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GREEN DAY

How does America's biggest punk band top the politically charged, multi-platinum *American Idiot*? Simple: They ratchet things up louder, prouder and even more defiantly. In this AP exclusive, Aaron Burgess learns exactly how much the Bay Area trio have accomplished under a self-imposed code of silence.

SPECIALS**81 MOST ANTICIPATED ALBUMS OF 2009**

AP's 12th annual yearbook-in-reverse is brimming with deets on the future plans of some of your favorite bands. Not only did we cram the pages with discs to watch for in 2K9, we checked in with bands who, for one reason or another, slacked off this year. (Hey, we're not passing judgment. Pinkie-swear.) And even if some of the participants are purposely cagey about their future plans, well, the photos sure are neat, gosh darnit...

78 APOCALYPSE ARE SEALED: AP'S YEAR IN REVIEW

Bookmark your fave doomsday-themed site and stock up on rations! Does our review of 2008 foretell bold signs of the coming apocalypse? Or are we just pulling some cheap-jack, half-assed sensationalist caca to make the year sound scarier than it actually was?

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THE AP RECORD STORE is ready to stuff your stockings this month with new albums from **THE KILLERS, JOEY CAPE, BUTCH WALKER, SHINY TOY GUNS, RYAN ADAMS & THE CARDINALS, SQUAREPUSHER, HOUSTON CALLS, SPYLACOPA, MAGNETIC MORNING, THE (INTERNATIONAL) NOISE CONSPIRACY, TIM BARRY, AKIMBO, MINUS THE BEAR, THE DECEMBERISTS, CROOKED FINGERS, THE JEALOUS SOUND** and more.

144 10 ESSENTIAL ALBUMS BY BANDS WHO BROKE UP THIS YEAR



AMERICAN IDIOT And A Smiley-Smiley

GIVEN THE MULTI-PLATINUM SUCCESS OF THE ERA-DEFINING *AMERICAN IDIOT*, YOU COULD LET THE MEMBERS OF **GREEN DAY** SLIDE FOR PHONING IN THE FOLLOW-UP. FORTUNATELY FOR LISTENERS, THEY COULD NEVER FORGIVE THEMSELVES FOR DOING THAT, WHICH IS WHY BILLIE JOE ARMSTRONG, MIKE DIRNT AND TRÉ COOL ARE MAKING SURE EVERY CHORD AND DRUMBEAT ON THEIR UPCOMING ALBUM REMAINS AS RESONANT AS EVER.

Story: AARON BURGESS // Photos: PHIL MUCCI

A 20-mile smoke trail creeps toward downtown Los Angeles from the San Fernando Valley, putting the Hollywood hills on guard against the wildfires that have threatened the city for the past two days. It's a cheap metaphor, but considering AP's final stop upon landing in L.A. this sunny October afternoon, we'll take it. Somewhere between the fires and the Hollywood sign—inside Studio B of the legendary Ocean Way Recording, to be exact—Green Day are tracking a massively anticipated new album whose mood reflects the growing tension outside the studio doors. Having no release date to march toward (as of now, it's very tentatively looking like spring), the full-blown media circus is still months away, but AP has arrived at Ocean Way for an exclusive first listen.

Like 2004's multiple-Grammy-winning *American Idiot*, which cemented the trio's status via sales of 5.8 million in the U.S. alone (according to Nielsen SoundScan) and a new, socially conscious identity to replace the bratty older one, the as-yet-untitled new disc is a political album: the boldest such release of Green Day's 20-year career. But where *American Idiot*—released less than two months before George W. Bush secured his second term—used a sprawling "punk-rock opera" to forecast the dread leading up to Bush's re-election, the new album finds Green Day getting personal again, tightening up to face the confusion of life in a soon-to-be post-Bush America.

Today, however, few outside of Green Day's inner circle are even aware there's a battle plan. Leading us through Studio B—the room where Green Day cut not only *American Idiot*, but also 2000's *Warning*, 1997's *Nimrod*, 1995's *Insomniac* and 1994's era-defining, Diamond-certified *Dookie*—singer/guitarist Billie Joe Armstrong jokes, "It's amazing how much you can get done when you don't tell anyone you're working." Indeed, despite being here to record the most eagerly awaited rock album of 2009, Green Day—Armstrong, 36; bassist Mike Dirnt, 36; and drummer Tré Cool, 35—have done virtually nothing to publicize their activity.

The rare news that's surfaced since the 2006 close of *American Idiot*'s tour cycle—reports of 45 songs written on piano (not true, Armstrong says), for example, and a 2008 clip of Garbage's Shirley Manson telling Carson Daly her band's hiatus stems partly from drummer/producer Butch Vig's work on a new Green Day album—drew surprisingly little buzz. Even the grainy YouTube clips Green Day started leaking from Ocean Way in October, despite offering visual proof of Vig behind the console, got little traction outside of fan websites. As far as the wider world was concerned, Green Day were still, to quote *American Idiot*'s Bush-bashing third single, on holiday.

If, however, we needed convincing of how immersed Green Day are in album No. 8, it comes via Ocean Way's lounge, which since the band's arrival has morphed from a tastefully decorated chill-out zone into a combination war room/research lab.

"They had some really nice artwork before we moved in here," Dirnt jokes, looking around the room as we settle into the lounge's plush sectional couch. Framed posters of the Ramones, the Rolling Stones and the Beatles hang on the walls, each a subconscious reminder to raise the bar creatively. Editions of *The New York Times*, their headlines a play-by-play of Barack Obama and John McCain's bitter race to replace the lame-duck Bush, lay among stacks of books and DVDs on the coffee table. Dozens of vinyl LPs procured during weekend trips to the band's Bay Area home—from Bruce Springsteen's *The River* to the Ramones' *Rocket To Russia*—sit on the floor. Some comic relief comes from the Vig and band-member caricatures from yearbookyourself.com that someone has pinned to the wall, but it's hard to ignore the *Los Angeles Times* front pages that hang alongside these items, and their headlines about hurricanes, the 2008 election and the collapsing U.S. economy.

Seated across from his bandmates in a space that's literally below the day's news, Armstrong acknowledges the task Green Day have ahead of them—not only improving on the musical ambitions of an era-defining record, but expanding on that record's message in ways that'll inspire the era that follows. "*American Idiot* was successful enough that we probably could have mailed in a follow-up," he begins. "And that was reason enough for me to say, 'No, we can't.' I think for a lot of rock bands, pop culture has overtaken substance, and for us, the best thing that you can do in response to that is to make the best fucking record you possibly can. It's like, once you think you're going deep, you haven't gone deep enough. You have to search the absolute demons of your soul to make a great record."

It's here that Armstrong reveals the true message at the new album's core. This time, it's not just about responding to George W. Bush—though as the demos Green Day will play for us show, Bush's policies remain an influence. It's not about trying to influence the Nov. 4 election—though as Armstrong, Dirnt and Cool tell us, they've already got their absentee ballots ready (it's Obama all around). And, even though characters and concepts tie together the 16 songs Green Day have brought to Ocean Way, it's not about using fiction to talk about facts. As much as these songs are about the world outside of Green Day, they're more about how the band are reacting to that world on the inside. This time, it's personal.

"There's nothing to prove anymore; we're just trying to show we have this spirit that rock 'n' roll can change lives, and it really is a religious experience that means something to us. It's more about faith now." —Billie Joe Armstrong

"Where it goes—you ready?" We're packed into an SUV in the parking lot Ocean Way shares with former Columbia Pictures headquarters Sunset Gower Studios, and Green Day's manager, Pat Magnarella, is about to press "play" on the only known copy of the new album's demos. As listening sessions go, it's a little surreal: Circling Sunset Boulevard as the first seven songs play [see sidebar], frantically attempting to scribble down lyrics before we're asked to return the lone printout of track details that even the band's PR team hasn't received, feels more akin to a CIA briefing. The security, however, is understandable: As legend goes, *American Idiot* only came to life out of necessity, after the master tapes for the 2004 album Green Day were supposed to have been recording vanished from the studio.

If Armstrong, Dirnt and Cool were able to overlook losing those masters because the songs weren't, in Armstrong's words, "maximum Green Day," they have good reason to keep the new material guarded. As Vig—whose credits span from AFI and Against Me! to Nirvana's *Nevermind*—will tell us later, "I had this 'eureka' moment during rehearsals where it was like, 'I'm sitting in a room with one of the greatest rock bands in the world, ever, and they are putting the fucking hammer down.' I was trying to be nonchalant, like, 'Yeah, guys, sounds pretty good,' but inside I was like, 'Holy fuck, man. I'm a lucky bastard to be sitting here right now!'"

Even in demo form, the songs that are roaring out of the SUV's speakers are the most "maximum"-sounding material Green Day have ever recorded: an airtight collection of politically charged anthems, occasional piano ballads, and power-pop pipe bombs that expand on *American Idiot*'s ambitiousness as much as they refine it to a knife point. There are no nine-minute suites (at least not yet) in the vein of *American Idiot*'s "Homecoming" or "Jesus Of Suburbia," but that's because Armstrong is packing suites' worth of changes, textures and dynamics into the format with which he's long been most comfortable: the three-minute pop song.

"Whether it's the biggest Marshall stack sound or the most transistor-radio sound, everything on this record serves a purpose," Armstrong explains when we get back to the studio lounge. "I'm using those sounds in a way that, I guess, someone would be writing composition or orchestration. I realize that sounds pretentious as hell, but that's me just diving into what I love to do, which is making big-sounding rock music that makes people want to jump up and down."

As much as he's pushing Green Day musically, Armstrong is also using the new material to make some of his boldest lyrical statements yet. Of the seven songs

we hear, at least two will send red-state radio programmers into a blacklisting frenzy. "All the songs are related to the way we feel," he says with a shrug. "I'm still trying to cross the t's and dot the i's, because things are still happening with the state of the world, but I'm basically trying to figure out what life has meant to me in the past three years."

"The lyrics on this record are like a novel," Cool offers, kicked back into his space on the studio couch. "Billie had them all written out and he showed them to us, and it's just like, boom—there it is."

Armstrong grins: "I guess there's a novel idea in there somewhere."

Dirnt, laughing, chimes in: "The songs speak to each other the way the songs on [Bruce Springsteen's] *Born To Run* speak to each other. I don't know if you'd call it a 'concept album,' but there's definitely a thread that connects everything."

It may not be a concept album in the classic sense of the term, but Green Day's latest is absolutely conceptual in spirit. "The best way I can describe it right now is that it's like an apocalyptic angry mob with a city on fire and flashing lights while making out with your girlfriend," Armstrong says. "The last few records, I definitely was writing from a perspective where I wanted it to be something conceptual, something that felt symbolic—but, God, I don't know—it could be taken either way. It could be taken as operatic, or it could be taken as just really good songs. I think that's the thing, trying to find that fine line between those two."

Divided into three acts—tentatively titled "Heroes And Cons," "Charlatans And Saints" and "Horseshoes And Handgrenades"—the new album introduces a handful of soon-to-be-familiar characters with names like "Gloria" and "Christian." *American Idiot*'s characters—Jesus Of Suburbia, the antihero St. Jimmy, and the rebel girl Whatsername—served a similar purpose, tying together songs whose storyline was equal parts suburban angst and global tension. Gloria and Christian, however, more reflect the tension and angst in their creator's world—a fact driven home by how often the word "I" appears alongside both names in the lyric sheet.

"Everyone's got a Gloria or a Christian inside of them," Armstrong explains. "It broadens the imagination by being more specific, but the names could also not be specific. They could represent something—a certain feeling. You want each character to represent a

part of yourself but also be based in the third person, so other people can relate to it."

There's a pause, and then he flashes that familiar impish grin. "Of course, you also want something that'll make one hell of a killer tattoo."

It's hard to imagine a time, especially in light of *American Idiot*'s endless accolades (as of this writing, Green Day were pitted against U2, Britney Spears and, er, Rick Astley for MTV Europe Music Awards' "Best Act Ever" title), when Green Day weren't the biggest punk band on Earth. *Dookie*, of course, officially won the trio that title, defining a sound, a look and a scene while inadvertently marking the point at which underground bands couldn't go home anymore. Even before Green Day signed to Reprise to cut that landmark, though, there were many who considered the band as big as this sound gets.

"We were staying at someone's house in Cleveland—this is before *Dookie* came out; we were touring on [1992's] *Kerplunk* at the time—and he was this big record-collector guy," Armstrong remembers. "He was like, 'Well, what are you gonna do now? I mean, *Kerplunk* is your opus.'" He cracks up. "It's funny now, but I remember it stressing me the fuck out. I was like, 'Oh, God, my best days are behind me, and I'm only 20 years old!'"

Obviously, Green Day defied their naysayer—and by the time 1997's "Good Riddance (Time Of Your Life)" morphed into the planet's honorary prom soundtrack, the band had delivered three snotty, hit-saturated opuses, won a Best Alternative Album Grammy for *Dookie* and shifted millions of units worldwide. The self-doubt Armstrong felt in '92 would linger, though, and as the former brats grew into family men (all Green Day members are dads; Armstrong, married since 1995, is the only one who's not been divorced), the big questions started looming.

While it's a stretch to call 2000's *Warning* (the only Reprise album until now that Green Day have recorded without original A&R man Rob Cavallo, who left Warner Bros. in 2007) a midlife crisis, the disc certainly marked a crisis point between Green Day and popular culture. The band's worst-selling studio record (in relative terms; it's since passed the 1 million mark), *Warning* was more a nod to the influences the band had long kept buried (Bruce Springsteen, Bob Dylan, the Beatles) than a logical continuation of the three albums before it. Critics appreciated the expanded direction, but the generation that considered *Dookie* its punk-rock "gateway drug" responded lukewarmly, while Green Day's own generation proved at the sales counter that it had long since given up pop-punk for mortgages, families and the daily grind.



American Idiot, of course, is the phoenix arisen from these ashes—the record that found Green Day embracing their age while also acting it, overcoming their midlife crisis to find a new lease on life. In some ways, the record's success might be attributable to the planets aligning—or at least to George W. Bush's re-election: Musically and thematically, it was the right album at the right time for the right people. But to write off *American Idiot*'s triumphs as mere luck is to undermine the sheer power of the music and the amount of work Green Day put into realizing it. Outside of Metallica and Guns N' Roses, no contemporary rock band went into their last sessions having so much to prove—and though both of those giants managed to make formidable new records, only Green Day have launched a completely new career.

"*American Idiot* freed us up to work on the most powerful stuff we've ever written," Armstrong says. "There's nothing to prove anymore; we're just trying to show we have this spirit that rock 'n' roll can change lives, and it really is a religious experience that means something to us. It's more about faith now."

"Before *Idiot*, it was hit or miss, but after *Idiot*—let us not forget just how massive that album and tour were—they are in a class where they are pretty much invulnerable," says Marc Spitz, author of the 2007 Green Day biography *Nobody Likes You: Inside The Turbulent Life, Times, And Music Of Green Day*. "That opened the books, burned the saints, the whole 'made guys' ritual. The question now is not, 'How do we keep from losing this status?' It's a permanent status. It's more a question of, 'Now that we are invulnerable, Rock And Roll Hall Of Fame-bound, with a dozen-and-a-half songs that any stadium in any city will always sing along to, what do we want to say, and how can we make sure it rings true?'"

Dou didn't hear about it, because they didn't talk about it, but Green Day started kicking around ideas for a new album as early as January 2006. By anyone's standards, the band deserved a longer break: They'd just wrapped *American Idiot*'s 150-date world tour (the 65,000-ticketholder apex of which is captured on the 2005 CD/DVD *Bullet In A Bible*) and hadn't even

INSIDE THE EIGHTH WONDER

Act 1: Heroes And Cons "21ST CENTURY BREAKDOWN"

Starting almost as a lullaby, this deeply personal song about growing up a Nixon-era outcast in what Armstrong refers to as "Generation Zero" explodes into a 4/4 blast of chiming guitars, rolling toms and choruses that seem pre-wired for arenas. "I could've talked about teenage rebellion, but I chose to sing, 'Born into Nixon/I was raised in hell,'" says Armstrong. "It's about the frustration that a lot of people have over the dying of the American dream, about growing up thinking you're gonna end up somewhere different than where you actually are. It's definitely a more personal song, but it's more general, too."

"KNOW YOUR ENEMY"

Deceptively simple with its Clash-like guitars and shout-along verses of "Do you know the enemy/Well gotta know the enemy," this huge rocker is a fierce call to arms against apathy. "The theme is a good example of the double meanings I'm playing with on this record," says Armstrong. "It could be a call to educate yourself on the world and what's going on, or it could also be a thing where you need to step back and look at yourself. That's something I think you'll get when you hear the second half of the record—but I'm not gonna spoil it for you."

"VIVA LA GLORIA"

Opening with a lush piano and string section ("That may end up being all guitars once it's on the record," Armstrong notes), and building into a crescendo of martial snare rolls and Pete Townshend-esque windmill riffs, this anthem finds Armstrong once more playing with double meanings. "I've always liked the name 'Gloria' and how it represents more

than just a woman's name," Armstrong says. "It could just mean 'glory.' I think it's more about just holding onto yourself and your energy, just to keep seeking out life and getting new experiences. The day you become old is the day you're not looking for new experiences anymore. You need that; you need to do things that keep you alive."

"BEFORE THE LOBOTOMY"

In another calm-before-the-storm moment, an acoustic, Beatles-esque opening dissolves into a crackling guitar texture before exploding into the hair-raising main riff and its verses about "dreaming," "singing" and "dying." "It's one of those songs where you're just drenching the blood out of your heart and squeezing it for all its worth," Armstrong says. "At the same time, it's pretty nihilistic, because it's got this idea of hiding behind something—it could be substance abuse or prescription drugs, or just growing up and numbing yourself against having clarity; anything that keeps you paralyzed and in a cell. When it gets to be too much, you have to find yourself coming out in the opposite direction."

"CHRISTIAN'S INFERNO"

The demo's chorus—which he's altering for the final song—is, "Whoa-oh, Jimmy's inferno," but Armstrong says this driving, almost industrial-tinged beast was never about *American Idiot*'s St. Jimmy. "Jimmy" is just something that rolled off the tongue because I was used to it," he says. "To use the name Christian really changes things. It could be literal—it could be a Christian—or it could be a kid's name; and then an inferno, you know, is self-explanatory. I love double-meaning, but I think that's why it sometimes takes me a long time to write: It's like you're searching for things that make it the big oxymoron."

cleared shelf space for the second Grammy the album would draw, a 2006 Record Of The Year statue for the single "Boulevard Of Broken Dreams." (*American Idiot* won the equally prestigious Best Rock Album award in 2005.) But for a band whose blue-collar roots have always been as much a badge of honor as a reason to keep working, Green Day weren't looking to sit back and count their money.

Sure, they enjoyed some downtime: Cool spent time traveling through Cuba, where he studied Latin percussion while immersing himself in the country's cultural history. After visiting Japan and taking a backpack-style tour of Europe, Dirnt focused on getting his familial house in order: He won custody of his daughter this summer, and literally days before AP's studio visit, he and his fiancée, Brittney, welcomed into the world their first child together, a boy named Brixton Michael. Armstrong also jumped back into his patriarchal role, and in 2007 traveled to New Orleans with his wife, Adrienne, and their sons Joey, 13, and Jakob, 10, to help rebuild homes destroyed by Hurricane Katrina. Even during these relative breaks, however, the songs kept percolating, whether via a 2007 cameo in *The Simpsons Movie* or the sort of star-caliber projects—a 2006 collaboration with U2 to benefit victims of Hurricane Katrina, and a 2007 cover of John Lennon's "Working Class Hero" to support Amnesty International's efforts in Darfur—Green Day might've been laughed at for pursuing before *American Idiot*.

"It always amazes me how quick it happens: You're sitting around one day and you're like, 'I'm unemployed? This is bullshit!'" says Dirnt. "You call up the other guys and you're like, 'Hey—you want a job?' We came back in pretty quick, but we tried to remember not to hit ourselves over the head with too much work."

It might not have felt like work, but Green Day were soon producing more new music—and great new music—than they'd done in years. Even as this upcoming album began coming together in Armstrong's head—and eventually in sessions that found Vig, now an in-house producer for Warner Bros., replacing Rob Cavallo as Green Day's sounding board—the band overflowed with enough ideas to form a side project. Several bottles of wine and one all-night jam later, that's what they had.

Foxboro Hot Tubs' 2008 album, *Stop Drop And Roll!!!!*, and subsequent club dates found Green Day and friends (auxiliary touring members Jason White and Jason Freese, along with keyboardist Kevin Preston) playing raw, British Invasion-style garage

Though AP arrived at Green Day's studio a bit too early to hear finished tracks, we got an exclusive, if brief, taste of the band's upcoming eighth studio album in demo form. Here's Billie Joe Armstrong's song-by-song take on how things are coming together.

"LAST NIGHT ON EARTH"

Musically a spiritual twin to John Lennon's "Woman," this piano-driven love ballad features some of the most direct lyrics Armstrong has ever written—although even these aren't all that they seem. "It is a straight-up romantic moment, but if you read between the lines, it's about the things we hide behind and the sort of glass we put up between each other that we can never really break. The first line is, 'I text a postcard sent to you/Did it go through?' I would write [my wife] Adrienne letters and text her messages, and I would say, 'All my love,' which is not the sort of thing that people who are in love say to each other all the time. People don't normally say the things they should say—or else they write it too often instead."

Act 2: Charlatans And Saints "MARCH OF THE DOGS"

The only song from the new album's second act that AP was permitted to hear in demo form, this searing, handclap- and lead-guitar-drenched indictment of organized religion is the sort of single that, ironically, would sound great blasting from car stereos in red-state America. "I think that religion is responsible for probably 90 percent of the problems the world is faced with right now, so it's a good time for a religious rant," Armstrong says. "It's something that's very taboo, you know; it's not gonna win us any popularity points with certain people, and because Green Day have such a mass audience, I think it's gonna test a lot of people. People are gonna be like, 'Aw, fuck—this is a good song, but I don't know if I can agree with what it's saying.'"



rock to some of the most intimate audiences Green Day had seen since their salad days in the Bay Area punk club 924 Gilman Street. (Not counting, of course, those 2003-2004 gigs by the masked new-wave band the Network, who, of course, were absolutely not Green Day.)

"Foxyboro was our way to come back in and reconnect," says Armstrong, who also spent a chunk of 2008 catching up with his long-running side project Pinhead Gunpowder. "We wrote a bunch of songs in one night on this shitty 8-track recorder, drank some booze, and then decided to go tour and just be completely at one with the crowd. That's really the only way we know how to do things. You can't live on planet rock star 24/7; you have to be down and dirty and have some fun."

"Fun" is the operative word on *Stop Drop And Roll!!!*—references to booze, as well as some clever plays on *American Idiot*'s themes, run through the record. But if you're looking for autobiography, some flash of portent about what was driving Green Day to get back to their next proper album, the opening line of *Stop Drop And Roll!!!*'s "Broadway" says it all: "I'm just killing time now/I do it all the time now/And it's killing me." As much as they enjoyed the chance to stretch out, Armstrong, Dirnt and Cool were ready to be Green Day again.

"It's some kind of quirk I have," says Armstrong. "I have this work ethic that'll probably eventually kill me. But I'm a songwriter—I'm obligated to keep pushing myself."

Church is the last place you'd expect to find a band who grew up in the Bay Area's doggedly leftist punk underground. But after coming off the road for *American Idiot*, Green Day spent a lot of time reconnecting with friends—and when one of those friends, a devout Christian, invited Cool and Armstrong to his son's dedication ceremony, the musicians felt obliged to attend.

"I was high," Cool clarifies, laughing. "But it was still like, 'Okay, you dig this church, I'll be there for you, buddy.' But, yeah—wow. Some of the shit that guy was saying..."

"The pastor said something to the extent of, 'Don't have opinions, because you're not being godly,'" Armstrong remembers, shaking his head. "And you're like, 'Holy shit—don't have *opinions*?' But none of those people had any doubts: They were willing to give themselves over on blind faith to the idea that this person was going to come out and be the solution to all their problems, and that this was somehow exclusive to a certain amount of people."

If Armstrong needed an experience to crystallize his ideas for album No. 8, this

was it. The preacher's sermon became the inspiration for "March Of The Dogs," a scathing attack on religion that leads off the new album's second act. But in a bigger sense, it was that experience of being an outsider in church—the idea that, having made such a widely received indictment of George W. Bush's right-wing Christian vision via *American Idiot*, he was still just a confused, lonely punk—that pushed Armstrong deeper into the album's central concept.

"Despite all the success the band have had around the world, they've never lost that punk-rock spirit—the angst and the inspiration that come from that sensibility," says Warner Bros. chairman and CEO Tom Whalley, also Green Day's A&R rep, when we catch him a few days after the L.A. trip. "Billie clearly continues to want to provoke and challenge the world as it exists, but with this album, he's also challenging himself more than ever before."

As Armstrong explains it, "The last album was dealing with a redneck president and going to war based on a bunch of lies. Since then, we've dealt with Hurricane Katrina. We've dealt with an economy that's crashed. We've dealt with a new sort of racism that's also being seen in this election. All these issues keep coming up, and one day, you sort of go, 'Oh, yeah—but what about the war?' Everything, every day, seems to be another crisis, and it gets hard to know *anything* after a while."

Such statements help to explain why there are no real answers on Green Day's new album. Despite the sense of encroaching darkness, however, there's also no hopelessness. "I think a lot of great rock 'n' roll is like that," says Dirnt. "There are moments where you may feel hopeless, but all of a sudden you lift out of that and you're like, 'Shit, here we go—I just went through a three-minute emotional roller coaster, but there's still this spark!'"

Even as Armstrong seemingly mocks *American Idiot*'s cultural impact in a song like "21st Century Breakdown"—"Tell us a story that's by candlelight/Waging a war and losing the fight"—he acknowledges that the fight the band started with that album has only just begun.

"A lot of this record is just trying to come up with answers to the confusion," Armstrong concludes before heading back into Studio B to resume tracking. "I think if more confused people come together, then hopefully we'll come up with a few more solutions."

"Sometimes we'll look at each other when we're talking about these songs and be like, 'Whoa—what are people gonna think about that?'" adds Cool, wide-eyed, before getting back to work himself. "Who knows, though—you know what I mean? Let's see. Let's shake some shit up—that's all you can do." **alt**