

# GRAND MAL



Grand Mal has spent a decade churning out albums loaded with brilliant off-kilter rock'n'roll gems about first round K.O.'s, bail-jumping ex-wives, disaster films, mustachioed fascists and endless misadventures. Throughout their evolution from grungy heavy pop to technological glam to full-on classic rock'n'roll, leader Bill Whitten's trademark deadpan vocal delivery, uncommon songwriting sensibility, and willingness to experiment have remained the band's consistent marks of distinction.

Whitten's previous band, Hartford, CT's noise-pop ne'er-do-wells St. Johnny, who Sonic Youth signed to Geffen, imploded in 1995. With only a cheap Epiphone Les Paul Jr. copy and a notebook full of rough edged hits to his name, Whitten found himself in New York. Inspired by the New York Dolls, T-Rex, and Mott the Hoople instead of his previously indie-centric influences, Whitten introduced Grand Mal later that year. Continuing work with St. Johnny producer Dave Fridmann (Mercury Rev, Flaming Lips, etc.), Grand Mal released a couple of critically acclaimed records on No. 6 before Slash/London came knocking at their door. Despite a successful release and some touring in the UK, Grand Mal's 1999 *Maledictions* was lost in limbo stateside thanks to the Seagram's buyout of the label's parent company, PolyGram. Arena Rock released the band's next long-player *Bad Timing* in 2003 (which features the multi-instrumental work of Flaming Lip Stephen Drozd) to nearly universal acclaim. Scott Hreha of *Pitchfork*, in a review that gave the album an 8.0 rating, hit the nail on the head when he wrote, "The only real problem that Whitten has to contend with now is keeping a band together long enough to take this new batch of songs on the road... Whitten's *Bad Timing* may – regrettably – find him slipping through the cracks of consequence yet again."

When 2005 rolled around Grand Mal was without a steady lineup. Whitten did, however, have a sheaf of new songs under his arm and an army of rock'n'roll friends to lay down tracks. The resulting album, *Love is the Best Con in Town* was created in his apartment over a seven-month period. He recorded the piano tracks at a mid-town rehearsal studio and the drum tracks in another practice space with his collaborator of eight years, drummer Parker Kindred (Adam Green, Antony and the Johnsons, ex-Jeff Buckley, etc.). He next filled the remainder of the tracks week by week at his apartment with a cast of more than twenty friends and collaborators that include Joan Wasser (AKA Joan as Policewoman) and members of Hopewell, The Silent League, and The Fame. The first Grand Mal recording not co-produced and engineered by Dave Fridmann, *Love Is The Best Con In Town* was however mastered by the master himself at his Tarbox Road Studio. Simmering with homegrown soul, the piano-based album is more stripped down and less bombastic than previous Grand Mal efforts – think of a collision of early Todd Rundgren, *Holland*-era Beach Boys, *Hunky Dory*, and of course the laid back swagger of classic Grand Mal-style r'n'r.

Whitten's friend, former Mal member Jonathan Toubin, who had spent hours listening to an early version of *Love Is The Best Con In Town* on an overseas flight (over and over), begged Bill to let him release the album when he launched New York Night Train Recordings. Whitten has also assembled an impressive new incarnation of Grand Mal with members of New York up-and-comers like The Silent League, Great Lakes, Mason Dixon, and Stars Like Fleas. With his best record and band lineup to date, Grand Mal is back in a big way.

## **DISCOGRAPHY**

*Grand Mal* (No. 6, 1996)

*Pleasure Is No Fun* (No. 6, 1997)

"Whole Lotta Nothing"/"Life's a Gas" CD single (Slash/London, 1998)

"Stay in Bed" from *Jawbreaker: Music from the Motion Picture* (London, 1999)

"Stay in Bed (Death in Vegas Remix)" CD single (Slash/London, 1999)

*Maledictions* (Slash/London, 1999)

"Hey Man" from *This is Next Year: A Brooklyn-Based Compilation* (Arena Rock, 2001)

*Bad Timing* (Arena Rock, 2003)

*Love Is The Best Con in Town* (New York Night Train, 2006)

## **GRAND MAL ON THE WEB**

Grand Mal official site

<http://www.grandmal.com>

New York Night Train Grand Mal Site

<http://newyorknighttrain.com/recordings/gmbio.html>

Grand Mal Myspace site

<http://myspace.com/grandmal>