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Interview: Alex Levine of The Gaslight Anthem

[The Gaslight Anthem](#) is a band that's hard to categorize musically. My best attempt at a description is that they're a healthy mix of punk, soul and classic rock. Their influences range from The Clash to Sam Cooke to Tom Petty. They're as welcomed at a punk show as they are in your parents' car on a family trip. However, there is one place you might be surprised to find them, and that's at a festival geared towards diehard Metallica fans. But that's exactly where they were this past weekend, handpicked by Metallica to play the Orion Music and More Festival (review [here](#)). I sat down with bassist Alex Levine near the "Frantic" stage to discuss their sudden rise in popularity and finding a fan in late night TV host [David Letterman](#).

Lorraine Schwartz

You're here playing a festival curated and headlined by Metallica. Did you grow up a fan of theirs at all? Were they an influence on you in any way?

Musically for Gaslight, no. As musicians yes, and I respect them just as people and what they've done with their career. People can say whatever they want about Lars and whatever, with that Napster thing. I think he's pretty badass and he was just standing up for what he believed in. I grew up with them- my Dad's a massive Metallica fan. We just met Lars and Kirk a couple weeks ago and they were the nicest guys.

The last time I saw [The Gaslight Anthem](#) play was at Bamboozle (review [here](#)). How was that for you, seeing your home territory transformed into a huge festival?

Bamboozle was cool. It's always a little weird when you show up to these festival environments because honestly, you can kinda turn around and be anywhere in the world. These festivals sometimes take the personality out of the place they're in. There's all these advertising things and then a stage and what not.

Right, like festivals these days don't tend to have any true individuality.

Exactly. We always have a running joke when we're in Europe. We'll be on a side of a stage at 2pm about to go on saying "We could be in Norway, or New Jersey or Spain right now." It can all look the same. But I think that they did a pretty good job keeping the integrity of Asbury Park. They had it on the beach which was cool. We were overlooking the beach while we played. I just wish the weather was a little bit nicer! It ended up being cool though. I

think they did a better job than a lot of these festivals do.

In one of the videos posted on YouTube, your [view](#) looking out from the stage was half ocean, half people.

Yeah it was crazy. It almost looked like we're falling into the ocean.

Did you end up sticking around to see fellow Jersey natives Bon Jovi?

I saw them go on stage, but I had to get back home. My Mom watched though!

Yeesh, Bon Jovi's a "Mom Band" now?!

Well MY Mom, yeah! It's one of her favorite bands.

Speaking of past shows in Asbury Park, will there be a full DVD coming out of your Convention Hall show or was the professional filming limited to the special Springsteen moment?

That would have been nice...we should have done that (laughs). Not that night though. We do want to do a live DVD sooner than later.

Since your last tour, there seems to be near-hysteria over Gaslight tickets with shows [selling out](#) in less than five minutes. What is your reaction to that? Are you surprised?

Honestly, we're not so much surprised as excited. Because when you put up tickets to any show you can't expect for it to sell out. Especially when it's not in your hometown. We haven't played some of these places in a long time. We kinda went into it like "Maybe they just don't know who we are? Or they don't want to see us?" You never know. It's just exciting that all those shows are selling out. It's pretty great.

How much control do you guys have over the concert ticket situation you've now been confronted with since your popularity has risen?

We're trying to fix those problems with scalpers and fake tickets. We're trying to get to the point where we can have a lot more control over the way our tickets are going out. It sucks because LiveNation and these ticket companies have to charge X amount of money. We're trying to figure out where the middle ground is. We pretty much have control over 99% of what our band is represented as. But with tickets and stuff like that, there's big businesses that take that by that horns and do it. We want to get to the point where we can control our own destiny. Kind of like what Metallica does!

After you finish your run opening for Rise Against this Fall, do you know what type of venues you're going to play for your headline shows?

Well, we're gonna do another European tour. Then, we're gonna come back and do a full U.S. tour of a lot of different places, for

probably two months this Spring. They'll be bigger venues than the shows we're doing now.

With your fanbase continually growing, it does seem like you have no choice but to play larger capacity halls from now on.

One thing to keep in mind with us is that we're never 'shoot for the stars' with the places we're gonna play. Like, we had our video at The Stone Pony; we like to play the smaller places. It gets to a point where you overgrow a certain venue. But to jump to an arena right away... people do that really prematurely just because they want the recognition of playing arenas or something.

I've definitely heard Brian (Fallon, singer for the Gaslight Anthem) say that some day you guys want to play Giants Stadium.

In a dream world? Yeah. I think people are super naive and they're just straight up liars when they say they don't want to play on the biggest stages of the world all the time. People that play music, no matter how punk rock or DIY you were at one point, when you start playing music in your mirror playing air guitar, you weren't picturing yourself in a basement your whole life! You picture yourself wailing out in front of a sea of people. That's the dream. But the reality is that we can't sell out a stadium now (laughs). Down the road we want to be at a point where we can play those kinds of shows though.

You have a webcast coming up with the Letterman show. How

did that come about? Was he personally involved?

We've done Letterman twice already. I guess the web or program director there likes us. They wanted us to do the show and then told us about how they do this webcast now and asked if we wanted to do it. We're gonna tape the Letterman show like you normally would and then they'll kick everyone out and bring fans into the Ed Sullivan Theater. We'll play about a 45 minute set. (To watch the archived webcast, click [here](#).)

When you guys [played](#) "The '59 Sound" on the Late Show, I could tell just from being a longtime Letterman fan, that you're one of the few modern rock bands Dave actually seemed legitimately impressed with. I don't see that kind of reaction too much from him.

Thanks. Yeah, I think David Letterman likes rock and roll!

You can follow The Gaslight Anthem on Twitter at [@GaslightAnthem](#) or check out GaslightAnthem.com for more information on their upcoming release "Handwritten" as well as tour dates and other news. Follow me on Twitter at [@ConcertExaminer!](#)