



"What's happening in Florida is bizarro; bands like Deicide and Death are total Satan metal. I think they really have something to say to the youth of America."

—Thurston Moore, *Sonic Youth* guitarist, as quoted in the metal magazine-on-video, *Video Sheet Metal*

LABELING THE FLORIDIAN METAL SCENE "total Satan" music isn't quite right, but there's definitely some heavy shit coming out of the Gator State. Aggressive, brutal, raw, uncomfortable, insane, bloody. . . . Wait a minute, this is the land of sunshine, orange juice, Anita Bryant, and Disney World—an amusement park of astounding proportions, twice the size of Manhattan and where, according to a recent *Time* magazine article, more than nine tons of manmade snow fall at Sea World's "Penguin Encounter" daily. But it's also an outpost of America that has spawned a few Ted Bundy wannabes. And the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints owns ten times more land in Florida than Disney. I came to Tampa in search of the bloody heart of rock'roll. I found it. *Bizarro* indeed.

It's a safe bet that Florida bands like Death, Deicide, Malevolent Creation, and Obituary are saying *something* to the youth of America—and what they're saying isn't pretty. The music is speed

tampa, florida

metal one step beyond, almost too fast to slam your head to. The vocals scream about all manner of death and destruction—heavy-metal fantasies plucked straight from the underworld—a 14-year-old's daydream, but just like in never-never land, Who really wants to grow up anyway?

THE YOUNG MUSICIAN WHO WALKS INTO Morrisound Recording in Tampa—where much of this hell is laid down for public consumption—has just taken a major step toward adulthood. He's a proud new dad, and like most proud new dads he is carrying around a few Polaroids of the little dude to show his friends. Though unlike most new fathers, Glen Benton, bassist and intoner for Deicide, has an inverted six-inch cross branded into his forehead, which today is covered with a metal-plate crucifix, and his son has been named Daemon—the Latin version meaning master of the supernatural. The "little devil" has already got a song dedicated to him called "Satan Spawn the Cacodaemon," which will be on Deicide's next album. Benton goes on to explain that one of the best parts of watching the birth was the placenta coming out

afterward and how he tried to talk the doctor into letting him take it home with him. "I have a jar of formaldehyde at the house and I wanted to add the placenta to the collection," Glen elaborates. "I've got my tonsils and my grandmother's kidney stones in there. But the doctor wouldn't let me because the afterbirth starts to decay and can spread infection."

Benton's band Deicide, which means "the killing of all that is holy," is an extreme example of this scene. The band spreads its own death-metal infection to all that are willing to listen. Along with Benton, members Eric and Brian Hoffman on guitars and Steve Asheim on drums are heavily into self-mutilation and the deliverance through their songs of the gospel according to Beelzebub. Benton reburns the cross into his forehead the third Sunday of every month, explaining, "My crosses would always go flying off when we played, so I figured I'd make it permanent. I usually keep my plate on it because when people see it all deep, they freak. It's a trademark of my beliefs." With songs like "Oblivious to Evil" and "Sacrificial Suicide" it ain't much of a secret what those beliefs are, but if you're still in the dark, here are some helpful hints from the master's mouth: "I straight out say that I want to kill Christians. I won't use subliminal words to get my point across. Christianity is like love your neighbor and let everybody walk all over

HIT AND BOTHERED

Floridian death metal — an E-ticket ride through hell in the land of amusement parks and serial killers. It's loud and it's ugly, and as your guide LAUREN SPENCER reminds you, keep all hands and feet inside the ride until it comes to a complete stop.

Deicide's Glen Benton:
A Floridian death-metal dude for our times?

Photographs /Art by Rene Miville

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you; in the satanic beliefs it's about controlling your destiny and being your own god." At their live shows you can be your own personal Jesus with the help of a few bloody props. While the band plays in full-on spiked armor, a slew of cat livers and guts are turned loose on the audience members, who thoughtfully throw them back on the band where they will inevitably get stuck on the Deicide dudes' metal. "The whole place becomes encased in the smell of rotting flesh and it becomes one large food fight," says Benton. "When the meat is going around with the nails on the armor and there's guts hanging off you, it's insane. This stuff is real."

What the hell is happening in Florida?

A friend of mine who'd interviewed Benton recently got this choice theory from him: "It's so fucking hot down here, all you can

must have been in the mood to piss someone off when he formed Mantis. Eight months later the name of the band was changed to Death and Schuldiner is given credit by many as the man who kick-started death metal into action. According to Burns, "Chuck is the modern-day founder of death metal—not to say there wasn't dark metal happening before, but at the time nobody had ever coined the name death metal and nobody had ever taken such an extreme stance as to call a band Death."

Tom Morris, co-owner of Morrisound Recording, chuckles. "They were gonna call it Chuck metal, but it didn't sound right."

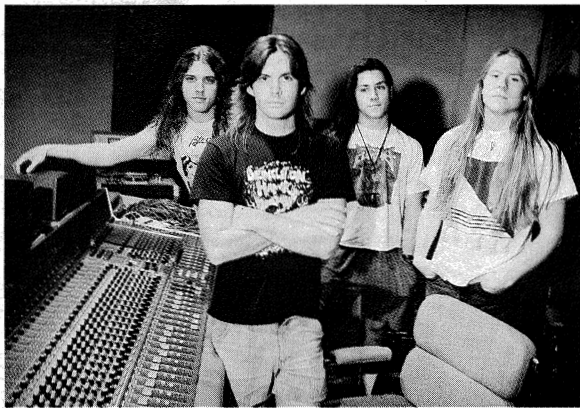
Borivoj Krgin, assistant editor at *Metal Maniacs* magazine and someone who's been instrumental in getting a lot of these bands signed to labels, adds, "Chuck was basically the only thing around in Florida in that genre of music for quite a while

It's a safe bet that Florida bands like Death, Deicide, and Obituary are saying something to the youth of America—and what they're saying isn't pretty.

Giorgio from San Francisco's Sadus—is recording its fourth album, and bands like Obituary and Malevolent Creation are spawning madly, as record labels hatch the eggs. "It's the most amazing thing how easy it is now to get signed," says Schuldiner.

it up with everything from Sacred Reich to Scatterbrain, while supporting the scene with in-studio interviews and tracks by local bands. All three of these guys are credited with bringing Tampa's brutal sound to the rest of the baffled world.

On the live tip, a club like the Rock-It, tucked in between fast food chains, car dealerships, and strip malls, is not unlike any hole in the wall found in Any City, U.S.A. With half-dressed cocktail waitresses with names like Bambi and spandex-stretched metal dudes riffing their way through hour-long sets, you can bet your crucifix there won't be any reality expansion here. These clubs depend on girls who'll attract guys who'll buy each other drinks and then buy each other more drinks while halfway ignoring the band onstage. A user-friendly experience. There are exceptions—a band like Silent Scream, which is loud and



Left to right: Death, in the studio with producer Scott Burns; Tampa's new breed, the Guff; 98Rocks's Brain Medlin partner in crime, Keith Collins.

think of is hell." That almost sums it up, but there must be more to it than that.

THESE BANDS MAKE SLAYER LOOK mellow, which is a weird thought," says Scott Burns, producer extraordinaire and the man most likely to be found listed on the sleeve of a slew of death metal recordings. He reigns over Tampa's Morrisound Recording where bands from all over the world come to enlist his services. "I don't think there's anything prophetic about death metal," he continues. "I think it's an extreme movement for the time and it's killer but in a couple of years another extreme movement will take its place."

Writer Kevin Sharp says, "Ten years ago it was Black Flag, now it's just packaged a little differently. There will always be a fourteen-year-old kid who'll want to piss off the parents or neighbors."

Back in 1983, Chuck Schuldiner

and that's why I think he's had a lot of problems, especially early on, finding members."

Indeed Schuldiner has gone through an onslaught of personnel changes and, as with any scene that becomes incestuous, this can lead to all manner of bad blood and rumors.

"I started when this was the most unacceptable music ever," says Schuldiner. "People would laugh at us and say what you're doing is a joke. When the band started we were in high school and everyone else would play covers and mainstream stuff. They thought we were just noise. Everyone told me you'll never make it, that music will never be popular."

But per usual, the rest of the world just needed some time to catch up, and eight years later it seems people are ready to take the journey to hell. Death—currently rounded out with Sean Reinert and Paul Masvidal from Miami's Cynic and Steve Di-

"You can almost guarantee that if you're from Florida in a death metal band you'll get signed. Death metal, Florida—it's the connection."

Bands may come to Tampa to suck off the scene, but as far as catching any death metal shows live in the city, this is less of a reality. There are a few ways to find the source. There's Ace's record store, run by Frank Dancsecs. It has the most extensive selection of metal this side of the Mason-Dixon line. Morbid Angel's Dave Vincent and Obituary's James Murphy both work there when they're not on the road, and although it's only open on the weekends (due to the fact that the store is in a flea market) kids flock to it to get a clue on what's happening. There's also *The Pit*, a radio show on 98-Rock that is overseen by Brian Medlin and his partner Keith Collins, formerly of Savatage—a seminal Florida metal band. Every Saturday night from midnight to two they mix

fast, seems to be on the edge of aggressive. But it's not extreme or misunderstood.

Those bands are usually found rehearsing in the rec rooms of nice suburban houses, where mom may be watching *Wheel of Fortune* while her son and his band make beautiful noise in the next room. The Guff is one of those bands, and while not on the pure death metal train, the band's lyrics are a slap of reality and their music is definitely loud enough to get attention. Burns produced the Guff's demo tape, which has done well on metal stations the world over. "But it's easy to get overlooked here if you're not death metal," says guitarist Mike Cutolo.

"That sound has definitely faded out a lot of bands that were in existence a year ago," says bassist Joel DeAngelis.

"The stuff we play is aggressive," Cutolo continues, "but when we opened for Deicide we were sur-