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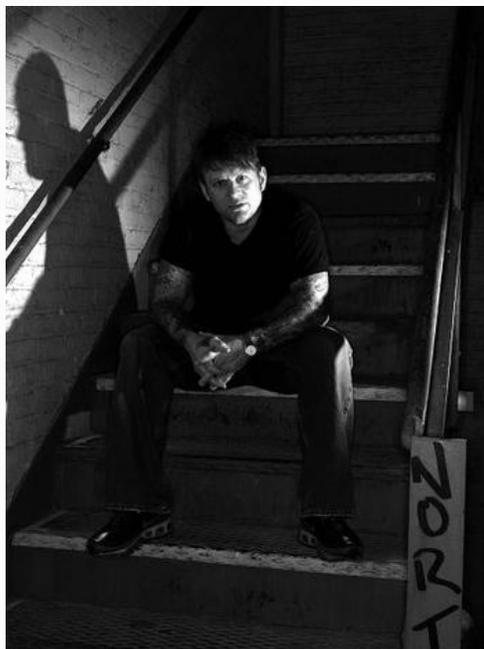
Q&A With John Joseph of the Cro-Mags, Playing Churchill's This Sunday

By Arielle Castillo Fri., Feb. 26 2010 at 10:11 AM
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If you spotted John Joseph on the street and didn't know any better, you'd probably quicken your pace. Though he's now 47 years old, the New York hardcore god is a compact, tattoo-covered package of brawn who could easily kick the ass of a poser half his age. And at one point, as the frontman of the notoriously volatile Cro-Mags, he probably would.



courtesy of punkhouse.org

Yes, the Cro-Mags's most famous album, 1986's *Age of Quarrel*, was a brutal piece of work. A couple of indicative song titles: "Show You No Mercy" and "Street Justice." It charges with punk fury, but in its sonic pummeling, laid the groundwork for the heavy-ing of hardcore. The record can sound downright melodic compared to the thuggish, breakdown-addicted straightedge hardcore acts of later years, but the initial seeping-in of metal was groundbreaking.

But times have changed. These days, Joseph is just as likely to hold forth on healthy, interconnected and sustainable living as he is on the laws of the street. He was at the forefront of what was dubbed, for better or for worse, the "krishna-core" faction of early New York hardcore. And though he broke with the religion's controversial establishment, ISKCON, he still follows its original principles as set forth by its founder, Swami

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Prabhupada.

And in Joseph's view, the latest karmic violators are corporate agricultural titans like Monsanto. For a brain-melting trip that will leave you questioning everything you eat, just get him talking about industrial corn and soybeans. (Or check out his new book, *Meat Is For Pussies*, due out April 15.)

All this is not such a stretch, though. After all, one of the biggest crowd favorites from *Age of Quarrel*, "We Gotta Know," warned that the only way to escape life's shackles is by using one's brain. (There was also another song on the record titled "World Peace.")

Let's get this clear, though: John Joseph has not gone soft. His righteousness is well-deserved through years of hardship, hard living, and finally, deliverance. (For details, you can read his Dickensian 2007 memoir, *The Evolution of a Cro-Magnon*.) And when he leads the Cro-Mags live, he's just as possessed as ever. The band's history has been fraught with internal fighting, and in this iteration, features just Joseph and drummer Mackie Jayson as original members. As long as Joseph's in the band, though, it's good to go, and the songs will still rage.

In advance of the show, Crossfade caught up with Joseph by phone earlier this week. Here's what he had to say, in all its lengthy glory, about 21st-century farming, superfoods, and, oh yeah, the Cro-Mags' legacy.

With the Attack, Nobody's Hero, Trust No One, OPS, Harbinger, Hivemind, and others. 7:30 p.m. Sunday, February 28. Churchill's Pub, 5501 NE Second Ave., Miami. Tickets cost \$10 in advance, \$12 at the door. Ages 18 and up; 305-757-1807; churchillspub.com

Crossfade: It's been almost four years since there's been any Cro-Mags release, and a while since the band came down all the way to South Florida. What made you decide it was time for a full-on tour? Also, are you playing as the "Cro-Mags (Jam)," as you've done a couple times recently, or just as the Cro-Mags?

John Joseph: It's the Cro-Mags. We didn't want to ruffle no feathers, but then we figured, yo, we have the right to the name as much as anybody else. Every show's been selling out because people want to come out and not deal with any of this negativity and drama that was part of the other half of the band. Actually, people say it's the best lineup since the original lineup.

You mean the *Age of Quarrel* lineup?

Yeah, the *Age of Quarrel* lineup, when we had everyone in the band, you know. Craig [Setari, the Cro-Mags' current bassist] is a veteran from Sick of it all, and AJ [Novello, guitarist] has been playing in the band for 20 years. Like I said, we just do it for the vibes. Music's a part of my life, and you know, it's part of what I do. I love to express myself musically.

Who actually has the legal rights to the Cro-Mags name?

I don't want to talk about legal stuff, because it's in litigation. Put it this way: When me and Mackie left the band, the other individuals trademarked the name. But just because somebody leaves the band, it doesn't give anybody the permission to trademark the name, then sell the stuff and block you from using the name. That's as far as I'll go on that subject. That's what's up. We'll see what happens. For now, come out and have a good time, and that's it.



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Well, I was going to ask you if you're speaking to Harley Flanagan, the band's original bassist, but I'm guessing the answer is no.

The answer to that is a double negative. I just talked to [Kevin] Parris [Mayhew, the band's original guitarist] a couple weeks ago. I said I had no beef. And Parris, finally after 20 years said, "Yo, you and Mackie are original members." Yeah, no kidding! But I'm cool, I don't have any beef with anybody.

Parris is not saying anything against us using the name, because he went and sold one of my songs to a video game. He collects the royalties off the iTunes stuff. So he's not gonna say anything against me doing what we're doing, because you can't do a bunch of stuff like that and then say, "You can't go play as the Cro-Mags." He's a little more level-headed and down to earth, and that's why we had a talk.

You came to Churchill's not long ago with your other project, Bloodclot. Are you still doing that? If so, what makes you decide to tour with one band or the other?

I was doing both, it was never one or the other. Bloodclot was just a side project with other members, and we tried to make it a band, but other individuals had other priorities, so it didn't pan out. To me it's about music, so whether it's with this band or that band.... Me and Mackie, before CBGBs closed, did "the Bad Brains featuring John Joseph and Mackie Jayson." Everyone tries to put these rules over music and all this stuff, but I don't care about the politics of all this band stuff. I just want to play music, and that's what's up. In some way, shape, or form, I'm always gonna be playing.

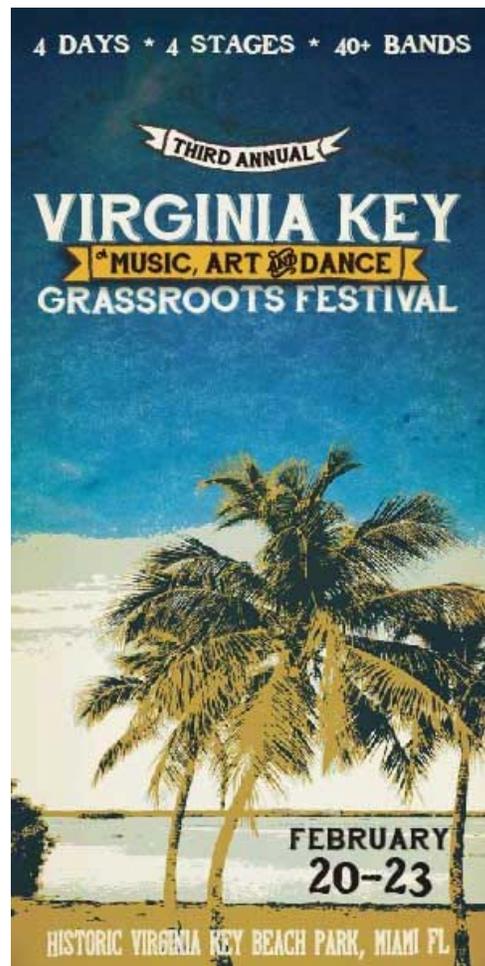
How's your company, Punkhouse, going? I was just wearing that shirt you sell that says "Always Believe Your Own Bullshit."

Yes, that saying was from a famous junkie hustler named Mike Debris, from New York. Punkhouse, we're revamping the whole web site. [*Evolution of a Cro-Magnon*] sold out of the first pressing; we're in the second pressing. We're launching a whole T-shirt line.... Just a bunch of good stuff.

I'm doing an all-natural superfood line. I'm branching out more into the health stuff, because my new book is all about vegan health, and the polluting of the food system by the government and the corporations. It's called *Meat is for Pussies* and it drops April 15. I'm opening a fast food vegan restaurant in New York. And we've got some more books coming through Punkhouse.

Are you publishing the meat book yourself, with Punkhouse?

We have another publishing company for that. We have two publishing companies, one is called Crush Publishing, and the other one is called Punkhouse. One is going to be more health. I'm doing a vegan cookbook, and vegan training DVDs, with a whole bunch of dudes who do top levels of fitness, Ironman, kickboxing, and muay thai to get in shape. That's the problem - a lot of the workout systems, they don't know anything about nutrition. You have to combine the two.



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What's your personal workout regimen like?

I'm training for an Ironman now, so I run, I do boxing, kickboxing, swimming, biking. I hit the weights, I do plyometrics, yoga, just whatever. I keep moving, and it's the same with the Cro-mags. That's a workout in itself.

This will be your first Ironman, right?

Yes, it's my first one. I've done triathlons, and Olympic distance triathlons. But the Ironman is a 2.2-mile ocean swim, then over 100 miles on the bike, and then a 26.2 mile marathon at the end. I've done all of those individually, but to sit there and do them, consecutively.... I'm not looking to shatter any records.

I'm doing that in 2011, so this whole year I'll be doing little races, marathons, and stuff like that, to try to get in as much practice as possible. It's hard because even the whole triathlon series, it kind of falls in line with the same time that I'll be touring. Like last year I trained for the New York City triathlon and then I was on the road. It's tough to juggle it. I'll probably take time off from touring next year to really focus on training a lot.

What's your superfood product about? Is it like the other greens drink powders out right now?

It's a whole line of products -- powders, tablets, all organic, no GMO, and a lot of it is going to be raw food supplements. I'm working with **Dr. Fred Biscie** - he's an 80-year-old raw foodist who runs ultramarathons, and he has Ph.D in nutritional science. He wrote the foreword to my new book. He's a brilliant, brilliant man. He's overseeing the site, and we're working closely with him, because we want his input on everything, so it can be the best that it can be.

It'll be probiotics and systemic enzymes for joints, vitamins, green powders, superfood green powders of like, the top-quality, raw-food organic spirulina, chlorella, alfalfa, wheatgrass powder, and things to clean the intestines.... Just everything.

Of course you've followed a vegan diet for a long time, but have you now gone raw?

I eat a lot of raw, yeah. I'm not all raw, but I would say more than half of my diet is. I juice every day. It's about the live enzymes of the food, that's what fights cancer and all this stuff. That's why there's a big push by the GMO companies, like Monsanto, now, to stop organic farming, because people are realizing that if you change your diet and get to the greens and superfoods, 90 percent of disease is diet-related. Everyone tries to act like it's genetic. But everyone has cancer cells. It just depends on how you live your life. If you're ingesting free radicals with all this food and all this crap, you're gonna get cancer.

That's why now, the government and the GMO companies and the pharmaceutical companies are all behind pushing this agenda called **Codex-Alimentarius**. Anyone can find out what exactly this is, and how we have to stop it. People start talking saying it's conspiracy theories and all this crap. This ain't conspiracy theory. They *are* doing this. If you go on thenhf.com, click on "Codex" and see what they're getting ready to do, and are already doing.

Here's McCain saying we have to cut down and put limits on supplements. And everyone thinks Obama is making all this change. Let me tell you something: Look at who he put in charge of agriculture in this country. The food czars are three top Monsanto people. All of these people are high-level CEOs of Monsanto! Now they have government positions where they're ratifying the food system in this country.

Now all food has to be irradiated - why would you want to ingest radiation? But what it does is, it kills the phytonutrients in the plants. And it kills the nutrients and the enzymes

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in the food. So basically, your food is now rendered useless. It looks like a tomato or lettuce or spinach, but it has no nutritional value. In turn, you become dependent on the drug companies to help you fight disease.

So this is what I'm involved in. The new book's title is a play on words. Everyone thinks that I'm calling you a pussy if you eat meat. That's not what the title is suggesting. What I say in the foreword is that if you continue to leading a sedentary lifestyle, sitting in front of the TV, getting no exercise, eating poisonous foods, you will become a pussy that is dependent on the pharmaceutical companies. If that's what you want, right on, don't buy my book. If you want to know what's really going on, then I suggest you pick it up.

If you watch *The Future of Food*, you'll see that the largest biological experiment on human biology is happening right now. It's crazy, and they do everything in the 23rd hour so no one knows what's going on. But everybody needs to find out. If it's up to these people, there are gonna be a lot of people getting sick.

So how do you feel about soy? So many people push soy as this panacea for vegans and vegetarians, but most of the soy products in this country almost all come at least indirectly from Monsanto.

Well, 90 percent of the soy produced in America is GMO. That's first of all. What I do is mix proteins; I mix pea, barley, soy. But the ones who are really slamming soy are the meat and dairy industry, because more people are turning away from them. A lot of people have soy allergies; if that's the case, stay away from it. I personally eat very little soy, actually, as far as protein is concerned.

You have to watch out for the GMO food. About 90 percent of the corn is GMO. We have to support organic farming, because it saves the environment. If you watch *The Future of Food*, you'll learn what Monsanto is doing. They're trying to sell more of their pesticide called Round-up. But then you have to buy their Round-up-ready soybeans, because those are the only things that don't die when they spray the fields with Round-up. The company's selling you the soybeans and pesticide, and they have 5000 patents waiting to happen. And it's now the first time they've been able to claim [intellectual] ownership of the seed [varieties], which is unheard of!

I'm really into this, because I don't just think locally - I'm thinking globally, because they're wiping out small farmers in Africa, India, South America. GMO corn invaded South America and Mexico and wiped out strains of organic corn that have been around for 5000 years!

They're even controlling the water. What these corporations are trying to take over is oil, water, and seeds. And if you watch a great documentary called *Flow*, you'll see what these companies are up to. They go into Third World countries, and they go where the water is, and build a dam. Then they tell the people, "You have to pay for your water now."

So, the corporations took over America; Obama works for the corporations. Obama is a puppet of the corporations of this country. His agenda is the agenda of these huge companies, and the Federal Reserve, which is run by private bankers.

Nothing is produced in America any more. We are a consumer nation. We import, and it's all corporate corruption, bailing out the banks with these crooks. It's absurd, and I'm just waiting to see when America is going to get fed up. And the American people *are* going to get fed up, because times are getting tougher; we haven't even seen anything yet. It's not getting better, it's going to get worse.

I'm not being pessimistic, I'm being realistic. Like the Cro Mags said, "The hard times are coming your way." That's when people will get pissed off, when they can't provide food for their families and they're homeless.

Are these issues you're discussing onstage at all these days?

I don't stand up there preaching, but everyone knows what I'm about. I'm not one of these guys who's gonna fly a plane into the IRS building or whatever. I agree with Bob Marley, you know? He fought things spiritually, and that's what I do.

I understand everybody's point of view, but I'm looking at it karmically on the planet. When you kill billions of animals every single year in this country, and you abort millions of children, whatever your political stance is, the laws of the universe state you have no right to take the life of any living entity. So there's gonna be karma for that activity.

That might be a pill some people don't want to swallow. I was talking to some vegans, and I was saying, "You guys go and rescue a pigeon in Central Park, but when I say, to me, abortion, is murder," then they say they support free choice. But then there they are, telling people what not to eat. To me, I say do away with all of it.

Do away with what exactly?

Through knowledge, and spreading knowledge and the advancement of people's consciousness, that's the way the abortions and the murders and animal slaughter will stop with this country, and around the world. Because most abortions are not performed because it was a rape or something like that, it's done out of inconvenience. I know some people may be like, "Who are they to tell us what to do with our bodies?" But in actuality, it's just like if you have a landlord, and there's someone living in a house, he doesn't have the right to kill the person in the house because he doesn't want them there any more.

I look at things beyond politics. I look at real spirituality: karma, and all of the things going on on the planet. It's all a result of the violence being caused against innocent living entities. And that's why there's war, and that's why things are getting crazier, and crazier, and crazier. People have to wake up their consciousness and advance spiritually. And when you do that, you're not running around poisoning your body and having unprotected sex and all this other nonsense.

How much of these beliefs do you think are reflected in your actual music?

The Cro-Mags are not shelter. They're not gonna get up onstage and try to get you to chant Hare Krishna. This band delivers this message with a baseball bat, and I'm speaking metaphorically. We're not trying to throw flowers at you. We deliver the message of what we have to say. But I don't believe in getting up there - I may say things between songs, but I don't go on rants.

The whole thing is that famous saying, you can lead a horse to water, but you can't make him drink. When someone wants to wake up spiritually, they will, and I see it a lot, now. I was just at the H2O show, and so many people came up to me and were like, "Dude, I stopped eating meat, I do yoga three times a week."

This is the Age of Aquarius if you look at it astrologically. This is an amazing time on this planet for people waking up their consciousness. It's always darkest before the dawn. There are also the most insane people trying to run this planet now.

But my whole thing is, I don't go telling anybody anything they don't want to hear. If they ask questions, then from my limited intelligence, I will explain it to them. I don't believe in sitting there preaching to people or giving them tracts. When they want the knowledge, they'll be willing to accept it and hopefully grow.

I come from a criminal background, I was locked up as a kid, ran the streets, went to jail for almost two years. Discontent is the first step in progress, when you're totally unhappy with your situation. You either have two choices: Get on medication or take change -- well, or get on drugs and alcohol.

It seems like the Cro-Mags really paved the way for so many straightedge

bands that followed. How do you feel about that legacy?

Well, the Bad Brains influenced everybody. As soon as you start thinking "I did this" or "I did that," it's like, who are we, in actuality? We're basically instruments. If someone gets some knowledge from us and we get off drugs and get off poisonous foods, and it helps their life and they make positive changes....

I get thousands of letters saying, "Dude, my father left me when I was a kid, and listening to the Cro-mags and the message helped me." I didn't have to talk to this dude to get the message out, I didn't have to say anything. All he had to do was read the lyrics or an interview or my book or whatever.

You're just an instrument. That's the problem with bands and celebrities, they get so caught up thinking they're the doer. It's like, the same way that gift was given to you, it could get taken away. You have to stay humble.

I've been going to punk rock shows since '77. I was there for punk rock, hardcore, the whole nine yards. But I don't sit there thinking that I did anything. I mean, a lot of the straightedge vegan kids, they were so judgmental on everybody, and that's why they got a bad name. They thought they were superior to everyone else. It's about staying humble, and spreading knowledge out of compassion, not preaching down to somebody like you're on some pedestal.

That's the same thing I say about the vegans, that's why they turned a lot of people off. How you deliver your message is everything. If it's delivered out of false ego and pride and all of these negative qualities, first of all, people are not even going to listen. Especially in this odd punk rock, street-level shit. They're going to want to kick your ass because you're pompous.

So I can't sit there saying, "The Cro-Mags did this, and the Cro-Mags did that." I'm always trying to keep moving forward. If you sit on your past laurels, then that's going to be the level of your growth in this life. You have to keep pushing forward.

Do you have any interest in writing or releasing new Cro-Mags material?

We'll see what happens. We're lining up the horses right now and seeing who wants to get down. Whether the album will be called "the Cro-Mags" depends on whatever happens. Everyone will know it's the Cro-Mags, though. But I want to have different people write songs for us, maybe members of Bad Brains, whatever. I want to play music and get a message out, and whoever ends up on it - it could be 10 different musicians playing on the records for all we know. I look at it like, the Cro-Mags are bigger than any one individual. The Cro-Mags stood for positivity and passing some knowledge on.

By the same token, your shows have long been famous for this element of danger. What can people expect from your show on Sunday? Have things been toned down at all?

I mean, people dance hard, but it's not the violence where there were so many knuckleheads in the '90s and 2000s fighting at shows. They know, don't bring that shit to our shows. I had Fred Biscie, who's 80 years old, and all these other people at our shows in New York.

It's good vibes, that's what I said. When the band is onstage and they're spewing negativity, then it's going to translate to the crowd. We don't roll like that. We squash any problems and we try to keep the room positive, the music positive, so people can have a good time, hear some great songs, and have some fun. We've been playing California and there were 12-year-olds with their dads who were into the Cro-Mags. It's really great, because I think this music is very positive.

There's less and less emphasis being placed on the arts in this country, because artists tend

to be free thinkers. So they're cutting all the arts programs, and not emphasizing music and art any more. Now it's like, be a cog in a machine. We try to keep the message of the music alive, and let people know what a great thing it is, if you have a gift to take it up.

I look at it as a gift, getting to go over the planet and meet people and spread positivity. The Cro-Mags may deliver that message in a particular way, but it's all out of love. We always have good times. We haven't had problems at any of our shows in years. That's why I train to keep in shape, to keep ready for the Cro-Mags, because for an hour we leave everything on the stage.

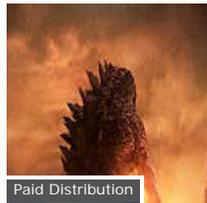
Here's a fun retro Miami flyer of a Cro-Mags show from the old Cameo Theatre, via the unofficial MySpace fan page, myspace.com/xcroxmagsx



Tags: **Churchill's Pub, John Joseph, the Cro-Mags**

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