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## Interview with Papa Roach's Tony Palermo

Back in 2007, Papa Roach (vocalist Jacoby Shaddix, guitarist Jerry Horton, bassist Tobin Esperance) and Unwritten Law drummer Tony Palermo, were at a crossroads. Each were facing difficulties within their respective bands behind the scenes, and change was necessary if they wanted to continue pursuing their musical dreams. Both parties wanted to be in a situation where all band members shared the same aggressive determination and drive that is so crucial to keeping a good thing going in the 2015 music world. When Palermo replaced original longtime member Dave Buckner, he not only brought those qualities to the table, but a fresh perspective and a punk influence that has melded well with the established band who burst onto the scene back when MTV was still playing videos in 2000. I spoke with Palermo at the Rock Allegiance Festival in Chester, PA about his early days as a member of Papa Roach and about how the band has evolved since joining.

**Lorraine Schwartz:** Having been a fan of Papa Roach since the early days, one thing that always set you apart from the rest of the band in my mind is that you came from a punk rock background. Is there anything you've carried over from that world to this world of

melodic Metal?

**Tony Palermo:** Well definitely, if you break it down to the playing styles. You know, Dave played a lot of big, slower drum fills. And that's not a diss! Just an observation.

**LS:** No of course not. Your style is definitely different though. It's a little more on the "vicious" side if I may say so.

**TP:** Yeah, it's a little more "on top." Like when I joined, they were like "Woah, dude!", because I came right out of that type of playing. But obviously with P. Roach there's more groove. I like doing those slower big fills, but I also like injecting some of that punk rock urgency. But I definitely need to mix it up, because if I was playing all fast fills all the time, it just wouldn't work. So I pick my moments. I'm the drummer that kind of plays more on top of the beat. But I've learned a lot. I've learned ways to just kind of pick moments where you get in the pocket more. Because otherwise everything just sounds so rushed. But being energetic in my playing is something I've always thought was the right thing to do. Like I'm never forcing it, like "My God, I've gotta play so hard tonight!" It's just the way I play. I've auditioned for bands and I'm sure they were like "F\*\*k! He's playing way too loud."

**LS:** Yeah, bands have a vision for their sound where they're looking for a certain style.

**TP:** Yeah right. Which is cool, because then I know, "OK cool, then I'm not the right guy for you." I'm fine with that. It should never be

forced.

**LS:** Do you know right away in these auditions if something wasn't going to work out?

**TP:** You always go in with the intention of playing your best and knowing the material you're auditioning. But it might be a look/image thing. Back when I was still doing the punk thing, but also playing in some indie bands, I had a less crazy hairstyle. The band that I was I auditioning for, they were just all like, dreads and stuff, so I did look kind of out of place. But I had learned the material and it sounded cool as f\*\*k when we were rehearsing.

**LS:** That's interesting because I never think of the Rock world being like that. I think of image or visual concerns as being more of a Pop thing. Like with boy bands for example.

**TP:** I have known people throughout my years of playing where maybe they had a gig, but then lost the gig because they didn't really move forward with them.

**LS:** Well luckily, you have been able to move forward with Papa Roach. Who, by the way, has seemingly become accustomed to the arena scene lately!

**TP:** Yes, and we'd like to keep it that way!

**LS:** Having been in bands that reached different levels of success, can you see why Roach has reached these heights?

**TP:** Yeah absolutely. It's all about work ethic. When I filled in, in 2007, I was pretty blown away by how everything was so connected. I mean the guys grew up together. However, because of that fact, I thought there may be some weird s\*\*t. But really it's like a family.

**LS:** Thinking about it, this is the only band the other three guys have ever really been in. I mean aside from your typical high school band experiences that are short-lived. So there must be a different dynamic there, compared to your past groups.

**TP:** Yeah I was blown away by how hard the guys work. With touring for one thing, which was how I initially met them (on other tours). But to be in it from the inside, seeing the thought process behind things and decision-making, I was like "Man!" I remember saying, after I filled in, that if I can't get this gig, I need to find a band like this.

**LS:** Given the state of Unwritten Law and Papa Roach at that point, it seems the timing was just right for the four of you to come together and move forward permanently.

**TP:** Yeah it was crazy timing. I definitely made some of those guys (in Unwritten Law) mad. I filled in for Papa Roach because we weren't doing much. Unwritten Law had a few more shows booked, but I got the call to fill in again at the end of the year. I was like, "I have to make myself available to these guys."

**LS:** From my perspective as a fan of both bands over the years, I

can see how a future with Roach in the long term seemed worth the commitment. As you mentioned, to get to where they are, they must have a great work ethic to be able to keep the band's momentum going. This means having tremendous focus on all band matters, no matter how big or small.

**TP:** I think a lot of that comes from having those major record deals where they just throw a ton of money at you and you sort of go, "Oh this is awesome!" But then you sort of forget about the other side of the business side of it. Like they made \$600,000 videos. But now they're like "What the f\*\*k were we thinking? That was so stupid." Eventually it's coming out of your pocket after awhile, and that's one thing you don't realize. When a label is throwing money at you, you have to recoup it.

**LS:** I recently [interviewed](#) Tim Sult of Clutch on the topic of where they've succeeded where other bands have failed. He mentioned that some bands get used to having money thrown behind them, but then once that money goes, the determination and drive suffers because they don't want to get down and dirty again.

**TP:** Then they don't want it that bad! We're always trying to get bigger and bigger. It's weird because I wasn't around when they sold millions of records. Now it's just always about "OK what new people can we get to." We're trying to package up with younger bands like Bring Me the Horizon or Of Mice and Men. Those bands always get talked about, because their demographic is so young. But, actually we are seeing a lot of younger people at shows which is awesome.

**LS:** Oh for sure. I see a lot of little kids at your shows now, which I didn't used to see.

**TP:** Yeah their parents are fans! After doing those Mötley Crüe and Nickelback shows where the demographic is a little older, we got a lot of fans from those tours. And now we have parents saying "Yeah my kids are into you guys!" It's cool. So next year, we want to try and find those right packages.

**LS:** I was just about to ask you if this is it for the tour cycle for F.E.A.R. It sounds like you're in the planning stages for another round of shows?

**TP:** No dates set in stone yet. But we're going to try to be super picky next year. I mean we're not just going to take tours just to take tours. Our whole thing is now, after doing this arena tour that we just did with Five Finger Death Punch and In This Moment, we don't want to go back to the theaters and clubs. But if we do end up doing that, it's going to be like "OK we're doing THIS theater of 1500 or 2000 people." We want to stay in the arenas.

**LS:** Papa Roach is actually a band that's great at playing arenas. Not every band is suited for that environment. But besides the huge energy you guys bring, the songs are very grand and anthemic. "Kick in the Teeth" being an example as a song that's made for huge crowd sing-alongs, not tiny little club shows.

**TP:** Well I mean that's something we're very conscious of when

writing. Tempos are very important. Like "Oh we can't play the song too fast because people aren't going to feel it." There's a pulse to a song. You can't play it too slow. We're always trying to find the perfect tempo. If it's a jump-tempo song, it's gotta be within a certain BPM. But, yeah we're striving to stay in the arenas. Having this last tour be so successful just felt right. We finally have production. And then having Maria coming out. It's just something special, like when Jerry and Jacoby go out into the audience to play "Scars" acoustic. It's just something different. We had just little things that just took our show a step up and were so stoked for that. All the things we did on this tour just felt right. We don't want to go back. We're going to Europe with Five Finger and we can't carry most of the stuff we have on this run over there because it's just way more expensive. So we're already frustrated. The shows are going to be great, but we're so elated that we have production now and the show that was put together. We will still probably be playing close to the same songs, but we just won't have some of the production.

**LS:** How does making the final decisions regarding show production work? Is it a matter of you presenting ideas to the powers that be and then they say yes or no?

**TP:** First of all, we having a lighting guy. We have to meet with him and say, "We've just come up with this whole thing." And he also had ideas that he came up with for this run. Like how to make it practical, because you have to think about everything. It starts with budget and then getting things on and off stage quickly. Also, we're on one bus and all the bunks are taken. So, he couldn't bring a

lighting tech, which means he had to set everything up and tear everything down. So you're limited. The show that you saw (on this run) is the absolute most that he could have done by himself and made it work. So there's a lot of variables. Eventually we'll be on two buses, so then he can have a lighting tech and we can make it bigger and therefore have more stuff. This tour, there was finally a production budget in the tour. So we were able to play with some of the tour money to help us out and help create what we did. I mean we're not gonna have pyro. It looks badass, but it's so expensive and you need pyro guys out. So then it's extra bunks, and extra hotel rooms, and extra per diems. It just all adds up. Soon as you start adding people... I mean you have hotels, you have flights, etc. You can get local stagehands to help, but there still a core of traveling people. It's pretty nuts.

**LS:** Along with the upcoming tour with Five Finger Death Punch, Jacoby said onstage that your future plans include releasing "Falling Apart" as the next single. Will you be filming a video for it?

**TP:** We're talking about it. We have some treatments written, so we're just trying to pick a treatment. I don't know if we're going to be in it. There's one that was written that didn't include us and had people acting.

**LS:** It seems like a bit of a spiritual song, perhaps referencing Jacoby's faith. Will that be incorporated into the storyline of the video at all?

**TP:** It depends on which treatment we go with. But yeah the plan is



for it to be released and have some kind of video. Right now "Gravity" is just gaining ground. There's no release date or radio date. But definitely some point next year. But yes, it's the next single.

Sounds good! You can find more information on Papa Roach as well as their upcoming tour dates with Five Finger Death Punch on their official [website](#). Follow me on Twitter at [@ConcertExaminer!](#)