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3/23

Q&A: Whether on stage, or at book club, Everclear's Art Alexakis is putting in the work

Band performs at Buffalo's Town Ballroom on Sept. 12

BY JOSHUA MALONI

GM/Managing Editor

Behind the strength and down-right ear-worminess of alt-rock hits "Santa Monica," "Father of Mine," "I Will Buy You A New Life," "Wonderful" and "Everything To Everyone," Art Alexakis has almost 3 million monthly listeners on Spotify – not to mention four albums certified Gold or Platinum, and 6 million-plus record sales. Everclear songs are So-Cal staples meant to be heard driving along the beach or in person at a sweaty rock club.

But beneath the easy-breezy chords you can't help but hum along to, Alexakis shares stories of his upbringing – a time defined by hardship.

In the band's bio, it states, "Alexakis suffered through a troubled youth, beginning with his father walking out when Alexakis was a child. Financial hardships pushed his family into the slums of Los Angeles, where Alexakis became a heavy drug user. Eventually, Alexakis suffered a near-fatal cocaine overdose, which finally pushed him to clean up."

On the hit song "Wonderful," Alexakis sings, "I close my eyes when I get too sad // I think thoughts that I know are bad // Close my eyes and I count to ten // Hope it's over when I open them // I want the things that I had before // Like a 'Star Wars' poster on my bedroom door // I wish I could count to ten // Make everything be wonderful again // Hope my mom and I hope my dad // Will figure out why they get so mad // Hear them scream, I hear them fight // Say bad words that make me want to cry. ... Please don't tell me everything is wonderful now."

Determined to make a new life, Alexakis moved to Portland and founded Everclear. His band signed with Capitol Records in the mid-'90s and found early success, MTV airplay, and placement on the soundtrack to the Leonardo DiCaprio-Claire Danes movie "Romeo + Juliet."

Following a successful stint with Capitol, Alexakis went independent in 2006. He continued to release music, even after being diagnosed with multiple sclerosis in 2019.

The 2020s didn't start any better for Alexakis, who caught the coronavirus and was hospitalized. Fortunately, he rebounded and, by the end of 2022, Everclear was recording a new project, "Live at The Whisky a Go Go."



Art Alexakis, center, and Everclear (Photo credit: Ashley Osborn // provided by Lappen Enterprises)

Fighting back has been a recurring theme for Alexakis – and something his new fans find endearing.

He shared more in this edited Q&A, just a few weeks ahead of a Sept. 12 concert inside Buffalo's Town Ballroom. Doors open at 7 p.m.

Q: Everything that I've read talks about how epic the live shows are, and that people can't explain – they can't put into words – how much energy you and your bandmates have; how much fun these sets have been. What is the secret sauce?

Art Alexakis: For old guys, right? (Laughs)

Q: I mean, I didn't want to add those words. But yeah, there may have been some suggestions of that.

Art Alexakis: That's fine. That's fine, dude. We know who we are; and you know, I'm 61; and the guys are in their 50s. And, yeah, we put on a rock show, man. I got MS. You know, it's hard for me to move like I used to, but I still move around and still jump up and down. And you know, we put on a rock show.

But I've always said if I can't move around, I can't put out that kind of show, I'll stop playing live. But I don't know, man. I don't know. I think fans want to hear the music, and see it performed live, and sing live.

I'm singing better than I ever have. I've been working on it. I've got a vocal coach, and, just like physical therapists for the MS, I do the work. I put the work in. I just came from physical therapy about a half hour before we got on the phone. I swim every day, and work out, eat right. You know, follow the protocol, do my medication and everything.

But the point is, I'm still out there doing it, and we're still out there doing it. And I love what I read online. I've read the same stuff you have, where people are like, "Wow, man, I can't believe these guys have this kind of energy." (Laughs)

Q: What made you decide to do that – because, again, you are a successful musician and singer. I don't know that anybody was suggesting you do that kind of thing. What made you decide to go that self-improvement route and, like you said, put in that work?

Art Alexakis: Well, because of the MS. It affects auditory stuff a little bit. So, I have to train my ears and train my vocal cords. I've had vocal cord problems off and on for years and years and years. And plus, when I had COVID in 2021, that was probably the real impetus for doing it. When I had COVID in 2021, I was in the hospital for three weeks, and in bed for another month with pneumonia. It took away about 10% of my lung capacity. So, one of the things we work on is deep breathing to increase my lung capacity and be able to hit the notes.

I don't know; it seemed like I needed some help. I'm not afraid to ask for help. I'm not.

And you know, I've been in a sober program for 34 years. I know when I have to give away my power over something, and just go, "Man, I need help." Whether it's from a higher power or from my brothers or my family or from someone else. I don't have a problem with that. I know I work as hard as I can, and I try to do as much as I can. I'm not stupid. I had back surgery a few years ago. So, I don't try to lift heavy things.

Q: No, I appreciate that. And I can appreciate reading about all the things that you've overcome in your

life, from when you were a child up until now, like you said, over the past couple of years with the pandemic.

Certainly, your band now – you, particularly – you're in a place where you have different generations of fans, different ages of fans. The fact that you sing in so many of your songs about these challenges that you've overcome – in light of what everybody's gone through in the past couple of years, do you find that the music, the lyrics or the sentiment resonates a little bit more with people now than it has in recent years?

Art Alexakis: That's a really great question. Because, yes – and the interesting thing about is, I think, these lyrics, which are, in some cases, 30, 20 years old, 25 years old, I think because of the prism that we're looking through of post-COVID and post-election, post-Jan. 6, and all that stuff that's happened over the last few years, I think the lyrics take on a different significance. And from a different perspective. Not just for me, but for people on the other side.

So, I think that's a really good question. And yeah, it is. And I find that exciting.

I mean, that's like if I read a classic book – like me and my wife and my daughter are – I was gonna say, "Don't tell anybody," but that's your job to tell people – I'm a big Jane Austen fan. Huge Jane Austen fan. (Laughs) I love Jane Austen movies, books, the whole nine yards. I love her with the way her characters (are); there was always a class struggle going on there, right? Which I can appreciate, coming from where I came from, and being where I'm at now, and living in LA, around a lot of fancy, upper-middle-class people, which, most of the time, I feel pretty detached from.

My point is, we're in a book club with a couple of my daughter's friends, and my wife, and her mom. I'm the lone guy. I'm the lone guy! A 61-year-old guy sitting there going, "Well, I think what Elizabeth Bennet is trying to get across here. ..." You know, it's not the most manly, rock 'n' roll thing, macho rock 'n' roll thing at all. But you know what? It's fun, and it gives me pleasure.

And I think one of the things that people who are fans – and have been fans for years, and keep coming back – I think that they sense with me, and with the guys in my band and my organization, that there's no BS there. There's no pretentiousness. There's no precociousness. What you see is what you get. We're pretty down-to-earth guys. And I think that, in this day and age after COVID, like I said, post-COVID prism, looking through it, I think a lot of people find that refreshing.

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