

NICK HEXUM

(311)

They were several years older, but I grew up with 311 in Omaha. Conor Oberst also lived down the street, and I remember playing soccer in his backyard a few times. Anyway, here's front man Nick Hexum on marijuana and getting a boot in the face.

I call this my "Welcome to New Jersey" story. We were playing at this place called Convention Hall on the Asbury Park boardwalk. They've cleaned it up a lot over the years, but when we were playing it in the '90s, it was a ghost town. It's featured in *The Sopranos*, and I think it's where Big Pussy got killed. It's a beautiful, old, haunted stone building, and we would have the wildest shows there. The first time we played there, after the first note, the place erupted, and I got hit right in the face with a boot. Clocked me right in the nose. It came flying out of the mosh pit. It was one of those heavy, big-soled, '90s boots, and it was heavier than a Doc Marten.

I kept going, but I immediately thought, "This is gonna be a long fuckin' night. Welcome to New Jersey." I think they just call the boot-in-the-face a Jersey Hi-Five. It did take me a minute to recompose myself, and I had to also remember that I've thrown shit out of the mosh pit before. It's not necessarily that someone is mad or hates your band. It's not like a rotten tomato. It's just a kid who wants to get your attention and is having so much fun that they don't know how to contain themselves. Those Convention shows were always the craziest.

Our crowd has always been hard to peg. It's a blend of skaters, punks, and kids who liked weed, NOFX, Nirvana, Rage Against the Machine, Cypress Hill, and reggae. I've always thought of myself as more of a punk than a metalhead. The hardcore punks might listen to us and dismiss it as non-punk. To me, it's always been more about a punk attitude than sound. I don't have any tattoos, so I don't fit into the punk mold. It's an attitude that I learned from Joe Strummer, which is to do whatever the hell you want and not worry about categories. I think that people who sound like punk from twenty years ago are the real poseurs. When the Clash and Sex Pistols started, they sounded like something no one had ever heard before.

Here's a good embarrassing story. 311's marijuana anthem is a cover of a solo by H.R. from Bad Brains' song, "Who's Got the Herb?" We've never put it out on an album, but it did come out on a box set. When we play it live, that's when everyone pulls out the weed and lights up. There's a part in the breakdown late in the song where I try and act all cool, dancing around the stage and pointing to people in the audience, "Who's got it? Who's got it?" I'll usually include the name of the town, like, "Who's got it...here in Columbus!"

Normally when I yell the city, the crowd erupts. This time there was no reaction whatsoever. There was just a bunch of smoke clouds and people staring at me. I yelled Columbus, but we were actually in Cincinnati. It took me about ten seconds to realize I had fucked up. I was completely mortified, and talk about killing the vibe of the place during a pot anthem. I wasn't stoned, but considering we've done over 2,000 shows, you're gonna botch a city here and there. Bruce Springsteen has done it too...c'mon!

Weed has always been a part of our creativity. Being rebellious kids, it was something we fell into during our Omaha days. You can imagine how hard it was for us to score and find halfway decent stuff back then. It was mostly ditch weed that would give us headaches. Cannabis has come so far in my lifetime. Now, I have more than I could ever deal with. I'm in the industry—I grow it, and I also make vapes. From the beginning, that was our process. We'd smoke and put a song together, and that hasn't changed. I don't like to be really stoned on stage because I've gotta be really

extroverted. In the studio or hanging out with the guys and practicing—that's the best cannabis time for me.

I'll always remember this one too. It was back on the first tour we ever did, and it was a straight-up mess. First, we had an RV fire. Everything burned up, and we lost all our equipment. We borrowed some money to buy a new RV and drove up to Vancouver for a show. We were so excited about going international, and as soon as we crossed the border, an axle on our new RV broke. We probably had about 150 bucks between us to make it to the show, and a new axle, with labor, cost about 3,000 bucks. The part wasn't available in Canada, so we had to wait a week to have it shipped to us.

It was a total nightmare, but we found a really nice Canadian family who let us stay with them. We only had that one show in Vancouver, and when we finally got there, we were so stressed out that we collectively decided to go berserk. We were drinking so hard before the show, and kept right on into the show. We gave this insane performance where we were rolling around on the stage, and we whipped the place into a fury. It's one of the wildest shows I can remember, just jumping off shit and drinking into oblivion. 1994 at the Town Pump. If video exists, it's probably nowhere near as good as I remember it.