

Tom DeLonge:  
the rebirth of a  
punk superstar



**“This is my new life. This is not a side project. This is absolutely the next**

MANIPULATION: CHRIS STOCKER



# TOM DELONGE

TOM DELONGE HAS TURNED HIS BACK ON POP PUNK AND TOILET HUMOUR. BUT DON'T WORRY, ANGELS AND AIRWAVES' DEBUT ALBUM MIGHT JUST BE THE BEST THING HE'S EVER DONE

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**T**om DeLonge is effusive about his new band Angels And Airwaves. A more cynical music magazine might say a little too effusive, but not *Total Guitar*. At times DeLonge almost sounds like a reborn Christian whose previous life is nothing but a source of embarrassment and bad memories. So it's goodbye to punk rock, nob gags and DeLonge's 'no effects' rule that dictated the Blink-182 guitar sound, and hello to skyscraping stadium rock that's openly indebted to bands like U2, The Police and even New Order.

Blink fans might be shuffling nervously in their Macbeth sneakers at this point, but having heard Angels And Airwaves' debut, *We Don't Need To Whisper*, *TG* reckons DeLonge might be right when he insists it's the best thing he's ever done. It might also change the way people perceive him: from potty-minded fratboy to serious musician. And the more DeLonge talks, the more you

Honestly, this is the best record I have ever made in my life and I'm really happy right now. Whether it's going to be big or whether no-one likes it, I really like where I'm at right now."

*You knew David (Kennedy, co-guitarist) from your side project Boxcar Racer, but how did you recruit the rest of the band?*

"I knew Atom [Willard, drums] through some acquaintances, and David knew Ryan [Sinn, bassist], so it just worked out that way. They were the first guys I talked to about it. I didn't mean to pick the first guys I spoke to, but after I figured out what the band was going to be about and who was going to be in it, I looked back and realised those were the first dudes I contacted. It seemed as if it was a magical constitution of some kind."

*Tell us about the movie of the same name that accompanies the album.*

**stepping-stone of my career. This is the last band I'm going to put together"**

get the sense this couldn't come a minute too soon for the ex-Blink-182 guitarist...

*Welcome back Tom! Now let's get down to business. Your new band Angels And Airwaves: is this another part time side project like Boxcar Racer or is it something with long term potential?*

"Angels And Airwaves is my new life. This is not a side project. This is absolutely the next stepping-stone of my career. This is the last band I'm going to put together."

*So where does that leave Blink-182?*

"Blink-182 have nothing planned that I can see in the future, nothing for quite a while. The reason I say it that way is because whenever I've said 'never' before it always ends up happening. It's the weirdest thing. But no, I haven't spoken to those guys in over a year and it's just not something that's going to happen anytime soon."

*Could you envisage a scenario where both groups could exist side by side?*

"No, I couldn't. I have no desire to try and work on more than one band.

"Well, the album and movie are supposed to be a metaphorical equation between love and war. It's meant to be about the best and worst things that people create on earth and in their own lives. Even though on a global scale what happened to me in my life is meaningless, it was still significant to me. My brother went off to war in Iraq because of a lie. My dad had leukaemia. I had just left a band that I had started myself. I just needed to create a whole new world around myself, so I thought the best way to do that was to take the world around me and let people digest it and then communicate it back to people. I didn't want [this album] to be just a collection of songs. I wanted it to be like a recording of an extremely emotional event, so that if you listen to the music it actually ignites a particular emotion within you. It's meant to be something more powerful than just a bunch of catchy tunes."

Tom DeLonge: back in the Blink-182 days





WELCOME TO NEVER PANTS RANCH...

CHECK OUT THE STUDIO WHERE TOM RECORDED *WE DON'T NEED TO WHISPER*. AS TG GETS THE LOW-DOWN ON THE GEAR

"The studio was a nest of experimentation," says the Angels And Airwaves frontman. It's right next to the bathroom, so sometimes we would put microphones in there to collect ambient room noise. We'd also do certain things to get enough volume in the studio. For example, where things would feedback a certain way you'd get a lot more feeling coming through the speakers, just as though you're standing in the room with a really loud amp. And then there were all the pedals. I feel like I've really learned how an audio signal works and how it's shaped within the track. Put it this way, a lot of these songs have something like 95 tracks of instrumentation, whereas the average Blink-182 track had 50 or 60.

"The main thing is blending guitar amps for the sound. That's something I always do. It's mostly a Vox AC30 and Matchless Chieftain, but I used my Fender Twin a lot and a Mesa/Boogie quite a few times. I also used a couple of Marshalls occasionally: a JCM900 and 800.

"I've never produced before, so this album was one huge learning process for me. I learned about everything from compression to stereo delays. I've always used big amps and 4x12 cabinets. I've used combos before, I guess, but not this way; not in a stereo organisation way. It made me learn a lot about space and how to open a song up and really get the right sound for the part so that it doesn't cloud any other areas of the song."



Nice rack! There's a Marshall JMP-1 programmable preamp in there...

Tom runs through a pair of Mesa/Boogie cabinets housed in a custom flight case

This tower of power includes a high output Electro-Voice PA cabinet

Tom uses this custom footswitch to control his rig when he's onstage

➔ Did you think twice about putting so much of your life on screen?

"Yeah, but it's not going to be put out like that. I would never put anything out there that's not going to be really cool or something that people can't get hold of. I'm not going to put something out there that people are just going to pick apart. I guess what I'm trying to do is create a spark that can lead to people

"Completely different. We pretty much recorded song by song and would do things like record the drums last when with every other session you usually record the drums first. It was a case of going with a gut feeling to create a sound that made us feel a specific way. We put up pictures from World War Two to try and understand some of the worst things that could happen in life.

of success in my life that I thought wouldn't happen, so now is the time to stop worrying about it."

Did you write all the guitar parts?

"I wrote *all* the guitar stuff. A lot of times I wanted to feel as though I was flying through some clouds on a jet plane, or if I wanted to feel as though a war was starting over the horizon I would

"I think Blink fans are going to dig it. It is totally different, but I know them and a lot of them

having a little hope and inspiration in their lives, because that is what the arts are for."

*Metaphorical equations, the arts? People are going to say you're overreaching yourself. A few years ago you were known solely for pop punk and knob jokes...*

"I'm 30 now, and our original fans are as old as I am and I think they're looking for something different. I think the young fans are too. They are so inundated with 'normal' punk rock where kids are acting sad or angry, or trying to wear what's in fashion. You know as well as I do that a lot of the European press think American rock 'n' roll feels lifeless and soulless, so I think it's time a band from America stepped it up a little bit. Don't get me wrong, there have been some great bands from America – Green Day, Metallica, RATM – but there have been no bands like Coldplay, U2 or The Cure. I think that grandiose sound is needed over here."

*Talking about the music, was your approach different on this album compared to any of your previous efforts with Blink-182?*

But we also put up pictures of space and science fiction movies to try and get this idea of endless hope for the future and the idea of not knowing what else is out there apart from our lonely little planet."

*What about the writing – are they all your songs, and what input did your other bandmembers have?*

"I'd set up a basic template, the architecture of the song, and the guys would then come in and follow the whole process through. We would come together collaboratively when everyone was laying down their parts. It was very much *my* baby, though. I didn't sit down and write the bass parts or the drum parts, but I was definitely involved with everything. But likewise I needed an objective opinion, and the guys in the band have a really great sensibility when it comes to what's cool and what fits."

*The album doesn't sound very punk rock, instead it sounds as though a lot of thought and consideration has gone into it...*

"Well, I just did what I thought was right. I didn't care about punk rock. I didn't care about critics. I've had a lot

somehow get those images in my head and try to make them come across in each part. It sounds kind of strange, but it seemed to work for me."

*How exactly did you transpose those ideas to the guitar?*

"I'm very aware of certain progressions and certain styles of picking that create certain feelings. Then we would get trickier with the percussion and the synthesisers and frame the foundation with what the guitar works off. The guitar ended up being kinda like the finished materials of a house."

*So if you wanted to evoke a sound like a jet plane, what would you do and what effects would you use?*

"We used a lot of flange and phasers, and a lot of choruses and compressors. We also used a lot of guitar synthesiser pedals, especially the Electro-Harmonix. I've discovered a whole new joy – painting with effects pedals! We used a lot of TC Electronics, Trinity 90s, Boss pedals... anything and everything. Honestly, I would go down to the nearest guitar shop, bring back boxes



After a year of turmoil, DeLonge now sees everything in black and white



ANGELIC OR DIABOLICAL?

TG RATES THE BANDS WHO INFLUENCED TOM DELONGE IN THE MAKING OF ANGELS AND AIRWAVES' DEBUT ALBUM

**COLDPLAY**



Despite a promising start that included the undeniably decent tunes *Yellow* and *Trouble*, it wasn't long before Chris Martin and chums were clogging up our airwaves with bland singles that barely hinted at their former glory. Then Martin christened his daughter 'Apple'. Cock. **VERDICT: DIABOLICAL**

**U2**



Even Bono's bandmates are fed up with the lead singer's political grandstanding. Why won't he just shut up and play the hits? And what

are as old as I am. We've been around for 13 years and I think they want something new"

of pedals and just start plugging in the weirdest shit ever."

*But a few years ago you said that you would never use them!*

Yeah, well that's the way it is now! We used effects very rarely in *Blink*, so this is a whole new colour palette to me. It seems to make sense with what I'm doing now."

*What was David's influence in all this? Did he turn you on to the joy of effects?*

No, I think David has had as little experience with effects as I have. It was definitely a learning process for the both of us, but incorporating this sort of stuff has made us much better guitar players."

*There's a definite U2 influence all over We Don't Need To Whisper. Did this involve an abundant use of delay?*

"Yeah, I love U2. They're one of my favourite bands. And yes, we used loads of delays, even on the vocals. It was just one of those things that added to the 'largeness' of the sound. I wanted huge sounds on the drums, huge echoes on the voice... I wanted huge echoes on the

guitar because I wanted the album to sound as though it was being played in a massive stadium."

*Did you alter the way you play guitar for this record?*

"I changed the way I did *everything* on this album. Live, it's really different because there's a lot of electronics going on with the band; a lot of drum programming and stuff. Everything is mathematically programmed because of the delay effects and because of the drum programming, so the way we break down songs and the way we enter songs has to be thought out in advance. We have to be able to incorporate electronics on the fly (as we're playing our instruments), so we have to be able to play and sing and be clicking stuff at the same time. It was hard to get the hang of it at first, but we've spent the last few months rehearsing and getting into it."

*There's hardly any distortion on We Don't Need To Whisper, either...*

"That's right. I'm tired of the same old punk rock thing. I don't think you can take punk rock out of me, but I'm trying →

a bunch of hits they are: *With Or Without You*, *Beautiful Day*, *The Fly*, *Pride (In The Name Of Love)*... With songs like that in their canon, you can't help but forgive U2 of their righteousness and occasional duff album.

**VERDICT: ANGELIC (JUST)**

**THE CURE**

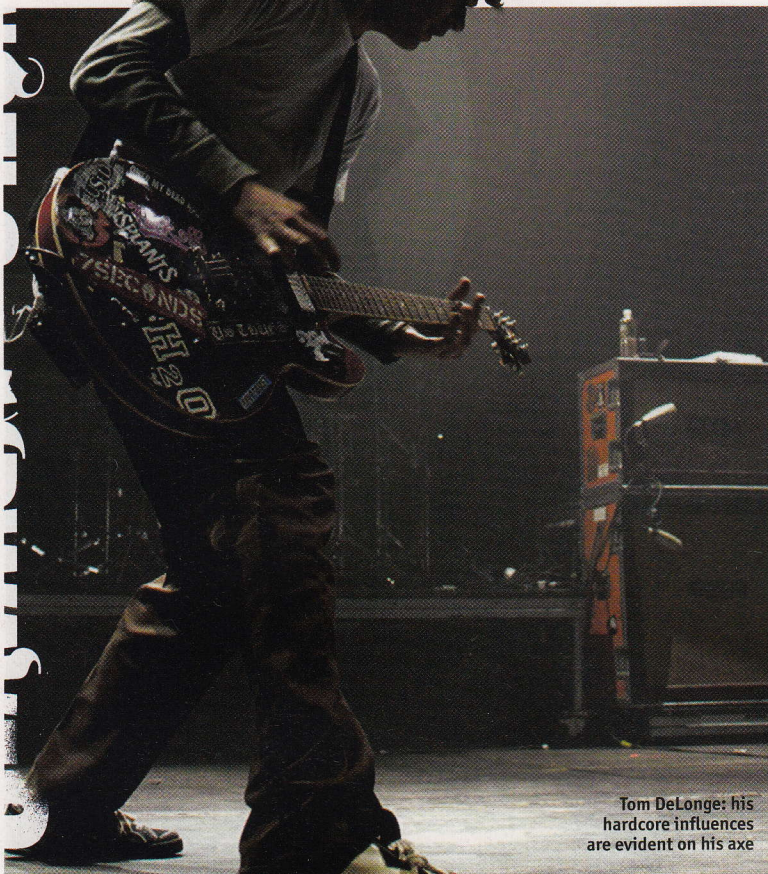


They wrote some of the coolest, kookiest pop songs ever (*Lovecats*, *Close To Me*, *Friday I'm In Love*) and created ethereal rock *par excellence*. We loved The Cure anyway, but when we discovered that singer/guitarist Robert Smith has been a long-standing subscriber to *Total Guitar* we became devoted fans. Impeccable music - impeccable taste.

**VERDICT: ANGELIC**

COLDPLAY/U2/THE CURE: LONDON FEATURES





Tom DeLonge: his hardcore influences are evident on his axe

→ to take the punk rock out of the music a little bit.”

*What gear did you use to record the album?*  
 “Most of the album was recorded on a Vox AC30 and a Matchless Chieftain. We used a Fender Twin on most of the tracks, and that really was the basic foundation of all the guitar sounds. We had quite a lot of gear lying around, but

like Africa, with AIDS, with the bird flu. I’m so sick of how I was feeling the past year of how I left my band and started over again. I felt like music was the last thing in the world I wanted to do. I’m so sick of all the negativity from so many bands who are dressing up in black and being pissed off and angry. I wanted a soundtrack that made me feel

**“I’m sick of negativity from bands dressing up in black, being pissed off and angry”**

we kept using the same things. I have about 15 old Marshall and Boogie amps, but we always came back to the same old combos. The Roland Phantom seemed to be the best thing in the world, so we used that a lot. Oh, and a toy piano that I bought at a toy store. I played that in the shower and it provided a cool xylophone effect on the last track *Start The Machine!*”

*Are you still using your signature Gibson 335 guitar?*

“Yeah! It’s a semi hollow body, but I’ve fashioned it with one pickup and one knob. It’s the best sounding guitar and I’ve spent a lot of time trying to make it good. It’s got an amazing pickup and it’s an amazing guitar. It’s just so versatile. It sounds huge when you put distortion on it, but it also sounds crisp and beautiful when you’re using it on clean tones.”

*It’s a very positive sounding record. What do you attribute that to?*

“I think it’s where I’m at in my life. I’m so sick of how America is viewed, I’m so sick of the war. I’m so sick of what is happening across the globe in places

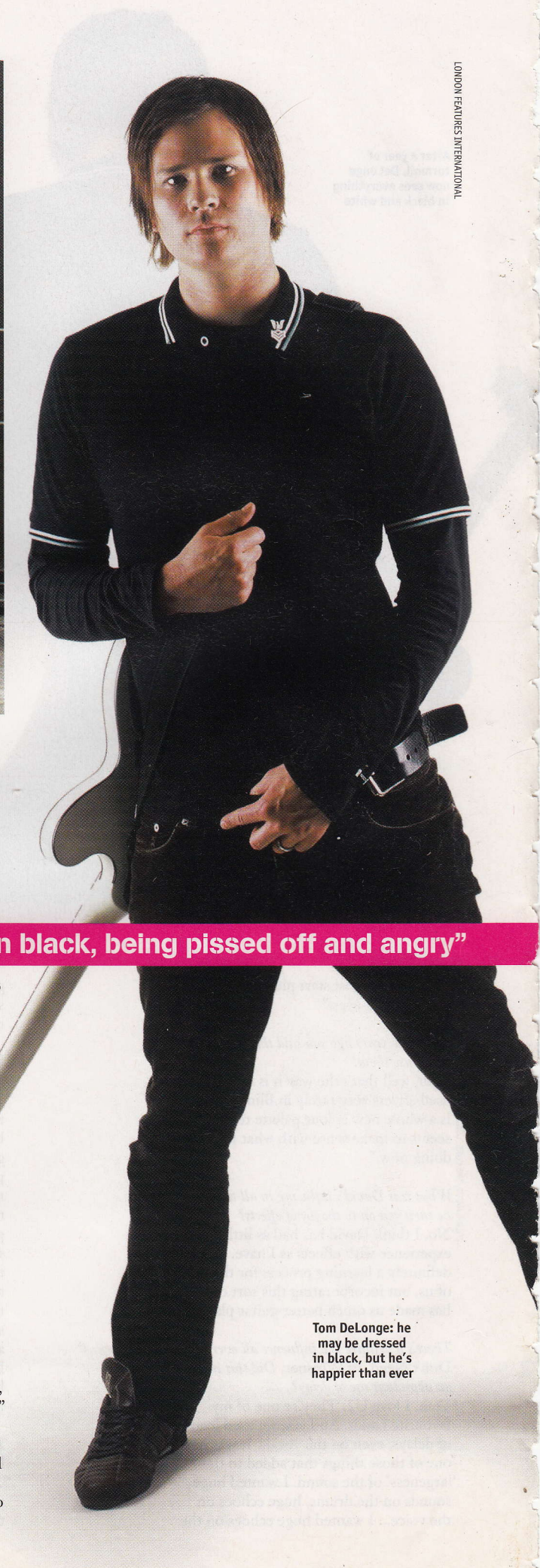
the way I wanted to feel, and I wanted to feel empowered and involved and be able to do whatever I wanted to do. I wanted to feel... heroic. And so I made this record for myself.”

*What do you think Blink-182 fans will make of this record?*

“I think Blink fans are gonna dig it. It is totally different, but I know [Blink fans] and a lot of them are as old as I am. We’ve been around for 13 years and I think they’re waiting for something new. I think young kids are waiting for something new. I think the timing is right. I realised when I was halfway through making the record that this music doesn’t exist for that group of kids, and it hasn’t existed for a long time, so I’m quite excited to be able to offer that.”

*Is this the sound of Tom DeLonge grown up?*

“I think so. Isn’t that scary? It’s kinda cool that people are starting to discover more sides of me because there is a lot more to me than people often see.” ■



LONDON FEATURES INTERNATIONAL

Tom DeLonge: he may be dressed in black, but he’s happier than ever