

AGAINST ME! – EXCLUSIVE GIGSOUP INTERVIEW WITH LAURA JANE GRACE

It's hammering down. The rain is soaking the red and white costumes of the charity workers dressed as Father Christmas, they jostle each other as they walk past, belting festive songs as they go. It's on this unseasonably warm December Saturday that GIGSOUP are on their way to meet *Laura Jane Grace*, lead singer of US based punk band *Against Me!*

Against Me! are in Bristol on the penultimate date of their first UK tour in two years. The band's seventh album, *Shape Shift With Me* was released in September, a change in direction from politically charged anthems, to love songs, albeit with all the clarity, lyrical bite and musical rawness we've come to expect.

'Welcome to our green room', Laura invites, gesturing around the tiny back stage area of SWX, the night club venue the band are playing tonight. Laura is generous with her time and even though I've caught her in the middle of lunch, is warm, interested and inviting. We settle down...

It's been two years since you've been here, how has the experience changed? What can we expect?

'New songs! We had a record come out in September and so we're playing a lot of new songs you know? It all feels pretty connected to me. It might have been two years since we've been here but we've been busy the whole time too, so it all strings together'.

You recorded *Transgender Dysphoria Blues* and *Shape Shift With Me* on your own label, *Total Treble*. How does that experience differ from when you're on a major label or an independent?

Every record is a different experience to some extent. Putting it out ourselves, there are other that we work with that do the same jobs that would be filled working with a major label or working with an indie label. I've kind of found in my experience that a record label is a record label and that some people that you work with do some things really well, don't do other things well and it's having your stuff with people who work on your behalf and hopefully they do a good job. The past two records in that way have been good experiences. It's nice feeling you have more control over your art, knowing that you own the masters at the end of the day is really important.

You have a good team of people now? I mean obviously the line-ups changed quite a bit

That's always been the case with the band though. *Against Me!* wasn't something where it was like four people went into a room and then picked up their instruments and then a

sound was born, you know? It started as a bedroom punk project. It's just kind of grown and I think that's one of the keys to survival is being able to change and adapt through time.

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But James (Bowman, Against Me! guitarist) has always been there by your side which is nice....

Sure but he wasn't there at the beginning though, there was a couple years of the band without James.

Your new album, *Shape Shift With Me* seems a departure from overtly political themes, but there's wonderful bite and aggression to each track, the lyrics are just as raw. What made you want to write an album of in your own admission, love songs?

It's just what I was going through at the time. I was going through a break up and I wanted to write about all the stages of love, you know? From the crush, to falling in love, to falling out of love, to the anger.

Which is your favourite song from this album to play live?

It kinda changes. I really like the song *Delicate, Petite and Other Things I'll Never Be* and I really like the song *Crash* and I like the song *Rebecca*, it's been a lot of fun to play live.

So, who is Rebecca?

She's my friend Rebecca. (Laura laughs at this point). (We both laugh and decide not to elaborate on that one).

We could almost turn this into a deep metaphorical question, who *is* Rebecca? (Laura laughs again). She's the one that got away.

Who inspires you?

I don't know (Laura laughs and throws the question back at me. We then have a conversation about *River Phoenix*, until I remind her that it's her interview).

I own this interview, awesome. Yeah, I don't know, it's hard to think in those terms living this life style. My friends inspire me.

What would you say would be the best thing to happen for Against Me! would be in 2017?

I'm really excited about the Green Day tour we're doing, that'll be fun and then we have a bunch of other tours that I can't really talk about because they're not announced. So lots of touring.

You're always on the road

Pretty much. I mean it ebbs and flows, where you put out a record and then you're really busy and then as time goes you get less busy, you do another record and start it all over again.

Did you pick the support bands yourself?

Yes. A friend of mine over here turned me on to *Milk Teeth* and I just really liked the band, you know, I really liked what I heard. Mobina Galore, my friend Gunner puts out their records. I mean I don't get to go to shows, unless they're shows I play. So if there's a band I want to see, I have to bring them on tour.

Lastly, what are you doing for Christmas?

No plans but hopefully hang out with my daughter.

Shape Shift With Me is out now on Xtra Mile. Laura Jane Grace's autobiography, Tranny: Confessions of Punk Rock's most Infamous Anarchist Sellout is out now via Hachette