

Laura, ahem, devouring another record...

K! STARS UNITE

C R A T E

EXPECTATIONS

LAURA JANE GRACE and **FRANK IERO** are punk rock lifers. From helping to define their formative years to making it their creative legacy, punk has been the fuel in the fire of their personal revolutions. Who better to go record shopping with, then?

WORDS: JAMES MACKINNON PHOTOS: GOBINDER JHITTA

If you want to see two lifelong punk rockers act like kids in a sweet shop, just let them loose in a record store. All Ages Records in Camden Town, London is a mecca for all forms of anarchic sounds proudly sticking two fingers up to authority, and Laura Jane Grace and Frank Iero – in town with their respective personal projects, The Devouring Mothers and The Future Violents – rifle through the racks of vinyl, staring up with glee at the assorted gems they unearth.

Laura quickly plucks out Big Attraction and Giddy Up, the double EP from Australian firecrackers Amyl And The Sniffers and asks Frank if he's heard it, enthusing "they're so good". Frank admits that he hasn't yet had the pleasure, and adds it to his pile. He continues flicking through the vinyl until suddenly his fingers stop. "I've actually been meaning to ask you about this," he says to Laura, as he turns to present her with Spiderland, the seminal 1991 release by post-hardcore luminaries Slint, one of the targets of Laura's ire in The Devouring Mothers song I Hate Chicago, along with Smashing Pumpkins and deep-dish pizza.

"Oh, I know they're not actually from Chicago," Laura grins mischievously. "They're from Kentucky, but people from Chicago are really into them so I put them in the song to piss people off!"

Frank, Laura and shop owner Nick all burst into raucous laughter. "For the record," Laura says to Kerrang!, "I actually like Smashing Pumpkins a lot, too."

Laura has been kicking against the pricks as Against Me!'s rebellious singer since forming the band in 1997 among Gainesville, Florida's anarcho-punk scene. Meanwhile, further up the Eastern seaboard, Frank found creative

freedom and liberation from the doldrums of suburban New Jersey in the local hardcore scene – a scene that would put him in touch with the members of My Chemical Romance. Both bands occasionally crossed paths, but it was only when Frank toured with Against Me! in 2015 – this time with The Collaboration – that a friendship forged in punk rock blossomed.

“I had always been an admirer of Against Me!, but from afar,” Frank says as he rings up his purchases. “It was so nice to connect over similar interests years later on that tour and realise that we were of the same kind.”

“We would have parking lot parties,” smiles Laura. “On the Fourth of July we nearly blew each other up with fireworks. We literally had to dive for cover!”

Similar sparks fly between these mutual fans today as they settle down in a nearby café to discuss how punk has shaped their lives...

You both came to punk rock at an early age. What was your first contact with that world and what drew you in?

LAURA JANE GRACE: “Well, for me it was because I got beat up a lot. I had originally gotten into music through bands like Led Zeppelin, Pink Floyd, the Grateful Dead and stuff like that. That’s what my friends were into and that scene seemed to be more about taking the beatings and saying, [raises V sign] ‘Peace, man.’ So punk rock and bands like The Clash and X came along to me as a total revelation – that you *could* fight back. You were still going to get beat up, but wearing studs and charging out your hair was like an armour against that. It was a way to further differentiate yourself from the other people around you, because I never felt like I fit in.”

FRANK IERO: “My dad was a drummer and the blues was kind of his punk rock. That was about a bunch of guys getting together in a basement and making recordings because they *had* to. When I found out about bands that existed with people who were just like me, making recordings in basements and putting on shows, that was all I wanted to do. That was my gateway into this secret society that I wanted in so bad.”

LAURA: “It did also have a certain element of, ‘Oh, the bar is a little lower for actually being able to play guitar!’ (laughs) Four chords, even three, and you’re ready to go!”

FRANK: “The ability to be part of that world and not have to be virtuoso was huge. Eddie Van Halen didn’t feel attainable. Punk rock did.”

Which bands did you gravitate towards?

FRANK: “Misfits were big, because they came from just down my block. I remember stealing Dead Kennedys’ Give Me Convenience Or Give Me Death when I was skating with my friends. At 13 it was all about what your local store had in stock. And then you could look through the liner notes to find out which bands they liked and then go find their records. It would open your mind to everything.”

LAURA: “It was a lot harder to discover bands, then. You had to make mixtapes and share stuff with friends.”

For you, Laura, getting involved with the punk community coincided with getting into anarchist and anti-fascist politics, right?

LAURA: “Well, a lot of those ideas were things that were not reachable for us. I think there were maybe only two or three squat houses that I had legitimately heard of in the U.S.. A couple of

people tried that in Florida and it was busted up by the cops within days. So we didn’t have any elders to look up to. But at the same time, the bands that I was getting into were the English anarcho-punk bands. So you would listen to things like Crass and try to figure out how to adapt those politics to what was happening around you. So we started doing things like Food Not Bombs [a volunteer movement that shares free vegan meals in protest of war and poverty], and then through that we met other activists. For me, punk was definitely the gateway into activism.”

How did your experiences compare in the New Jersey hardcore scene, Frank?

FRANK: “Well, you would hear about this stuff because New York was very close, but at the same time I grew up in a neighbourhood in New Jersey, so it wasn’t like there was much to be oppressed by. Like Laura said, you would listen to bands like The Clash and Sham 69 and try to figure out how that applied to your world, but it wasn’t on that level. For me punk wasn’t so much about activism as much as telling stories.”

When it came to booking your first tours, did it feel like you had a network to draw upon?

LAURA: “Book Your Own Fuckin’ Life [the book of punk contacts published annually by

“I FEEL LIKE HUMANITY NEEDS TO WAKE THE FUCK UP”
FRANK IERO

Maximum Rockroll] was literally the network. I had started doing a zine and become pen pals with people through that, and then I met people across the country. We booked our first tour through those contacts and maybe out of a month-long tour only 10 shows out of 30 happened, but it was the time of your life!”

FRANK: “Same thing for me. In the first band I toured with, Pency Prep, we booked this tour around this one big support slot we had in Minnesota and we were like, ‘Holy shit, we get to play [legendary Minneapolis venue] First Avenue? We have to go!’”

LAURA: “First Av? That’s rad!”

FRANK: “Oh my God, it was huge. So we somehow got a van and it would break down every day, but we’re going. We played maybe 10 shows and just before that one big show the van just gave up four hours outside of Minnesota. So we didn’t get to play that one big show we had booked the whole tour around, but that was what those tours were like. It was one big road trip and we got to play our music in towns we never thought we would even get to see. We saw ‘the world’ and that was a big thing for us. I probably learned more in that one month than I ever did in the 12 years that I went to school.”

Had your paths crossed much before this current tour together?

FRANK: “It’s funny, because My Chemical Romance and Against Me! were both on Warners and had the same A&R, but we had

never properly hung out together. It was usually just passing each other at festivals and such.”

LAURA: “There were those shows in Canada [on the 2011 Honda Civic Tour] where there was us, blink-182 and Rancid, but years before that, we both played together to maybe 15 people at a venue where you basically had to walk through a meth lab to get paid.”

FRANK: “Oh yeah, in Nashville, Tennessee! I remember that. I remember watching you guys and thinking, ‘Holy shit, this band is way too good – this is scarier than the meth!’”

What were your first impressions of My Chemical Romance, Laura?

LAURA: “To me, they always stood apart. There were all those other bands they were getting lumped in with, but they were clearly way fucking better than all of them.”

FRANK: “Thank you, I appreciate that. It’s funny, because I would always be there any time Against Me! would play Jersey or Brooklyn. I remember our A&R guy would say, ‘Go say hi!’ but I’d be like, ‘I don’t wanna be that guy!’”

How do you feel punk rock has changed since people now have the technology and means to record music, put it out and then book a tour, using a device in their pockets?

LAURA: “That’s actually been worrying me a lot lately, because I think we fucked up by switching so totally to that technology as a means of opposition. That’s what punk rock is supposed to be – a form of opposition and protest movement. But now we’re so reliant on communications and yet that whole system of communication is so easily manipulated that you can’t form a true sense of things. And as those systems get more and more controlled it will become less effectual for organising protests or resistance art. I think we really need to get back to distributing zines and writing letters in the mail, and I know that sounds so old fashioned, but it’s fucking real.”

FRANK: “Human beings on a global scale need to realise that there are way more similarities than differences and look out for one another. The world is going to shit, we’re killing each other and the planet is dying. Enough of pushing each other down for ridiculous differences that don’t make any fucking sense. I feel like beyond punk rock, it’s just a humanity thing that we need to wake the fuck up.”

What does punk mean to you now and has it changed at all over the years?

FRANK: “For me, I think of it as the spark. It’s the spark that got me into this world of creating and to not have any rules surrounding what I make, where I make it and how I make it. I know it probably doesn’t mean that to anyone else, but I don’t care. It’s given me the freedom to be myself and create what I want to create.”

LAURA: “I would agree with that, the only thing I would add is that it has meant all of that to me for the last 25 years. I’m 38 years old; I’ve been listening to punk rock since I was 13 and it still feels exactly the same 25 years later.” **!!**

LAURA JANE GRACE AND THE DEVOURING MOTHERS’ NEW ALBUM BOUGHT TO ROT IS AVAILABLE NOW THROUGH BLOODSHOT RECORDS. FRANK IERO AND THE FUTURE VIOLENTS’ NEW ALBUM BARRIERS IS AVAILABLE NOW THROUGH UNFD



Punk rock lifers, Laura Jane Grace and Frank Iero



Frank, not so sure about Amyl And The Sniffers



Wait, is that Les Claypool?



Hard Nuts and Hard whats?!



‘No, we don’t have the new Taylor Swift record, mate...’

LEFT OF THE DIAL

FRANK AND LAURA buy each other a record they love...

HARD SKIN
HARD NUTS AND HARD C**TS
(BROKEN RECORDS, 1998)

LAURA: “I love Hard Skin. I was around 19 when I got this record and here I am today. With a lot of Oi!-style punk, I like the music but the macho attitude behind it is not my thing. Hard Skin completely take the piss out of that macho posturing, so it’s a fun way for me to hear it. I mean: ‘I spent all day in the fucking pub because I’m a c**t!’ That kind of humour is right up my alley, and I wish I could have written that. I actually bought this for Frank because he hadn’t heard of them, so I thought it was a worthwhile introduction and there’s no better place to start than their first LP.”



MISFITS
WALK AMONG US
(RUBY RECORDS, 1982)

FRANK: “The Misfits were huge for me because they were hometown heroes. I grew up near [Misfits’ New Jersey hometown] Lodi and when you’d go to the high school there were still pictures of Doyle and Jerry Only on the trophy cases. It doesn’t get bigger than that. If you’re from New Jersey, it’s Bon Jovi, Misfits, Bruce Springsteen – that’s where it’s at! It’s inspiring because they grew up where I did, making music for themselves that would go on to make a huge imprint on the world. This record was the soundtrack to my summer when I was 13. It was recorded really lo-fi, but I think that made it even more alluring.”

