

Black Rebel Motorcycle Club
Final Bio – Baby 81

Baby 81 is an ambitious, powerful, guitar-driven rock'n'roll record that's guaranteed to get people jumping *and* thinking. Sonically it's a far cry from 2005's rootsy, acoustic *Howl*, *Baby 81* was born only minutes after the final track on *Howl* was completed, when Peter Hayes (guitars/vocals) and Robert Levon Been (bass/vocals/keys) were rejoined in the studio by drummer Nick Jago after a brief break up earlier that year.

"I was almost in tears the whole time, it was very emotional," Jago recalls. "That was the most memorable recording session I've had." Been felt the same way: After laying down the inspired, hard-charging "Took Out a Loan" and "666 Conducer," "I held onto those two songs for the next year, daydreaming about what would happen if we finished that" Been says.

The band's journey to *Baby 81* started in the mid-'90s, when Hayes met Been in high school outside San Francisco. After they were later joined by the British Jago, the band named themselves after the gang in the cult film "Wild One" and started playing gigs. For two albums — their 2001 self-titled debut and 2003's *Take Them On, On Your Own* — BRMC became known for their psychedelic fuzz-rock, a mixture of droning vocals, athletic bass lines, and bluesy guitars. During an August 2004 European festival tour, tensions and excesses tore the three apart, and Jago walked away. When they returned to the States, Been and Hayes turned out *Howl* — a quieter, raw, soulful collection that stripped the band's raucous grooves down to their essential elements — and after the gang was reunited, they played Reading and Leeds in 2005.

When the *Howl* tours were completed, BRMC made trips to rehearsal studios armed with tapes of jams tentatively titled after the cities they were created in (though the hypnotic, bluesy "Berlin" kept its original title). They tinkered, wrote, scrapped work, and recorded again. And together, these 13 tracks are *Baby 81* — songs born into conflict that represent hope for the future, much like the LP's namesake, an infant admitted to the hospital in the wake of 2004's tsunami that was claimed by nine different mothers until it found its way back to its own family "Nick suggested the name.

Baby 81 is a driving rock'n'roll record that still maintains *Howl*'s folk core. "I see it kind of as the sister of *Howl*," Hayes says. Lyrically, the group lasers in on a theme they've explored before: "Personal revolt. It's gotta start somewhere, and if it ain't on a personal level, it's too easy to beat the crap out of governments with words," Hayes explains. "Start with yourself and hopefully you get enough people doing it on their own and we can all come together."

There's plenty on *Baby 81* to get inspired by: the chunky riff that launches opener "Took Out a Loan"; the massive, Led Zeppelin-style beat propelling "666 Conducer"; the woozy, piano-led "Window," or the gorgeous symphonic drone of "All You Do Is Talk". But most surprisingly is how the album somehow ties in all 3 of their previous efforts, while still managing to take a leap forward.

Anthemic first single “Weapon of Choice,” a powerful collaboration between the two songwriters, Hayes compared its sound to that album’s “Love Burns.” “I like the idea of hiding a lot of acoustic guitars behind the electrics,” Hayes says. “I’ve got this guitar my dad gave me, and I always try to put it on songs, behind the electrics, just to keep his spirit in there.” Family is quite important to the band, Been’s father, worked as a sound engineer on *Baby 81*, and has even handled live sound for the band.

The album’s most upbeat tune, the melodic “Not What You Wanted,” is one of just “two songs we have that are in a major key” Hayes says with a laugh. After the original recording of the song failed to resonate with the band, “I went in and spent two weeks just putting on hundreds of guitar parts and harmonica, the reverse guitar, vocals, and shit,” Hayes adds. “I stayed there all night for about three days straight. I love it. No drugs needed.”

The group also pushed themselves on “American X,” a sprawling rocker that clocks in at exactly nine minutes and eleven seconds — by coincidence (“It is really creepy,” Been says, adding that the band didn’t intend for the record to have any overt political overtones) “I think it’s the longest song we’ve ever done, and it’s also the first time we did a real guitar solo,” adds Been, who played guitar on the track. “We feel like we put on somebody else’s skin for a while, and we just sat back let it take us far and beyond where we’d ever planned. It’s like a curly swirly mantra of psychogenic manifestations, with sprinkles on top.”

The LP ends with “Am I Only” one of Hayes’ oldest songs “that I’ve been trying to get him to put on record for the longest time, since the first album,” Been says of the beautiful, mid-tempo track that boasts one of his favorite of Peter’s lines, “You turn into a song and everything feels wrong, there’s so much to see, but lost is meant to be, am I only only one of you.”

When BRMC talk about *Baby 81*, they say a lot about timing: knowing when to stop working on songs, finding those slivers of time captured in sound checks to sculpt into the next album. And although it ends with a track Hayes wrote in his late teens, “The sequence of this record is almost perfectly chronological from the first song we recorded for the album to the last,” Been points out. “I know a lot of bands don’t do that, but I think it makes the album feel more alive, it’s like a living, breathing organism.”

Ultimately, *Baby 81* captures Black Rebel Motorcycle Club at the most crucial time of their career. “I think we all took a leap of faith a little bit more on this album, writing more current songs,” Been reveals. “We used to hold on pretty tight to new songs, but it kind of feels like people are finally going to hear where we’re at right now — we’re much more in the moment.”