

HARSHMELLOW

Otis "O" Barthoulameu has been contributing to the skateboarding experience as a skater, photographer and musician for the past 30-plus years. Through many bands, his heavy recipe of "hard rawk" has been ubiquitous—in the first Plan B video, across multiple years of the Warped Tour, with his dial-twiddling skills as a producer for megastars like Blink-182, etcetera. As the world gets back into the pit following some dark years for live music, this 61-year-old journeyman offers his latest band Harshmellow, which sounds exactly like the name—thunderous guitar guided by O's melodic warbling. Sneak a cheek and dig in! —*Michael Burnett*

How long have you been called O?
Since I was a little kid. O, because I was round in the first place. I don't know who gave it to me. It's probably since I was in high school.

What was the music that first caught your attention; that got you excited?
That's a crazy question to ask. Maybe Zep when I was young. Then Sabbath records when they came out. I loved Sabbath, that's why I had a band called Fluf. A lot of English stuff. Then later, Black Flag, most importantly. I thought, *I can do this*. I wanted to do it, too.

They made it seem like anyone could do it?
Yeah, they were kids like me. Not rock stars. I saw them in Huntington Beach the first time, maybe before 1980? I don't know.

Did it feel like something new was happening?
Yeah. All my friends were in bands. The Adolescents were starting, all those bands. It's not like somebody told them what to do. It wasn't contrived. It's not like today. I was in love with the first wave of punk rock. It's a lot different today.

Where did it come from? Were you all trying to be like Sex Pistols and The Damned?
Oh yeah. TSOL was very influenced by The Damned and they were my favorite band ever so we loved The Damned, too.

You're known as an artist, a photographer, producer and musician. How'd you learn all this stuff?
Just by doing it! Yeah, I've never had a guitar lesson in my entire life. I never had, like, a producer's lesson or was taught how to make records. I just listened to what I liked and figured it out. And then I'm fortunate enough that people trusted my opinion. They're like, *Oh yeah, he's got it*. When Blink-182 was having trouble recording their record in LA and it wasn't going well, they called me up and said, *Let's do it in San Diego. Help us make it!* And that's how the *Cheshire Cat* record came about.

And she said yes. I was so shocked that I had to do it. But I didn't really have to do it. I wanted to do it. And she's rad. So she plays bass in the band, and then Dale Crover plays drums on this tour coming up.

And Dale's been in lots of bands, right? The Melvins, Nirvana and a bunch I don't know; you name it.

And then Sarah, what's her background?
She's been a musician. So how I met Sarah is that she was in School of Rock when she was 16. And her teacher asked, "Hey, you want to come and play with School of Rock? We're gonna do a Fluf cover." I said sure. And that's where I met her. She was 16 and I thought, *Wow, she's good*. She played guitar, way better than me. She's better than me. So when she agreed to be in a band; I had no choice.

What's the vibe like with a youngster playing with two older cats?
It doesn't seem out of place. Yeah. Which I thought it would, but it never did. She can hang. Or rather, we can hang with her.

You are known for having a giant quiver of skateboards. Are you the same with guitars?

I don't think I have such a giant quiver of skateboards.

You have a lot; you have more than anybody I know!
Tod's got way more than me. Chicken's got 10,000!

No, I mean the amount that you bring out to skate.
Okay, yeah, I've got like 15 boards. So thanks. I got my 15 boards set up. Yeah, and that's stupid. I don't know why. I guess I just have the luxury to try out whatever I want.

So are you the same with guitars?
I'm probably worse with guitars! Just recently I called up Fender before we went on this tour. I called up my guy and asked, *Can you send me that Squire?* It's like a contemporary Squire. It just came out. So I got it all apart, put all this stuff on it, made it custom and now it's amazing. You can buy the same guitar, but it's not gonna look like mine. Same as my skateboards—I customize everything.

So you've been in bands your whole life? You just turned 61. What made you want to start a new band now?
I don't know. I asked a friend of mine. Sarah, she just recently left another band. And I asked her, "Hey, do you want to start a band?"

After being in this biz for so long, what keeps you doing it?
When you wake up in the morning, you have something new. I need to be creative. And that's my creative outlet. Whether it's music or skateboarding, or photography or painting.

As far as being in a band, what's the best part? And what's the worst, if any?
I don't really see a bad part about it. I love to tour. So maybe some people would say that touring is bad. I mean, I thought about it the last time when I was in my mid 50s, still sleeping on floors. In my 50s. That was funny. But it didn't seem to bother me and never stopped me. I don't know. I don't ever see a downside. I think it's all good. I'm the dude who wakes up in the morning early and drives around the town, or takes a bike ride or whatever I can find on tour and just sees everything. I go sit someplace and have breakfast sometimes by myself. I really want to do that. I'm going to guitar shops every day. I don't drink or smoke, so that's how I spend my day. I don't party. Partying for me would be like they have pepperoni, jalapeño pizza backstage! Oh, man!

Who's the most famous person you've seen naked?
That's a crazy question. I want to lie right here and make it juicy, but I guess I'll say GG Allin. Yeah. I saw him shit in his hand and then throw it, almost hitting me. So he walks on stage, completely nude except for cowboy boots—cowboy boots and a hat. And then two drumsticks up his ass. He played three songs

then went and sat down in his van completely covered in shit. I couldn't believe it. John Reis got a photo with him. It's insane.

Have you witnessed any true rock star behavior over the years?
Not really. Maybe Ryan Adams? He was exactly how people had described him. Usually everybody says someone is a certain way and then you meet them and they're completely normal or different than what you expected. He didn't do anything lame, really, he just lived up to his reputation. But then I played ping pong with Robert Smith, and everyone said he was unbeatable on the tour and I kicked his ass four games in a row. You might not think of the dude from The Cure being a ping pong champ, but he was different than what you might expect from seeing him on stage. And I'm a huge Cure fan.

What about you? Have you ever enjoyed any personal rock star moments?
Yeah, once when Dinosaur Jr opened up for Foo Fighters at Fenway Park, I didn't have a room and Dave Grohl said I could have his. It was the craziest room at the Four Seasons Hotel—like four rooms and a living room and four bedrooms. Dave just goes, "Hey, you can have my room. Just don't go crazy on ringing up food." Which I thought was rad. But in that room, there was so much food. Like, entire

trays of chocolate. I went nuts and felt horrible. I finally had to go to sleep to stop eating. That was super cool of him.

So what's your plan with Harshmellow?
Just keep touring and keep playing and making records. We're about to leave for a six-week tour with The Melvins across the entire United States.

Last question: what's a one-cheek sneak?
It can mean many things to many people, but the classic version is when you're sitting on a

"There's not a day that I wake up where I don't want to skateboard"

hard wooden chair. It needs to be a wooden chair so it sounds like thunder. You lift one cheek and let loose the how-you-doin' juice. You'll know it worked if it sounded like a small thunderclap. The day that you don't think farts are funny is the day that you die. So if you don't think farts are funny anymore, that's it. Your life is over. ♠

