

lamb of god

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let there be light!

Of all the musical genres most likely to inspire the wrath of the righteous, heavy metal pips them all to the post. **Jon Monsoon** spoke to metal mayhemers Lamb of God's frontman, Randall Blythe, about the sins of being bad.

If it is generally accepted that heavy metal (and by that, please include all of its relatives hidden up the family tree: the uncles of death metal, the aunts of speed metal, the teenage siblings of screamo and nu-metal) is truly The Devil's Music, then it must hold that its practitioners are the very servants of Satan, or at least the willing whipping boys (and girls) of His Unholy Darkness. By all accounts, the quintet from Virginia, USA aren't exactly the baddest band at the sinner's soul braai. Despite a church-baiting start to life under the t-shirt-worthy moniker 'Burn the Priest' in 1990 (around the time other misunderstood metallers, Judas Priest, were on trial for inciting two drunken kids listening to their music on a walkman to attempt suicide), Lamb of God hold no distinctions for being especially badass or even especially metal-evil (they prefer the tag 'progressive rock'). Although their fan club is called 'The Congregation', as a band they don't employ the usual devil-imagery so favoured among the metallic ilk; rather their subject matter ranges from the angrily political to the intensely personal. And frontman Randy Blythe is just about the nicest, sanest guy you could ever hope to meet this side of Hades.

Fifteen years ago, they were a little-known band from Richmond, Virginia. A favourite among a rabid following of underground thrash metal fanatics, the band toured North America relentlessly and began their international career in support of their *As the Palaces Burn* album in 2003. Some ten years after inception, Lamb of God had risen to the top of the independent metal scene.

To date, the band has released six studio albums, one live album, and three DVDs. Their fifth album, *Sacrament*, was Grammy nominated for Best Metal Performance and was also the best-selling metal album

worldwide in 2006. Lamb of God's cumulative sales equal almost two million in the US. They've toured with Ozzfest and performed at Download, both twice, among many other major festivals. And because of the little time they take off in between, Lamb of God has been called the "hardest working band in metal".

Their uncommon work ethic, uncompromising musicianship and intellectual lyrics have set them apart, in and out of their own genre. It would be fair to say they've helped push the extreme metal scene to the brink of mainstream acceptance. "It's hard to define metal anymore," comments Blythe over the line from backstage somewhere in Italy. "I think the general public is at a point of being tired of pop music, so it follows that some heavier sounds are sneaking their way into 'commercial' music."

Aside from that, the band has also widely been named leaders of the New Wave of American Heavy Metal. Must be something to do with their loyal fanbase, painstakingly built over 15-odd years gigging the planet. "I'm not Britney Spears man; I am a real dude," Andy explains. "You can see me walking down the street in my hometown, so there is always that one-on-one connection with our fans."

In 2009, Lamb of God – guitarist Willie Adler, Willie's drummer brother Chris, bassist John Campbell, guitarist Mark Morton and vocalist Randy Blythe – have recaptured the attention of the heavy metal world, toting a vicious new and highly-anticipated album they've deemed *Wrath*.

If, as Oscar Wilde (another member of the Gleeful Sinners Club) once surmised, "Wickedness is a myth invented by good people to account for the curious attractiveness of others", then metal (call it what you will) circa 2009 is looking mighty pretty right about now, and Lamb of God are on the front cover.