

# JOHN HOLLAND

Long-haired singer of New York Electronic-Goth band Salem was interviewed by Michael Joseph Bullock Jr., with photographs by David Benjamin Sherry

I have never met anyone who uses the word 'like' more than John Holland. For him it's, like, a noun, verb, adverb and adjective – all at once. I am told that this is common in Michigan, where he grew up. John is from a musical family. His mom teaches harp and his dad teaches viola. He was taught to play the piano at the age of five. As a teenager he got into heavy drug use and prostitution; by his early twenties his friends Jack Donoghue and Heather Marlatt convinced him to make music instead. Two years ago they started the awesome band Salem, mixing styles that seemingly should never go together: Goth, Juke, Electronic and Hip-hop. Salem's four-song EP titled *Yes, I Smoke Crack* came out in limited edition on white vinyl and sold out immediately.

**Michael: So what is this about you being a teenage prostitute? Were you doing it for the thrill of it?**

John: No. Because I needed money to buy drugs.

**Really? What drugs?**

Well, I was doing coke and heroin – I was speedballing.

**Did your friends know that you were doing this?**

My friend Heather knew, who is also in Salem. My other friends sorta knew. But I was doing it, like, when I was, like, 16 or 17. When I was growing up in Michigan, I would just go to, like, the gas station where I would, like, hang out in the back and, you know, someone would just, like, drive up to the back and blah, blah, blah. But, like, when I went to Chicago...

**Wait, wait, wait! You'd go to the gas station and people would just pull up? What were they like?**

Just, like, guys. Some of them were pretty

hot, 'cause they were, like, really white trash and, like, probably almost all of them had wives. But some of them were also really, like, nasty and, like, fat. But I didn't make good money there. It was, like, real cheap in Michigan. But when I went to Chicago, I made, like, really good money. **So the majority were 'on the down low'?** Yeah, they, like, wanted to, like, fuck a guy and they couldn't, 'cause they were married.

**How would it work? They just knew you were there? How'd you solicit them?**

Yeah, I'd be back there and they'd just pull up and they'd be, like, 'Hey, are you looking for a date?' and I'd be, like, 'Yup.' (laughs) But in Chicago I could trick in a cab. I would just get in a cab and be, like, 'Hey, I don't have any money. Can you help me out?' And they would drive me to somewhere secluded and, like, fuck me, or I'd do whatever, give them a blowjob or a hand job and I wouldn't have to pay, but they'd give me money. I would, like, get so much



**Hair, hair, hair! Jack (left) and John (right) love each other**



work from cabs.

**What do you mean? Chicago has that many gay cab drivers?**

Well, maybe not all gay, but at least horny. You could just hail a cab and be, like, 'Hey, I don't have any money' and they'd know what you were talking about. But there was an IHOP (International House of Pancakes) near the Boystown, in Chicago's gay area, and you would go back in their parking lot to trick. It was me and a bunch of other guys. People would just drive up and take whoever they wanted.

**Really? A lineup? What kind of rates would you get?**

I could make, like, \$2,000 for having someone fuck me.

**What? For a whole weekend?**

No, just for a night.

**Isn't that kind of rate more for highbrow prostitution?**

Well, I'm actually lying; that, like, only happened a few times. But you just start out, like, '\$2,000?' and they either say yes or no. If they're like, 'No', then you have to lower your rate.

**And some people would give you \$2,000?**

Yeah. And then I'd buy drugs.

**Did you go to college?**

Yeah, I did. I went to college at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago – for drawing and installation.

**Did you finish?**

No. I was going to finish it, but during my last year I got, like, really messed up. I was, like, a hardcore drug addict. I never went to class, and I would do a lot of drugs and drink, like, a handle (1.75 liters) of whiskey in a day. I just never finished.

**So when you were addicted to drugs, what kind of high were you looking for?**

Well, I'm sorta, like, a pretty, like, depressed person...

**So it's a total escape?**

Yeah. I never really feel good, unless I'm, like, drinking or doing drugs, because I'm – I mean I'm not gonna say I've had a hard life; I had really good parents, but I've had a lot of fucked-up shit happen to me from when I was really young.

**So, how did you go from being a down-and-out drug addict to putting together a band?**

Well, the way the band happened was: Jack and I were making music in Chicago while I was really fucked up, but, like, he really cared. He doesn't like it when I do that

kind of stuff. And then Heather came to live with me for two months and that's actually when it happened, when we formed Salem.

**So that was two years ago?**

Yeah.

**How do you know Heather?**

I met Heather when I was going to high school in Michigan. She was a senior and I was a freshman and we just became friends.

**And how did you meet Jack?**

I met Jack in Chicago, when I was a junior in college. He came to my work one day. I was working at American Apparel and the first thing he said to me was: 'You cannot have any friends other than me and my friend Jesse.' I was dating this guy at the time and Jack was, like, 'You can't date him. You have to just disconnect from everyone you know and if you want to talk to any of them, you'll have to write it down in a book, and we'll look at it and approve whether you can talk to them or not.'

That's the first interaction I had with Jack.

**And you thought it was a good idea?**

Yeah, because he's, like, the hottest person I've ever met. So I was, like, 'Okay', to him – but I wasn't actually gonna do that.

**He's younger than you?**

Yeah, he's 20 now, so he was 18 when we met.

**So what was his deal? Why did he think he could tell you that? Was it an S&M thing?**

No, it wasn't that. His personality is really hard to explain, but I think it was a joke. It was his way of being, like, 'I wanna be your friend.'

**Why do you think he's the hottest guy?**

Just 'cause he is. He has, like, big lips and he has the body of a man and the face of a boy – you know what I mean?

**So did you have sex with him?**

We've hooked up a few times.

**But you didn't become boyfriends?**

Well, we're really close.

**But sex didn't work out?**

He has this weird thing where he's, like, 'I'm not attracted to people I respect.' You know Dopey in *Snow White*? He's into that kind of person.

**I have never heard of anyone with a Dopey fetish.**

Yeah, well, he likes people who are, like, dumb.

**Is he a top?**

Oh yeah. He will never get fucked.

**So he wants to fuck someone dumb?**

Yeah. That's it.

**So you decided to make music instead of have sex?**

Yeah. He used to make Juke.

**Is Juke popular in Chicago?**

That's where it came from. Juke and Footwork.

**Footwork? I don't know that.**

It's like Juke but more clubby; it's also more ghetto.

**How would you describe Juke?**

Juke is like, uh, someone being, like, 'Git down low, git down low, git down low,' or, like, 'Fuck yo bitch, fuck yo bitch' – it's just quickly saying it over and over and over. But Footwork is more like...well, actually the difference is the dance. There's a dance that goes with both. Footwork is when guys do the dance where you just move your leg and you don't move your arms, but your feet are doing this crazy shit. And Juke is your whole body.

**How is it different from Crunking?**

It's totally different than Crunking, because Footwork and Juke are not as dance-y. They're not dance-y at all. It's all about the legs.

**You don't strike me as a dancer. Do you do it?**

I wish. I can't, but I really like the music.

**So Jack was making Juke? And you were also making music by yourself?**

Yeah, I was making music under the name WHORE-CE.

**What kind of music? The same as Salem?**

A little different, more clubby.

**I can't imagine that.**

(laughs) Well, I was on speed, so I would stay up all night and make these crazy club songs. It was more dance-y, more upbeat. And then Jack and me became friends. Jack makes all the beats. Well, sometimes I do, sometimes he does.

**How does Heather fit in? Did you introduce her to Jack and she said 'I'm here, let's make music together?'**

Yeah, pretty much.

**And why is the band called Salem?**

Because of the Salem witch trials. Why not?

**Are you witches?**

I wish I were a witch, but I'm not.

**Do you get mad when people call your band 'Goth'?**

I don't care.

**How do you describe your music?**

I don't know. Uh, it's annoying when people try to say shit like 'Electro/Punk' blah, blah, blah...

**What would be the best way to describe it if I were to tell a friend?**

Electronic.

**You don't like 'Electronic Goth with Juke influences'?**

Yeah, that would be fine. But I don't really know why everyone thinks it's 'Goth'.

**Because you're named Salem.**

Yeah. (laughs) Do you want a cigarette?

**Thanks. Did you name the album *Yes, I Smoke Crack*?**

I don't remember. But there was a reason. I think I saw that somewhere.

**Do you smoke crack?**

I have, yeah. I had a stint. I was fucking this guy who was a total crack head and I started smoking crack – back in Michigan. But I don't anymore.

**Was it a sex drug?**

No. We'd smoke a bunch of crack and we'd fuck all night, but that would only happen sometimes. He'd give me rocks and a pipe and I started smoking it regularly, but it started making me feel really freaky because I have bad anxiety. I don't know, I feel, like, 'Yes, I Smoke Crack' is a good name, but that's about it...

**Did you break up with your crack-smoking friend?**

He moved away. I have no idea where he is now. We weren't dating or anything. I'd just fuck him, we'd smoke crack, and that's it.

**Are you using drugs lately?**

No, but I sorta wanna take some speed though.

**Right now?**

Yeah. I got some – you want some?

**Sure. I have never taken speed. What does it do?**

It just, like, gives you energy and, like, makes you feel good.

**What else do you do in Salem besides make the beats?**

I sing and I play keyboard and guitar.

**You sing? Which songs do you sing on?**

Well, I sing on all the songs. If it's Heather singing, then it's her, but on the other songs it's always me singing. The ones where it's slowed way down, those are my vocals.

**Oh, that's you? Well, that's another reason why people might say it's Goth. You sound demonic.**

Yeah, I'm not gonna say it's not dark.

**When Heather sings she sounds angelic, and then when Jack raps he sounds thuggy.**

Yeah, when he raps, he slows down and gets a low voice.

**He sounds like an older black guy. I had no idea he was a young white guy. Is he a fan of hip-hop?**

Yeah, we all are.

**What do you like?**

I like Three 6 Mafia, Twista. I like a lot of different things. I like Lil' Wayne a lot, too. I mean, I love a lot of rap and, like, Debussy.

**I don't know them.**

No, it's not a band. He was a classical composer. I'll play it for you. I like all kinds of music. I actually don't really like country music, but I do like that song by Tammy Wynette, 'Stand by Your Man'.

**Why that one?**

It's so good! (laughs) Oh and Mariah Carey.

**You're kidding?**

I love Mariah Carey. She is, like, one of my favorite musicians.

**Why?**

She's just so good. Her voice is like an angel. I swear to God.

**So – no cynicism – you're a true Mariah Carey fan?**

Yeah, yeah!

**But you would never make music like her?**

Well, I mean, if I could sing like her I totally would. I'd sing like her on the music we make right now.

**Heather sings pretty angelically. Maybe you should push her to sing more pumped up.**

Mariah Carey isn't pumped up!

**Well, she hits every note in every song.**

Well, that doesn't mean you're pumped up. It just means you're really talented.

**So you have lots of respect for her?**

You don't understand how much I love Mariah Carey.

**It's becoming clear... So, why did you re-make 'Streets of Philadelphia'?**

Oh! Because we liked that song. Pretty simple. Bruce Springsteen's song is good, and we were watching the movie *Philadelphia* and they were playing it in the beginning. We just wanted to remake it.

**Why did you take out 'Philadelphia' from the refrain?**

Just to make it so it's not only about a city.

**From hearing your music I would never**

**think you or Jack were gay.**

It's not gay at all – we have nothing to do with gay culture, except on some songs, when I write lyrics about guys I like.

**Oh, so they're love songs?**

No. More like rape songs. (laughs) It's not all the time, because Heather writes the lyrics too.

**So if you can't have Jack as a boyfriend, what else are you looking for?**

I'm looking for a distraction.

**You're a top at the moment?**

I can mix it up. Like, someone can fuck me, sure, but it's, like, boring. When I was tricking I was a nymphomaniac. I used to have sex all the time. But now I also take a lot of medication because I have, like, problems, (laughs) and so I don't really have a sex drive.

**Can you make music without a sex drive?**

Oh yeah. Sex has nothing to do with making music.

**Really? Rhythm? Beat? Nothing?**

Nothing. I used to love sex, but I don't care about it now.

**So if not Jack, then who?**

If I can't have Jack I'd have, like, a thug or, like, a hot woodsman. (laughs) But definitely a thug – they just really turn me on. Or, like, a woodsman with a big beard.

**A big belly?**

Oh no. Well, actually, that doesn't matter. A belly is fine, but a ripped woodsman is better. But I'm mostly attracted to thugs, but most homo-thugs are only into their own kind.

**So having this death-metal type of look, can you still pick up a homo-thug?**

I haven't, ever.

**So it's just a fantasy. Is a woodsman the same as a bear or wolf?**

No, they are not bears or wolves.

**What's the distinction?**

A bear is part of gay culture, but a woodsman is, like, just a guy who has a beard and is stocky and handsome – like, nicely built. They may like to hunt or be outdoorsy types, but they don't have to be.

And they definitely prefer to have sex with guys, but aren't defined by that.

**So you've had sex with a woodsman then?**

Yeah. Of course.

**Where would one pick up a woodsman?**

In Michigan.