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VISITING ACT | So Now They're on Steroids **Dando and the Lemonheads are back**

BY SHAWNTÉ SALABERT



Head Lemon Evan Dando: Purveyor of a totally different kind of 'pop-punk'

Evan Dando is silent on the other end as I describe the dream: he and I are strolling around a large airplane hangar filled with giant, white brontosaurus, talking casually about the new Lemonheads album. "Does that mean anything to you?" I ask, waiting patiently for illumination. He pauses. "Hmm ... white dinosaurs ... well, certainly it's snowing out where I am."

I've been warned not to get too deep with Dando -- don't talk about the personal stuff. He might just hang up the phone; he's done it before. By "personal stuff," of course, the publicist means the years of serious drug use that followed -- and potentially eclipsed -- the Lemonheads' mid-'90s *It's A Shame About Ray* heyday.

"Anyone that starts a band, the first thing you know is that nothing that

people write about you matters at all, especially not the good things," says Dando. "It doesn't make any difference."

It's been about a decade since the press frenzy detailed the Lemonheads' demise and Dando seems to have shaken off any bad juju generated in the mid-'90s because he's not so much reunited as resurrected the band and released a self-titled album that more than hints at Dando's punk rock roots.

Paving the road for this comeback of sorts, Dando released a solo disc, *Baby I'm Bored*, in 2003, and the next year he joined the legendary Detroit garage-punk outfit MC5 for a 41-date tour. The stint brought back the punk ethos of the early Lemonheads. "We started off as a total punk rock band -- loud, screaming, with short songs."

Fresh from the MC5 experience, he picked up the pen. "I started writing songs that were extroverted, like our old stuff."

When he brought the Lemonheads back around, it was in style and frontman only. Dando toured with a revolving cast and finally recorded *The Lemonheads* with the Descendents/All rhythm section, bassist Karl Alvarez and drummer Bill Stevenson, with Dinosaur Jr. guitarist J Mascis joining in.

Dando could have coasted by on name recognition, but it was important to him to "put out some more good records for people to remember the band by." *The Lemonheads*, released this winter on Vagrant, is kind of the debut of the new wave of Lemonheads and it appears that Dando's talent didn't wash away in those quiet years.

"Things haven't changed that much for me," Dando insists. "I kind of let things take their natural course and just make the best records I can and play the best shows I can."

The touring trio includes members of Indianapolis band The Pieces -- guitarist Vess Ruhtenberg (ex-Antenna, United States Three) and drummer Devon Ashley.

"It's like Lemonheads on steroids," Dando laughs. "Every fifth show, you have a transcendental experience where you really lose yourself; you remember why you're pummeling your body by traveling so much."