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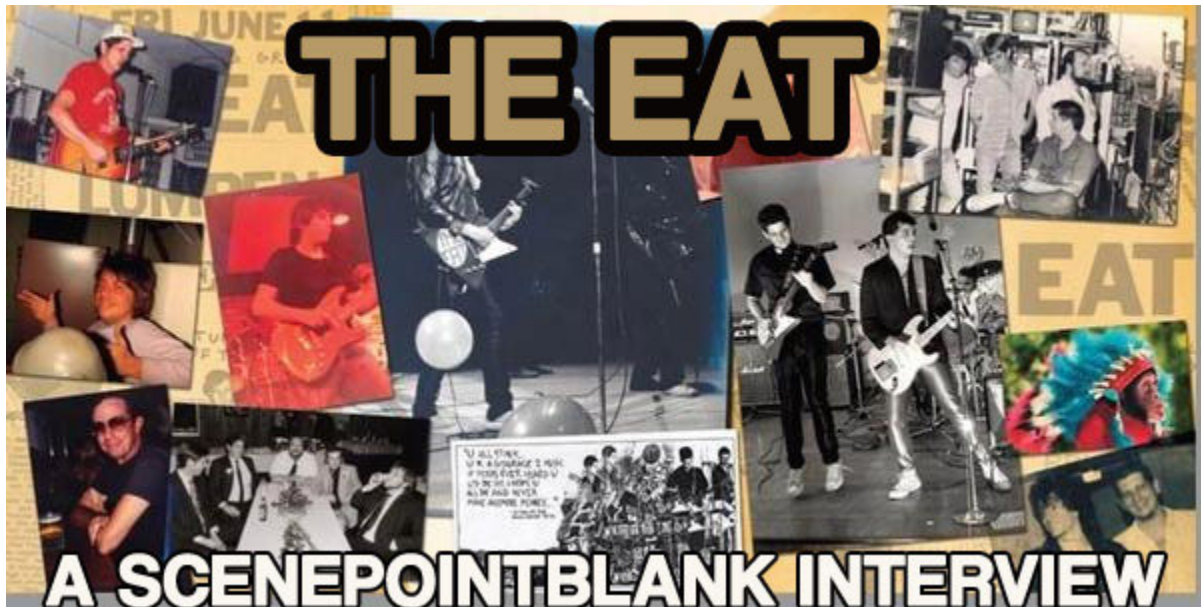
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Interview: The Eat

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I first fell in love with The Eat upon seeing them live in Miami, FL at their 1996 reunion show. I had heard plenty of buzz about them from locals such as Los Canadians and The Crumbs, but nothing could prepare me for the ebullition that occurred as they returned in top form while several generations of South Florida punks sang along to every word. The arrival of the much-anticipated *It's Not The Eat, It's The Humidity* collection has been cause for celebration as you will be hard-pressed to get your hands on a copy of most of their releases without paying top dollar. Hell, their *Communist Radio* single is arguably the holy grail of the Killed By Death series. Scene Point Blank recently had the pleasure of discussing the origin and early reactions to the band, the new Alternative Tentacles collection, and a whole lot more with The Eat vocalist and guitarist Eddie O' Brien.

Scene Point Blank: What would you say some of your influences were growing up that worked their way into The Eat sound?

Eddie O' Brien: General stuff of the 60's. We listened to The Beatles and all of that stuff. Jefferson Airplane and The Byrds and all that. The punk rock groups that were out, The Clash, The Ramones and The Jam and a handful of others, they were kind of considered our contemporaries or something and I don't think we were really influenced too much by them.

Scene Point Blank: So a lot of the influences were 60's rock stuff?

Eddie O' Brien: Yeah, I guess, because we were all twenty-five/twenty-six when we were doing the group; my brother was a little younger, but Chris and I had been in cover bands and hippy bands and all of that stuff before.

Scene Point Blank: Was The Eat your first original musical project together?

Eddie O' Brien: Yeah, well we were in other bands in the early 70's, (Chris and I) that did some original material.

Scene Point Blank: I know you've talked about how difficult it was to get gigs playing original material at that time. Did early Eat shows feature cover stuff?

Eddie O' Brien: Yeah. We just couldn't even really believe that we could get away with it at that point. But we were able to get away with it, playing all originals eventually.

Scene Point Blank: What were early reactions to the band like?

Eddie O' Brien: I think one of the first gigs we played was at this bar in Miami Beach called the Irish House and on our first record that we put out, the *Communist Radio* record, there was an actual note that was passed up to us that we should die. I can't remember the exact words. If Texas ever heard you, you would be hit. I hope you all die and never make any more money. Yeah, nobody liked us. Nobody really liked us that much the whole time. We had maybe a hardcore of about maybe forty or fifty people around town, and we had a few gigs we played for pretty big crowds, but we played plenty of gigs where there were twelve people there. Maybe even the majority.

Scene Point Blank: With the growth of punk and hardcore there seems to be a really established community and I think it's a lot easier for everyone doing stuff now. During The Eat's time did you guys feel part of a punk community?

Eddie O' Brien: I think so. There were maybe a half a dozen other bands and we were all friends and we all played together and we were friends outside the clubs and stuff. And there were maybe about

fifty people that did other stuff and just regular fans and stuff. But it was small. Real small. Not like other cities I don't think. Not like L.A. or New York or San Francisco or anything.

Scene Point Blank: You guys did limited touring right? How many tours did you actually end up doing?

Eddie O' Brien: We only really did one. We went out of town...we went to Tampa a few times and then we did one where we went up to NYC and a bunch of places in between, but it was really only one.

Scene Point Blank: How did that tour go? Were the reactions strong outside of Florida?

Eddie O' Brien: Yeah, it was pretty good. At that time we kind of had friends in these other cities that had been turned on to us in Atlanta and up in North Carolina, so there was maybe at least a dozen people in each city who already knew who we were. It was fun, but we were all working straight jobs at the time and we knew that this was just going to be a two-week thing and then we'd be back and going back to work. There was never any serious thought of doing it full time. I mean, how could you? I had kids, what am I going to do, come home with twenty bucks and say we'll I got three free beers. For me anyway, there was never really any thought about quitting a day job or anything.

Scene Point Blank: Who were some of the other bands of your era from Florida that never really got there due, but put out some great stuff?

Eddie O' Brien: One band, the Reactions, they were real good. And the Cichlids were a band that had a record out on a semi-major label. They were good. And Charlie Picket who we used to play with a lot, he got signed by Twin/Tone Records in Minneapolis and he spent about five or six years touring and his records are real good. Peter Buck produced one of his records. But he just got up to AA/AAA, he never got into the major leagues. And I play with Charlie now around town. I play bass for him in his group. We play three or four times a year. There are tons of other groups, but I can't remember right now. And groups that existed for a little while and broke up and all of that.

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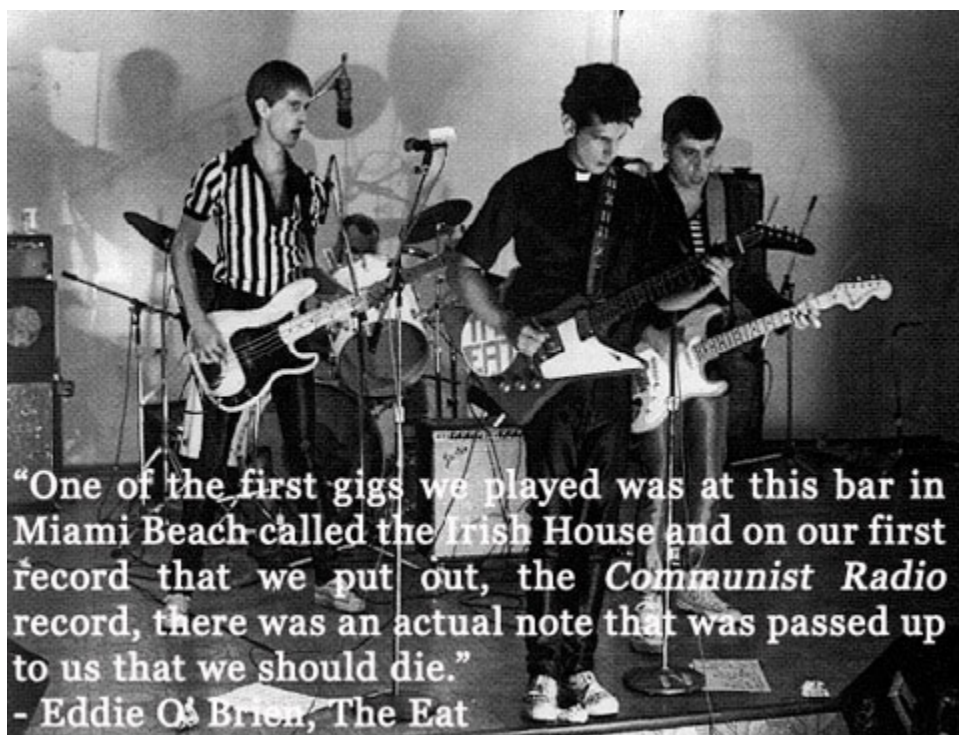
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Scene Point Blank: Was *Communist Radio* the only one of your records that was self-released?

Eddie O' Brien: We self-released everything. Well, that 10", the blue one, *Scattered Wahoo Action*, we self-released that as a cassette and then years later, this guy in Holland, I think maybe Jello [Biafra] turned this guy onto us or turned us on to him and then he put out the actual vinyl 10" of it.

Scene Point Blank: Was that the initial relationship with Jello, through that 10" on the Dutch label?

Eddie O' Brien: I guess so. You know, I remember when we still had the band together or we were right near the end that Jello had written a letter to us like in care of the local music store we had here called Open Books and Records that was owned by Ted Gottfried and Leslie Wimmer and they were sort of the rallying point of the little scene. They started a record label themselves called Open Records. They put out a real good compilation called *The Land That Time Forgot*.

Scene Point Blank: Oh, absolutely. That's a great one.

Eddie O' Brien: Yeah, we were on that and Charlie and a bunch of the bands from that period. But anyway, I think Jello sent that letter to the record store or to us in care of the record store telling us that he had liked us.

Scene Point Blank: How limited was that early vinyl?

Eddie O' Brien: I think it was 500 for *Communist Radio* and a 1,000 for the EP.

Scene Point Blank: When did you first hear of the prices those were commanding in terms of record auctions in later years?

Eddie O' Brien: I'm trying to remember exactly when, it gets really hazy, but I kind of think this was in the late 80's, somebody contacted us from a record distributor, contacted Chris Cottie our drummer and wanted to give us something like twenty bucks each for them. And we thought, this guy is nuts. We got as many as we could and sold them for twenty bucks each. And then I guess they probably sold for more. I guess. But whatever, we were happy...we thought the guy was crazy to give us twenty bucks each for them. That was like probably around the late 80's, yeah.

Scene Point Blank: Some of those auctions go up into the high three figures. Were there ever plans to reissue any of that stuff?

Eddie O' Brien: Yeah, there were plans, but they never came to fruition. And people kept bootlegging them. There must be about a dozen different bootlegs of them that I've seen on eBay.

Scene Point Blank: So everything that's been released afterwards in terms of 7"s has been unofficial bootlegs?

Eddie O' Brien: Yeah, well we did the two records when we were together, the single and the EP and we did that *Scattered Wahoo Action* that we put out on a cassette and that this guy Edwin in Holland later put out on vinyl. And we made that *Hialeah* record in the 90's, I guess early 90's, I can't remember exactly when and that was another EP we put out ourselves. Oh god, you're asking the wrong guy. I've tried to forget [laughs]. There was one of our friends here in town, Joe Harris had a little record company called Jeterboy Records and he put that out.

Scene Point Blank: That was the *Hialeah* 7"?

Eddie O' Brien: Yeah, the *Hialeah* 7".

Scene Point Blank: So was the 1996 Churchills Pub reunion show your first show back since the 80's?

Eddie O' Brien: No. We had played maybe two or three in between that I think. But I think on that show, lately all kinds of stuff has been popping up recently, but somebody gave me videotapes of those other shows that we did in 80's, the prior shows, and we were doing a lot of...we weren't playing punk rock, we were playing like long drawn out swampabilly jams and everything. I don't know what possessed us at the time, why we thought that was a good idea. But at that show in '96 I remember at that time my brother and Chris Cottie had a band that was playing called the Drug Czars. They had been talking to a lot of people and they had a little scene going too then. I was kind of retired from show business at the time. But they were telling me, look, all these people are interested in The Eat and I said c'mon. And so when we got together to rehearse we said let's just play the regular punk rock, just not play any long swampabilly jams, just play like a regular The Eat punk rock show like it was in the old days which is what we did. And it was real good. It turned out real good.

Scene Point Blank: Was the *Hialeah* material all written during the 90's or was some of that left over from earlier songwriting sessions?

Eddie O' Brien: You know what? I can't remember. I didn't write anything on it myself. The only thing I did was took one of my brother's older songs and rewrote the lyrics and that was the song "Hialeah." And that was really my brother's music. It was an old song that I rewrote the lyrics to. And all the other original material was all Michael's. Michael is a pretty prolific songwriter. He kept

writing all the time even when we didn't have a band together. He always had songs. He's writing songs now for the Drug Czars. He's just one of these guys that's driven to write songs. I was always kind of one of these guys that they said you have to write a song, I said, ok wait, let me get a piece of paper, I'll be back in an hour, you know? But Michael is a creative type that is driven to write no matter what. Even if he doesn't have an outlet for it, he's writing songs.

Scene Point Blank: That's interesting you mention there is some video footage out there because I was wondering if any video footage is going to be part of the Alternative Tentacles collection or if there are any plans for an Eat DVD.

Eddie O' Brien: Nobody mentioned it, but it's probably a good idea. But no, it's not part of the Alternative Tentacles thing. But we have them and we're passing them around. It didn't seem to us that anyone would be interested outside of us, but maybe there's some interest in it.

Scene Point Blank: Definitely. In a similar vein, I know that the *Slowly I Turn* Eat CD-R had a buzz for a while [*Slowly I Turn* is a CD-R collection of Eat material that was released prior to the Alternative Tentacles project]. Was that something that was just released by you guys?

Eddie O' Brien: Yeah, that was kind of something that Kenny and Michael put together and we just passed it around among the band members and friends and sort of thought that maybe we could put this out if we could get someone to pay for it. And the Alternative Tentacles thing came up, which I guess, is way better. It's the same stuff I think pretty much. It's mostly all the same material that was on that.

Scene Point Blank: What about the *Live In Lemon City* CD that was just released? That's a mix of live material, right?

Eddie O' Brien: Yeah, there's supposed to be a live CD with the Alternative Tentacles CD. That is why it's a double CD because of the live stuff. I'm not sure if it's the same live stuff from *Lemon City* or not. I know the *Lemon City* was thirteen tracks that my brother Michael picked out of all his stuff and then he took it over to my brother-in-law who has a recording studio and Michael went over there and juiced it up a little bit, as best he could.

Scene Point Blank: Yeah, it ended up sounding great. And I'm glad you mention the song selection because the CD has a lot of great stage banter in between songs and I'm guessing that was part of the decision in selecting certain tracks.

Eddie O' Brien: Yeah I guess, but the truth is it's mostly me shooting my mouth off and to me it's a little bit odd or maybe embarrassing to hear like a drunk twenty-five year old version of yourself shooting his stupid mouth off. If it was me I might not have put it on there, but it was Michael who did it and it's some funny stuff.

Scene Point Blank: And I think that's great in terms of the appeal of a live CD because it really captures what the moment was and what that era...

Eddie O' Brien: What we used to do when we played live anyway...we used to all drink a bit and get up there and we just...out of a sixty minute set fifteen minutes of it was bullshit. It definitely captures it.

Scene Point Blank: I know a 12" came out recently that contains a set from the Polish American Club in 1981. Was that released by you guys?

Eddie O' Brien: No. I know a little bit about it. There's a guy, a friend of ours from the old days named, his punk rock name is Lou Ming and he has a website where he's got a ton of this Florida stuff that he puts on CD's and sells, but I don't think he makes a lot of money or any money probably on it, it's more of a doing it for the love of music type of deal. But he was selling that live at the Polish American Club thing and then somebody I guess got a hold of that and made it into vinyl. We don't care that much about people doing stuff like that. We're not making, nobody's making a shitload of money on it. So it's kind of nice. We emailed the guy and extorted like ten copies of the record for ourselves.

Scene Point Blank: When did the plans for the Alternative Tentacles collection get rolling? I know there's been buzz about it for a couple of years now.

Eddie O' Brien: Yeah, I guess it's been going for a couple of years. There's a guy who used to live here in South Florida, Justin McNeil and he lives out there in SF with you guys and he is associated with Alternative Tentacles or Jello in some way and he's the one who kind of ramrodded it. I don't know if he actually works for Alternative Tentacles or works with them, but I think he's the one who mostly ramrodded it. It took kind of a long time. About two years I guess. Most of it because we couldn't get it together and couldn't agree on shit and all of that. We're not recording or anything. It's all old stuff.

Scene Point Blank: Was anything remastered for the collection?

Eddie O' Brien: Well, I think again my brother took it into my brother-in-law's recording studio and fooled around with it a little bit. And I think the Alternative Tentacles guys fooled around with it. I haven't heard it yet really. I haven't heard the finished... what rolls off the production line. So I don't know. I hope it sounds good. Or as best as it can sound cause most of it, probably half of it was stuff that we made on a four track in the basement in the first place and then dumped and dumped and dumped half track to half track and it was pretty lo-fi stuff to being with. And the live stuff, some of it is like handheld cassette mics held up in the dance floor and stuff like that. Yeah, it's all pretty lo-fi.

Scene Point Blank: From what I read I get the impression that they were able to do a good job cleaning up a lot of that stuff.

Eddie O' Brien: Good [laughs].

Scene Point Blank: Unfortunately Chris passed a few years back, but are there any plans for some live shows following the release of the Alternative Tentacles collection?

Eddie O' Brien: Yeah, I guess. We're kind of kicking around the idea now. We have a couple friends that could probably fill in. I don't know if it's a good idea or not personally. I'm kind of ambivalent about it myself, but Kenny and Michael are into it, so we've kind of agreed in principle to do it, but we haven't actually got to the point of having rehearsals or anything like that yet. We'll just play a couple of gigs around Miami probably, that's all.

Scene Point Blank: Is there anything lately that you've been listening to that you'd like to turn our readers on to?

Eddie O' Brien: I've been listening to stuff that's like... I probably never listen to anything that's newer than fifty years old. I've been listening to that Anthology of American Folk Music, Leadbelly, I listen to Bob Wills, I listen to old jazz, Charlie Parker, stuff like that. Yeah, I don't know what's going on in the modern world of music. I don't know anything about it.

Scene Point Blank: Thank you so much for doing the interview. It was a pleasure.

Words: [Mike B.](#) | Graphics: [Matt](#)

- The Eat Website: <http://www.mindspring.com/~wrcz/theeat/>

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