

Hearts and Sleeves

EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW

PANIC! AT THE DISCO

by Nathan Wrann





PANIC! AT THE DISCO A FEVER YOU CAN'T SWEAT OUT

Panic! at the Disco is undoubtedly one of the hottest bands in the country right now. A fact that comes as a surprise to everyone, including the band members themselves. Their debut CD, *A Fever You Can't Sweat Out*, is a schizophrenic, semi-experimental, (strangely) catchy-as-hell, danceable, pop(?), rock(?) album which, despite less than favorable reviews found on the internet has already sold over 200,000 copies in less than 5 months. So the question to ask now is why? How? This isn't some perfectly crafted, laboratory tested record album. At this time in history,

following the recent success of Green Day and Fall Out Boy, a thousand straightforward, pop-punk, 3 chord wonders should have been the next grunge-like fad to launch into the stratosphere of musical moolah. Some might argue that Panic! have ridden Fall Out Boy's Pete Wentz's coattails right onto the Decaydance (Wentz's) label and into a grand success but I would disagree. I think this album struck a chord with its intended audience. Every generation has an album or a band that speaks to it but there are very few albums that can take the experience of an age group (at any time in history) and capture it so exquisitely. Not solely through lyrical content or

energy but through the actual composition of the record itself. *A Fever...* does precisely that. To be 19 years old is to be angry. You're either stuck at home still doing what your fucking parents want you to do or your stuck at college doing what your fucking parents want you to do. To be 19 years old is to be confused. you aren't really considered a man (try to buy a beer if you don't believe me, and then suffer the consequences if you get caught) but you sure as hell aren't a fucking kid. But you're still a teenager. One minute you want to do something that you will deny 5 minutes later. Through its schizophrenic techno-to-vaudeville genre range and its poetically confrontational lyrics That is precisely the essence of what this CD captures (subconsciously?): the anger, confusion and indecisiveness of that most in-between of ages, 19. The creators of this album can, years down the road, look back at it as a portrait of the artist as an angry young man. But where this CD really succeeds and infuriates the listener is spelled out in the 7th track "Lying is the Most Fun a Girl Can Have Without Taking Her Clothes Off" with the lines: "I've got more wit, a better kiss, a hotter touch... a better fuck than any boy you'll ever meet." Essentially after falling prey to its siren song of unconventional breaks, intricate minutia, genre mixing and unique instrumentation straightforward pop and rock just doesn't fuck as good because "sweetie" you had Panic!



On February 5th 2006 We sat down with Brendon Urie and had a little talk.

That interview follows:

Hearts and Sleeves: Did you expect any of this?

Brendon: "This" being the hype and fame and stuff?

H&S: "This" being your extremely quick ascent.

Brendon: No I didn't at all. We didn't have any intention when we started the band to be big, you know, rock stars. We didn't want to do that we wanted to write music that we enjoy listening to and enjoy playing.

H&S: Do you feel any pressure from the quick rise?

Brendon: In the beginning there was some expectations, some pressure but I think now that people have seen kind of what we're capable of it's lessened a bit. Maybe there will be a little bit more for the next record. But I think it's gotten better since we've been on the road.

H&S: How have your lives changed since the CD came out?

Brendon: It's been busy. It wasn't so bad before but now we have the next 5 or 6 months planned of just everyday tours, shows, going to Japan, going to the U.K. It's fun though, it's good.

H&S: Congratulations on the single (I Write Sins, Not Tragedies) hitting TRL last week. Did you notice any change?

Brendon: Thank you. We're not big pushers of radio and stuff. We didn't really want our stuff on the radio because we didn't want it all to happen so quickly. But they decided to put it on. We never pushed

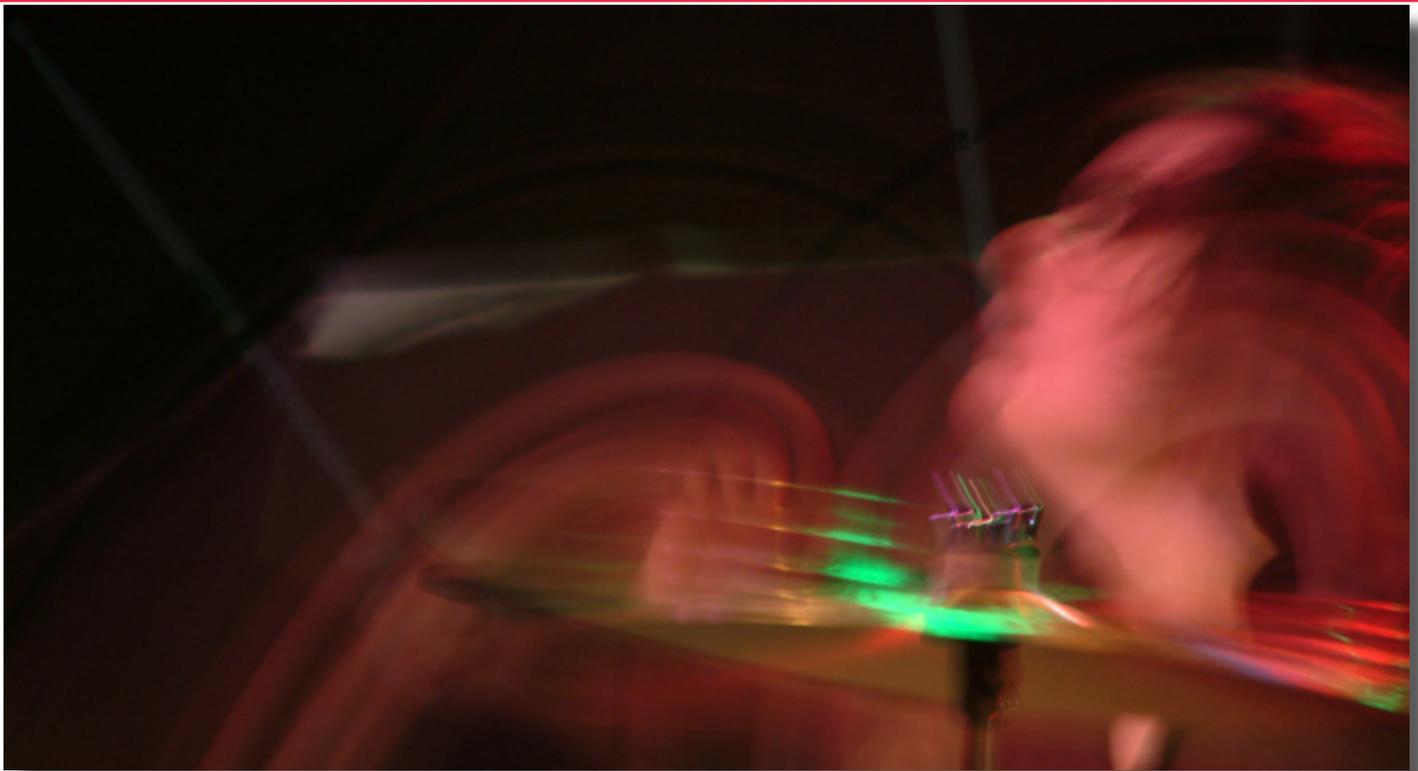
for it.

H&S: Who are "they?"

Brendon: The people at MTV were getting so many requests from fans that they decided to put it on. We didn't really tell them.

H&S: That's awesome. That's a great way for it to happen.





Brendon: Yeah, that was really flattering. We're very grateful for our fans. It's good and it could be bad also.

H&S: Most bands in this "scene" spend a good amount of time after their first album touring in vans and meeting fans and have the ability to walk around in relative anonymity, with your video and popularity blowing up how does that affect the time that you have to experience this from the ground up in a personal way?

Brendon: We have lost some of the intimacy really quickly. The first tour we were able to hang out with the fans, we had a van and that was really neat and I do miss that. It sucks now, with the popularity people will notice us a lot more and it is tough to keep the intimacy with the fans. You kinda do wish that you could just walk down the

street and just talk with them a little bit longer but then you have people running up and are just like "hey hey hey" and freaking out and there's no need to freak out. We're just like you. We're not these older idols, you know, we're just kids like you guys. It sucks that we lost it but it's also cool to get our name out there. To have gotten so big so quickly can be good, we're just trying to get our music out there to as many people as we can.

H&S: It's a different experience but an experience nonetheless.

Brendon: Exactly.

H&S: How about time for fan interaction or things that you had planned like the book club or online journals? Are those going to fall to the wayside as you spend time doing other things?

Brendon: We are going to be very busy but we hope to continue the book club and all that stuff. We like interacting with our fans. I hope that we don't lose that. I hope it doesn't come to that. I don't think that would happen to the point that we get that busy. It is going to get busy but I don't think to that extent. I hope we don't lose that.

H&S: Do you think that, for lack of a better word "street cred" –

Brendon: Haha "street cred."

H&S: Do you think that the "street cred" that most bands build up when they tour in a van, not that you lack it completely, obviously people knew of you beforehand but there are tens of thousands of people out there that bought your CD just because of TRL, do you think that, that [possible lack of "street



cred”] could hurt your future at all because you don’t have that fanatic, intimate base that is developed over time touring in vans and meeting with thousands of people.

Brendon: Possibly, but then again the people that we would lose just because they like that song on TRL, I mean, that’s not so important to me. They look for singles they don’t really look for good music. They’re more just into watching TRL than actually looking for good music. I’m not too worried about losing those types of fans. I hope that starting out we had a good fan base but it did grow pretty rapidly and a little out of control. We’re still a young band. We’ve only been a band for two years. We still have time to build our fan base so that’s not completely out of the question. It happened quickly but I don’t think that we lost too much time.

H&S: I don’t know if you can speak for this but in the band’s bio on your website there is a rift with Ryan’s father mentioned, is that rift still there?

Brendon: Ryan’s dad was mentioned in our biography?

H&S: Yeah, it says that Ryan dropped out of school which opened a rift with his father. So when you look at where you are now and you’ve sold over 100,000 albums and are on MTV is that rift still there? Can you speak for that?

Brendon: With me and Ryan our parents were the least supportive in the beginning because they had other plans, and other expectations for us. That was really hard trying to convince them.

Kimberly [H&S Assistant Editor]: Were you thinking of going to college too?

Brendon: Yeah, my parents actually are really religious. They wanted me to go on a mission for our church for two years and they wanted me to go to BYU [Brigham Young University]. I wasn’t into that, that’s not me. When I told them that I just wanted to drop out of everything and head out on the road they weren’t too excited. Now that everything is taking off and there is some success and they see that this can get somewhere and it could be a career for us they’re way more supportive. They’re the biggest fans now and Ryan’s dad is awesome. It’s totally done a 180.

H&S: There’s only a certain time in your life that you can become a rock star and you can go to college at anytime.

Brendon: Exactly. We wouldn’t have made a different decision.

H&S: Your songs have a lot of unconventional breaks and instrumentation. How much of that is thought out before heading into the studio

Brendon: When we were writing we hadn’t been a band for very long and we were under a little

bit of pressure. Having only written maybe two songs together we didn’t know what direction we wanted to go with the band or how we wanted to sound. That’s why it came out two-sided. A lot of the second half was written in the studio and recorded in like the last five days. So that was really tough. We were stressing out pretty bad. We didn’t have some songs written. We still didn’t get to do some a couple ideas that we had but that was just due to a lack of time. A lot of the vaudevillian, accordian, orchestral stuff was done in the studio we actually pulled in a cello player and a trumpet player. The techno dance stuff those were probably some of the first songs that we wrote. You can see the difference of the amount of time that we had to write through the course of the first half to the second half, that’s pretty much how we wrote it, from the first song to the last song. On that note, I think that the next record is going to be more like the last song on our album. A bit more theatrical, you’ll still be able to dance to it I hope but a little less techno.

H&S: The schizophrenic aspect of it had more to do with you guys not knowing yourselves as well as not knowing the album.

Brendon: Pretty much. We didn’t know what direction to go and didn’t have a sound in mind.

H&S: Did you have any inspirations or influences that you drew from for those experimental parts?



Brendon: Do you mean that accordion type stuff?

H&S: Just the fact that most bands nowadays are not going to go through a whole song that fairly poppy and then break into an accordion part or a piano part or a techno part and then the second half of the song is completely different than the first half.

Brendon: I think that just has to do with us just being really weird. A lot of people wouldn't really get us.

H&S: Apparently not since you've sold over 100,000 copies of your album. [ed note: *A Fever...* has now sold over 200,000 copies as of press time]

Brendon: The way it comes out I guess is just a product of everybody in the band having huge similarities in music but we also listen to a lot of different stuff. For example Spencer listens to Fleetwood Mac and then will jump over and listen to Arcade Fire. I listen to the same stuff but then I'll listen to Journey more or some pop stuff. Or Ryan listens to movie scores or theatrical stuff. A lot of that was Ryan would pop up and be like "I think it could do this" and I'd be like "whoah" and I'd add some pop to it. It's just a mix of different combinations of where we come from.

H&S: Your songs are pretty confrontational lyrically, to the point that it could be called an "angry" album. Is there any particular reason why it is so angry?

Brendon: Ryan writes the lyrics and during writing there were instances where he was just going through tough times, with his dad not being supportive and...

Kimberly: Does he come from a religious background too?

Brendon: Yeah, he went to a lot of Christian and Catholic private schools growing up so that kind of put us into the whole religion being forced on us feeling.

Kimberly: I know what you mean. I went to Catholic school from Kindergarten through Graduation and you just get overloaded. I joke now that I'll never have to step into a church again because I've paid my dues.

H&S: My next question was actually going to be that there is a lot of religious imagery in the

album and I was going to ask why.

Brendon: Both of our families, especially mine, were really forceful with the religion and it didn't come to the point until I was 16 when I finally was like "maybe I can start thinking for my self" and when I took that step I decided that I can be my own person and I don't have to be what they want me to be.

[Flip Tape]

H&S: We were talking about the anger and the religious imagery of the album.

Brendon: A lot of that was when there were a lot of instances where anger just got built up. A lot of stuff happened to him [Ryan]. I look back and there was just a lot of stress and a lot of mixed emotion and I don't know, it came out the way it did. Some people were like "was it weird to sing that? Since he was so angry, was it weird to sing his lyrics?" well no.

H&S: Are you looking at my questions? That one was coming up.

Brendon: Oh I'm sorry. I'm just moving along.

H&S: No, I'm just kidding, keep going.

Brendon: On that note people always ask "is it weird singing his lyrics" I don't think so. I'm not a poet at all. Ryan, I think, writes great lyrics. He's really mature for





his age. He's a different thinker. A lot of, I'm not going to name names, but some of the bands today are just like...

H&S: Oh come on, you can name names.

Brendon: No no no. I don't know, there's certain bands, and it works for them, where they're just flat out "here's the line" and you can't really think about it.

H&S: Interestingly, along those lines in the lyric sheet there's all the parenthesis, all the unspoken stuff. Which is really cool.

Brendon: I thought that was really unique about Ryan about how he wrote that way. The prose, the unspoken stuff. It still completes the story. It's unique. I enjoy the way he writes and I'll forever keep

singing it.

H&S: My next question was: "Ryan writes the lyrics and you sing them. How does this work out, especially with some of the more complex and offbeat vocalizing and phrasing?" The way that he writes so distinctly is it difficult for you to vocalize it?

Brendon: I don't think so. I think it's fun to sing his lyrics some times. Even while he was writing it certain lines I would sing and just laugh to myself that it's kind of funny. I think it's definitely easier to sing his lyrics because they're so well written. I could never sing my own stuff because I suck at writing poetry. I think that we try to make catchy melodies where you would hear this word "caricature" and wonder what is that. So we'd put it into this good melody so it would

stick with you, so you'd get the melody down and then the word would just flow into it and then you'd pick it up later.

H&S: The CD progresses from techno to pop to rock to jazz to honky tonk. Do you have any preferred genre of music.

Brendon: We try to be as broad as possible. I really don't like just sitting down listening to one genre. That's just boring to me. I grew up listening to everything my parents listened to Air Supply, Hall and Oates, Genesis, Journey, The Eagles, Fleetwood Mac. My sisters listened to The Smiths, The Cure, The Cult, different '80's band. I know the other guys listen to a lot of different stuff. They turn me on to a lot of newer stuff like Arcade Fire and Cursive. I think it can only help to broaden your musical tastes.

H&S: Who is your number one in your playlist?

Brendon: I don't know that I have a number one. I have a bunch of number ones that I've been listening to. Lately I've been falling asleep listening to Yann Tiersen, he did the soundtrack for "Amelie." That was a really good movie and I like the soundtrack to it with the accordions. It's just really good vivid imagery that you can get just from listening to the music. I think that is just really influential and really inspiring. Regina Spektor is also really good. I listened to some U2 the other day.

H&S: Which one?





Brendon: Joshua Tree and Achtung Baby.

H&S: That's a good one for interesting instrumentation. Despite the variety on the first CD there is going to be some expectation to keep the sound "the same" on the follow-up. Have you considered the follow-up yet?

Brendon: We've been talking about it. The newest stuff that we've written we use in our live show which is just minute-long transitions into the next song, we try to keep it continuous music but due to shorter set times we haven't been able to do that too well. Ryan and I sat down and put a little thing together two nights ago on guitar. Just a really general type of thing. We're kind of working on a story type thing.

H&S: Like a concept album?

Brendon: Possibly. I don't know if it will have one huge concept but certain songs will have stories, I believe. But from some of the newer stuff I wouldn't expect "Time to Dance" and don't expect techno to break out in the song, or dance parts. The second half [of "A Fever..."] is more the direction that we want to go in. there will be some salsa type stuff or some Spanish guitar. We're all working on our musicianship so we'll see how far we can get.

H&S: you have a big audience now, any cause that you feel is worth supporting that you would

suggest for people to make the world a better place.

Brendon: I actually haven't put much thought into it. I don't know. I used to visit PETA all the time. I tried being vegan for a long time. I'm vegetarian now. Being a singer I tried the "singer's" diet which is no dairy or anything. Pretty much all I could eat is carrots. I still don't drink milk so I'm borderline vegan vegetarian. So I guess I support PETA.

H&S: Where is Panic! at the Disco heading?

Brendon: All over the place.

H&S: Just like the album.

Brendon: That's pretty much us. We're heading to the U.K. and Japan. We're hoping to take some time off to write. That's where we're heading.

Kimberly: Are you going home to write?

Brendon: We've actually been talking about that. We're hoping to go some place foreign maybe Paris or Italy.

H&S: Any release schedule for the album?

Brendon: Maybe summer of 2007.

H&S: Don't do that 2 years between albums thing.

Brendon: We hate when bands take a long time off because then

you expect it to be the best record ever.

H&S: Second single off of the album?

Brendon: We're talking about a video for um...

H&S: You already pushed the envelope with "goddamn" on this last one you may as well go all the way with "Lying..."

Brendon: Might as well push the "F" word out there. We actually want to do it for "These Tables Are Numbered..." that would be really cool. We want to do something really neat with that video. We just barely started talking about it last night, but.

H&S: Great! Thanks for taking the time to talk with us.

