



THE DEVIL

MIXING THE PERSONAL AND THE POLITICAL TO PRODUCE A RALLYING CRY OF A RECORD, LETLIVE. RETURN TO RAISE HELL AND RAISE THE STAKES...

WORDS: Mischa Pearlman **PHOTOS:** Jonathan Wiener

When Jason Aalon Butler was 19 years old, his white blood cell count was so low that his doctor told him he had cancer. He didn't, but it nevertheless had a profound effect on his outlook and approach to life. A decade plus later, in March of this year, letlive. embarked on a month-long U.S. tour with The Wonder Years, but due to ill health, Jason was forced to sit out the first three dates, and the band pulled out of the last two. It's still

uncertain what's wrong with him, but while the incident set off flashbacks to his teenage years, the 30-year-old frontman is taking it all in his stride.

"At first," he says as a yawn creeps out of his mouth, "I thought it was some subcutaneous thing on my lungs, but then it ended up being shingles, which was super fucking gnarly. And now they're just trying to make sure it doesn't affect my nervous system. But when I first got ill, I hadn't felt that way since being 19 in the hospital. I felt completely helpless."

He laughs, his spirits clearly still high. But then, health aside, he has every reason to be happy. For a start, he's now happily married – to New Zealand-born songstress Gin Wigmore – but letlive., after a period of relative turmoil and uncertainty, are back with a solidified line-up, a new album, 'If I'm The Devil...', and a renewed sense of energy, purpose and life.

"This can totally go on record," Jason says frankly, "because I think people should know the reality of writing a record and being so passionate about something you

Hard as it may have been, overcome it is precisely what the band – completed by guitarist Jeff Sahyoun, bassist Ryan Jay Johnson and drummer Loniel Robinson – did. The result is a tour de force of explosive protest music that's both personal and political, intellectual and visceral. Its 11 songs both exist in – and are an incisive commentary about – a divided and damaged America that's at war with itself ideologically and politically, but they're also borne out of the context of that country's dark history of racism, not to mention Jason's mixed race heritage. That in itself is nothing new – since coming to prominence with the 2011 reissue of 'Fake History', letlive. have been one the most important political groups in the U.S., but whereas that element bubbled beneath the surface of their songs, the band are now bringing that discussion to the forefront with revolutionary zeal.

"I guess we're making it more obvious," the frontman nods. "I feel like I've been doing it almost from the moment I started playing in letlive., and I was trying to find different ways to elucidate these issues – and for some reason they were part of the disenfranchisement. They got the minority vote for what's important in America. With this record, I feel a lot stronger about these issues, and I don't really see any reason for me, as an artist or as a person, to mute what I believe needs to be said or heard.

"But it's only more obvious because I've learned more," he continues, "and as I learned more I've become more frustrated, and as I've become more frustrated I feel like there's nowhere else for me to air this out."

In addition to his own personal experience and history – which includes civil disobedience, protest and an arrest in 2007 on a charge (later dropped) of assaulting a police officer – Jason cites a 2014 article by Ta-Nehisi Coates in *The Atlantic*, one of America's most iconic literary and cultural commentary magazines, as a huge source of inspiration for this record. Entitled *The Case For Reparations*, its exploration of systemic racism in America and the country's inability to both confront and own up to its own horrific past struck an unshakeable chord, and was further compounded by the surge of racism unleashed by Donald Trump's campaign for the Republican Presidential nomination. Yet for the letlive. vocalist, Trump's prejudices and hateful rhetoric

do, but we were in a really bad position as a band. Artistically, I think we were trying to serve ourselves, and the idea that we thought would be best for letlive., so there were a lot of barriers for us to overcome. The last three years have been really eye-opening and broadening of my mind. After we got through that I think the only thing to do was be better as a band if we wanted to continue. The idea of letlive. is bigger than the four of us, so I never really saw it fading away, but getting together in a room to write without any static was a harder to overcome than I'd hoped."

**“THE IDEA OF
LETLIVE. IS
BIGGER THAN
THE FOUR OF US”**

JASON AALON BUTLER



merely scratch the surface. The ambitious (and successful) intention of 'If I'm The Devil...' is to dig deeply towards the root of the problem.

"These things have truly been exacerbated in a way that you cannot evade them," he says, his tone a mixture of defiance and sadness. "You just can't. They're here. They're everywhere you look. And sure, Trump is absolutely the bane of political progress – he's horrible, but we're focussed so much on that we're forgetting that right outside of our door are policies that are keeping people subjugated and marginalised. And that's something on a very local, civic level we could actually affect, but instead we're getting fucking bombarded and exhausted by the Trumps of the world that we're missing the forest for the trees."

To some extent, what 'If I'm The Devil...' aims to do is burn that forest down. Not in a nihilistic, destructive way, but rather in order to reveal the truth of the situation, to make people

aware of the broken system upon which America operates and which, essentially, forced Let Live. to create this album – in the hope that people will stand up and fight for change.

**"WE'RE SO EXHAUSTED
BY THE TRUMPS OF
THE WORLD THAT
WE'RE MISSING THE
FOREST FOR THE TREES"**

JASON AALON BUTLER

"This is not a conspiracy," the frontman states fiercely. "These are not ideas or fabricated stories. This is reality, and this reality is being upheld by policy. I wrote these songs as a soundtrack to what I believe needs to happen. I believe this has to happen if we're going to see any real social benefit from the change that we so passionately discuss on our blogs and Twitter feeds. We need to be active rather than just talking. And I'm not asking everyone to drop their lives to fight for this cause. I'm just saying invest in it *some way, somehow*. I think our collective idea and consciousness in protest will be effective. I do believe that."

'If I'm The Devil...' is out on June 10 through Epitaph.