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Interview: The UK's Sharks discuss Warped Tour and punk rock

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Hailing from Royal Leamington Spa, England, [Sharks](#) have had a great start to their career so far. Formed just four years ago, they've already gained the respect of their heroes, having opened for [Chuck Ragan](#) (of Hot Water Music) and [Social Distortion](#) this year alone. Labeled as 'punk rock' by many, they don't mind the classification so long as the term is used to describe their attitude rather than to try to box them in.



Singer James Mattock of UK band Sharks playing at Warped Tour on July 23, 2011 at Nassau Coliseum

Lorraine Schwartz



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Comparisons between James Mattock and punk rock warlord Joe Strummer are inevitable though, given the striking similarity in vocal styles. But once you see [Sharks live](#), you'll see that singer Mattock, guitarist Andrew Bayliss, and drummer Sam Lister have a way all their own. In fact, it was their live [performance](#) in May at the Stone Pony (opening for Social D) that made them one of the reasons I decided to stare heatstroke in the face and [brave](#) my first ever [Warped Tour](#). It was at Warped's Nassau Coliseum date that I chatted with them about their summer, punk, and the greatness that is [Mike Ness](#).

How are you doing today?

SAM: Very hot today. But doing good.

Heading into this tour, I'm sure you had ideas about how your Summer would go. Has the tour met your expectations?

SAM: It's exceeded mine, in a good way.

ANDREW: Absolutely, it's been totally joyous.

How have you been handling the unpredictable daily set time changes for bands?

SAM: I think the reason it's done, not many people realize, is so the smaller bands don't clash with the bigger bands every day. If you had a fixed set time, and it was at the same time as A Day To Remember or The Devil Wears Prada, no one would ever come and see you. [Kevin](#) (Lyman, tour creator) does it to be productive and give the smaller bands more exposure. So I think it's actually a really good system.

ANDREW: And also it wouldn't be fair for one band to be first on every day. So to swap it around is making it even for every band.

Have you seen any bands that you didn't know before that you've taken to?

ANDREW: Loads, yeah.

JAMES: The main one in particular is [Foxy Shazam](#). I'd heard of them but like, never really got around to listening to them. For the first time, I saw them on my birthday and it was night. They played last and I just fell in love with them straight away. Then I tried my best to watch them every day if I could. They're just great.

SAM: Sensational. Heard the record and it's just amazing as well.

I just watched Lucero for the first time earlier today and was immediately hooked.

SAM: Yeah we love them as well. They played at the barbecue the other day. It was great.

I've heard that these BBQs exist. Are they every night?

SAM: When you have later bus calls. If you have a long drive they won't. But most days, yeah.

JAMES: From like 9, to midnight, if that's as late as the bus call, which it usually is. They like getting bands to play. Like [Bad Rabbits](#) had a great set the other day...and also [Lucero](#)... everyone just gathers around and everyone's just having a good time.

ANDREW: Respect to Kevin for putting on such a broad range of bands on Warped.

Over the years the lineup has definitely increased in variety.

SAM: Everyone's done it. Even like, Eminem and Black Eyed Peas pre-Fergie.

The last time you were in town, you played with Social Distortion at the Stone Pony.

What was it like touring with (singer/punk legend) Mike Ness?

JAMES: Where do you start?

SAM: What a great person. Just an amazing presence. When you're around him you just feel like you're in the presence of a true great. Everyone hangs on his every word.

ANDREW: That was quite an overwhelming show, just for where it was and the [history](#) with that place... Springsteen... memorabilia all over the place. And obviously playing with Social D, it was sort of like a double whammy.

JAMES: Mike Ness is one of those people who seems to have never lost his grit and original attitude. So many bands from that era have totally lost it and it's like, embarrassing. But he just keeps topping himself. He's just cool as hell and he's a genius.

I was reading that [Joy Division](#) was one of your influences as well.

ANDREW: Massively yeah.

SAM: How about this: I did a pub quiz with [Stephen Morris](#) last year. I was on his team and I didn't say anything for like two hours. I just watched him. And it was brilliant.

Did you go into fan boy mode?

SAM: A bit. I dunno. Well I tried not to. I couldn't really help it. I tried to play it cool, but I don't know how well I did.

JAMES: It's a drummer thing.

You've been labeled as "punk rock." Everyone seems to have a different definition of what "punk rock" means. What is yours?

ANDREW: I think because it's been tagged on so much, the actual musical term has just become stale. I think it really is just a spirit of what you're doing. It's like an ethos more than a certain genre of music.

Do you feel having that term attached to you is at all confining, like you feel pressured to stick to certain guidelines musically or image-wise?

JAMES: If it's meant the way we want it to mean, like musical freedom and freedom from whatever else, then I'm glad they understand us. Because that's what we're trying to get through as people, with positive messages, provocative lyrics & artwork and just making people think. We kind of want to go against it (the perceived limitations of the tag 'punk rock') more than anything.

ANDREW: We're not really tied down to anyone's thoughts or any particular journalist or anything. That's their opinion of it, and we'll just carry on doing what we're doing.

The music industry has changed so much in the past few years, did the idea of walking into this turmoil make you nervous or have you just embraced it?

JAMES: We don't even really know how it's changed because we've only been a band for 4 years and began just as it was all kind of falling apart.

SAM: We don't really have a choice, we kind of have to embrace it now. I feel like we've made the best of it.

JAMES: Going from something that was a lot easier, like 10 or whatever years ago, I'd guess it'd be hard to take the change. But we're working with what we've got and it's going fine so far!

Be sure to check out my [slideshow](#) and [video clip](#) from their performance at Warped Tour.

Sharks will be back in town with the [AP Tour](#) on October 19th at Toad's Place in New Haven, CT, November 22nd at Irving Plaza in NY, NY and November 23rd at Starland Ballroom in Sayreville, NJ ([tickets](#) on sale this week). Follow them on [Twitter](#), on [Tumblr](#), or 'like' their [Facebook](#) page. Samples of their music and their CD "Joys of Living" can be found on [Amazon](#).

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