

An Interview with Rob Miller of Amebix

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Artists can help to mark our progress as a society, and exceptional ones can sometimes help to point the way ahead. Current unrest around the world, from the Middle East to Wall Street, might be better understood through the eyes of an artist who has seen this sort of thing before. Recently I have had the privilege of speaking to Rob Miller, singer, songwriter and bassist for the early 'crust punk' band Amebix. On the Autumnal Equinox of last year Rob, along with original guitarist Stig C. Miller and drummer Roy Mayorga (from the band Stone Sour), released *Sonic Mass* (Amebix/Easy Action Records)- their first album since 1985.

JG: Your latest album seems to have the same strong anti-totalitarian message that can be found in your previous works. What sorts of events did you experience in the formative years of the band which may have influenced this stance?

Rob: We grew up in the time of Thatcher, and the contemporary was Reagan in the States, and there were all these sort of fairly totalitarian ideas that were coming across. Punk, in a sense, was a reaction against that kind of thing. The Thatcher government was clamping down a lot on freedom of movement, freedom of speech, and it was one of the great divisive eras in my life. Thatcherism set the precedent for the survival of the greedy and the breakup of communities as a whole. For me, punk rock's original message was about personal freedom.

JG: There was an event at Stonehenge in 1984 that was an influence as well, correct?

Rob: The Stonehenge Free Festival was a group of well-meaning hippies that started this thing off. Every year you'd meet at the Summer Solstice around Stonehenge, and it had this inevitable decline as drugs became a larger part of it. But, the Thatcher imperative was to stop any gatherings of people in a free space without them having some sort of control over it. In 1984, that was when the so-called Battle of the Bean Field came down, and people were coming back from the festival having been beaten up- men, women and kids. It was disempowering people on a spiritual level, as well.

JG: There has always been a call to action in your music. Do you think that recent uprisings, such as the world-wide Occupy movement and the Arab Spring, are in this same spirit?

Rob: I'm sort of cynical about this so-called Arab Spring movement, because some of the things I've been reading are pointing towards more than just a people's movement, particularly in Libya. Their issues are a lot stronger than ours, socially, than we ever had in the 70's and 80's as punk rock kids because we had a damn sight more freedom than those people could ever imagine, so the emphasis is far greater for them- you don't just get your personal freedoms taken away, you get your life taken away. You get tortured and beaten. I wouldn't like to put that as a parallel to kids who had a fairly spoiled life in comparison. My emphasis was not so much in the political sphere, but rather the individual. Within the core of humanity is freedom.

JG: Amebix's sound has always maintained a kind of warrior edge to it, in spite of its often anti-war lyrics. You were even a sergeant in the Air Training Corps, 2312 Squadron of the RAF, a crack shot with a rifle (and proud of it) and have become a world-renowned sword smith in your own right. How do you reconcile your music with this idea of warriorship?

Rob: There's a nobility in that. It's not something you necessarily have to manifest in a martial respect. I don't find it as a dichotomy. I understand it on a different level which is some kind of internal order. The sword acts as a key and a focal point for the individual- something that you will find within yourself. All the things that evolve from that have to be informed by the notions of justice.

*Sonic Mass is available on both vinyl and CD at www.amebix.net or wherever music is sold.