Youth Brigade Biography

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Youth Brigade formed at the end of summer 1980 amid the explosion of the punk scene in Southern California. The L.A. punk scene at that time had been detonated by the repressive culture of the post-70's burnout. Amongst many of the bands that one day would become known as early pioneers of the hardcore punk rock scene, Youth Brigade have created a legend as one of the most powerful independent bands in the North America.

Shortly after forming, two of the three members, Mark and Shawn, spawned the Better Youth Organization as a way to promote alternative music, art and other creative endeavors in a completely independent manner. BYO Records began with the infamous punk compilation, ***Someone Got Their Head Kicked In*** (BYO 001). The classic punk record was a vehicle for Mark and Shawn to collaborate with other bands from the time and also to have recorded music of their own band. During that era, Youth Brigade, BYO Records, and the scene as a whole were much more integrated. The absence of established channels necessitated a community that was far less delineated than what we see now in terms of "bands","labels" or "promoter" and so on. Anyone who was a punk was a friend and comrade and in that spirit, the Los Angeles punk scene was created. The landmark documentary, ***Another State of Mind***, chronicled a momentous point for D.I.Y. bands by following Youth Brigade and Social Distortion on a self-booked tour through 30 venues (this is a loose term) across the U.S. That tour fell apart prematurely, but as a result, a precedent was set on what the possibilities could be for a young punk band on a mission.

Brothers Shawn, Mark and Adam Stern shared a basic philosophy when they started the band: that "youth" is an attitude, not an age and that every generation has the responsibility to change what they feel is wrong in the world. Throughout their career, they've always stressed the importance of collective strength for change through music. Though they do not consider themselves a "political" band per say, they've never shied away from expressing their beliefs about our society. Early songs, "Fight to Unite," "Men in Blue," and "Did You Wanna Die," amongst countless others, urge listeners to question themselves and the world around them. This continues to be Youth Brigade's motivation for making music.

The lineup has changed a few times over the years (one incarnation of the band was a six piece!...and no, there aren't six Stern Brothers!) with Mark and Shawn always at it's helm. Younger brother Adam, there from the beginning and always and integral part of the soul of Youth Brigade, has intermittently played in the band throughout the recent decade as have a handful of others including former Cadillac Tramps, US Bombs, and current Social Distortion guitarist Jonny "Two Bags" Wickersham. Jonny Two Bags appeared on one album and toured extensively as a member of Youth Brigade. As of late, Youth Brigade are Mark, Shawn, Joey Balls and John Carey, both of whom are also members of the beloved local L.A. bands Blue Collar Special and the up-and-coming Old Man Markley.

To date, Youth Brigade have released the following full-length recordings: ***Sound and Fury*** (1982), ***The Dividing Line*** (1986), ***Happy Hour*** (1994), ***Sink with California*** (1994) – a C.D. version of ***Sound and Fury*** plus live tracks, ***To Sell The Truth*** (1996), and ***Out of Print*** (1998) – which features the original, unreleased first recording of ***Sound and Fury*** plus live tracks and tracks of previous 7" singles. They've released several 7"s on other labels internationally as well as on their own BYO Records. Their most recent release is one side of a split record with San Francisco's Swingin' Utters for Volume 2 of the wildly popular ***BYO Split Series*** in 1999. Aside from Youth Brigade releases, Mark and Adam were in Royal Crown Revue for a period and released the scene-shifting album ***Kings of Gangster Bop*** (1992) on BYO. Shawn was also in That's It and released ***Really?*** (1991) on BYO. Youth Brigade also were reincarnated for a period in the mid-to-late 1980's and have two BYO releases under the name "The Brigade" – ***The Dividing Line*** (1986) and ***Come Together*** (1986). This is a band that has been recording, touring, and creating bridges within the punk rock community for upwards of 30 years, so we'll save you the long lists of touring mates and accomplishments – let's just say that they've travelled the world on account of their music and have lived every minute wholeheartedly invested in their beliefs.

So what comes next? Youth Brigade recorded a song for the BYO 25th Anniversary Boxed set entitled ***Let Them Know: The Story of Youth Brigade and BYO Records*** and will be touring heavily through the latter part of 2009 through 2010 in support of the release. Like many things they've accomplished, this marks something that has seemingly come natural for them, but has never been done before. Youth Brigade have again managed to gather friends, partners, and peers from the last three decades to create this project as a community as only BYO and Youth Brigade can. Participants range from band members of some of the greatest punk bands on the planet to booking agents, label owners, fans, writers and others intimately familiar with what actually happened throughout the years. It's through their voices that the documentary movie recalls the band and label's over 25 years of trailblazing the southern California punk rock landscape. Written submissions and rare never-before-seen photos were compiled to narrate the story within a book and finally, a return to the roots of what started their record label back in '82, a classic punk rock compilation record showcasing the effect and inspiration that BYO has helped foster for all these years!

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