

ROCK UNINCORPORATED  
BY BLOOD ALONE

BY: MATTHEW MORRIS

Originally published in *IT Magazine*, Oct. 2005

I recently met with Portland goth band By Blood Alone for some candid conversation about their current state of affairs. But we didn't meet on a lonely hilltop under a weeping willow, or in a foggy cemetery, or on the bank of a river in the moonlight. We met at a local restaurant with a very anti-goth sports theme. Present was Jack Doran (bass) John Graveside (guitar), Mistress Cruella (vocals) and Jenny Williamson (keyboards). Drummer John Hoener was absent, as his upcoming departure from the band looms. We took a large booth in the back and got to the core of BBA's existence.

From your first introduction to her you might wonder why vocalist Cruella is even into the darker subcultures; she is usually all smiles and batty eyelashes. But for anyone who can relate to the genre you understand that it isn't really about depression and darkness and decay. It's about the romanticism and drama of tragedy. By Blood Alone comes through as the small orchestra in the pit of a contemporary theater tragedy.

"Two of my absolute favorite things in life are singing and dressing up," says Cruella, smiling through her dark eyeliner and waving the heavy rings on her fingers. "Art is in there somewhere, but that is like when I made a dress for one of my shows. ...People talk about image and persona and all of that, but I just feel like I'm dressing up and being my self all at the same time. [*Laughs*] I wish it could be Halloween every day!"

"We do [the gothic image] in the photos. We are definitely pushing that image, though," says Jack Doran.

"It is kind of like Halloween every day," says guitarist John Graveside (a.k.a. Rowan Bishop off stage). "Why do I want to go around being me? I'm boring! But, John Graveside, he's fun. No matter what you look like, you're going to be pegged to be something. If you look bland, then you get pegged to be bland. The look and the sound don't always coincide, if you're lucky enough to get people to listen to sound anyway."

Listening to a band's sound is what many musicians take for granted as the paramount attraction to their band. BBA is no different in this regard. They stand behind their songwriting and their sound. John Graveside was very determined to have two distinct elements in his band; one was a haunting, smooth female voice. The other was an ambiguous desire for an organ, cello, violin, or something of that nature. Comprised of the stock elements of guitar, bass and drums, BBA also has keyboards, courtesy of Jenny Williamson. Arguably, it is the keyboards that give BBA the haunting and moody sound they were desperately searching for in the beginning. Jenny's keyboards add an element of classic gothic and horror culture that predates drum sets and electric guitar.

"I really liked how The Phoenix described our music as if the B-52's had all their dogs die in an electrical storm," says Jenny. "I thought that was exactly what I was going for. There are pop elements, but it's also very dark."

"We get a lot of comparisons to completely different bands," says Graveside, referring to comparisons of Linda Perry versus Iced Earth. "And they are all valid for those people."

Being a Portland band has allowed the politics of our local scene to be played. Striving to succeed and making a name for yourself is hard work, but it helps if you have a few aces up your sleeve. "Barb of Geno's has been very supportive of us," comments Cruella. "She has always been supportive of female musicians and female fronted bands. They gave us our first show last year. ...Networking is amazing, because in the short period of time that I've been working with these guys, you meet someone who knows someone else

and pretty soon you're getting phone calls. And without the internet, all this work would be tenfold. Now we have been playing shows out of state and it's really picking up."

"We have been really lucky," says Graveside regarding promotion and media blitzing. "Usually you send out your promos and you get a 10 percent return. This time around we've had about a 90 percent return."

The buzz around BBA is primarily due to their recent CD release, "Eternally." This 4 song release gives listeners a very accurate sampling to the different moods of BBA's music. The opening romp "Every Night" details Cruella's zombie nightmares to a galloping guitar and rhythm section. The song contains a very strong hook with a catchy vocal arrangement. On the other side of the spectrum is "Eternally," which has a primal drum beat from John Hoerner and creeping bass line by Jack Doran. The dark and somber mood of this song is very clear, complimented by the melancholy guitar and vocal lines of the chorus. You can sample their songs at [www.bybloodalone.com](http://www.bybloodalone.com) and buy a copy for yourself at local Bullmoose music stores or visit CD Baby at: [www.cdbaby.com/cd/bybloodalone](http://www.cdbaby.com/cd/bybloodalone).

In current pop culture where the contrived image and the "non"-image are almost the same thing (ex: costumes and makeup vs. t-shirt and jeans), BBA balances a tightrope. Too much image removes the focus from your music. Too little does the same. However, this band has decided to put their music first and let it do the talking. The songwriting is not overly complex or extreme in any direction, except BBA's affinity for dark romanticism. Their blend of pop, metal and gothic music brings together an original sound for this Portland band. There is no one else far and wide that sounds like By Blood Alone, but any casual fan can pick out familiar elements to enjoy. A BBA performance is quiet and tranquil during one song and full out rock the next. They are dark, brooding, and sensitive, but most of all By Blood Alone have a sound for just about every mood swing.

If you are a fan of gothic music, get out into the daylight a pick up a copy of "Eternally." If you aren't, prop open your coffin lid and let a little fresh air in. It will do you good.

*For more info: [www.bybloodalone.com](http://www.bybloodalone.com) or [www.myspace.com/bybloodalone](http://www.myspace.com/bybloodalone).*