

Big Jed Sucks

Pop Irony or Just Plain Ignorance?

"Die, Faggot, Die": It's the title of a punk-a-billy single you've probably never heard. I hadn't till recently.

Shortly after the band **Big Jed** issued the song this summer, AIDS activists in Bakersfield, Calif., Big Jed's hometown, threatened a boycott, forcing one local record store to drop the single and two others to hide it under the counter. The disc wasn't widely distributed, but it did show up on the late-night programs of a few college radio stations. And rumors circulated.

On hearing the title, I dismissed "Die, Faggot, Die" as a stupid, desperate bid for attention by some bargain-basement bigots. It seemed best to ignore it.

When Big Jed recently played a date at San Francisco's Covered Wagon Club, they were greeted by a crowd of gay anarchists and activists (who'd heard the song's title, even if they'd never listened to the record). The 40 protesters easily outnumbered the act's paying customers. The activists argued with the band outside the club and then rushed the doors, hoping to get inside before Big Jed came onstage. But everyone who hadn't paid was ejected from the club, and one protester was arrested.

That melee was only the beginning. The evening climaxed late, after the police and the lion's share of the activists had vanished. Big Jed's lead singer (a heavyset 26-year-old named Tod) refused to begin the controversial song until he had sucked a protester's cock onstage. One of the remaining activists obliged.

Ending the tune with the chant "The only good fag is a dead fag," Tod grinned crookedly at the crowd and asked, "And what does that make *me*?" Good question, dude.

Last month it was **The Frogs**—two hetero brothers singing deadpan on folkie odes to the joys of swilling semen. They billed their show as a gay pride celebration. Now we've got cow-punk Tod championing mandatory testing, urging discreet tattoos for the HIV-positive, and singing about killing a fag—after offering a respectable demonstration of onstage cock sucking.

I've got to admit that my respect for Big Jed's lead singer soared as I watched his

cheeks collapse on the activist's bare crotch. I was righteously boggled and wondered, *Who was the butt of which jokes? Are we approaching the limits of pop irony?*

I could no longer just write off Big Jed as rubes and rednecks, so I took a closer look at the single and interviewed its author.

"Die, Faggot, Die" is actually a song in three parts. The first section, "You Can't Get AIDS from a Toilet Seat," is a well-crafted rap *against* ignorance and panic, a lesson that folks like Eddie Murphy (see his recent *Rolling Stone* interview, if you must) need to hear.

The second part, "Die, Faggot, Die," is the vengeful cry of a guy infected with AIDS by his now dead girlfriend. He plans to take down the gay PWA who *consciously* gave it to her. This sick little scenario was inspired, Tod explains, when he was watching *Geraldo* a few years back and heard a PWA say he didn't care *whom* he took down with him.

The third section, "The Only Good Fag," is a jingle sung in the voice of a brain-dead hick. Tod insists, "You'd have to be pretty twisted to agree with it and pretty stupid to take it at face value." I wonder if he doesn't

Low blows: Big Jed gets down onstage.



overestimate his audience, but then I remember that he *did* deep-throat a dude's dipstick for them.

Tod says that the central section of the number is "not homophobic, but AIDS-spreader-phobic." Ultimately, that's a naive, boneheaded conceit, logic worthy of William F. Buckley. It's a dumb digression in a good song. Unfortunately, it's also the basis for the dumb slogan the band has chosen to exploit.

I'd hardly be bothered to make the point or mention the band if Big Jed's music hadn't surprised and pleased me almost as much as Tod's attempt to tickle his tonsils. The group's molten warps on classic country music and audacious spins on country's sentimental storytelling could be the mutant offspring of Buck Owens and Big Black.

Tod has got an ear for satire, celebration, and twisted wit. But on "Die, Faggot, Die" he is derailed by his stubborn identification with a couple of idiotic ideas. And he doesn't seem ready to give them up.

Big Jed promises a video of "Die, Faggot, Die," with Tod playing both the executioner and the executed, and a debut LP, *No Fuckin' Regrets* (Dry Hole Record), out by October. Those who want to judge for themselves can order the offending single for \$2 cash, \$3 on red vinyl, from DHR, P.O. Box 750, Bakersfield, CA 93302.

Big Jed is relocating to San Francisco, with no apologies. But wise Tod admits, "If it gets so that we can't play anywhere because of that song, I'll probably retire it and rename the band." The group's bass player told a reporter, "I don't think anyone is going to kill a faggot because of that song, but if they do, we'll call our next album *Kill George Bush*."

I'm thinking these guys are educable and that San Francisco could do them a world of good. I'm also thinking that I'd love to see an AIDS benefit featuring Big Jed and The Frogs, with **Donna Summer**, **Guns 'n' Roses**, and **George Michael**.

Because there is one thing I'm sure of: If there weren't any homos, none of those folks could be the acts they are today. Suck on that.

—Adam Block