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Interview: Scott Russo of Unwritten Law explains departure of longtime members

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Diehard fans of legendary San Diego punk group [Unwritten Law](#) are psyched to have finally received a new album from the band for the first time in six years with the recent release of [Swan](#), which may be their best album yet. However, those attending the band's Warped Tour shows this summer have noticed something was missing from the live show. Make that two somethings. Guitarist Steve Morris and bassist Pat "PK" Knight have been mysteriously absent from the tour without much explanation. Singer Scott Russo spoke with me Saturday afternoon at Warped's Nassau Coliseum date to give me the details on what lead up to the two longtime members' departure and where he and the new lineup of [Unwritten Law](#) stand now.



Unwritten Law at 2011 Warped Tour

Lorraine Schwartz



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LS: So...I'm not looking for gossip exactly, but do you have any official comment on Steve & PK's absence from Warped Tour?

Uh, yeah. I mean this isn't gossip. This is the gospel is what it is. Out of respect for them and their families we didn't want to release a press release til everything kinda chilled out and everyone hung out. But anyway, what happened was they missed their families, they didn't want to tour unless there was money involved, and they didn't believe in the band. These are words directly out of their mouths.

This is what it is... it's truly like... everything happened for a reason. We got off stage the very last night of our tour and we hugged and were all like "good tour, good tour". One person f**ed off wherever, I f**ed off to the bar and got a drink and a taco with the owner of the club that had us, then I went to the hotel to get my s**. I was actually in the shower getting cleaned up before getting back on the bus. Then when I looked at my phone I saw two missed calls from Steve and a super text like "Where the f** are you motherf**er?!" and I was like "Whaaat?" I shut my phone off and was kinda laughing. Then I climb on the bus and sure enough, Steve comes raging at me. I was like "Bro, chill out man, I'm just twenty minutes late." He got in front of my face screaming at me and said "What are you gonna hit me? Ya gonna hit me?" I thought he was going to hit me or I was going to hit him. And I said "Get outta my face! Nope? Then-" BOOM! I threw a punch. One punch knocked him out, he went to sleep. That was the end of Steve. Then six days later they (Steve and PK) both

kinda came together and said "There's no money, we don't believe in the band, and we miss our families, and now there's drama...we quit."

LS: This talk of punching someone out sounds so matter of fact. I mean, at least in my daily life, this kind of thing just doesn't go on...

Yeah well something must have been in him to push his buttons that far and something must have been in me to push MY buttons that far cus it's not like us to ever act like that. But it happened. It went down. These are the facts. I'm very sad to have lost two people that have been so close to me my whole life. But in the same sentence, these people left me, I didn't leave them. So straight up man, f*** them for f***ing over me, my family and my fans. They're not homies anymore cus they f***ing left me, my fans and my family hanging. But everything was meant to happen, meant to be. Steve was meant to go. Cus it's not like me to f***ing slug my own band members, but it got that far. It got to the point where it was either me or him. They were the sweetest guys but you know... their soul's not into it and you're f***ing using this as a paycheck? F*** that.

LS: It's actually the same in an office place or any company really. Obviously a company runs better with people who care about what they're doing, rather than with apathetic employees.

Absolutely, and this company is running f***ing flawless.

LS: I knew the guys had played the tour just before this. But then I YouTube'd recent fan videos from Warped this year and thought "Woah woah... wait a minute. Who are those two guys?" and wondered what was up.

That's the thing- there wasn't a lot of people coming out to the shows, but we knew that was gonna happen. We haven't toured in years... we haven't had a real record out in six years. People forget. So with a first tour with a brand new record, we're gonna have to re-ignite everything. And I think they were bummed out, they were old, they were tired, they missed their family and no one was making any money. And so all these things combined built up stress in them.

LS: So they're OUT out, not just for this tour.

No they're done. They're f***ing done. The boys obviously don't want us to continue on, but the bottom line is I write the songs and Unwritten Law is mine. I mean, they were already leaving before we even finished that first American tour that was only a month long, as soon as the record came out. There's nothing I can do. I'm not gonna put down 20 years of my

life after writing the record of my lifetime for two people that don't want it and f***ing quit. I'm gonna give it everything I've got. This ship will sail on, straight up.

LS: Who are the two guys that are with you now? How did you hook up with them?

Kevin Bes (Besignano), the guitar player from Bullets & Octane and Derik Envy. Derik's the bass player from every band in L.A. He plays with every f***ing one. They're permanent replacements, not stand-ins.

The day before the fight happened (the second to last day of that tour), we were sitting poolside at the hotel. Kevin was the guitar tech on the last tour, and was also guitar player for [Scott Russo & The Big Bang](#) as well. I said to Kevin: "Steve isn't gonna make it to Warped Tour. Can you learn the set?" He was like "What are you talking about?" I said "Dude. Trust me. He's not gonna come out on Warped Tour." He'd been complaining about Warped Tour for a month, since we were in Australia. Then PK started saying he missed his girls, you know, his babies. Which I understand, I have kids myself. So anyway, I asked Kevin (about learning the set), and he said "I've already got half of it down right now. I'll have the other half of it done by tomorrow." I was like "OK cool!... don't say a word!" And this is even the weirder thing: when I was 20 minutes late for that bus call that last night, Steve was looking at Kevin (Kevin didn't even tell me this til two weeks ago, this tripped me out and my jaw dropped)...Steve said "I f***ng quit. Are you ready to play guitar for Unwritten Law?" and Kevin said "Woah dude. What are you talking about?" And Steve said "F*** this. I'm f***ing over it." Then I walk in the bus, Steve freaks out on me, I knock him out, boom, and that was a wrap. So actually, Kevin had already been offered the job before Steve had quit.

So we had [Kevin](#), he was already locked in. We were headlining a festival six days later and I'm sure the guys thought we were gonna be pulled but I already had another guitar player already learning the set and was ahead of the game. Now we had to find a bass player. Dylan (Dylan Howard, drummer for Unwritten Law) knows everyone in Hollywood and a whole bunch of bass players. But then a whole bunch of people fell out of the auditions and so we only had two people lined up. We tried out the first bass player and it didn't work. I was like "Oh my god, maybe this ISN'T meant to be." Everything sounded right, but it didn't feel right cus the bass wasn't there. And then [Derik Envy](#) walks in, right when I was seriously about to be in tears.

As soon as he plugs in and we go into the first note of "Dark Days", I'm like "Ohhh my god, that's it!" Me and Dylan just look at each other and go "Oh my god!" Then we started to go into "Nevermind" but Derik was off an octave. I said "Because I like you, I want you to learn the song real quick. I'm gonna pull Dylan outside and have a cigarette with him." I pulled

Dylan over and said "What do you think? Is this it?" He's like "Dude. This is it." I said "Is this as good as it gets?" and Dylan said "Dude. This will be better than what we were working with before." I'm like "Are you serious?" He's like "Yeah man." And he knows cus he's actually a musical instructor at MI (Musicians Institute). He sees a million bassists and plays in a million bands, cus Dylan's the biggest slut on the planet.

So we go back in there and we hit "Nevermind" and I said "Oh my god let's play 'Shoulda Known Better!'" And it's just f***ing perfect. Everything's perfect. And bigger. Kevin knew the whole set but the bass players only had to learn three songs in that two days. So I said to Derik "Here's an additional 20 songs. Learn these all before Saturday. We'll see ya there!" So he went home for four days, stopped his job, and learned all the songs. We had practice for two days before that next show. We had to play that first show just six days after the boys quit and it went off without a f***ing hitch. We've been on ever since.

Everyone's hungry now and everyone wants it as a whole whereas before me and Dylan were the only hungry ones. Now, all four of us are hungry.

Check out my slideshow of Unwritten Law from Saturday's Warped Tour date at Nassau Coliseum [here](#). Stay tuned for part two of my interview with Scott Russo.

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