

Circle Jerks' latest tour begins new era under major label

■ **LEGEND:** Group's distinctive sound sets them apart and sends today's youth a message

By Anne Moser-Kornfeld
Entertainment Editor

Back in 1980, when the Circle Jerks started making a name for themselves in the Los Angeles punk scene, lead vocalist Keith Morris said the band played mostly to their peers, who were just looking for a good time.

Now after 15 years of breaking up and getting back together, the band recently went into the studio to put together their latest release, *Oddities, Abnormalities and Curiosities*. What sets this collection apart from other albums they've produced is that this one marks their first major-label offering.

In a recent phone interview, Morris spoke about the upcoming tour, which brings the band to La Luna in Portland on Aug. 4, and the musical decisions that went into putting *Oddities, Abnormalities and Curiosities* together.

The opening track, "Teenage Electric," starts off by describing how the times are getting more and more difficult for kids.

Because the audiences for Circle Jerks' concerts seem younger each year and more bands are forcing older groups to compete for audiences' attentions, the Circle Jerks incorporate elements into their songs that show how they've come into their own, after years of simply playing hard and wild.

"The song 'Teenage Electric' is a call to arms, telling teenagers how they've been manipulated by the media, and leaves a little bit to the listener," Morris said.

Leaving a little bit for the listener comes from the Circle Jerks' desire to avoid being so clear-cut that audiences don't have to think for themselves.

Morris said that the Circle Jerks broke up because they "weren't really behaving like a band. But we got back together because we realized what we had before



The Circle Jerks, Greg Hetson, Keith Morris, Zander Schloss and Keith Clark, began a cross-country tour in July. They play in Portland at La Luna on Aug. 4.

was still happening."

To prove this was true, the band recorded *Oddities, Abnormalities and Curiosities* live in a single room with production handled by Mercury

Records.

"Most of the songs were first takes with bad notes here and there," Morris said. When co-founder and guitarist Greg Hetson brought a copy of "Teenage

Electric" to Morris and asked him, "What does this song mean?", Morris responded with his poignant intolerance for things that make little or no sense to him.

A later song, "Shining Through the Door," Morris called a "punk-rock gospel" for its hopeful tune. We try to balance everything with our anger and our sarcasm," he said.

The anger that made the Circle Jerks famous isn't from that certain chemistry the band members share, although each member has ventured into various independent projects besides playing with the Circle Jerks, which include originating other bands like Morris' Buglamp. Zander Schloss is a multi-instrumentalist who has scored a number of film soundtracks. Greg Hetson is a member of Bad Religion and Keith Clark began an accounting firm in 1993.

Morris said their music emphasizes the absurd side of life. He freely admits that "when you're young it's a lot easier to get away with things, but when you reach a certain age, you reach a wall of responsibility that comes right up in your face."

In preparation for the tour, Morris worries about logistics like the sound checks, works in the studio some days until 5 a.m., and then jumps around onstage, screaming in the baritone voice that still ranks him as one of the most respected punk vocalists of all time.

There is an intensity to Morris' and the Circle Jerks' style that few other groups are able to match.

For the band, it's been different going from an independent label and moving up into a position where they're chauffeured everywhere. Not only have audiences for the Circle Jerks changed, but so has the band.

But Morris hopes audiences come to the shows to "party down, twist and shout and [get] friendly with everybody else." He wants to remind audiences to "be aware that the world starts at your feet and moves."

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