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# ANTIQUES

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Pom Pom Squad

# Eugene S. Robinson is Still Standing

The pugilistic former Oxbow frontman talks Buñuel, Steve Albini, and lessons learned from a hardcore life.



Eugene S. Robinson

“I could think of lots of things I’d rather do than run, but I can also think of lots of things I’d rather do than die.”

Popularized in 1968 by Rat Pack fixture (and erstwhile Satanist) Sammy Davis Jr., “I’ve Gotta Be Me” is not to be trifled with. Any soused karaoke fool who dares try their hand at this three-minute number best be prepared for the show-stopping finish. Following in a covers tradition that includes swinging showman Paul Anka and garage-rock godhead Iggy Pop, Eugene S. Robinson remains all too aware of that perilous climax.

“It’s more difficult to sing than the national anthem,” he says, having recorded it for a forthcoming standards album. “I ended up slaying it to what I thought was the elemental essence of the song.”

A far cry from his seminal 1980s Bay Area hardcore band Whipping Boy, these are the types of choices San Franciscan sexagenarian Robinson gets to consider now. After unapologetically exploding his long-running musical unit Oxbow, amid allegations made against a former bandmate, the perennial frontman and culture writer has since shifted into a most prodigious period in his career. October saw the release of the double album *Mansuetudo* by his American-Italian noise rock combo Buñuel, featuring guests like Converge’s Jacob Bannon and The Jesus Lizard’s Duane Denison. Weeks later came an even more outré debut from his avant-electronic duo Mangene, *101 Atomic Terms and What They Mean*.

On top of all that, the punk rock elder statesman spends his weekends publishing *Look What You Made Me Do*, a Sunday newsletter of self-aware topical musings. Whenever he’s not recounting his remarkable anecdote-ready life, he’s taking aim at the disgraced and distasteful, including his former Ozzy Media boss Carlos Watson and MMA fighter Conor McGregor. “I’m on the Substack bestseller list,” he says. “Realistically, I’m happier doing Substack than I’ve been with my last five significant jobs.”

Fresh from jiu-jitsu, Robinson spoke with *ANTICS* about where’s he at nowadays—and where he’s going.

Eugene S. Robinson

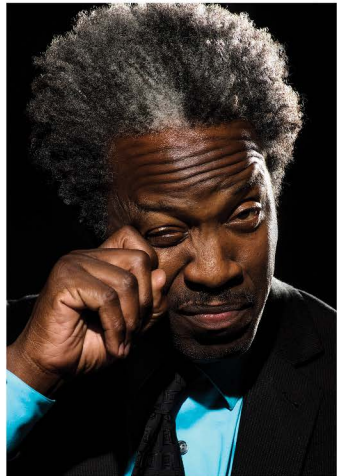
You released this latest Buñuel album in America through [the Chicago indie label] Skin Graft, which I didn’t realize was still active.

There are a few labels from the old days that I’ve always had a thing for, Amphetamine Reptile [and] Skin Graft. I just assumed that they would have nothing to do with us, because typically they never have. It was like a weird Midwest thing, which I think, if you want to know the truth of it, goes back to hardcore days when Whipping Boy got into that big fistfight with The Misfits. But Mark [Fischer] from Skin Graft is a great guy and actually lives in Austria. He came to see Oxbow play at this great old theater in Vienna. It was sold out, and I think it left a really great impression. It’s nice to be on a label where you like to listen to their stuff, which is kind of where I was with Ipecac [Recordings]. Actually, most of the labels that I’ve been on have been labels where I’ve liked to listen to the other stuff they put out.

Do you feel any sense of community from being on a label rather than going it alone?

You use a good word that I never use: community. I always think of community as a baseball bat. So if a club owner is tempted to treat us poorly, they know that the next time one of the label’s acts wants to come through, we’ll report that we were treated poorly. Chuck Dukowski from Black Flag is the one who got me to think about things along those lines. It’s associations. This John Wayne Western myth of the solo actor? Total bullshit.

Going back to Buñuel, the new album has these bursts of thrashy, hardcore punk on “Drug Burn” and “High. Speed. Chase,” which kinda reconciles Whipping Boy with Oxbow.



We’re cooking a meal and using that stuff as seasoning—maybe an incorrect use of the word, because you would never have a dinner of pepper. But to have these mini courses as the main course plays out, the main course being the record in total, is a big delight for me. It would be sad if they were all like that, but that’s not the way the meal works. There are different pieces coming out at different times. Xabi [Iriondo - guitarist] and Franz’s [Valente - drummer] musical take on it is great. It never would’ve worked back in 1983. Too sophisticated.

That’s contrasted by the song “A Room in Berlin,” in the way you approach the vocals on that one. For these

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