

Emerging From The Middle Of 'Iowa'

Roadrunner Act Slipknot's Success Story Isn't Just Masks And Numerals

BY WES ORSHOSKI

NEW YORK—"They take their music very seriously," a Roadrunner Records publicist says of the label's platinum shock-thrashers Slipknot. For most bands, this much is implied. But most bands aren't like Slipknot.

In fact, most groups have nothing in common with the hardcore nonet, which, in the three years since emerging from the very definition of the middle of nowhere—Des Moines, Iowa—has gone on to establish itself as the reigning act of shock rock.

What's helped win Slipknot that title (which it is sure to retain after the highly anticipated Aug. 28 release of its second Roadrunner album, *Iowa*) more than anything else, and what distinguishes it from just about every other act, is that each member of the band wears a mask. We're not talking sparkly Mexican wrestling masks or rubbery Dick Nixon mugs. The Slipknot get-ups range from the psychotic clown to the bloody mime.

What's more, when the band members—some of whom have exchanged their names for numerals—take the stage in these masks (and matching, sometimes faux-blood-stained jumpsuits), they deliver the stuff of modern-day metal legend: relentlessly full-throttle aggression, chaotic and frightening enough to generate as many nightmares as Gene Simmons' blood-spewing antics did in the '70s.

With Slipknot making Halloween an everyday event, it's understandable that the group's publicist feels compelled to stress that the band

also puts care and effort into its songwriting as well. (Their songs are published by EMI April Music/Music That Music, ASCAP. Slipknot is managed by L.A.-based Steve Richards at No Name Management and booked by Dave Kirby at the Agency Group in Los Angeles.)



SLIPKNOT

Snickering though you may, commercially, Slipknot is no joke: It has sold more than 1 million copies of 1999's *Slipknot*, its first Roadrunner set and second overall. And if the group's online presence is any indicator, *Iowa* is sure to be an even bigger success. To help stir excitement for *Iowa*, Roadrunner recently posted an MP3 of new track "Heretic Song" on its Web site for free downloading. Label president Jonas Nachsin says that in the first second after its posting, about 1,000 users began downloading the song. He adds that the track has been downloaded about 175,000 times since.

Slipknot's reputation began growing in 1999, when the then-mostly unknown act joined that year's Ozzfest.

Playing to metalheads across the U.S.—from the fest's second stage—helped *Slipknot* reach platinum status.

This summer, Slipknot again set up its forthcoming album with a slot on the just-wrapped Ozzfest, this time playing the main stage with Black Sabbath and Marilyn Manson, among others. The band will hit the road again Sept. 14, when it begins the Pledge of Allegiance arena tour with Rammstein and System of a Down. This time around, the band's fans—which the group refers to as its "maggots"—are in for a more interactive, less restrictive experience, promises its founder, Shawn Crahan, aka the Clown, aka No. 6.

"We're not fucking around," he says. "When we came out, we told people it was going to be world domination."

Crahan, 31, says that *Iowa*—which will be packaged in a foil booklet with a 12-panel vellum foldout—features the band at its "most brutal." *Slipknot*, he says, is like "being a little kid, totally full of anxiety. It's someone who will chew off an ear to get the chance to allow the world to hear it. Well, we still have that [with *Iowa*], but instead of the ear, now it's the whole body."

LEAD TRACK LEAKED

Nachsin says Roadrunner was forced to service "Left Behind" to metal and active and modern rock formats earlier this month, after several stations leaked the track. The label has also partnered with MTV for an *MTV 360* promotion that will see the album promoted across MTV and MTV2, as well as on mtv.com.

Natalie Waleik, senior buyer for Newbury Comics' 22 stores, says the band's local Ozzfest stop is already making an impact at the Boston-area chain, with *Slipknot* sales picking up.

Iowa "will certainly be bigger out of the box," she says. "[*Slipknot*] took a few months to take off and is still selling well two years later. This time, they have radio [support], which they probably don't even need."

Despite the masks, the Satanic images that float through the band's work, and such song titles as "People=Shit," Crahan says, there's an uplifting aspect to Slipknot—an esteem-boosting message of empowerment—that is often missed.

"We are here to wake you up and kill the part of the brain that tells you that you can't," Crahan says. "It's not about me. It's about what I'm doing for kids. When I walk out onstage, there's 15,000 kids that, to me, represent potential. And I'm here to tell you, to tell them, that no matter what they tell you, no matter what they say, you can be from nowhere and you can break out and become anything you want. Because the bottom line is [that] this is your lifetime. This is your time, here, now, on this planet."



by Melinda Newman

The Beat™

AYEROFF RETURNS: Fifteen years after leaving Warner Bros. Records, Jeff Ayeroff returns to the label as creative director. In the interim, of course, Ayeroff was co-chairman of Virgin Records America and co-founder of the Work Group with his former partner Jordan Harris. Most recently he ran the U.S. marketing campaign for the Beatles' *1* album.

Ayeroff will also serve as creative consultant to Warner Music Group. His duties will include representing Warner in certain initiatives with parent company AOL Time Warner.

HAPPY TOGETHER: Backstreet Boy Brian Littrell and his actress wife, Leighanne Littrell, have launched Brileigh Productions. The first



LEIGHANNE AND BRIAN LITRELL

release from the production company will be the Navarre-distributed Oct. 23 soundtrack to *Olive Juice*, which arrives on video Oct. 9.

Leighanne, who appears in *Olive Juice*, will serve as the president of Brileigh Productions, which is wholly owned by the Littrells. Non-equity participants in the label are Brett Donowho and Greg Weiss of Insight Entertainment Group.

The pair deliberately decided to start small because, Leighanne says, "a lot of times with a larger label, you're not going to get control." She adds that Brileigh is negotiating to sign Brett Laurence, who appears on the soundtrack.

Brian also remains a partner in the Interscope-distributed label run by Backstreet Boys and its management company the Firm. Following a seven-week break from touring to allow Backstreet Boy A.J. McLean to receive treatment for alcoholism and depression, Brian returned to the road with the group Aug. 24.

After the tour ends in October, Brian isn't sure what's next, he says. "There are contracts to go to the Far East. If that will happen, we don't know. We're living day to day, and we want to take care of what we do and what we care about, and that's A.J."

Denying any rumors of a breakup, Brian says, "We definitely have more albums to do."

JUST WATCH: We will be shocked if Metropolitan Entertainment Group (MEG) isn't purchased by SFX/Clear Channel Entertainment (CCE) in the coming months, despite protestations by MEG's new chairman that such a sale is not a given.

To recap, John Scher, who founded the New York/New Jersey-based MEG 30 years ago, was ousted from his post Aug. 15 and replaced by Scott Mackin, CEO of Covanta Energy. Covanta now owns close to 80% of MEG following its purchase of most of Scher's 40% share of the company (*Billboard*, Aug. 25). Scher will now head its record label, Hybrid Recordings.

Covanta (formerly Ogden) had MEG on the block for more than a year. Several suitors—some in the concert industry, some not—sniffed around MEG, but no deal was struck to buy out Covanta.

Scher says, "It's no mystery that Covanta made a decision in 1999 [to divest its entertainment properties] and, candidly, our management team wasn't able to find a buyer everyone was happy with."

The one company Scher was adamant about not selling to was CCE, with whom he had battled over Northeast territories. This move now clears the way for CCE to move in. It's possible that with Scher no longer having right of first refusal, House of Blues (a previous potential buyer) or another company will step back in, but we doubt it.

Our fear is that once MEG tumbles, the few remaining indie promoters will not be able to stand up against consolidation. As it is now, CCE has snapped up most of the top-tier regional promoters. Among the few holdouts are Chicago-based Jam; New Orleans-based Beaver Productions; West Palm Beach, Fla.-based Fantasma; Dallas-based 462; Portland, Ore.-based Double Tee; Washington, D.C.-based I.M.P.; and Denver-based NIPP, which is suing CCE.

Scher, even though he had Covanta as a partner and before that PolyGram, was emblematic of the indie promoter—the David standing up to Goliath.

IN BRIEF: Former Hollywood Records senior VP/GM Mark DiDia will start in his new role as senior VP at Capitol Records by the end of August . . . Artemis Records has signed Russell Crowe's band, 30 Odd Foot of Grunts, and will release the group's *Bastard Life or Clarity* in the U.S. on Sept. 18 . . . Danzig has inked with Survival Management for representation and is negotiating a new label deal.

Additional reporting by Ray Waddell.

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