



l-r (back): Hexum, Martinez,
P-Nut & Mahoney.
(front): Sexton.

311 is one of the most explosive and experimental up-and-coming bands in the rock world today. Fusing hard rock with funk, rap and reggae, the band has created quite a potent musical cocktail. Growing up in the Midwest - Nebraska to be exact, where the East meets the West - has proven to be quite a perfect breeding ground for the sound of 311, as well as their many dimensions.

Since signing with Capricorn Records in 1992, 311 has recorded an album per year and toured non-stop, selling out club dates and theaters nationwide. This is due in large part to the massive grassroots fan base they've cultivated over the years. Now, with headlining spots on the "H.O.R.D.E." and "WARPED" tours, as well as an MTV 'Choose Or Lose' voter registration and awareness concert in San Diego, 311 has stepped out of the pack of new artists to achieve a Gold record and a Top 25 song at Active Rock and Alternative radio.

Blending razor-sharp musicianship with diverse musical styles, 311 has developed quite an aggressive attitude, both musically and politically. Drawing on a fanbase that draws from many different walks of life, they are quick to point out that their attitude does not always equal anger; while rock n' roll bands are busy contemplating the woes of society, 311 have taken the path of a positive outlook, both lyrically and politically.

Being an election year, I decided to gear my conversation with Nick Hexum, co-lead singer for 311, towards politics and music. Reminiscent of The Clash, U2, Midnight Oil and Bob Marley, this is the politics of 311.

Does 311 have a particular political view and belief?

"We have strong feelings on a variety of issues: we stand for pro-choice, anti-censorship and the decriminalization of marijuana; we all support the use of hemp-based products as an alternative to the deforestation of the planet. "There are certain injustices in America today that are ridiculous. If a 'dead-head' gets arrested for possession, he will spend 12 to 15 years in jail, whereas someone who is convicted of a violent crime will only spend six months in jail. One of these crimes has a victim and one doesn't, yet the drug charge carries so much more of a stigma. The war on drugs is almost useless to an extent. It's one of those cosmetic things that politicians are saying in order to subvert and misguide the youth of America. Personally, if it wasn't for marijuana being illegal, I would be a completely model citizen!"

"As for the youth of America, politicians are making decisions without contemplating how it will affect this country's younger generations. For example, the Greenhouse Effect is a serious problem that the young people of this country are going to have to deal with. In addition, the Reagan supply-side economics are merely a euphemism for deficit spending, which the younger generations are going to have to pay for in the long run!"

Would you say this is a subversion of the personal freedoms of the younger generation by the older generation?

"Absolutely! There are a lot of people that believe young people think politics is just about taxes, and disregard most other issues. In reality, these types of issues affect us more than anyone else."

Are you, personally, active politically?

"I vote and I speak my mind as much as possible. I am a registered Democrat and I believe in stripped-down politics. There have been presidents in the past, like Kennedy, who were doing things, like the fight for civil rights, that weren't very popular with the rest of the political agenda of the country. In all, we need more pioneers and less wimps in politics!"

Recently, you performed in San Diego for an MTV 'Choose or Lose' free concert in support of voter awareness and registration. How did you become involved in this nationally televised broadcast?

"We have a pretty hard-core touring schedule. But MTV was very insistent on us being involved. They felt we were the perfect band for the show. They flew us out to San Diego, set us up in a nice hotel and took really good care of us. Besides, it is for an important cause, expressing ourselves in a way that would attract the young people of this country and get them to register to vote."

Did you watch any of the recent political conventions?

"The conventions are really just a big infomercial. They sit around and pat each other on the back. For the most part, it seems like a lot of delusional people. As a band, we know why we're here."

If you were a woman, would you support the Republican or Democratic platform? Being male, does that change your perspective?

"The Republicans stand for taking the choice away from women. I think any woman in their right mind would vote for the Democrats. The Democratic party caters more towards the minorities and women. As far as the band is concerned, we are now making money, and the he tax bracket that we are in is killing us. If we wanted to be selfish, we would be supporting the Republican party because they are in favor of a tax reduction. There are more important issues than that. We feel doing what we feel is morally right."

Do you set out to make the lyrics of your songs political in nature?

"In the song 'Unity' from the *Music* album, I do explicitly state that if you don't vote, then don't bitch. That's the bottom line! You can't sit around and complain about the government if you don't get out and vote."

"Personally, I'm more interested in the politics between two individuals. I speak and write about what I deal with on a daily basis, which is the politics between two people and not just what's on any government level. People should follow their own personal bliss. On our second record, *Grassroots*, there is a lyric that states, 'Make no attempt to try and suss the stupid out,' suss meaning understand others differences instead of trying to change their point of view. It's really about being tolerant, non-combative and non-confrontational. Just accept that people are different. That's a fairly liberal attitude, which explains why I support the Democratic party."

Do you see the band as a way for you to express your own feelings about personal freedoms or is it an incorporation of the band's sentiments as a whole...or is it a reflection of the political situation in general?

"To the best of my knowledge, I am speaking for the entire band. If we were all talking politics, P-Nut would gear the conversation towards the legalization of cannabis. But that is only one issue out of many. SA's lyrics revolve mostly around poetry, images and rhythms. Overall, we're known as a celebrational good-time party band, but we don't hesitate to express ourselves on issues that we feel are significant."

Do you feel the younger audience that attends your shows and are purchasing your records are the easiest to communicate with?

"The younger you are, the more open-minded you are. The older you get, the more jaded your thoughts tend to be. It's only natural!"

"With the success of our latest single, 'Down,' and our video in rotation at MTV, our national exposure has obviously grown. Therefore, the size of the crowds at our shows have also swelled. With that, we have also seen an even younger audience that comes to our shows. But every person has somewhat the same emotions, so we don't practice any form of elitism between the younger and older sections of our fans."

Do you feel that the music of today brainwashes today's youth?

"It doesn't go as far as brainwashing. There are a lot of bands out there with varying view points. 311's attitude is more moderate than, say, Rage Against The Machine, but more political in nature than No Doubt. With the varying views and ideas that are present in music today, we felt the best thing for us to do is speak on what we know and feel strongly about."

The band has been very active with headlining dates on the "H.O.R.D.E." and "WARPED" tours. Do you see these as a natural outlet for the band to express its political beliefs?

"There will definitely be an activism element on both of these tours. But, there is a different vibe to both of these tours. The 'WARPED' tour was more of the underground punk rock scene, whereas the 'H.O.R.D.E.' tour is more issue-oriented."

"We try to downplay everything else but the music. We want to be known for our songs. That's why we picked 311 for the name of the band. The name tells you very little about the band itself; it's just some guys making songs. If you enjoy the music then you'll like the band. The whole story of 311 is that we are hard-working musicians that love to get up and rock the house!"

311 has performed with artists ranging from Cypress Hill to KoRn to No Doubt to Lenny Kravitz to Blues Traveler. How is it that 311 can segue with all these musically varying artists?

"We wanted to perform with these type of bands mostly for the experience. What a wonderful story that is, to be able to bridge the gap between the punks and the hippies. Lyrically, we talk about things that are somewhat sentimental, but we also have a serious punk energy. Because we, as a band, have such a wide range of influences and styles, we are able to successfully bridge that gap between these widely varying musical artists."

Is there one band in particular that stands out as a personal favorite?

"The band that stands out the most is No Doubt. They are very good friends of ours, but more importantly, they have a tremendous vibe about them. Overall, we tend to get along with most bands, though."

You were recently involved with the KISS reunion, performing at Madison Square Garden. What was it like to be a part of all that mayhem?

"That was another show that we did just for the experience. As far as the vibe for the show itself, it wasn't a particularly great show. The show was a sell-out long before we were announced on the bill, so it wasn't as if a whole bunch of our fans bought tickets specifically to see us play. For the most part, we performed our songs the best we could and then we split."

How does the band collectively measure the level of success for 311?

"Six months ago, before any of this happened, we felt that we were on our way to breaking out in a major way. Then all of a sudden, we started selling 50,000 records a week and our songs started climbing up the charts. It's to the point now where it's mind boggling. We were already happy with what was going on for us as a band. We had achieved a great deal of success by doing it our way! Then all this extra stuff started happening; the addition of our video to MTV, a Top 10 song, appearing on 'Late Night With Conan O'Brien' and headlining spots on the 'H.O.R.D.E.' and 'WARPED' tours. In reality, all this extra stuff is really just gravy though. The definite upside is that we will no longer be considered just a little band from Omaha. As a result, our fans should always be able to find our records in the stores. There will always be a 311."

"If it wasn't for marijuana being illegal, I would be a completely model citizen"

"Now that we are on MTV, there should be a certain demand in every market for our music. It's the power of the music video that is able to touch hundreds of thousands of people simultaneously. That's one of the important things about helping to break a band. It makes for the availability of the music, which is crucial to the further success of any band. Some of our fans might only like a few of our songs, whereas others are into the entire musical scene that we present. I hope that we are gaining not only the fair-weather fan but also those that will be sworn fans for life. The long term goal is to be a band that is completely album-oriented. We don't want to worry about whether a particular single is going to be a hit or if our latest video is going to be added to MTV. We simply do the music we love for the fans that have stood behind us, as well as those new fans that we are gaining right now. We strictly want to stay true to the craft. In all, we want to reach for new heights artistically, not necessarily and exclusively financially."

When creating an album, how important is it to consider potential radio airplay?

"To be honest, I think the band is to a point where we don't really have to worry about it. Personally, I'm leaning more towards melodies and less towards rap. Obviously there will be some songs that have hooks because that's what we like to listen to. I'm a fan of all types of music. A band can be on the cutting edge but still incorporate classic melodies in the music. The best example I can think of is U2, who I consider to be my role models."

"As far as what's next for 311, we have talked about busting out the acoustic guitars and even my Rhoades electric piano for a few songs on the next record. We already have two new songs that are destined to become 311 classics. 'Beautiful Disaster' is my favorite so far. The other has a working title of 'Rub A Dub,' which obviously will be changed by the time we record it for the next album. For the next album though, we want to go back to the basics as far as melodies, but push to the fringe of our abilities for arrangements and production. Basically incorporate the past, but also push the envelope to the future."

"We don't want to rush to do another album, though. We're going to take our time and put as much ear candy on the record as possible. We'll use little noises, space sounds and instruments like a clavinet and the Rhoades electric piano. I mean we plan on running the full gamut."

"Right now, we're going through a cyclical period as far as how our music is produced. Our self-produced record, *Unity*, was live punk, whereas on *Music*, our debut on Capricorn, we went all out with percussions, samples and new kinds of production and mixing. On the *Grassroots* album, we went back to a more raw sound. For *311*, we took out most of the percussion element and stripped it down to just guitar, bass, drums and vocals. It's an album filled with straight-forward songs."

"We try to remain open-minded about our music and challenge our listeners. We try to throw in new styles, like acid jazz and trip-hop."

These styles of music were not represented very much on the latest album. We will not be creating a 'Part 2' to the self-titled album; we are going to be moving into the future and not staying in the present and go too far into the past."

"Musically, I think the next record will be more of a hybrid - less rapping and more singing. We plan to use a lot of dancehall reggae, with drum beats and rhythms, as well as dub styles, which is our musical niche. Songs like 'All Mixed Up' are a straight Jamaican sound with the incorporation of distortion guitar. That is a particular style the band is really into and something that we plan to explore further. Sometime after the new year we'll start pre-production on a new album to hopefully be on the street by June or July."

There has been a tremendous amount of success with the latest album, 311, especially the third single, "Down". Down has received a great deal of airplay from Alternative Radio to mainstream Rock and even Top 40. MTV has even jumped in with support of the video. Has this sudden rush of popularity changed the way the band perceives its own success?

"At this moment, we are more concerned about preserving what we have. We weren't ready for this type of madness on our first album. But we have grown and matured a lot, both personally and collectively as a band. We know where we're at and what we're doing. So if we sold a billion records tomorrow, which would be great, we will still be the same artists, true to the music that has made 311 what it is. I guess this sudden rush in popularity has made us more secure as a band that our music is being listened to and appreciated."

"As far as 'Down' is concerned, it was the first song that everyone in the band was enthusiastic about playing live. We think it is one of the highlights of the show, yet it also has a hook for radio airplay. We collectively had this gut feeling about 'Down' because it was the perfect marriage between the two. The song has a significant meaning, as well: it is a thank you to all our fans who have supported us from the very beginning, but also it is a personal thank you from myself to the rest of the band for helping to keep the band rolling even in the face of adversity." 🎧

By Michael Vogel

BAND: **311**

ORIGIN: Omaha raised/Los Angeles based

LINEUP: Nick Hexum (vocals/guitar)

Chad Sexton (drums/percussion)

Timothy Mahoney (guitar)

P-Nut (bass)

SA Martinez (vocals/tarntables)

ABOUT THE CD: This eponymous effort is the band's fifth release, and third for a major label. The album has exceeded Gold status and is fast approaching Platinum.

PRODUCER: Ron Saint Germain & 311

LABEL: Capricorn/Mercury