

THE AQUARIAN

WEEKLY



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Fu Manchu

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PHOTO BY JERAMI JOHNSON

by JJ Koczan

It's hard to believe, but upon issuing *We Must Obey* this week through Century Media's rock imprint, Liquor & Poker Music, SoCal hard rock quartet Fu Manchu have reached the milestone of their 10th album. The full-length comes on the heels of the *Hung Out To Dry* EP released late last year. What began in simpler times (1994) with *No One Rides For Free* on Bong Load Records has carried the band across the world and down through such post-grunge rock classics as *King Of The Road* and *California Crossing*, each maintaining a sound at once laid back and driving, evident of the band's Golden State home.

For *We Must Obey*, however, the band (Scott Hill on vocals/guitar, Brad Davis on bass, Bob Balch on guitar and Scott Reeder—no, not *that* Scott Reeder—on drums) have upped the aggression factor, drawing inspiration from their roots in the early west coast hardcore scene. Of course, it's all channeled through the band's signature fuzz-laden tone, which is even more present now than on their last offering, 2004's *Start The Machine*, their first and only album on DRT Entertainment (Clutch, Powerman 5000).

They'll be at the Knitting Factory in NYC on Monday, March 19, but when I spoke to Hill, the plans for the tour had not yet been finalized. He was excited, however, about the band's shift in sound and louder, meatier direction. **What happened with DRT?**

It just kind of wasn't what we expected. When we first signed to them, it was a lot of, 'Yeah, we'll do what we gotta do to keep you guys out on the road and we'll push the record.' Then, when the record came out, we did a

couple tours and it kind of fizzled out from there. It didn't seem like a lot of help from the label.

At first it was cool, but we're used to staying out on the road for a year or so for a record, and I think they were just kind of like, 'Put the record out, get the guys out there on tour and see how it does.' At least that's how we felt.

So, at the end of a few tours, it really wasn't as much support as we needed, you could say.

Start The Machine was your ninth record. One would think they'd be able to get a feel for your touring cycle.

Yeah, we can pretty much tour and be self-sufficient and stuff, but we do need some tour support sometimes. It's just that we didn't feel that we were getting the kind of support we needed from the label. They're all cool and stuff, but at the end of the day it just wasn't what we were looking for.

And making the jump to Century Media—were there other candidates there, or was it just like, 'These guys have it down, let's go'?

When we were talking with DRT, Century Media were talking with us as well back then. They wanted to sign us to Liquor & Poker, which was kind of a new label at the time—so was DRT—but we went with DRT because our friends Clutch were on that and they had good things to say about the label.

So we did that, and as soon as we got off DRT, we got contacted by Century Media/Liquor & Poker, and they have their stuff down when it comes to hard rock and heavy music in general, so it was a no-brainer just to go with them.

Since you guys weren't touring as much, putting out the *Hung Out To Dry* seven inch and EP, was that kind

of a way of keeping momentum going for the full-length?

What it was, was that we were in the studio doing the new record and the guys from the label came down and we were talking to them and they said they'd been wanting to do a gatefold seven inch/CD release. And we were like, 'Yeah, that sounds cool, we're totally into that kind of stuff,' and they said, 'You guys are the perfect band we'd like to do it with.'

And they took two songs from the record, and we went back in the studio and recorded another song just for the EP, and we covered 'DOA' by Van Halen just for the EP. But it was just like, 'Here's a couple new songs from the record that's coming out and a couple more that you can only get here.'

A gatefold CD/vinyl combo is a pretty unique idea.

I've never seen it. We're big fans of vinyl, we like to release all our stuff on vinyl, and when they came to us, we were all, 'Yeah, let's do it. If we've got to go back and record a couple songs for it, let's do it.'

The album is back to your roots too, in terms of sound.

Bob and I pulled out the old fuzz pedals we hadn't used for a while. Things are a little dirtier sounding, a little heavier. I guess it's going back a little. We try to go forward as much as possible, but sometimes you've got to take a step back, I suppose.

The last one was very slick sounding, had very clean tone, so coming off that, it's not surprising you might want to move it in a different direction.

Yeah, we definitely wanted to change up some guitar tones and I think the new record is easily the most aggres-

sive, fastest thing we've done. And we wanted to match the songs, get a fuzzier, dirtier guitar tone, and Bob and I both pulled out the old fuzz pedals, plugged in and there you go.

Was that something that, when you sat down and started writing, you said, 'Okay, let's take this direction,' or was it just how it came out?

It's just kind of how it came out. I think the last couple records, *Start The Machine* especially, were kind of veering towards a more aggressive sound, sludgier, mid-tempo stuff, and I remember I just kept coming to practice with all these aggressive, kind of weird breaks, stops and starts songs, and that's just how it developed.

It's just what we were into writing at the time, and like I said, we just wanted to match the songs with a fuzzier, dirtier guitar tone. I'm a big fan of old, early-'80s hardcore punk rock stuff. That's kind of all I listen to, so I kind of infused that Black Flag, Minor Threat and Blue Cheer, I kind of mixed all that together. **How do you feel about hitting the 10th record mark?**

I didn't even know it was our 10th (laughs), but I feel very fortunate that we're even around still playing, still able to put out records, people still coming out to the shows. We're setting up tours right now and we've got tours in the works for US, Europe and Australia. Feel very lucky that we're even able to still do this.

I talked to Finn Ryan from The Atomic Bitchwax not too long ago. He says hi. I asked him if there was something in the music that was specifically NJ, and he told me that, the way he put it was that when the East Coast says 'fuck you,' it means they like you, and on the West Coast,

everybody's more laid back and friendly, but they don't really mean it.

That's kind of a good description. There is a lot of good laid back stuff here on the West Coast, but when we say 'Fuck you,' I guess we actually mean fuck you. (laughs) Our record, I guess you could say, is a big 'fuck you.' It's a pretty good description.

We all live right at the beach. I pretty much surf all day, come home and practice, go on tour, write songs. So, you know, it is kind of laid back, but at the same time, our record and songs are anything but laid back.

Again, we didn't set out to write a real aggressive record, but I think a lot of influences come from the '80s punk rock stuff mixed with the old '70s stuff. **Is there something in your music that you feel is specifically Californian, aside from that punk influence?**

I don't know if it's specifically in our music. It might be in some of our artwork. We've done cars at the beach, skateboarding, muscle cars, choppers. Some of the artwork is definitely Southern California.

People say I have a laid back style of singing, so that might be evident of a more laid back Southern California feel in our music. But I don't know if there's specifically one type of thing.

We Must Obey is available now via Century Media. Catch Fu Manchu live at the Knitting Factory in NYC March 19. For more info and updated tour schedules, check out fu-manchu.com and myspace.com/fumanchu