

VCS Alumni Podcast - Where Have They Been, Where Are They Now!

Hosted by Bob Dreste (VCS '80)

2023 Episode 3 Transcript - Bill Kelliher (VCS '89) – 40:07

Speaker 1 (Bob Dreste)

Welcome to another edition of VCS Alumni podcast. I'm your host, Bob Dreste. Today we are being joined by one of Victor's finest, Bill Kelliher. Bills is a 1989 graduate of Victor, we are catching up with Bill at the Syracuse Oncenter, where he and his band Mastodon will be performing tonight. His band has released 8 albums to date and has spent nearly the last quarter century producing albums, touring, and other projects. We are thankful that Bill has provided this opportunity, prior to his show today. Bill, welcome to the podcast.

Speaker 2 – (Bill Kelliher)

Hey, thank you very much for having me.

Speaker 1

I got to be honest, preparing for this interview, I did not know you at first, I knew the band Mastodon, but I never knew that the guitar player was from Victor, so I asked some of the people that you graduated with around your era there, like Tim Lockwood being one of them and stuff, I said, "Do you guys know Bill Kelliher?" They all answered the same 4 words, and it pretty much was like, oh, Bill, he's a great guy, you know? So, you come highly touted by the people back home. Let's start at the beginning, tell us about where you grew up in Victor and your family growing up in Victor.

Speaker 2

I grew up on Raccoon Run. Yep. It's pretty funny to think about that now. When I tell people I was like, yeah. I grew up on Raccoon Run. Like wow. Holy sticks, that's the sticks? Yeah. But yeah, humble little neighborhood and the cool thing about it was that, you know, there were no houses. It was a very brand-new neighborhood. So, there was lots of like we had a big hill in the backyard for sledding in the winter and lots of exploring to do in the woods. And there's like a rock quarry behind the house and a big pond. And we rode dirt bikes and shot bows and arrows, played ninja and stuff like that. And a kid that lived across the street, Russell Woods, who was my age. He was, he came from a whole family of, you know, his, his sister played violin and he played violin, and his brother played piano and oboe and all kinds of instruments in the family. So, Russ and I, immediately when we got into rock'n'roll.

Speaker 1

What? What age was this?

Speaker 2

14, 15 so I wanted, I played guitar, and he played bass and we would jam like Rush and Led Zeppelin and Van Halen all the time together and, you know, started getting into trouble and stuff like that together. And you know, that was it was a good neighborhood. We had Devin Arnold and Matt Santoro and Jen Santoro. Jen Santoro's coming out, tonight, which is great.

Speaker 1

Oh wow, is that the same Santoro that was a teacher. I mean, related. No, no relation. OK. Do you remember Mr. Santoro? They probably weren't teaching typing when you went through.

Speaker 2

I failed typing. I had a different, I don't think it was Mr. Santoro, it was someone else. I was horrible at it. I'm pretty good at it now.

Speaker 1

Remember you used to do the time typing things and I would. They're just like memorizing everything and then when it came time to do the thing I was like.

Speaker 2

But I did. I do. You know, everyone uses computers, but years ago I remembered what my teacher had said about putting, I think it's the G in the H. You put your fingers on, yeah.

Speaker 1

Yeah, that's what they said.

Speaker 2

Totally wrong, QWERTY, but you put your fingers around that and then you just learn how to do it without even looking. It's like playing the guitar so.

Speaker 1

At what age did you, I mean, kind of a little bit of this, but what age did you start playing guitar and just give us brief synopsis about your journey to forming Mastodon.

Speaker 2

Ah, it was a long time when I started playing guitar, but I started, I begged my parents for a guitar and I got one on my 15th birthday. All my, all the guys that hung out with, it was about eight or nine of us. I was the last guy to get a guitar. And all my friends are playing. So, I was like, I gotta have a guitar.

Speaker 1

They're already riffing everything, right?

Speaker 2

Yeah, they were, and I'll never forget, everyone was finger tapping, trying to do eruption. And they're, you know, some of them are probably still doing that, you know? And we all would sit in the bedroom and just try to play guitar at the same time. Um, there was, let's see, so there was a turning point in my life, and it was when I discovered punk rock. Because you know, living in Victor and listening to WCMF or whatever, all have all you heard was like your parents music like, and they're still playing the same old, Boston, Zeppelin,

Speaker 1

Foreigner.

Speaker 2

Yeah, lots of Foreigner. Great band, every song. Awesome. You know all those.

Speaker 1

Lou Graham doesn't listen to this podcast, no.

Speaker 2

Those ancient, ancient rock songs, but everyone was into that. At the time, you know, I was very like a sponge, you know, I was just sucking up everything, very impressionable. And one of my friends, Matt Mickelson, had found this punk rock tape and he brought it to me. And he was like, this is, listen to this tape, it's the worst music you've ever heard. It's horrible. And I actually took it home, listened to it, and I loved it. I was like, this is incredible. What is this music from another planet? So, my trajectory from my friends just went that way. And what I learned from that was, there's different music out there than just these guys who are on the radio. There are guys who are actually my age and they're out there doing it themselves, and they're touring, they're making records, and I had no idea you could do that. Like you put your mind to it. And that was that was what the credo of, like, punk rock was like, hey, we're going to do our own thing, so that's what I started doing. I just started like learning some of these songs, started a band immediately and we, you know, we played.

Speaker 1

With people from Victor?

Speaker 2

Yeah, because that's I don't have 15 years old. Me and Russell Woods, and I think Joel Basciani, and Bill O'Brien, who has the barbershop in Victor on Main Street. He was a singer, and we started a band and we played like the, we had a battle of the bands or something at Victor. And we played that. And that's literally when I met my wife. Which was crazy, 1988. I remember we started, we just started, you know, just started playing music, and never thought it would be something that would, you know, take me around the world 20 times. It was just fun and my parents, you know.

Speaker 1

Were your parents supportive of it?

Speaker 2

Not really.

Speaker 1

Were they like, you know, this is really good, Bill because.

Speaker 2

Not really, my dad was an immigrant from Ireland, and which makes me an Irish citizen because I got my citizenship a couple about 10 years ago, which is awesome. But he came to this country, and he started with nothing. He had a couple of stereo shops on Monroe Ave., and you know, when I remember asking him, I was like, he's like, I want to go to college, I want to go for, to CCFL, what it was called back then. I want to go for recording because I had no idea what I wanted to do. And he was like, don't get into the music business. Don't do that, because he was in it, and he was. He wasn't, I don't think he's a great businessman.

Speaker

Right.

Speaker 2

Anyway, you know he turned me on to like U2. He got me like U2 War, that record, and I had a really nice stereo system in my room. Of course, because.

Speaker 1

I bet you did.

Speaker 2

Yeah. McIntosh. Back then, like the Edge was a weird guitar player. Like he was very strange, non-traditional. You know, just play almost like a mandolin, like Irish folk music, so I would learn a lot of their songs and you know, bug my dad a lot for, you know, I need a delay pedal. I need a distortion pedal and I need another amp. I need a guitar or whatever, strings you know.

Speaker

Yeah, yeah.

Speaker 2

Trying to think of how to get from there to. OK so I used to when I was old enough, Matt Santoro and I would, you know, he had the car, I didn't have a car yet. So, we would go up into Rochester, the big city and, you know, start seeing touring bands, like local punk bands and stuff like that.

Speaker 1

Bug Jar type stuff?

Speaker 2

Or before Bug Jar. Really it was like there was a place called The Citadel House and they used to have, you know, it was like an apartment, someone's house. They would have shows in the basement were total DIY punk rock stuff.

Speaker 1

True underground.

Speaker 2

Yeah. Rochester was like a hotbed for that back in the like late 80s, early 90s. There were a lot of, like, there was Idols downtown. And all these punk rock bands would come through and we would sneak in. I had a fake ID and got busted a few times and anyway so, you know, I kind of learned from the whole thing. It was to me; it was like this Mecca. It was so cool to, like, get away from the small town, Victor and go into the big city, Rochester and it was dangerous and new and exciting.

Speaker 1

And still is.

Speaker 2

Yeah, and just, I just kind of weaseled my way into like being friends with this guy named Todd Worsham who was in this band called Big Hair and they were the biggest, like kind of punk rock, most new wave band in Rochester. And we became really good friends. And I mean before that I actually joined a band called Brave New World, which was Greg Asproulis from Victor, Jeff Backer, Bernie Talty and me and Bernie are still great friends. I mean we I'm still good friends with Greg and I mean, I just saw Jeff recently too, but I they were they were the big Victor band and they and I was like oh, I love these guys. I I want to be in a band with them and eventually I got in the band and then that took me to Rochester and started playing with Rochester musicians. And that just kind of led to, I was playing in a band with Kevin Cass and Jason Cass from Victor. I'm trying to think of who else.

Speaker 1

It's just outside my wheelhouse.

Speaker 2

Yeah. And it just kind of led to, I was playing in probably 3 or 4 bands, a couple of times a week.

Speaker 1

At age?

Speaker 2

Like 18/19. Playing like the Water Street Music Hall, the horizontal Boogie bar it was called back then.

Speaker 1

Oh, yeah.

Speaker 2

There's, like Back Streets

Speaker 1

Remember that.

Speaker 2

I don't.

Speaker 1

Mason jar?

Speaker 2

There was Richmonds, which was Milestones.

Speaker 1

Still there.

Speaker 2

Not Richmonds, yeah, maybe it is Richmonds. So, I was kind of working the circuit and I knew nothing about touring. All I knew was about getting on stage and playing my guitar. And like, you know, writing, writing songs and stuff like that, I had no idea how. I just thought someone would come knock on your door if you played out enough in Rochester.

Speaker 1

Right, we're here. We're here. Where's Bill?

Speaker 2

Yeah. Warner Brothers just come knocking on your door with a contract, right? We saw you guys in at the Bug Jar last night. I just didn't know. I had no idea until. Like I said, I moved to Atlanta in 97 and tried and tried playing bands. I was there for almost a year, moved back to Rochester solely because my old band Lethargy with Braun was getting back together and there we're going to take it serious this time. We're going to record a record we're going to we did record a bunch of records with. But not records with like tapes back then with a lot of my bands. But it was so expensive. Nobody ever had the money to do it and we had to have a rent, a rehearsal spot which we never had any money back then I. Could barely pay my rent.

Speaker

Right.

Speaker 2

And it all just kind of culminated into Lethargy. When I had moved back from Atlanta, you know, the guy that had left Rochester and come back and I almost felt defeated. I was like, I got to do something and I gotta get this band off the ground.

Speaker 1

We got to ramp this up.

Speaker 2

Yeah, it's like, but anyway, so it was shortly after that, Braun got asked to play in this band called Today is the Day, and they're out of near Boston area. And I was like, dude, please take me with you. I'll play the triangle. I don't care. I know that band, I just saw them in Atlanta like before I moved back.

Speaker

Right.

Speaker 2

And they're a touring band, and sure enough, a few months later he calls me. And he's like, hey, we need a bass player, and I know you can do it. So, jump on a plane. Ended up moving there, played with that band. We immediately went to Europe. We toured all over the United States in a van, little diving clubs slept on floors. This is like 1999. And I immediately was like, OK, I know how to do this now. This is this isn't that hard, you know? And we were on a small record label out of Philadelphia. And you know, I had ulterior motives. I was like Braun, we're going to leave this band because it was a three piece with a revolving door. One main guy who's in charge. He was a crazy person.

Speaker 1

That was the revolving door.

Speaker 2

Yeah, so there was a reason for that, And anyway, so.

Speaker 1

Was he the lead singer?

Speaker 2

Yeah, he's the singer and guitar player. And he wrote great songs. But with those kind of creative people, there's a little bit of madness going on.

Speaker 1

My one friend calls that LSD, lead singer disease.

Speaker 2

Oh, yeah, for sure. So anyway, that just kind of led, you know, I was like, Braun, Julianne, at the time my girlfriend, she's got an apartment, has an extra bedroom move with me. Let's go. He had never even been to Atlanta, and he was like, let's do it. I was like, even if you don't play drums with me, there's a million wanted ads for drummers or whatever. And it's nice and warm. There's no cold winters. It's a change of scenery.

Speaker 1

The world's your playground down there.

Speaker 2

Yeah. So, he came down with me and we just worked really hard. I immediately got a rehearsal spot. We started writing songs, just the two of us. And I was putting up flyers all over, and we met the other two guys because, literally, their band was losing a drummer and a singer, and we needed a bass player and a guitarist, so we joined forces. And that old record company from Philadelphia Relapse. They were like,

whatever you and Braun do next, give us first crack at it. We'd like to, you know, hear what you guys have to do.

Speaker 1

So how many years after they initially said that that, did this transpire?

Speaker 2

Oh, it was very, very quickly, because we when we had moved to Atlanta and started writing songs together, we wrote 9 songs and immediately recorded them. And the other two, the other two guys in the band, Troy, and Brent Hinds, because of their history in the Southeast, they already knew, Troy had a van and we're like, you got a van. Cool. We got a van. Let's do this. So, we basically jumped in the van and he, this is back in the day when we didn't have cell phones, we didn't have computers. We had one, Julianne had a computer the house in the kitchen and we would go in there. And there's this thing called BYOF book your own life.net you go on there and it was like this network of people's basements and storage spaces or whatever where we could connect and network and we could make a tour out of it and we used to print out the Rand McNally paper maps like this thick, and someone would sit shotgun, and you got to get off at 16 and then oh hang on, lets pronounce. You. Know one page. And those are. The days you know we would live out of our van. And we would just play and blood, sweat and tears, you know? And eventually well, we signed with Relapse, pretty quickly. We didn't have a lawyer or anything. Which was idiot. We did have a lawyer, but she didn't charge us. But that just kind of led down the road to where we were. We would just go up and down the East Coast like every month we'd be playing the same exact places and then eventually we start going out West and we just got the attention what you know what usually what managers and record companies want is a band that's working. Like they don't care if you're good, they. That helps, but they really just want to know. That you're dedicated.

Speaker 1

In the show.

Speaker 2

And you're going to show up. You're going to play. Because I always, when kids ask me, like, how do you do it? I'm like, I'm still doing it. It's every day is doing it. There's no, hey, I made it. It's like I can put the paint brushes down now. It's never like that. It's just a constant. Moving, evolving. Evolving. Yeah. And you always have to remember that it could all end at any time. And basically, what that led to was. Managers started to call us up because we had a kind of manager in house manager at Relapse Records and he was like you guys are getting too big for me to handle. There's all this presses coming in, there's all these people on talk to you. You guys gotta get a manager. Yeah, so that was really scary because there was all these, like LA managers like these, just like you think in the movies, like totally slick. Go take you out for dinner. Then the record company is the same thing.

Speaker 1

I can't even imagine what this right it's like.

Speaker 2

Let's take you out for dinner. And let's do this. And I there was one guy from Capitol Records who took us out. We were in Vegas, and I brought my buddy, Todd Worsham from Rochester with me. We're in Vegas and he's like, I kid you not, you know, I'm like, go, Dude. Order as much food get the most expensive thing. We're at the Russian Red Room, which is like a Russian vodka place, I'm like. The most expensive, they're going to pay for everything. We were all just drunk of our minds, and I look at the guy and I go. He's like, so yeah, when do we sign? When do we sign with Capital Records? I'm like, what's your favorite Mastodon record? And I stumped him. He was like, oh, you know, the one with the, and he didn't know. And I was like, OK, that's all I needed to know.

Speaker 1

Thanks for dinner, he probably told his people Bill before he went in there. He's probably. Like, let me show you how to deal with these guys.

Speaker 2

Yeah. No, no, I've. I've learned a long time ago that you, you know, no one's going to. You got to question everybody and everything. Have street smarts. I don't believe you know, put your money where your mouth is. You. Know what I mean?

Speaker 1

Totally.

Speaker 2

Hell no. Nope. So, we got a great manager out of it, Nick John, who unfortunately passed away a few years ago from pancreatic cancer and he was like my best friend. And there's no one ever going to be like him, and we've been kind of lost without them. Honestly, it's been really tough, but we're still with the same management company. But Nick John was our friend and our dude, but having him a manager to kind of steer us in the right to sit in the right and make the right decisions and get us to where we are today. You know you can't put a price tag on that. It was just amazing and we started getting tours with bigger bands like Slayer. We got a tour Slayer. I was like, Oh my God. I used. To you know, I learned every one of your songs in high school and used to jam them and, Iron Maiden Metallica. We toured those guys, those. Those are my heroes. You know what I mean? And now we're like, on the same touring in South America with them is incredible. So.

Speaker 1

So, for people listening who may not have heard of Mastodon, you know some of these people like they'd be my age. I don't know. May not have heard of it. A lot of people just say like you're a metal band, but I I've listened to a lot of your stuff. I go down these rabbit holes and I'm down. I'm going down this master down rabbit hole now. But when I hear your stuff, it's obviously metal, but it's way more complex than just, you know, I grew up with like Priest, Maiden, Ozzy. All that stuff, this stuff is on another level where it is so complex, the patient, everything is, it's not your standard metal, how would how would you describe the type of music that you play?

Speaker 2

That's a really hard question, but I mean, yeah, it is easy enough just to label. Oh, they're just a metal band, but it's much more than a metal band because I don't even listen to metal anymore.

Speaker

Right.

Speaker 2

I'm all over the place with if it's music and it's good, I like it. You know what I mean? It's not. A lot of people assume like, oh, you guys must all just listen to head bang and metal all the time. Like, Nah, I'm not really in high school. I did. I was a kid.

Speaker 1

I used to go to sleep at night with priest on headphones like blasting, and my parents are like what?

Speaker 2

So that's so that's happened, that's what happened.

Speaker 1

And that exactly. What the hell are we creating here?

Speaker 2

You know, I feel like there's so many influences and with our band, I don't feel like there's any real. What's the word still pretty early.

Speaker 1

Can't really pigeonhole genre.

Speaker 2

There's, there's never. Any like we can't. We can't go in those waters, you know, I mean, it's like everything is as long as it's a cool riff that we all agree. Like that's cool riff, like Braun wrote a. He writes a lot of the vocal melodies and he's like don't tell the other guys, but that's totally ripped off from the Bee Gees, the total Bee Gees, because Braun loves Bee Gees, Bowie, Bjork, you know, we listen to it. You know, a lot of Thin Lizzy in there with when you have two guitarists, you know, it's hard not to harmonize. And not just play the same thing all the time. And you know, I feel like, yeah, you can see our and hear our influences. You know, we kind of wear them proudly. Metallica, Slayer, Rush King Crimson. I mean, we really like You know Prog Rock is very cool. But I feel like if you listen to our very first record, then put it AB it with our latest record. You'd be like, wow, that's two totally different bands.

Speaker 1

I started like from the beginning. You know some of.

Speaker 2

Yeah, I sometimes I tell people start from the last record and work your way back because.

Speaker 1

The some of the early ones.

Speaker

That's so true.

Speaker 1

Like her, I'm like Lisa. 'S like wow, that is heavy, and I go hang on. Hang on right here. Let's go to Hushed and Grim. And listen to this.

Speaker 2

Yeah, so it's such a, you know, and I and I try to tell because, you know, fans are fans, you if you make music or art? For someone else, then you're not truly an artist. You know what I mean? For me? I'm selfish when I write a riff or a song or whatever. I'm kind of doing it for me and to impress the other guys in the band like it has, it has to be. It has to pass.

Speaker 1

Right. That mark.

Speaker 2

Inspection it's like, so I'm always. I'm always writing. I always have my guitar with me and. I'm always trying to come up with, you know, test myself and do better. Like you should. A lot of our fans are like, no, they never put anything out any better than the first record, and I'm like that's not true, I'm a human being and I mature and I evolve. I get better at the guitar, and I have different ideas and different thoughts.

Speaker 1

How does it work, Bill, when you're when you're coming up with a new song? Are you working the riff 1st and then like we'll put the words to it later or vice versa or combination? Sometimes both.

Speaker 2

Usually, That's the way it works because no one ever in the band was a singer, you know? And they were just like, instrumentalist, you know, we would just, we would always write. We never even really think about. Like, I think about writing songwriting so much differently. Now, after working with producers. And you know guys who've been in the business longer and just, just growing. You know what, I mean? So like when we used to write in the first records, we didn't think about lyrics or vocals. We would just be able to scream over that stuff and let's just write as much heavy. Yeah, this riffs heavier than that. Riffs heavier than that. Riffs heavier than that riff. It just kill people. But then we started like thinking about it. Like, well, what if we? Put some dynamics. We gotta have some dynamics in the songs and then we're like as people got better singing. Being we used to have a singer originally and he was from Rochester for a very short time, it didn't really work out. So, then we had a tour he lined up and I was like, hey, someone's gotta start singing because we have these songs that are recorded with vocals. So, everybody started, you know, some guys start taking vocal lessons and you know, it just started progressing. We

started thinking like, oh, well, this is the verse. And that's the could be a chorus and maybe we don't play as many notes here and don't heavy it up here and heavy it up there. So we start approaching it.

Speaker 1

Instead of full on all the time, yeah.

Speaker 2

It can't be heavy without some softness. If you're heavy all the time, it's just like you just get numb to it.

Speaker 1

Right, I totally agree. So, Mastodon has been a band for nearly 25 years. You have won a Grammy along with being nominated for six others. Correct.

Speaker 2

That's right. This, along with several other awards over the years, including Metal Gods Award in 2007. That is huge. I mean that is, that's not three quarter, that's intense all these awards with one band over a 20-year period that speaks volume to the dedication of the band members that you're with and also the bond that each of you must have. How would you describe life as a touring musician?

Speaker 2

Well, in 2023 it's a lot different than say, in 2001 or 2002. You know, even after 911 things changed. And I don't know. That's a deep question, but. You know, for me, my personal journey. When I first started touring, we were just in a van. Like I said, you know, I was just happy like the happy dog on a ride like this is great. Oh my God, I don't care. We're getting paid 50 bucks. Who cares? This is awesome. I'm getting to play in Joe's Basement in Salem, MA, or whatever. When we, you know, we. We got to the point where we did the Ozzfest and we did the Ozzfest in 2005. They were like you have to have a tour bus. You cannot tour in a van. You have to be professional and have to have a tour bus.

Speaker 1

They're here.

Speaker 2

Once you get once you get a tour bus there's no going back to a van. It's like when you sit in first class on a plane, you can't go sit with the gen pop anymore. So, you know, that was a big change. The getting into a tour bus because now we have some dedicated tour bus driver. So, it's like oh, now what do we do now? We're on the bus for like 23 hours out of the day. Let's party and let's rage and all that stuff. And then I, you know, then I had kids and would go home from tour, and you know, I have to be not rock star, Bill and I have to be a dad now and like.

Speaker

Right.

Speaker 2

Straighten up and take care of these kids and life changing moments. You know what I mean? And. You know, everything is. It's been a bumpy ride, but things are really good now, you know, but. As far as my kids are all grown up and you know the band's still around after 24 freaking years.

Speaker 1

You know something? Go to. The Wikipedia page there isn't like 18 past band members. It's like boom, there's nobody left. It's like.

Speaker 2

Yeah, same four guys and it's been you know it's kind of, it's been hard touring just because of because of COVID and all the competition that's out there and the price of everything that people don't understand that. Like for instance, we, we had to cancel two big tours in Europe last year because we were spending every day the amount of money, we were making right, which was \$35,000 bucks a day. Just to. That was our, that's our guarantee, but we were spending that on our crew, on the bus, on the gas, on the, on the show, just the price of business, you know, I mean, so we're like well, no.

Speaker 1

Just to keep train, yeah.

Speaker 2

No, I'm not going. To leave. I'm not going to leave home for a month and make \$0.00 and everyone else gets paid.

Speaker 1

It's just grinding, yeah.

Speaker 2

And it's like, why I'm too old to do that, right? We're not a young band. It's like we don't need to do that.

Speaker 1

You can pick and choose, yeah.

Speaker 2

So, what I you know what I do now is I had to supplement like that income. So, I do guitar lessons every day. I run our merch. We have two merch stores. One is run one is run by a major like big company that would give us a big advance and buy the rights to like cloth products like T-shirts. Hats or whatever, but we I started this poster business where we make posters for the tour posters for every show and with relapse our old label. Now we're on Warner. We're actually not on Warner Brothers anymore. We're bet on Warner Brothers for like 15, 16 years. We're just about to sign a new contract with a brand new company. I sell our records cause we get paid in the records like 14% every time they repress them which is which is great because we sell them on tour and we make you know, make that income. But you know when you're a musician and you're out there, they put you on the stage and they make you look huge and like you, all those guys must be billionaires and they're.

Speaker 1

That was one of my questions, It's a common misconception.

Speaker 2

They make it out that way and when you go, when you really break it down, you know there's. You have to, I only learned this like years ago. Like you have to rent out these places like these aren't they're not just giving you this place for free so you can play here, and they make the bar money or whatever. So, you can rent, rent these places out for a lot of money. But. You know, there's so many people in the chain before the musician gets paid and no one knows that. For instance, like the T-shirts like this is a big controversy right now. The T-shirt says our T-shirt. Like, say, we're touring with a bigger band like Iron Maiden. Their T-shirts are \$60.00. We have to price match their shirt. Even though we would only sell our shirt for 30. But no, because you're touring the bigger band, you have to sell it for the same price.

Speaker 1

Because people probably be like, I'll just get the Mastodon shirt, I can get two.

Speaker 2

On top of that, the venue wants to charge. They're going to take 20% just because. Just because they're going to take 20% off of your off of your sale, your management takes, you know, between 15 and 20% of the gross of everything. So, say the tour. You know when someone says, hey, you're playing a show and this is made-up. But say you're playing a show in Syracuse. It's a \$100,000 guarantee I have to immediately think. 30% off the top of that. So, it's not like that. It's not like, OK, so management takes 20, they take 20, so. Now it's 80. And then the booking agent takes 10, so it's not like they're. It's not like they're just taking 30 off their top, they're taking 20% of 100%, 10% of a 100 then. It's just.

Speaker 1

The funnel just keeps funneling down.

Speaker 2

I always have to think in my head like. It's usually when I see a number like that we have to think is it there? We do have a formula. I'm trying to remember. It's usually like. I don't know. Like, OK, that's really like half of that is what. We're gonna, that the band's gonna see. But then that gets cut. In half. And then there's well. It gets cut in four pieces for each band member, and then my tax bracket is like 49%. So, I have to think half of that and I'm like.

Speaker 1

Right.

Speaker 2

Is it worth it to get off my couch to play for \$100,000 bucks. That's like, that's amazing. That's like.

Speaker 1

Yeah, right. People, a lot of.

Speaker 2

Money, but with the cost of everything and with gas and goods and you know, shipping stuff and everything ends up. It's just crazy. I'm not complaining.

Speaker 1

Oh, I know what you're saying. That's completely.

Speaker 2

I just try to get it out there to the common like, the man who's like. They have a \$60.00 t-Shirts like, yeah, but we don't even usually don't even see them, like, cause the the T-shirt company like they own. They own it because they gave us an advance which we have to split with, you know, management takes their cut off that which. They deserve it. They've gotten us to where we are and they work hard for us, but it's not all you might think it is, but no, I feel like sometimes

Speaker 1

It's not like you're playing for the door. Here's everything you know.

Speaker 2

Honestly, I feel like there have been times we brought merch to the venue and I'm like, we actually lost money. And there there's been times where we we've been on tour, I'm like, Man, I remember when we were in the van, we were making more money. Right? We're making \$1,000 bucks a night and we would just. Gas money. And then we'd get fed by the venue and then we'd sleep on somebody's floor, and I would send like \$1,000 bucks a week home. I was like, I can't do that now. I mean, so yeah, there's a lot of supplemental things that I do. I own a bunch of property back in Atlanta. I have a rehearsal facility. I own a studio that we recorded the last record in. And that, you know helped, I helped build and that was one of my dreams, you know.

Speaker 1

Is that just for you guys or Is it everybody and anybody going there?

Speaker 2

No, it's open to the public. There's a lot of bands come through and I have my partner at the studio. He's in-house, so he's always there like, doing the doing leg work and putting the hours in so.

Speaker 1

There's a lot of recording studios up in and around Rochester. In fact, one of the guys from, Bob Potter, have you ever heard of him? He has a recording studio and he's also the head of the whole Finger Lakes recording program at FLCC. As someone who has made it to the upper echelon music, interesting. What advice would you give? Somebody aspiring to go down the same path that you did.

Speaker 2

Quit. No. Well, that's kind of a loaded question because it depends on what you what you expect out of it. You know, if you're, if you're looking to go into. Playing music for. For monetary reason, like my mom

always told me you should. Be you should be a dentist, Billy. Yeah, it's. It's a long, like ACDC said. It's a long, long way to the top if you wanna rock'n'roll?

Speaker 1

Can you tell about that that you went in front of Congress?

Speaker 2

Yeah, sure.

Speaker 1

Modernization of music. You want talk about that?

Speaker 2

Yeah, That was the MA Act the Music Modernization Act, because I'm a member of the Recording Academy Grammy Committee, they had asked a couple of members from every state to come down to Congress and basically go in and talk to your Congressman and state representatives and it's it was all about streaming music, basically. And how there was never and probably really bad at explaining this, but they basically, you know, back in the 70s when they wrote the laws musicians always got screwed out of their royalties, but it was hard physical copies of vinyl records they never thought in 30 years. There's gonna be music flying through the air into your phone. You could just download it and listen to it. They had no idea.

Speaker 1

Right. The Record Theater.

Speaker 2

There's Camelot. They never they never prepared for that. So, they never wrote any rules or regulations on how to monetize that so streaming platforms like Spotify, Apple Music, Pandora, you know, all that stuff. They really don't have to give the musicians like anything legally, and they barely, barely, barely do.

Speaker 1

Right.

Speaker 2

So, when I went in and sat down with, you know, these head honchos, they had no idea. They're like, oh, we thought you guys were like millionaires making tons of money off Spotify. I'm like no, here's why? Please sign this. And they did. They signed the Music Modernization Act.

Speaker 1

That's awesome.

Speaker 2

I don't know how you know. I don't know if it's gone into play yet and how it works yet, but I think Apple and Spotify like they tried to counter it. And basically, it boils down to this. My manager had told me he was like. Way back when, when Napster was around and I was always on the side of Lars Ulrich, you know? Yeah, because he was like. You need to arrest these. People who are down illegally downloading. Our music and everything.

Speaker 1

I remember Napster first came out. You felt like a criminal.

Speaker 2

Everybody was like, rockstar, you got millions of dollars going to arrest like 15-year-old girl. Well, you know, I was like, I kind of agree with him. You know everyone else like. Well, like oh, you wait. It's like if you were a cook in a restaurant. You don't give. Your food away for free. So anyway, my manager told me he's like, so what's going on is like all these major record companies, Capital, Warner, Interscope, Sony, whoever they, they all couldn't sell records anymore, cause everyone's illegally downloading them from Napster so record sales are making they're all sitting fat and high on the hog and.

Speaker 1

Right.

Speaker 2

Spending all kinds of money on music videos and whatever, and nobody's buying physical copies anymore. They could not get together and agree on how to stream music. It took in a computer company called Apple to walk into every and go.

Speaker

Right.

Speaker 2

We'll give you this much money if you give us the keys to the masters. The keys to the kingdom and they literally were like ohh here you go cause good luck we have no idea how to do this so Apple took the master's and started charging, you know, created Apple Music and and it was like, yeah, for \$0.99 a month you can listen to as many as you want.

Speaker 3

Right.

Speaker 1

And so, then they're paying back the musicians on the number of plays or whatever?

Speaker 2

Yeah, but it's miniscule even.

Speaker 1

And plus, they're the ones that report the numbers, you know what I mean? Like, they're not gonna be like you know, oh yeah, we didn't do anything this month they didn't download any.

Speaker 2

Trust me, like you know, I have Spotify account. I listen to Spotify. It's easy. It's great. I mean, a lot of my friends, like, I don't have that. I boycott that. I'm like, well, you're. I mean, unfortunately it's. Yeah. They're the devil, but right, you're missing out. Cause I can't listen to anything. Cause it's they're they kind of got the stranglehold on it all. Yeah, I know they don't pay anybody, and that sucks, but.

Speaker 1

Right.

Speaker 2

I mean. How are you? You know, we gotta figure that's why this MMA thing, you know, came along like the drummer. He was a young guy. He was like a fill-in drummer for Aretha Franklin, came from Atlanta with us. And he's like, yeah, the only the only way she can make money. She's, I think, passed away now. But. This is years ago. He's like the only way that she can make money is if she tours and she's like in her 70s. She doesn't make any money because she signed a bad record deal back then. Yeah, and you hear. Hear her songs all over the radio all day long, all the time. But she doesn't see any of that money because of this. There's a there. There was no law. About what?

Speaker 1

Wild West? Yeah

Speaker 2

It's like when you walk into a bar and they got a jukebox and they're playing your song and people are putting money into it. Like they do have to pay. We get little, tiny amounts of that because you have to pay for the right. BMI. BMG.

Speaker 1

Right. Thank you so much for taking the time to talk to us today. I know I speak for all Victor alumni when I say that you are truly an awesome representation of someone who has made it in the music industry while remaining grounded and authentic at the same time. Thank you so much.

Speaker 2

Thank you. It was a pleasure.