



**thank  
god for  
mental  
illness**

an interview with



words by mischa pearlman

*It was difficult to decide how to write up this interview with Brian Jonestown Massacre's Anton Newcombe. There's so much to say about it and the temptation to comment on it is immense. But in the end, it seemed better just to leave it as a transcript, unedited and unbiased – just the dialogue as it was at the time between the two of us in a London hotel on a bright February afternoon. A few sections when he was talking to his wife or other people in the room have been edited out, as this is long enough already, but apart from that, this is the interview exactly as it happened.*

*All there is to add is that, at the beginning, before the tape started rolling, Anton was as polite and courteous and gentlemanly as anybody could be. As soon as the interview proper begins, something very subtle changes, and it slowly builds until, well, you'll see. As the recorder is turned on, we're talking about transcribing interviews, and how, sometimes, it's hard to distinguish the voices of various band members when there are a few of them present. Anton has his own theory:*

"I think it'd be harder to interview George Michael after he crashes his Range Rover one more time all high on weed coming back from a public restroom and he drives into a wall and he'd be all slurring, like 'I can't drive' into the interview."

#### **What are your take on interviews?**

"I don't really enjoy this."

#### **I can imagine. I was reading up, doing some research, and sometimes you're not very nice to people.**

"They're not very nice to me either. Like if you really look at the vast tomes of examples... At the end of the day, it's music. It's supposed to be listened to, not really talked about, and I'm not a sycophant about music and I'm not full of myself to where I'd want to discuss things endlessly. I don't mind if I'm personally engaged with somebody explaining where my head is, but I don't really feel like the reader or listener cares to really engage themselves in looking into anything, because...the reason why I know that to be true is I can just turn on the radio. Obviously the market that is supposedly supposed to dictate, you know, the content...I'm gonna throw up."

#### **But surely there are fans who will want to hear what you have to say?**

"Fans implies fanaticism. You know, Hitler had fans. They were called the Hitler Youth. That's what fanatic...fans implies fanaticism. That's a fact. I don't give a shit about that stuff. Are you really a big fan of the Hitler Youth?"

#### **Not particularly, no. Being half-Jewish too, it's not really...but you see what I'm trying to say. That without people who like your music...**

"I am not my music, so here we are."

#### **Okay, so we're talking about you personally?**

"Well, we're talking together. We're not talking about me in third person. Which, I mean, indicate precisely what you mean to say, but technically we are having a discussion together, us. I am not talking about myself in third person. You would get a [sic] 'F' at Oxford, straight back down to a lower class in one second over that. But that's just the fact of it. I never felt the need to go to college but that is just obvious to me."

#### **Okay, that's fine. So you were telling me the history of this place...**

"'Fine' means nothing. 'Fine' is code for 'not fine'. It's a word that means nothing, it's like 'nice'. Oh this is 'nice'. Look at the sun, it's 'nice'. Look at these people, the way they're interacting, that's 'nice'. Oh look at his hair, it's 'fine'. Just relax."

#### **Well, what I wanted to ask you was a question about your mind, because when...**

"The dreamer examines his pillow. How am I going to describe to you about the nature of my mind? That is my mind wanting my voice to talk about itself. Now we're right back to third person situation. I just don't understand where you're coming from, personally." [Here he turns to his wife] Do you?"

"No, not really."

"And she's just my wife. I mean, I really don't understand that, do you? I mean, I taught myself to speak English. I don't care if you're half Jewish from Freud's books. I know all about this junk. And I'm completely underwhelmed with society and journalism, to be frank. I have no problem pulling rank over anybody who pulls class and polite and PC I could give a f\*ck about [sic], but I'm civic minded."

Click [here](#) to read part 2.



**What I was going to ask, was that when I came in we had a chat about the history of this place.**

"Yeah."

**And you knew it. You knew these things. You...**

"Have a photographic memory. So you wouldn't understand what that means unless you actually have one, because then we' be talking about things we don't know about and that would just deprive the listener of anything meaningful, or the dear *gentile* [sic] reader."

**And you were reeling those songs off to the person on the phone [an NME journalist], you just had it there. It was incredible to listen to you, how you knew these five songs [he listed rather obscure live performances of certain artists available only through online video media], their dates, venues and everything...**

"We're, like, fooling around. Not that it's your business. I'm talking about all kinds of jazz, just 'brp brp brp', you know. I'm really interested. We watch *Cash In The Attic* and just have a hoot and I know everything about all the stuff they're looking at."

"And *Bargain Hunt*," chirps in his wife.

"Basically of it. And when I go to museums I know all about it. I used to sit around and instead of playing video games and jacking off I used to read *American Heritage* and *Encyclopaedia Britannica* from cover to cover and dictionaries and everything, making acronyms of words and whatever, you know."

**And can you remember all of that now still?**

"I have a photographic memory. You don't know what that means."

**But can you still reference those 'photographs' now? Do they fade with time?**

"I've been trying to destroy my brain with drugs but evidently I'm not Amy Winehouse and I'm just indestructible or something."

**That must be nice. No, I can't say nice, can I? What's it like...**

"It's a torture. Like who wants to live forever in a world full of Tesco trainer ten year-olds running up and down the stairs with backpacks giving you dirty looks rolling out of a council flat farting out a bag of Walker's crisps their last meal of 99p beans and toast thinking that they're Superman? I mean, this sucks."

**Do you feel a renewed sense of life, though, since...**

*[Here he starts talking to a nearby couple and asks to borrow their power cord for his laptop. This lasts for a few minutes]*

**So in terms of technology, are you enjoying the advances that it's allowed?**

"Well I've been programming since I was nine years old and I'm forty years old, so 31 years ago I don't know what you were doing."

**I wasn't quite alive yet...**

"Yeah, well, think about it. So anybody who thinks they can master the markets or do anything, they really don't understand that once the people that created how the environments interact with each other, they cannot be uncreated just because you can apply some sort of charlatanism or, you know, opportunistic, or, you know, let me think of the right word for it *[6 second pause]* – hustle – on everybody else because they don't have a clue how things work, you can't undo the people that created the environment. You just can't. And that's why Microsoft systems continuously have bugs and Macs are all integrated now and they've got them now...ah, *[to his wife, who's just brought down the computer]* you're so sweet. You know what this *[a sticker on his Mac]* says in Icelandic? 'Your bank doesn't care about you.' Isn't that great?"

*[Anton gets the cable from the nearby couple. He plugs it in and thanks the couple profusely as the wife and I chat about where they're going to next. He tells the couple he has 19 Macs stored under a table in his house and none of the work anymore]*

**So you don't recycle these Macs that you've got, then?**

"Uh, you can use them as hard drives, even when they crash out. You can chain them together, so mine are always really souped-up, whatever we've got, and I don't know how you can recycle Macintoshes. We try our best. I try and put them in a woodchipper and feed them to pigeons but that just makes old people frown at me and I figure they've fought through World War II and various stock crashes and all the seventies bad TV..."

Click [here](#) to read part 3.





**Do you think there's any cure for the malaise of the modern world? Is there anything we can do about it?**

"I guess, evidently, we're going to attack Iran and start an atomic war and everybody's going to have to get their shit together. They basically kicked a hornet's nest. Not there. I mean, we're fighting China too, I mean, that's going to change the malaise, but I just don't understand how you can brainwash everybody and expect to defend everybody at the same time if they can't function even against an ex-Tesco advertising campaign. To me, I just don't see the logic in it. I think it's failed. It seems like there's a planned obsolescence for mass-population that's been in the works for a long time. If it was my guess, that's what I'd think. And that'll kill the congestion tax right there. Just kill off like 60% of the population."

**How do you feel about the political state of America right now?**

"They're suing half of the caucuses of the States individually for rigging the votes, which has already been proved, and they're already proved court cases, and it's a fact so it's not like 'Oh, they rigged a vote in Florida once or in Ohio the next time, they're doing the whole thing. So...I don't think there's one uniform opinion in America, and I have to be careful because I'm claiming citizenship there right now, and it's treachery right now, according to the suspension of habeus corpus, for me to be discussing this with a foreigner in a foreign country. All I can say, honestly, is I have healthy faith in the resiliency of some of the American people. There is not one unified opinion. We're going to talk about 46 million people, we're talking about over 350 million people probably in residence, we just don't know, but it's probably that many, and there's not one unified opinion and I like that, but I really don't like the push through...faulty concepts and people's fears in one direction. I don't want everyone to wear one brown shirt or one black shirt or step down the street in a certain way or tell me when to get into a shower. And I see that."

**Can we extend that to your music? Is there...**

"It's not related. These are my opinions."

**But do your opinions in any way inform the music that you make, or is it completely separate? Because obviously, people tend to make music...**

*[Iratly]* "Well, obviously, if you listen to our dialogue, I think a lot. So my thought process informs my music. It's like Legos – if you get all the building blocks. You either get life or you don't get it and I'm a person that gets it. Period. And that's incontrovertible. It's evident. I mean, how many employees do you have?"

**I don't...**

"I have 49 with paid insurance in England alone. Full time. That's a living wage, with full medical. So you can't argue with results and I'm not interested in discussing my music whatsoever. Why don't you sit here and tell me what you think about my music, because I don't think you get it either. And I don't care. That's the interesting thing about art, is you can't stop what's already out there. You can't do anything. All the Mossad agents in the world can't stop it. It's already out there."

**But that's a good thing, surely?**

"I don't believe in good and bad."

**Okay, it's positive.**

"I believe it's positive, because it speaks for humanity and thus it's against a machine mentality. So I don't need Prozac to express that. Now what should really disturb you is that the President of my country cannot speak in a sentence, articulate any of these notions as well as I just did. And that should scare you. Not, 'Oh, I've got to pay off my £175 a month flat rent or week or whatever it is,' but that should truly terrify you."

**But that's a condition of human society now, that we're...**

"Apathetic. Well, I think that's induced. Because people have a natural curiosity. Some people do. Now I intend just to be a productive, civic-minded member of society until the day they kill me first."

**And do you think they're going to kill you?**

"Well, I've just seen what happens to the tall blade of grass, always, on a polo field."

**Is that a worry?**

"No. It doesn't trouble me. It's not like it's winning the national f\*cking lottery being alive here. I mean this sucks. So I don't really give a shit. That's true. I'm not joking. I'm not even afraid."

**Are you afraid of anything? Is that anything that scares you?**

"Well here's the thing. I have a natural reflex. I get terrified for a minute and then jump right into the fire and carry on with my business. That's real. That isn't a false sense of 'Hi, I'm nine years old, my mum bought me this fake Adidas thing at the car boot sale and now I'm going to go beat up a thirty year old' mentality. That's not what I'm talking about. Everything tears me apart, but I just go for it."

**And it makes you stronger?**

"I think experience makes you wise. So my wisdom means I have discernment and I have an equilibrium and a wealth of information and perspective to draw upon and make informed decisions."





**I was going to ask you earlier, but we kind of got distracted, about the drugs, and how that has affected the way you look at the world now. Has it changed your viewpoint? Do you feel more alive? Do you feel more...**

"Well, listen. I'm not advocating drug use but I use drugs and I'm personally [a few indecipherable words] using them all the time...I use them...everybody uses them."

**Absolutely.**

"Prozac is a drug."

**But you said earlier that you tried to destroy yourself through drugs and it didn't work...**

"No no no, not really destroy myself, but numb myself down to the point where I could relate to any of y...I almost said something insulting, which I have more class than that - um, to be able to relate to other people in society who basically are numbskulls and aren't think and are never capable of relating to any of the concepts or anything or articulating...there's no way in hell they can keep up with it. I run circles around everybody. I'll go to Queen Anne's college right here in the physics lab and just go right through people in a second. So I'm f\*cked because I'm not walking on the same terra firma as everybody. I can speak it in any different language. I just don't know what other people are thinking, what their interests are, I could care less. And I have more insight than they have amongst each other but then again I'm not into eugenics so I don't care."

**Have you ever met anybody on your level, that you can engage with on an equal footing?**

"I've met people I've been in envy of on different levels, because people have various strong points that really shine through under circumstances and my whole life I was just like, 'Wow, I need to go back and learn some more things because this person just really impressed me.' And that has been on physical, intellectual levels, romantic levels, everything, musical levels, just where I was in awe of people's abilities. But I'm not too concerned with that these days."

**Sure. But you always want to learn about new things, about new advances...**

"Yeah. I really want to get Harry Potter in the sack and pick his brain."

**You can probably get Daniel Radcliffe, the actor, but Harry Potter might be hard....**

"Money makes the little doggy dance, man. Evidently. I mean, he's on the market. I was looking in Time Out, he was there...[a few more indecipherable words]...put your hand in that Bangkok ladyboy."

**They're all growing up, aren't they? They're about 18 now, so they can do whatever they want.**

"Evidently. [He puts on a strange voice like Tom Waits]. Magic is afoot, dear readers".

**Do you believe in magic?**

[He sings] "In a young girl's heart.' Ah yeah. Name that tune. I can't remember that band. I hated them. I think it's Three Dog Nine or something, no it's Loving Spoonful. [Sings] 'Do you believe in magic in a young girl's heart'. Yeah, that's who it is. Oh man, I hate that guy who does all the harp."

**You have a lot of records, don't you?**

"I used to have 36,000 vinyls. Between Greg and I we had over 100,000, my business partner that died, that founded Bomp Records. [For a brief moment, he sounds actually quite sad]. Uh, but now I don't care about it so much."

**Do you listen constantly to music?**

"I do when I have my Mac charged. We're working on it."

**So you've converted to digital now, instead of having vinyl?**

"No, I use all kinds of stuff. I actually converted to the abstract chirpings of bats.."

[His wife interjects] "And there's the baby thing."

"I have Baby Mozart."

**What's Baby Mozart? That sounds amazing!**

"They have this thing in America for people out of preschool and there's a blinking light and four buttons you can press and it's like a round orb and it's digital and it'll just play a Bach or a Mozart sonata..."

[His wife interrupts again] "Like a baby toy and it's chirping or a waterfall..."

"...and the baby's hypnotised immediately. Like, oh look, my baby's getting smarter, it doesn't move. I do it to my dog and it'll just zonk out my dog. He's super intelligent - Iggy Pup is her name - and she'll just go like this and she'll be sitting there for like an hour, completely hypnotised automatically. And people do that, you know, we gotta go watch TV, watch Cash In The Attic I can't deal with these babies. [Addressing his wife] You're beautiful, I love you. I do."

[There's a brief discussion about Donnie Darko, then Anton reels off a list of films he considers to be great. Then, with no prompting, he digresses into the following statement]

I was talking to these two people who are very very established members of society and what I've come to reason and understand is that everybody's too f\*cking greedy right now and can't wait to try to f\*ck somebody over as their only means.. not being productive, it's thievery, it's the end, it's the hallmark of the death of a civilisation, so I can't even think what else I can even say."

Click [here](#) to read part 5.





**What about books? Do you read much?**

"More than you would ever know."

**Are we talking fact, fiction...**

"How about this one? Do you know what Ismailism is?"

**I don't, no.**

"Well, you should learn about the [*indecipherable*] 'cause you'll never understand what they're trying to sell you about Al'Qaeda that doesn't exist unless you know about Ismailism and something that will never give up and the death [*sic*] it will be amazing cause Rome marched through Damascus and built the Roman baths and aqueducts there and they're gone. They're here. Londinium. That's what Albert Shrine is right across this park. You should walk across this park and take a look at it, read about this. I mean you should, it's a beautiful day, it's straight across, it's right there, Albert Hall, they completely reguiled it...but these books are thicker than your head and surely contain more knowledge. I'm talking 1500 Cambridge Press, these are books to educate professors, these are not public books, it's not Barnes and Nobles or get them on sale at Boots or what have you. These are the real deal, crazy books."

**Do you think they should be made available to the public?**

"Well, they obviously are, there's a whole world out there, but here's the thing..."

**No-one wants to learn?**

"I don't watch pornos. Or play video games..."

*[Out of the window, Anton sees some pigeons flying around and talks at length about them, before a brief discussion about the open space in New York and the size of Central Park]*

**How do you find New York? Are you enjoying it or not?**

"It's just a sh\*t hole I mean London's a messy sh\*t hole too, but it's got a thousand years of sh\*t hole history and New York's just got a couple hundred years. The Indians didn't even hang out there because nothing would grow cause the climate changes. They didn't [*indecipherable*] fish there and banked there and camped there, but there was no permanent settlements when they made New Amsterdam, the Dutch."

**Do you miss the West Coast?**

"Elements of it. I figure I'll take my wife out to meet my nana and all my family and my roots and all that stuff and show here from BC down, even into Mexico. I just think it'd be educational for her. She's never traveled that way."

**Would you go by coach, by Greyhound?**

"I'll drive my Mercedes, man. I don't care, I'll just roll right down."

**I'd love to drive across the States actually.**

"I've done it a million times."

**Yeah. I feel very unfortunate I was born in England rather than America. I suppose it's the allure of the unknown.**

*[Here he lets out a heavy, disapproving sigh]* "You weren't born in the lowlands of Bangladesh..."

**Well, yes, it's all relative.**

"...like having a monsoon flood every day carrying your holy cow or whatever over your head as you're running for these highground piles that they built, that aren't even dykes, that are just standing points to run if you grab your people in the middle of a monsoon with trees flying around so you can't hang on to them. I mean think about it."

**Do you always think on such epic terms? It seems everything translates to a bigger aspect, a bigger part of the world.**

"Perspective. No, the bigger part of the universe. How's that. Perspectives."

**But you always think grandly?**

"No, I don't have a myopic vision. I'm not focused and self-centred, I'm just thinking about perspective to me. When you said you thought you were unfortunate for being born in the UK, I mean, I can just think of a million different situations. Try Guatemala, Honduras..."

**Of course. At some point, though, you have to reign it in surely?**

"You have to. At some point you need to actually concentrate on yourself because you were the one who was expressing some false sense of pity you were born in a different place. I don't have to do a f\*cking thing. I'm your elder. You have to go f\*ck yourself, basically. This is over, this interview. Because this is a ridiculous assumption. You really don't know how to speak English and I can't believe you passed your A-levels."

**Well thank you very much...**

"No, it isn't a thank you situation. You don't have to be smug."

**I wasn't being smug.**

"Well you are, actually, because this is not a thank you situation. I would say 'Good day'. That's polite. That's civic. And civil. I'm just saying good day because it's insulting to me that you would say that."

**I was going to say thank you for your time.**

"Well, you didn't. So you...a minimum of decorum is required. And at least a minimum of professionalism. And I can say to you in three languages this is unacceptable. This is my time. This is my beautiful wife. I'd rather be f\*cking her than talking to you. I mean, you can barely speak English, because if you rewind your tape, I got a witness right here, he'll just review it for you and you can find just find numerous, not grammatical [*sic*] errors, but errors of syntax that are really insulting to somebody who has any sort of intelligence. I don't know if you need to up or down your Prozac level, but really, man, this is over. And you can talk as much shit about me as you want..."

**I have no intention to...**

"Well, then, go quietly. Please. I mean, I'll pay you for your time."

*And those were undoubtedly the last words Anton Newcombe will ever speak to yours truly. It was, to say the least, quite an experience. For the record, I've never taken Prozac...*

[Disclaimer: The above dialogue is a word for word transcript of the interview with Anton Newcombe and has been transcribed exactly as the interview occurred. Nothing has been added or changed to the dialogue. Where noted, certain small sections - where he was addressing his wife, or other people, or talking about pigeons - have been removed for the sake of brevity. Everything else has been left untouched. Any comments below are not necessarily the view of Aloud. We're working on the technicalities and legalities of the soundclip. Bear with us!]