



Laura Jane Grace on Her Delinquent Past and Against Me!'s Future

"I feel like there's still room for the band to grow, and I just want to keep doing that," she tells Rolling Stone

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Against Me! went through some changes between their fifth album (2010's *White Crosses*) and their sixth album (the excellent new *Transgender Dysphoria Blues*). An experiment with being major-label punks ended with Sire dropping them. A tree fell through the roof of their recording studio. Half the band quit. And lead singer Laura Jane Grace, formerly known as Tom Gabel, came out as a transgender woman – first to the people in her life, then to the world [via Rolling Stone](#).

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We recently met with Grace and guitarist James Bowman at a hotel in North Hollywood, California, sitting by the pool in the winter sunshine. Bowman disconnected the hotel's PA system so we could talk, while Grace showed off the tattoos covering her feet.

Is *Transgender Dysphoria Blues* a concept album?

Laura Jane Grace: I was writing under the guise of making a concept record, creating a narrative that strung the songs together. A lot of the songs deal with gender and dysphoria.

James Bowman: I remember one practice, I was listening to the lyrics, and there must have been a look on my face, because you said, "I'm working on a concept record." I was like, "Okay, a concept record. That makes sense. People do that."

Were you making a concept record to put a thin veneer over the autobiographical elements?

LJG: Yeah. A lot of it had to do initially with not confronting the issue. But then there was no need after a while. The concept originally was that it was going to be about a transsexual prostitute. The transsexual part of that being obvious, the prostitute part coming from the major-label experience and feeling like you'd been run through the wringer.

Tell me about "Two Coffins."

LJG: "Two Coffins" is a song I wrote for my daughter. It's about realizing your own mortality: someday I'm going to die, my daughter is going to die, and you have no idea the changes that are going to happen between now and then, and what you're going to lose along the way. She sings it, and it's kind of heartbreaking.

Has your stage wardrobe been evolving?

LJG: The color black is always going to be a staple with me, but a lot of it is figuring out what works. It's not like I came out in *Rolling Stone* and all of a sudden I had a closet full of all the clothes I want. And being totally absorbed in making a record, it doesn't leave a lot of time to go shopping.

When you came out, who surprised you as being cooler than you thought they would be?

LJG: I guess you [James]. Not that I thought you'd be a dick. Going through all this, so much has happened and we're still standing by each other. When I was fourteen years old, the first day I met James, if you had asked me "Do you think you'll be 33 years old, openly transsexual, having played in a band together for 17 years, sitting at a hotel in North Hollywood, doing an interview with Rolling Stone together?" I'd say, "Fuck no, you're out of your mind."

What did you think of each other when you first met?

LJG: It was the first day of high school [in Naples, Florida], and I was a nervous punk kid. Then I saw a green Mohawk go down the hall.

JB: I got in a lot of trouble for that Mohawk.

LJG: It became a solid group of friends because there weren't many punks, and everyone sat together at lunch. We went to all the shows we could, coordinating a parent to drive us, and then we all started playing in our first bands together. What people don't realize when they talk about our lineup changes is that the original Against Me! broke up in 2001. It never recorded a full-length record. We did one tour, got hit by a semi truck at the end of it, and the band disintegrated.

Literally?

LJG: Yeah. We were seventy-five miles north of Georgia, and we had just stopped at Wendy's and gotten some French fries with the last of our money. I was driving. It was about ten at night. I looked in the side-view mirror and I saw a semi truck's headlights, and I knew it was too close. Then it hit the back right corner of our van. Our two left tires blew out. We rolled like four times and landed upside-down on the side of the road.

Was anyone seriously hurt?

LJG: Jordan [Kleeman] tore his ACL ligament, and that was it. Kevin [Mahon], who was the drummer at the time, was crushed under the gear every time we rolled, but he was surprisingly the first one out of the van. We were all really lucky.

JB: We were the only two wearing seatbelts, and I had mine behind my back. So fucking stupid. My head went through the windshield.

What haven't you done yet that you'd like to?

LJG: I feel like there's still room for the band to grow, and I just want to keep doing that. After a point, you're a lifer. Are you going to become a lawyer or a doctor at this point?

JB: No, no. I'm a high-school dropout and a felon.

LJG: When we were younger, we both got arrested. When I was fourteen years old, I got arrested for battering an officer and resisting arrest with violence. I was beat up by the cops and they charged me with that. There was no original arresting charge.

JB: I was arrested for grand theft. I was fifteen, I think. It was a 1972 convertible Mercedes-Benz. It was really nice. But it was not mine.

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