

THE EVOLUTION OF

DEVO

GERALD CASALE ON MUSIC, MAYHEM, AND MTV

By Mar Yvette

It's been nearly three decades since Devo first became a cult sensation with their skewed mix of droid new wave and herky-jerky punk rock. The avant-garde misfits broke through the '80s mainstream with their primitive (yet prescient) use of technology, outlandish costumes, unusual lyrics, and infamous "de-evolution" philosophy, which argues mankind is regressing instead of evolving. But by the time grunge trampled the '90s, Devo had called it quits. Since then, founding bassist Gerald Casale, among other things, has directed videos for bands like Foo Fighters. Now, as renewed interest in Devo mounts—as evidenced by their recent sold-out tour across the United States—another Devo revolution could be around the corner.

Does the lingering interest in Devo surprise you at all?

Not really, because Devo was never trendy, believe it or not. We didn't really fit into the new wave or punk era, we were just lumped there. People are still interested because our music didn't date the way other music does. Our lyrics, the way we used sound and put music together, have lasted.

Devo had a strong image—the red tiered hats, the crazy jumpsuits—but it wasn't manufactured. Today everything is so contrived.

The whole culture is a repackaged, repurposed amalgam of the last three or four decades. But if somebody today is going to mine the past and repurpose it, I'd rather it be something like Devo because at least we had real energy.

Do you think music should have a message?

It's not what I think, it's the truth. All the great stuff that people ever truly loved has always been about more than getting drunk, getting laid, whatever. Great music has been about changing the culture.

Devo was a huge part of MTV when the network actually played music videos.

What do you think about MTV now?

Well, it has become the inversion of itself. It's Jekyll and Hyde and it's turned into the evil monster.

Do you watch a lot of TV?

[Laughs] I do it to make myself sick. It's so disgusting and so subhuman that it provides me proof of de-evolution, so I have to keep up with what's happening. It's like getting an inoculation of a virus. I don't really watch anything except cable news to see how the propaganda works for the government, animal programs because I identify more with animals than humans, and all the hideous reality shows because, when you watch them, you realize that everybody deserves to die.

How did the whole de-evolution thing emerge?

We picked up on it from various sources. There's a quack book called *Now It Can Be Told: The Truth about De-Evolution*, which was written by a crazy Austrian anthropologist in the '60s. It was a better explanation for why mankind is the way it is so we kind of ran with it, not really believing it would become so real.

Devo the prophets!

Yeah, de-evolution is real. What we talked about happened and now we're in it.

Where are we headed?

[Laughs] Oh, we're going down. There's no doubt about it.

So life sucks?

Oh, it's hideous. It's a beautiful planet and people are disgusting. And the people in charge are the most disgusting. They're not stupid, they have power and money, and they have the ability to turn it around. But they're all so corrupt and cynical that they're using the fact that everybody else is so stupid to take everyone's money and do nothing good for anybody.

Sounds like there's more to fight against than when Devo first addressed these issues.

It's too big now. You can't even fight it. It's like stabbing Jello. You can stab the Jello over and over, but nothing's going to happen. You're just going to get tired.

Are you at least having fun?

[Laughs] I'm just trying to get a voice in the marketplace again. Devo had a voice and people were paying attention. I liked being in that position because you need a platform for what you're trying to explain. It would be great if we got out there again and became an irritant to all the Bill O'Reillys and Bushes of the world.



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