



BLOOD OF GODS

SANGUIS
DEORUM

HOUSE of SMITH



**CHARLES
SMITH**

I've been wanting to get you in Blood Of Gods since the first issue, but I'm glad it happened now because that one's long sold out, and now there are a lot more people reading.

CHARLES: You don't know people are paying attention, and then all of a sudden-man-they get you. And it's like, I didn't know people were paying attention to what I was doing, I was just doing my thing, hoping they would pay attention, but I didn't really take an account of who was paying attention, I just kept doing it. I think it's maybe like that in music: you're just focused on what you're doing, next thing you know there's an audience out there in front of you and you're like, "Where the fuck did all these people come from?!"

BoG: Yes! I used to have a college radio and it often felt the same way, where I felt like I was just screaming into the void and no one was listening or paying attention, and then in the days following I'd hear from people and friends who said they heard me, or liked what they heard... and I had no idea. I actually wish this interview was in our last issue, because we had a great feature called "What's So Punk About Wine." Where people in the wine biz share how punk ideals helped inform their approach to wine.

CHARLES: "What's so punk about wine?" Well, the one thing, is that SO FEW people exhibit what is really punk about wine in the wine world. Same thing about music - there's a lot of beige out there. But when you decide to factor in your own individual voice, it's that bit kind of like, "I don't know how to play guitar - I got a guitar. I started playing it - I got some other people to make noise with. Eventually we made a sound together." And you know, I think it's the same thing. You have nothing to lose, you can only go forward, and that's what's

really PUNK about punk - you're kind of forced against something, you're either against or running away from. And I think that kind of forms that thing about, "What's So Punk About Wine?" If you decide to have your own voice, and you're not really paying attention to what other people do, but you learn from the history of what people are doing-you can have that to draw from, and create something that's purely your own. And I would say that's very rock n roll, or that's really punk. But also, a lot of times it comes out of poverty, and out of shitty situations. Like me, I came from poverty and shitty situations so I had nothing to lose, but to go forward - You're not afraid of your own voice cause that's actually all you have. What have you got to lose? There's nothing to lose.

BoG: And also, as far as punk ethos, challenging the status quo, pushing back against convention, and asking questions. Do you see that paralleled in your experience?

CHARLES: Yea, absolutely. You have a pretty good lay of the land, and you can decide what your truth is going to be, and typically it's not going to be the collective truth of everyone else, because you know, to say, "Punk rockers or 'Punk' is not well-informed"...?! Punk is more well-informed than the vast majority of people because they actually pay attention, because they're into it, you know? They're on it, man! And to really be on it means you have to be in the moment, and to be in the moment does not allow for convention, it creates risk. And with risk there is reward. And that's where the excitement happens.

BoG: That kind of ties into the old adage of, "He who dares, wins." You've gotta take that leap.

CHARLES: Yea, the act of actually doing it is the exciting part. Succeeding is like, "Next." There's no excitement, there's no satisfaction. And then it becomes dull or numb, and, "What am I going to do? Hit repeat, and do this over and over and over again?" I think the cooler things in wine are through innovation, which is something that



I guess, in retrospect, you would say it certainly is. I mean, is that definitely a risk? Fuck yea. It's trusting that there are people out there that feel the same way that you do, and they're going to find you by you putting your voice out there.

**"I think about everybody,
'What do the people want?'
And then give them it with
integrity, and intent, and
purity, and no compromise."**

BoG: What do you do when doubt or fear creeps in? When you take these risks, are you ever scared?

CHARLES: !Oh yea! Sure. Man, there's no guarantee. There are no guarantees with anything. I think when you're calculated, I think you can do it but it's kind of like 'paint by numbers.' When I want to do something that turns out to be innovative, I guess, I kind of have this idea, like, "Okay, I check this box, I check this box..." I take care of every part of it, and it's bullet-proof for me in integrity, then I can move forward with certainty knowing that, without promise, but certainly, it's good. Because I'm thinking about the people and

what they want and I'm responding to not just an inner-voice, but also the connectivity. This isn't about me, it's about the collective "We." And that's why I say, when you know those people are out there, you know that eventually they're gonna hear you. And that's who you want to get in contact with. So, yea there's absolutely a, "Holy fuck! I can't believe I'm doing this!" And it's like, "Okay, everything I thought connects, and they get it." And that is really cool when you're heard.

BoG: Absolutely. I think it's like a Venn diagram where one circle is the part that satisfies you personally, on a deeper, creative, maybe even spiritual, level, and the other circle is what your fans and followers like and want, and where they overlap is the sweet spot.

CHARLES: !Well the cool thing is everybody, you're able to put something out there that taps into something in every type of person, it's not just a focus for a certain group. I make my wines for everybody, and if you want them-we may have very different interests, maybe different political whatever-but if you like what I'm doing, and you get it, we have a relationship, you know what I mean? And that is really cool. I think about everybody, "What do the people want?" And then give them it with integrity, and intent, and purity, and no compromise. And then if it turns out to be commercial, let's say you're a band and you've been slugging away forever, playing in shitty places, and you're really tight, and you've got a lot of people that love you, and all of a sudden you get huge, and then they're all like, "You've betrayed us!" I mean, how did they betray you? Because more people like what you like?! They're not betraying anybody. As long as you're not betraying yourself, and you can look in the mirror and go, "Yea, this is my truth." There's no betrayal.

BoG: By the way, I saw you're wearing a Melvins shirt and I remember when I first heard the Melvins, I was probably a young teenager in middle school or high school, and it was SCARY.

CHARLES: It's heavy!

BoG: I think it was maybe 'Stoner Witch' or something, and it was so sludgy and brutal... but it brings to mind my short fuse for elitists where I'll be at a wine event or a tasting and I'll see these pedantic wine snobs or elitists trying to flex their wine knowledge or palate, but then they'll turn around and turn on something like, the Dave Matthews Band...

CHARLES: !(Laughs) Oh my god.

BoG: ...And-disclaimer: I know it's all subjective, but when I see Charles Smith is wearing a Melvins shirt or a Dead Moon shirt, I think, "Alright, cool, he's good, he checks out. The good taste isn't limited to his wine-tasting palate."

CHARLES: !Well, I mean, I've been around for a long time. I turned 18 in '79, so I had hard rock and heavy metal, and then I had new wave and punk rock, and then METAL-metal, then dirtier and slower music in the 90s, and all the way through... So my wardrobe is basically reflective of the years, it's not because I found my new favorite thing. You eventually figure out what you wear and what suits you, ya know. I don't even know how old this Melvins t-shirt is... I think it's probably 15-20 years old, I don't know. I was exercising in it earlier, I needed a shirt, and I don't buy Lululemon, so what the fuck, ya know? Maybe the Melvins should start their workout line.

BoG: There's a lot of extremity and brutality involved in growing grapes and making wine. So in your opinion: What's so metal about wine?

CHARLES: !Well, I have vineyards that are absolutely out in the middle of absolutely of nowhere - I mean NOWHERE. There's nothing around. There's not a town that's around for 20-30 miles, there's not like some cute Hamlet. How do you pick this place that's out in the middle of nowhere, where nobody's seeing what you do, and you're doing it

completely on your own? You're feeling the Fall come on, which I always think is dark and foreboding, and the fruit comes off when it's done and it's completely more or less spent, and where its last burst of energy is. And then you take it into a cold vessel outside, and I used to foot crush all my stuff barefooted, and you're doing this thing and then eventually it's just going to start fermenting, and it's this thing that you have no idea, you can't control it, it takes on a life of its own, and it's going to end up on the other side... There's a lot of trust. I think it's really bad ass to do this sometimes.

"Making wine without heart is not even worth doing"

BoG: Speaking of fermentation and things you can't control, it's been mentioned before that it's like a punk concert



(Ed. the included double sided poster with BoG #5) where there's a sense of "controlled chaos" - where things can get wild and crazy, and there's an element of danger/uncertainty, but it can also come together to create something beautiful. "Making wine without heart is not even worth doing"

CHARLES: !Well, it takes on a life of its own. So you've seen these really big shows where disastrous things happen. Nobody is wishing this, like I said, it takes on a life of its own and it can go to an inevitable crash, but on the other hand, most nearly every single night it goes in a completely different way, where everyone fosters togetherness, and somehow they find themselves in that moment-individually and in a group-together which is pretty bad ass.

BoG: That's a perfect example. It usually harmonizes. People usually police themselves, or find their own rhythm. But I think of the Rolling Stones concert at the Altamont Speedway, where shit gets crazy, the ferment goes bad, and in their case someone gets stabbed. And that's where it can jump the track, like a stuck fermentation, or a bad yeast is introduced and it can get bad...

CHARLES: !I think you trust the process. If you know that you're prepared, you get ready for it, and then you just do it with reckless abandon. Understanding that the process, and you cannot control it all, and when you do you take away some of the passion and emotion of it, and for me making wine without heart is not even worth doing. I mean, I could go buy some wine if that's how I wanna do it, if I can't do it with full emotion and be emotionally available to do it, then, yea... I think it's the same thing being around musicians and bands and so forth, if you don't go out there every night, and put out everything that you want to put out, and leave everything on the stage, then what the fuck are you doing there? Make room for somebody else. If there's something that's honest and personal, we'll react, most likely.

BoG: Whenever you encounter elitism, how do you deal with it?

CHARLES: I just usually walk the other way. I do my own thing. I know what's going on, but I'm not really watching everybody





else run their game, I'm too busy doing my own, and that's how I contribute to the whole world of wine, by being completely engaged doing my thing, and I'm just a piece of it. I'm not interested in being part of something cause I'm already part of a collective something so I don't need to break it down into another thing. And for people that want it to be like that, that's the way they want to live, but I walk alone. It's not for a lack of not thinking other people aren't talented and there's not good wine or nice people, but I'm just doing my own thing. So there tends to be people that, in many things-including wine, where they want to be a part of a club, ya know? I don't want to be a part of anything, I wanna just be a part of me (laughs). And if I get to co-habitate and work with other like-minded people, and collaborate and so forth, then that's really, really cool. And I can appreciate people that are doing it in a different way than what I'm doing, but these private clubs and these private organizations, and, "I hang out with this person. You hang out with this person..." It's like, "Man, I'm just making wine." And if I'm in Walla Walla, then I'm a part of the wine community there cause I grow grapes and I started making wine in '99. We find our tribe wherever we go, and they can be very different from yourselves, but there's something that they carry around that's inherently the same as you. It's very easy for me to name people that I really like what they're doing, and mostly when it comes to wine, and really relatable in other things I'm interested in, it has nothing to do with any of that, I just think they're badasses in what they're doing because of the integrity in which they do it.

"...if you don't go out there every night, and put out everything that you want to put out, and leave everything on the stage, then what the fuck are you doing there? Make room for somebody else."

BoG: !Great quote!

CHARLES: !Yea – the integrity in which they do it. And that's the deal with hard rock, metal, doom metal, black metal... you

KNOW that this is most likely never going to be big, but this is purity for you. It's ground zero, it's the heart of darkness in everything, and you are compelled to do this because this is inherently who you are. And that's why if I'm at a show, or Copenhell or whatever, I'm always looking for the smaller stages, you know, near people, because their intent is right there in front of you. And it's so great, and you get this so well in music, particularly in hard rock and metal music, because there's a blueprint for it and finding their own way within this, where it's already a crowded field, and feeling that you have your own voice and you are being true to yourself, makes you a part of the collective of the whole thing. And that is your participation in it, and that is my participation with everybody else in the wine world that I know, don't know, hang out with, don't hang out with, appreciate their work, don't appreciate their work.. my contribution is contributing myself to it. That's it.

BoG: A lot of folks had their lives changed during and since the pandemic shut down — how did you handle it?

CHARLES: I just decided, "I have a wine cellar and I'm going to drink through it!" (Laughs) That's pretty much what I did. When the pandemic started, I went out to my house in Walla Walla, at the winery, and I stayed there and was like, "I have about 5,000 bottles of wine here, and let's see how I can put a big dent in it." So I submitted myself to mezcal for breakfast, wine for lunch, mezcal for pre/mid-afternoon, wine for dinner, and mezcal for later in the night... I think everybody found their own way through this thing. I mean it was a really weird thing to do. Who knows what that big wave or disruption is really going to mean going forward? I'm really curious with music, actually, what's going to happen. How the delivery system for music, being online and so forth, and pluck songs out of nowhere, which is great to be able to listen to back catalogs. But I don't know what it's actually going to mean for music in the future. I mean there's sure been a hell of a lot of doom, destruction, and darkness that came out of this - I think there should be some great material, especially for the Nordic bands.

BoG: What are you digging lately?

CHARLES: Recently, nothing new musically. I just decided that I was going to pretty much start every day with Black Sabbath's first record, it seems to be resonating with me for the last month. And so, at least one day I've been putting on Black Sabbath's Black Sabbath and it's been really, really working for me right now. With all this smoke in the air, I think listening to those guys bang it out, it seems kind of simpatico with where my head's at right now. And right now, getting rev'd up and getting ready for harvest, this is the way to go into it - with a little bit of swagger and anticipation and the excitement of when it's gonna happen. And I guess right now my soundtrack for it is Black Sabbath.

"Feeling that you have your own voice and you are being true to yourself makes you a part of the collective of the whole thing. And that is your participation in it, and that is my participation with everybody else in the wine world..."



AM

GRENACHE THE BOY POWERLINE ESTATE VINEYARD 2019



Light ruby color, as one expects from Grenache, and then a nose like cinnamon gummies, with soft red cherry notes that evolve into something with a bit more candy to it, like strawberry roll-ups. Pretty soon some vanilla wafts in along with a bit of red raisins and spiciness from black pepper. The overall effect is of candied bing cherries and black pepper. Although it has just a tiny hint of sweetness, that isn't disruptive, but the wine finishes a little quickly.

ROYAL CITY SYRAH STONERIDGE VINEYARD 2018



Stoneridge sits in the Royal Slope AVA, at just around 800 feet elevation, with excellent air movement (you're just above the Columbia River, so the grapes can hang out and avoid the risk of frost. In a warm year like 2018, wines like this Syrah grew an extra layer of flesh. Along with classic black and blue fruits aromas and flavors, and a lot of black and white pepper, there are cherries that have been either candied or reduced to syrup to enrich the middle and finish. Toss in a bit of leather and sweat and you have the Smith style.

THE CREATOR CABERNET-SYRAH POWERLINE ESTATE VINEYARD 2019



The Cabernet in this blend isn't particularly big and rich; it's been more or less shortened by the cold ending of the 2019 vintage. But the herbal savoriness of slightly underripe Cab along with its greenish tannins is really at home in this blend. Now that might sound like damning with faint praise but it's not. Instead, you take the fatty richness of Syrah grown on stones (it ain't only the Rocks District that has them) and you tighten it up, even elevate it, by adding that fuzzy, furry Cab and you have an intriguing blend with distinct personality.

—Doug Frost, MS MW



HOUSE of SMITH

K
VINTNERS

SIXTO

VINO
CASASMITH

SUBSTANCE

BLeighton

GOLDEN WEST