**FAKE NAMES**

In early 2016, D.C. punk legends Brian Baker (Minor Threat, Dag Nasty, Bad Religion) and Michael Hampton (S.O.A., Embrace, One Last Wish) met up at Hampton’s Brooklyn home to play music together, with no intentions beyond possibly writing a song or two. Friends since first grade, the two guitarists ended up writing a handful of songs that day, then closed out the session with a spur-of-the-moment decision to start a band. When it came to finding a bassist, Baker and Hampton looked to Johnny Temple of Girls Against Boys and Soulside (another fellow student at their elementary school), who equally shared their passion for what Temple refers to as “loud, angry, visceral music.” By the end of the year, the band had enlisted Refused frontman Dennis Lyxzén as their singer, thus cementing the lineup to punk-rock supergroup Fake Names.

On their self-titled debut, Fake Names bring their collective history to a 28-minute burst of unbridled energy. Co-produced by Hampton and Geoff Sanoff and recorded at Renegade Studios (a New York City facility owned by Little Steven Van Zandt), the album augments their bare-bones breed of punk with a heavy dose of power-pop, cleanly manifested in the band’s bittersweet melodies and abundant backup harmonies.

At the heart of *Fake Names* is the singular kinship between Baker and Hampton, ineffably informed by sharing stages in their respective bands during the genesis of American hardcore music. “This feels like years of buildup to two phenomenal guitarists finally playing in a real band together,” says Temple. “It’s two lead guitar players who really know how to work together, with such an incredibly fluid meshing of their individual styles, and there’s never a moment where they’re competing over who’s playing the catchiest riff. I’ve never seen a hint of anything like that before.”

While Temple emerged from the same culture-shaping scene as Baker and Hampton, Lyxzén hails from an entirely different musical universe, having co-founded Refused in the Swedish city of Umeå. But when Refused, Girls Against Boys, and Bad Religion shared the bill at Riot Fest Chicago in 2016, both Baker and Temple were struck with the sudden inspiration to recruit Lyxzén as their singer—an offer he happily accepted. “I’m a huge record collector, and I’ve been hoarding all of their records for years,” notes Lyxzén, who names Minor Threat and Embrace among his favorite bands.

Once he’d returned to Sweden, Lyxzén began writing and recording vocals for the demos that Hampton had sent him, adding an element of lyrical invective that instantly gelled with his bandmates’ sensibilities. “We all have long histories of playing in bands where the singer is critiquing mainstream society and corporate society, and Dennis definitely didn’t shy away from that kind of critique,” Temple points out. And when Lyxzén headed back to the U.S. for a series of practice sessions, the band felt an automatic musical chemistry. “Dennis fit right in with us,” says Baker. “He’s a great singer and his ears were tuned to the kind of music all our bands were making back in the ’80s, so he knew exactly what to do. All of it made sense of immediately.”

Soon after dubbing themselves Fake Names—a moniker that’s part *Raising Arizona* reference, part recognition of the “ubiquitous and demonic use of the term ‘fake news,’” according to Baker—the band headed to Renegade Studios with the goal of creating a demo to present to record labels. But after playing those recordings for Baker’s Bad Religion bandmate Brett Gurewitz, the Epitaph founder made an unexpected proposal. “Brett said to us, ‘This isn’t a demo, this is the album,’” Baker recalls. “He was pretty adamant about putting it out exactly as it was, so that’s what we wound up doing.”

Built on performances both restlessly kinetic and unfailingly precise, *Fake Names* kicks off with the glorious fury of “All for Sale”—a lament against the toxic effects of capitalism. “It’s a song about how everyone’s owned by the banks and owned by the corporations,” says Lyxzén. “We’re slaves to debt and to our jobs, and we’re brainwashed to believe this is the only system that works.” On the frenetic and fast-paced “Brick,” Fake Names deliver a classic punk anthem complete with chant-along chorus and revolution-minded lyrics encapsulated by Lyxzén as “taking down the names of the people and institutions that have done you wrong.” And on “First Everlasting,” the album shifts into a brighter mood and bouncier tempo, even as Lyxzén examines some emotionally weighty subject matter. “It’s a more existential song, about taking a look at yourself and accepting the role you’ve played in your own life,” he says. “It’s about growing up and moving forward, and learning from past mistakes and failures.”

Although Fake Names deliberately avoided imposing any particular vision on the album’s creation, they did establish one rule for their writing sessions. “We didn’t want to do anything that we couldn’t reproduce live, which meant no pedals on any of the guitars,” says Baker. “It’s a lot less forgiving when you’re playing a very clean, dry guitar like that—the mistakes show way more clearly—but it was a fun challenge to go in that direction with the kind of music that could easily be very effect-heavy.” Recorded to tape, *Fake Names* ultimately unfolds as a welcome contrast to the more prevalent sonic aesthetic of the moment. “In the last 10 years I’ve seen all these bands with walls of pedals, even if they’re not playing anything atmospheric, and it sounds so processed but not in a powerful way,” says Hampton. “We wanted to see what we could come up with by going back to how we did it in high school, where basically all you’ve got is a guitar and an amplifier.”

Throughout their debut album, Fake Names radiate the pure joy in reclaiming a certain simplicity in the creative process. “When you’re younger and in a band, you feel really strongly about getting your opinions across, and sometimes you fight with your bandmates just because you feel like fighting,” says Hampton. “But there’s been none of that with this band—no one’s precious about anything, and it’s been so easy to work together.” Echoing that sentiment, Lyxzén points to the lack of calculation that’s defined the band since the very beginning. “A lot of times with bands there’s an agenda, and people often have very different ideas on what you need to do to succeed,” he says. “But with this band there’s no agenda at all: it’s a project completely driven by lust for the music, and the simple fact that we just truly love playing together.”