bouncers thought they were fuckin fighting everybody, they thought there was a big scrap up the front. So they got all the bouncers up the front and of course that starts masses of shit with all the stage divers. And of course I asked the manager afterwards "Do you want us back?" and he goes "I like your music, and I know you can pull a very big crowd, but I don't like your crowd - I don't want it back." And you know, that's just an ignorant attitude - but the Car Park, every other venue but Paisley Park, are asking for us."

You've been getting a bit of radio

play too? TOM: "Radio down in Wellington and Auckland has been really good to us - student radio that is."

HAMISH: "We got like number 5 on the playlist on Radio Active which is pretty good."

TOM: "They playlisted our demo and we were pushing aside fuckin heaps of bands eh - I mean, not just local bands but international acts - in terms of requests."

HAMISH: "Request rates. Yeah, we're up 'here' and, I dunno... **PIXIES** down 'here' you know - which is really cool cause I fuckin hate the **PIXIES**!"

Now, the important stuff, the music. When I heard the first stuff it reminded me of **Metallica** and the later stuff reminded me of **Testament** what now? HAMISH: "We've gone a long way beyond that now - it's our own particular style - it's like no-one else, it's all us."

TOM: "Put this in the interview - the problem with NZ metal is that it's old fuddy-duddy's doing cliché shit, and they should just fuck off and die really."

HAMISH: "They're playing shit that no-one wants to hear anymore. It's just speeded up rhythm and blues, old heavy metal that's been thrashed to death."

At this stage the thing (who shall remain nameless but we'll call him Darren Ha!) lying in the corner snoring wakes up - well, it doesn't really wake up - it just opens it eyes and begins moving around, pulling the curtains and trying to scratch it's way outside thru the adjacent wall and windows. A quick push out the door into the nearest bush saves a cleaning bill.

OK, what about the EP you've got planed? TOM: "We're spending \$4500 to \$5000. We're spending a week in the studio - the idea is to make the production as good as anything from overseas. It'll be a 12", unless it's restricted to CD and tape only."

Are you gonna put it out yourselves? TOM: "Nah, it will be thru a company it depends what the company is. It's all uncertain at the moment, all that's certain is recording."

"I don't know how fast the stuff will be, it won't be as fast as our

old stuff."

Yeah, that newer material I heard wasn't as fast as the demo but it was a lot more varied, a lot more changes. HAMISH: "We've got a few more, sort of... I dunno... a lot of it's a little bit more **Faith No More** influenced eh."

TOM: "Yeah, we're taking influences basically from other kinds of music - it's all on a metal base - it's not like wimping out or anything like that. I think basically everything is more extreme - like there are more time changes, it's more melodic, it's more thrashy, it's more slow Ha!, it's more heavy - all that kind of stuff. You know, it's more of everything. I think basically the cornerstone of all the stuff we're writing is they've got catchy choruses and they fuckin stick in your head."

So what are you gonna have on the EP? TOM: "There's 'It' and two new songs. One's called 'Subject Matter' and the other's called 'Down Dance' - they're funny names but they're good songs."

HAMISH: "Down Dance" has gone down really well with crowds in Wellington. "It" went down a real treat and "Down Dance" has gone down very similar."

TOM: "Fuck yeah, they love it."

"Anyway, there's 3 songs plus **Black Sabbath's** 'The Wizard', but with a talkbox - no harmonica. And in this I've got all this space to go apeshit on soloing and stuff like that - which I'm gonna do. It gives me a chance to show off some of my licks and stuff."

"We want it to be of overseas standard. We don't want it to lose power, but we don't want to it be raw and grungy. We're looking for a sound like **Overkill** 'The Years Of Decay' - powerful but produced."

So what's gonna happen with your older stuff? TOM: "What's gonna happening with them is that they'll be live."

Have you changed any of those older songs in any way? TOM: "Yeah, 'It' has got a completely different intro. I mean - you know, we listen to that intro now and we go '**Metallica**'. And the bit in the middle has changed into a big mosh part."

HAMISH: "Yeah, it's really moshy - it's real cool."

If you're gonna be looking for overseas interest, do you think coming from New Zealand will help you? TOM: "A lot of people call us - you know - the best in this country. I think being the best in an entire country, you know, people look up - like **Sepultura** man, take a look at them. Fuck I wouldn't take notice of a fuckin Brazilian band, I'd just go 'Fuck who cares about Brazil' you know. But if they say 'We're the best thrash band in Brazil' - OK I'll give them a listen - and look how far **Sepultura** have got just on that, you know."

HAMISH: "That's a big advantage to us cause we can get the name overseas."

So, what's after all this? TOM: "Well, hopefully improving. After the EP we want to get an album - if we don't get on a major label this time round we're gonna keep on pushing for a major label. Eventually we want to try and make a hit overseas and basically, you know, if it all bums out - well, fuck it - we'll probably go our separate ways. You know, it's not like a lot of bands that say 'We'll be doing this in clubs and shit even if the success doesn't happen, we'll still be doing this' cause it's a load of shit because how can you sit there and play in front of fuckin 20 people for 5 years and go 'Hey man, I'm just doing this for the fun' - it's a load of shit eh. You need success to give you inspiration to keep going and to be more creative."

HAMISH: "It's a really expensive hobby, and I mean if you're playing in front of 20 people a night it's a hobby. We can all spend between \$4000 and \$7000 on gear, and that's fuckin expensive if it's a hobby."

TOM: "I mean, we all love the music, we're all into the music but for me personally right, I'm a musician first and foremost, that's how I make my living. If this band isn't making it - you know - after a while, then fuck it, I'm gonna go and look at other avenues, because I've gotta make a living out of it - that's the simple fact. A lot of people don't have that reality to live with, they've got other jobs and shit but I am this - this is what I am. I've gotta watch my butt Ha!"

To get in touch with **Shihad** write to the following address. And for video coverage of them at the Grunt Metal Awards (which includes **Asylum** and **Hammerack** as well) send \$39-95 to either of these addresses: Grunt Records, 800 Colombo St, Christchurch or Video Specialists, P.O. Box 13-409, Christchurch. (VHS only)

SHIHAD: C/- Gerald Dwyer, Box 11-177 Wellington, NEW ZEALAND.

(PHONE: (04) 835-238)

PAUL



Their killer debut "THE AWAKENING" was reviewed last issue (was that ages ago or what?!) and now drummer Stipen answers a few questions for us. **Merciless** began in the beginning of 1986 with Karlen (bass), Erik (guitar) and Stipen and a few months later they added vocalist Kalle. They recorded their first demo "BEHIND THE BLACK DOOR" in early '88 then kicked Kalle out of the band. Rogga was bought in to complete the current line-up then the band recorded their very successful "REALM OF THE DARK" demo. With the bands potential recognized Deathlike Silence Production released their 8-track debut in late '89.

Between the start of '86 and now you've released 2 demos, changed vocalist, and picked up a record deal. Is there anything else fairly major that happened with **Merciless**? "Yes, the music is now going to be much better. It's more brutal and faster and we are playing live much more now."

Do you want to talk about the material on the demos "BEHIND THE BLACK DOOR" and the later demo "REALM OF THE DARK"? What sort of musical progression was there between the tapes, and what tracks made it onto the LP? "I think the "B.T.B.D." demo was just something we did because we wanted to hear what it should sound like when we were in the studio. It is not even mixed. The "REALM..." demo is much better in all ways, the sound, the songs, the energy, everything. I think the vocals are the best on that demo, it's much more aggressive than the first demo. I think