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MUSIC

Lawless shows the real him

By Mark Madden
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After years of writing typical heavy-metal tributes to sex and alcohol, W.A.S.P.'s Blackie Lawless lets you see the real him on the group's new LP, "The Headless Children." He says its been a long time coming.

"These lyrics are thoughts I've had since before W.A.S.P. formed," Lawless said. "I'd have written them sooner, but I didn't think anyone cared. It turns out they do."

"The Headless Children" features a blazing cover of The Who's "The Real Me," but anti-drug and anti-violence themes are also addressed. For a guy who used to toss raw meat to the audience, wear an exploding codpiece and be a favorite target of the Parents' Music Resource Center, old Blackie comes off as a pretty responsible guy.

"I really never thought of it that way," said the singer/guitarist. "I have inspiration for lyrics like on the album every day. You just need to see some catastrophe like the slaughter in China and they come out."

"That said, this is the heaviest record we've done. We haven't changed our sound. I know the lyrics aren't typical rock 'n' roll, but show me where it's written that we've all painted ourselves into corners."

W.A.S.P.'s live show has progressed as well. Lawless used to simulate the decapitation of a scantily clad woman on stage and drink blood from a hollow human skull, but now he just lets the audience do what it does at home — watch TV.

"The drum riser levitates and becomes a giant TV in mid-show, and we show how the famous villains on 'The Headless Children' cover became famous," Lawless said. "This is the TV generation, right? It's a very emotional show."

Despite the change in approach, Lawless doesn't regret W.A.S.P.'s gory days.

"We did all that, it was great, we still do songs like 'Blind In Texas' and 'Wild Child,' and we always will. But that period's over."

"I think we have a different audience than we did in those days, and I'm sure the hard-core people who were really into the blood and guts are resisting our change in direction. But they don't really listen to the music anyway. The audience we have now should be more stable and faithful."

Speaking of faithful (but not stable), Lawless recently met the inspiration for his style of lyrics, Who guitarist Pete Townshend, at The Who's Radio City Music Hall show in New York City.

"I'd had some correspondence with Pete before," Lawless said. "I sent him a copy of the tape in February, figuring I'd never hear from him, but a couple weeks later I got a letter saying how much he liked it, including 'The Real Me.' And he signed it, 'Love, Pete.'"

"So, I met him at Radio City Music Hall and we took a photo and talked. I learned the craft of writing lyrics from him, and to sit and talk with him was great. It turned into a real musician thing."

When asked if he could see soldiering on at 44 a la Townshend, Lawless replied, "Well, I'm 32 and a fitness nut. As long as I can do it with quality I'll do it. But there's nothing worse than a band going through the motions."

"That's why I'm so proud of Pete. He's got a bad problem with his hearing, but he still has the fire. When he gets on stage, he starts windmilling and jumping. He can't help himself. The music takes over. That's what rock 'n' roll's all about."

If you're going

W.A.S.P. headlines a three-act metal show at Penn Hills' City Limits tomorrow night at 7:30 with Accept and Metal Church.



Blackie Lawless

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