

# Jerry Casale of Devo interviewed by Josh Friedman, July 27, 1980

**Jerry Casale** 00:07

...degrees when we played. It was 102 in the park, so on stage, it was over 120 degrees.

**Josh Friedman** 00:14

I saw Pere Ubu down in Washington last week...

**Background speaker** 00:19

...just coming out. You went that way. You did come out,

**Background speaker 2** 00:27

The show was really good.

**Jerry Casale** 00:30

Yeah, we had some technical problems. But all in all we got through it. Our show is really not designed to be played outdoors because of the nature of the electronics and everything. And being outdoors affects the oscillators on the synthesizers and the wireless guitar units go off of their frequency and cause problems with the sound. That was booked, you know, against our wishes. We didn't want to play an outdoor gig.

**Josh Friedman** 00:58

Do you like a more intimate setting?

**Jerry Casale** 01:00

Absolutely. Like the Santa Monica Civic, where we really like to play in Los Angeles, is like 3500 people. And it's perfect, because it sounds really good. Everyone can see very well. And yet it's big enough to have an experience in. And we prefer that kind of a thing. We need a stage with a proscenium arch because what we do is formal and theatrical, and requires certain production values. And doing an outdoor gig really defeats a lot of that.

**Josh Friedman** 01:30

The show at Baltimore, Painters Mill, last winter ... theater in the round...

**Jerry Casale** 01:36

Right.

**Josh Friedman** 01:37

That was really good for your whole show, 'cause the audience was right in there with...

**Jerry Casale** 01:42

Yeah, yeah, I remember that now. [chuckles]

**Josh Friedman** 01:44

That was, that was good. Also, there was this one guy sitting next to me with a Devo suit, looked exactly like Mark [Mothersbaugh].

**Jerry Casale** 01:44

Uh huh.

**Josh Friedman** 01:49

And Mark crawled out into the audience.

**Jerry Casale** 01:57

Right.

**Josh Friedman** 01:57

And the guy grabbed for him. And it was like two mirror images, you know, fighting and it was just a really surrealistic scene. Um, how political are you? In other words, how serious?

**Jerry Casale** 02:11

Serious? I'm serious.

**Josh Friedman** 02:13

Who are you voting for [in the upcoming 1980 United States Presidential election]?

**Jerry Casale** 02:17

If you think political equals serious. I mean, I think Reagan's serious. I don't know what that means. Who am I voting for? There's no one to vote for. As Devo says, this makes no difference. I mean, we're, we're at the point, nationally, I think where what's going on vindicates the kind of vision we had of things three years ago. Not that we didn't have it before that. But I mean, the vision that we projected towards people once we got a record contract.

**Josh Friedman** 02:52

Where's it all going? Everyone's talking about World War Three around the corner.

**Jerry Casale** 02:56

I don't see that. I've said that we are in World War Three. Meaning that what the war is, is a fight for whose perception of the world will win. Who takes control of the facts of existence. Because the information can be interpreted in many different ways. And so, depending on your values, your set of values and your vision of how people should live on the planet, your politics are formed. So, right now, the people with the most inhumane vision of man are winning.

**Josh Friedman** 03:41

A lot of the... a big fraction of your audience just might, you know, be forced to join the army and be brought into something that they're trying to really get far from right now.

**Jerry Casale** 03:54

I know. It's a perverse situation. It really is. I mean, the Army is not the answer. Maybe the De-evolutionary army is in the sense that ... we do need an army of such, we need large groups of organized kids who are thinking and doing and mutating reality, rather than passively indulging themselves in consumer society and getting screwed up on drugs and being big babies and being mindless conformists.

**Josh Friedman** 04:33

But what about the people that come to your show dressed, uh, what they think is outrageous?

**Jerry Casale** 04:40

Well, I'd rather have them doing that than joining the Young Republicans or going to a Van Halen show.

**Josh Friedman** 04:48

Which is one and the same?

**Jerry Casale** 04:50

Uh, yeah.

**Josh Friedman** 04:52

Ok. Why so many love songs on the latest album?

**Jerry Casale** 04:58

Well, I don't really think they are love songs. They are songs that could be interpreted as dealing with love only because they deal with, in some aspect, human relationships. It's what happened. We wrote songs using much of the same subject matter as most other popular music but, with Devo ... slants Devo perceptions of the same subject matters. It's not the subject, it's the treatment that counts. I mean, there's maybe only twenty-four basic plots to movies. But after that, it's what, how you deal with the subject matter.

**Josh Friedman** 05:38

Do you see a correlation between... [person speaking in background]

**Jerry Casale** 05:42

Sure.

**Josh Friedman** 05:44

Do you see a correlation between the era of surrealism and Dada in the early 1900s with what's happening in new wave music now?

**Jerry Casale** 05:55

Yeah, I do see some similarities. I really do. But you know, because what's interesting is I feel that we live in a Dada culture. The vision the Dadaists had of the 20th century has come true. We live in it. It has become living Dada.

**Josh Friedman** 06:13

Pop culture?

**Jerry Casale** 06:15

Absolutely. It's insane. Daily life is absurd.

**Josh Friedman** 06:21

About a year ago, I think it was Bomp! Magazine had this article about psychedelic music again. Devo was listed as one of the psychedelic New Wave groups.

**Jerry Casale** 06:32

[chuckles] Yeah, we may we may fit in there by default. Because we deal with imagination. And we deal with visceral and biological energy, as opposed to most groups dealing with more kind of prepared energy, you know, like a burger. That has certain similarities with psychedelic culture.

**Josh Friedman** 07:00

What about drugs themselves? You said, two years ago, Devo is waiting for drugs to find you.

**Jerry Casale** 07:06

[chuckles] Yes. They haven't.

**Josh Friedman** 07:08

They have not?

**Jerry Casale** 07:09

No.

**Josh Friedman** 07:09

But you moved to Beverly Hills?

**Jerry Casale** 07:11

No, we live in and around Los Angeles, but not Beverly Hills.

**Josh Friedman** 07:15

Not Beverly Hills. So, you've escaped the drug culture.

**Jerry Casale** 07:19

No, the drug culture is all around us. The United States is a drug culture. Drugs are the norm.

**Josh Friedman** 07:28

Yeah, a major percentage of the fans here tonight are on one drug or another.

**Jerry Casale** 07:33

I suppose they were.

**Josh Friedman** 07:36

How do you feel about that?

**Jerry Casale** 07:38

It's too bad.

**Josh Friedman** 07:40

Be better to watch your shows straight?

**Jerry Casale** 07:43

We're the drug.

**Josh Friedman** 07:44

I see. Can you explain it to me?

**Jerry Casale** 07:51

Well, drugs are a catalyst. A drug is a chemical process once it's ingested. That's how I feel about Devo. We don't want to beat people into submission, we want to activate them.

**Josh Friedman** 08:08

To do what? What kind of changes are you impacting on your audience

**Jerry Casale** 08:15

We want to mutate their perception of the facts of their existence. So they see what's been going on in a different light. The same way a drug like acid caused people to see all the familiar things in a brand new light. It's very important.

**Josh Friedman** 08:38

Has the guy who wrote that book, "The Beginning [unitelligible]," written anything else that you know of...

**Jerry Casale** 08:43

No.

**Josh Friedman** 08:43

Has he had any contact with you?

**Jerry Casale** 08:44

Uh-uh. No, we've never gotten to speak with him and...

**Josh Friedman** 08:48

Are you trying?

**Jerry Casale** 08:49

Yeah, we'd love to.

**Josh Friedman** 08:52

How did you first come upon that book?

**Jerry Casale** 08:57

I read about it in Time Magazine in 1974. [background noise from people in room] It was a book that subsequently turned out to be ... discontinued. It's out of print. I read about it and read a book review of it in Time Magazine, an outraged reviewer, and then was never able to find a book.

**Josh Friedman** 09:35

There's a lot of people that go around with a theory that's really against all the norms of, you know, what we've learned in college or high school or something. They tend to attract people. It's a power situation or cult type thing. This guy hasn't done it, but a lot of people have done the same thing. They have their own secrets of the universe that tend to attract people. And they can control that group of people. Have you ever had any experience with people from the Unification Church come up to you, as a member of Devo?

**Jerry Casale** 10:19

No, no. Because of our, our habits, in our...

**Josh Friedman** 10:29

Any fanatics come up to you and say, wait a minute, this group is doing something that I shouldn't be doing.

**Jerry Casale** 10:38

[laughs] No, that's only the critics and the radio.

**Josh Friedman** 10:43

I see. I read in an article in a magazine that you're working on a new sound, but until you get that sound together...

**Jerry Casale** 10:54

Yeah.

**Josh Friedman** 10:54

...you're not gonna be doing that. Can you explain that more?

**Jerry Casale** 10:58

We just wanted to be able to still have kinetic energy on stage and use primitive, primitive synthesizer sounds but not be stuck standing behind a bank of synthesizers. We wanted to have a very compact mobile instrument that was capable of producing a small range of very special sounds and, so, still be able to play with, with movement and visceral energy.

**Josh Friedman** 11:27

Something that's part of your suit?

**Jerry Casale** 11:29

Yeah.

**Josh Friedman** 11:30

I see. [unintelligible] big theremin antennas on the stage.

**Jerry Casale** 11:35

[chuckles] It's not out of the question.

**Josh Friedman** 11:37

Have you tried anything like that?

**Jerry Casale** 11:40

Actually, we haven't even... no, we haven't had time to get around to that.

**Josh Friedman** 11:47

The music in the intermission was, was that Devo's music?

**Jerry Casale** 11:52

Yeah, we did Muzak versions of our first two albums, and play them before the show.

**Josh Friedman** 12:02

They were, uh...

**Jerry Casale** 12:03

It sets the mood!

**Josh Friedman** 12:05

They were a little bit more. I don't want to use the word progressive. But for me, they have more interest in some of the size of the outdoors, because there's different way to hit.

**Jerry Casale** 12:17

Uh-huh!

**Josh Friedman** 12:17

It was just about all electronics. Are you gonna be doing stuff like that?

**Jerry Casale** 12:21

Yeah. It's more minimal. Yes.

**Josh Friedman** 12:24

More minimal...

**Jerry Casale** 12:25

More minimal, more discrete sounds like those, like those tapes, they got only maybe four or six instruments on a tape. That's it.

**Josh Friedman** 12:34

Have you gone out as far to the general public as, as you want now? Is there a retreat coming? A retreat? Well...

**Jerry Casale** 12:44

No, no, I wouldn't. No, it's not, it won't be at odds with approaching the public at all. In fact, it will be much more effective. Because we have to go, we have to go too far to go far enough.

**Josh Friedman** 13:00

You're too normal?

**Jerry Casale** 13:04

Yeah, we're too normal.

**Josh Friedman** 13:06

Why didn't you want to be normal in the first place?

**Jerry Casale** 13:09

It just happened. We don't even want to do anything.

**Josh Friedman** 13:13

What do you mean?

**Jerry Casale** 13:14

Well, I mean, we didn't sit down and go, "let's be weird." And we didn't sit down and go, "let's be normal." We are Devo. All I meant by saying "too normal" is that everybody's using the kind of experiments that we started with a few years ago and applying them to very kind of watered-down commercial visions of the same thing.

**Josh Friedman** 13:34

I see. So, now it's time to branch out again...

**Jerry Casale** 13:37

It's time to make a new statement that's as unique as Devo's first album.

**Josh Friedman** 13:41

What's the statement?

**Background speaker** 13:46

We're leaving. [unintelligible crosstalk]

**Jerry Casale** 13:47

Huh? [unintelligible crosstalk] Robert's staying. Over at the hotel? Okay. [chuckles] I'll be done real soon, Robert. Okay.

**Josh Friedman** 14:07

What do you think of this whole rock and roll business anyway?

**Jerry Casale** 14:10

Oh, well, you know, I feel the same way that I've read published opinions of, like, Gary Numan on the record business. I feel the same way he does.

**Josh Friedman** 14:22

Which is?

**Jerry Casale** 14:23

That it's demeaning, humiliating and generally boring because the the mentality level is so predictable. And the experience one has in it is so humiliating, the whole thing is so mundane. It's not a place for a person, artistic or imaginative person to be.

**Josh Friedman** 14:40

But you got to get through it to get what you want out of this situation.

**Jerry Casale** 14:43

That's right.

**Josh Friedman** 14:44

That's the problem.

**Jerry Casale** 14:46

Right? How else could you approach it? There isn't any other way. If there was another way, I would have done it. Really.

**Josh Friedman** 14:51

Can a group control every aspect of their...

**Jerry Casale** 14:59

It can control about zero. What you can do is attempt to preserve your energy, not lose your vision and not let these people make you so mad and so humiliated that that you turn inward, you know?

**Josh Friedman** 15:19

Any hit singles coming?

**Jerry Casale** 15:20

[chuckles] Good singles?

**Josh Friedman** 15:23

Hit singles.

**Jerry Casale** 15:24

I don't know. We wanted to release "Whip It" as an AM single because I really feel it should be on AM radio.

**Josh Friedman** 15:28

Now, there's a drug reference.

**Jerry Casale** 15:31

"Whip It"? That's a drug reference? I go down on record right now as saying I don't know what you're talking about. I mean, I confess to being naive...

**Josh Friedman** 15:51

Yeah, I just saw some...

**Jerry Casale** 15:52

[laughs] Do a lot of people know this?

**Josh Friedman** 15:57

Yeah, they're marketed under that name. [background talking] I'm sure it's even trademarked. They're spelled the same way.

**Jerry Casale** 16:05

[laughs] Well, I'll tell you I didn't, I wasn't even aware of it.

**Josh Friedman** 16:10

Maybe there'll be ads on...

**Jerry Casale** 16:11

So, now, when they when they hear "when a problem comes along, you must whip it," they just think that when things are bad you just snort [unitelligible]. That's perfect! [laughs]

**Josh Friedman** 16:24

People are drawing the wrong conclusions.

**Jerry Casale** 16:26

That's perfect.

**Josh Friedman** 16:31

Thanks for the interview.

**Jerry Casale** 16:32

Okay.

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Transcribed by SCPA staff with assistance from Otter.ai