

Tuesday, August 31, 2004

## My Chemical Romance - An Interview With Guitarist Ray Toro



With the release of their new album *Three Cheers For Sweet Revenge*, New Jersey's own [My Chemical Romance](#) has consolidated a reputation for brilliant, biting and boundary-leaping rock and roll that first came to worldwide attention with their 2002 Eyeball Records debut *I Brought You My Bullets, You Brought Me Your Love*.

Featuring thirteen new originals written by the band, *Three Cheers For Sweet Revenge* is an impressive leap forward for a group that's been constantly on tour for the better part of 2 years, winning a fanatical following across North America and Europe, both as headliners and co-billed with The Used, Taking Back Sunday, Story Of The Year and a host of others. Epiphone's Don Mitchell recently had a conversation with guitarist Ray Toro.

**EPI:** Hey Ray, thank you for taking the time out of your busy schedule to talk with us. Tell me about My Chemical Romance and how you got started.

**RAY:** Well, we're based out of New Jersey and we've been together for two and a half years. Gerard (lead singer Gerard Way) has been a friend of mine for years and was attending the School of Visual Arts in New York. He was working on a cartoon at the time and there was actually interest from the Cartoon Network but after 9/11 happened things just didn't work out and he decided he wanted to start a band. He got together with a friend of ours Matt Pelissier and started writing some songs. I was still in college and wasn't really happy doing

what I was doing. I really hadn't been seriously playing guitar in a couple of years at that point but he gave me a call and said he wanted me to check out his songs. I went to a practice in this attic they were set up in and the music he was writing was like nothing I had ever heard. It was really cool with this dark edge but still a pop element. After a while it became obvious that there was an energy we all felt when we were playing together and that's how we started. Mikey Way, who is Gerard's brother started playing bass with us and we got Frank Iero a couple months later to fill out the other guitar spot. He was in another band that had helped us get some of our first shows and when that band broke up our first instinct was to get him! He was already a fan of our band and a great guitar player. Once that happened the lineup solidified and we've been going pretty strong since. I think we were all really in that stage of our lives where we were kind of at that crossroads where you can either go one way or another and it just worked out that we all happened to get together with this band. We were really lucky to find each other and are even luckier to be where we are now.



**EPI:** So after things were solidified with band members, what happened next? Did you hit the club scene pretty heavy or what?

**RAY:** The first places we played were VFW halls. In Jersey, bands put on shows in VFW halls and they'll charge maybe \$5 or \$6 for a show that has five or six local bands on the bill. They were usually really small shows where like ten to fifteen kids would show up or maybe forty if you were lucky! It was really fun though. At the same time Gerard and Mikey had this friend named Alex Saavedra who ran Eyeball Records. We had recorded a demo with my computer that was just kind of slapped together in a day or two. It sounded really crappy but Alex liked the songs and wanted to help us out so he put us in a small studio in New York. We recorded one track and at that time we had never recorded with even half-way decent equipment so when we finished that track we were totally stoked! We ended up signing with Eyeball Records and that's where we recorded our first record.

**EPI:** After the first record was completed, did you hit the road right away?



**RAY:** As soon as we finished the first record, like a month or two after that we started touring and we really haven't stopped! This year alone we've had a total of maybe two weeks off, if that. One half of being in a band is the



recording aspect and the other half is the live stuff and we just love playing live. It's cool to go from city to city playing for people. When we started this band we only hoped that people would actually want to come see us play and it has been a nice surprise to see so many people connect with our music. It's pretty awesome and we love to do what we do.

**EPI:** How has being on this years Warped Tour been for you guys?

**RAY:** We finished up on the Warped Tour a couple of weeks ago. We did the first half of the tour, starting on the West Coast and ending in Chicago. The Warped Tour is pretty crazy....they have four or five stages with maybe fifteen bands playing on each stage. It's really hectic and at times confusing. You get a different schedule every day and you don't know when your playing until around 9:30 or 10:00 in the morning so you have to wake up very early and you might have to play in an hour or you might sit around all day waiting to play.

It's kind of crazy but it's also very fun. A lot of people call it the Summer Camp for bands because it's basically a bunch of bands hanging out. It's a really cool way to meet guys in bands that you respect and make new friends. Everybody hangs out and after every show there's a barbeque where everyone gets together for burgers and hotdogs. You're able to chit chat with everyone so it's a really cool vibe.

**EPI:** I heard you just did a short tour of Japan. How did that go?

**RAY:** We played two shows at this huge festival over there. It was kind of like a Warped Tour for Japan. These were huge shows! There were over 30,000 people that showed up for the second show in Tokyo. The kids there were great and really appreciated the bands. They were very welcoming and it was an awesome experience for us. People would be singing our lyrics even if they couldn't speak English! I think we're going back in January and I am looking forward to that.



**EPI:** I've been listening to the new record "Three Cheers For Sweet Revenge" and it sounds great. Was the recording experience a good one?

**RAY:** It was very cool. When we recorded our first record we didn't have much time. The whole thing was recorded in about a week but



for this one we actually had time to write! I like our first record a lot but it's kind of rushed in the sense that we didn't actually get a chance to take the time to really see if certain songs were working. For this record we had a lot of pre-production time and we spent a lot of time with our producer. We made a real effort to kind of trim all the fat and get to the core of what makes a good song. It was a great time. We recorded in Los Angeles and were there for almost three months with most of that time spent in pre-production working on the songs. The recording process was awesome as well. The first record was very low budget; we recorded it for like a couple thousand dollars. On this one we had real equipment, tons of toys to play with and time to make things right. I loved every second of it.

**EPI:** Did the band write the material or did you bring in co-writers?

**RAY:** We write our own material. Our producer did however help us arrange some things. If you look at our first record, we had the tendency to be like Verse, Chorus, Verse, Chorus and then go to a big outro section. But when you do that you never get that chorus back, you know the hook never comes back.... and that's one of the things he helped us learn. Sometimes you have to go back to the Chorus and wrap up the song...you know, make it a circle. So all the music is written by us but he helped us arrange some of the songs.

**EPI:** Can we expect anything soon from you guys on the video front?

**RAY:** As a matter of fact, we just finished a video. It's the first single off the album called "I'm Not OK". We got to work with an awesome director named Marc Webb. He's really young and has this really cool visual sense about him. We had this idea of putting us in a prep school setting....it's really funny to see us in those prep school uniforms...and Marc just ran with the idea and gave it kind of a movie trailer feel! We don't have the finished product yet since we just finished filming yesterday but from everything that we saw on the playbacks we know it's going to be great. It should be finished in a couple weeks and start airing next month. We had a great time making it.

**EPI:** Tell me about your own personal guitar journey. Did you start playing at a young age?

**RAY:** I started playing when I was a sophomore in high school. My older brother was really who got me started. He played and I thought it was the coolest thing. He'd always have a guitar lying around the house and be jamming on it day and night. My mom



would get really mad because it would be like two o'clock in the morning and he'd still be playing while we were all trying to sleep! He always had a ton of guitar magazines lying around and books like Pink Floyd and Metallica that had the tabs so I just started picking them up and trying to learn. My brother was definitely the reason I started but some of my favorite players are Slash, Randy Rhoades and Kirk Hammett of Metallica. Metal players had a huge influence on me.



**EPI:** Of course we are honored that you choose to play Epiphone product!

**RAY:** I have an [Epiphone Les Paul](#) model and it's frickin' awesome! I play a lot of chords where there's a lot of finger stretching and I use a lot of octaves and then add melody on top. I always try to find a tone where you can hear every single note going on and the Epiphone responds beautifully. I've always loved playing Les Paul models and this one's cool because it's lighter than most, really comfortable to play on stage and has a really fast neck. I really like Epiphone's stuff. I love playing them.

**EPI:** There's a cool harmony lead in "I'm Not OK" that says to me that you are more than the typical three-chord player of today. How did you come up with that lead?

**RAY:** When we were writing that song in the practice studio I really wanted it to have a classic rock type solo. One of the cool things about how we wrote this record is that I could take stuff back to the hotel at night on my computer. I had talked to Gerard about this solo and we agreed that the song needed a huge guitar solo. Kind of a throwback to things like Zeppelin or Queen might do. You don't hear a lot of harmonized guitar solos now days or for that matter guitar solos at all so I wanted to make it as big as possible. I sat in that hotel room and recorded guitar after guitar until I finally found what I was looking for. There are actually three different things going on in that solo and it just kind of works. It was fun to write and I love the solo in that song. It came out exactly how I wanted it.

**EPI:** The record sounds great and we wish you continued success from your Epiphone family!

For more information on My Chemical Romance and Ray, visit [www.MyChemicalRomance.com](http://www.MyChemicalRomance.com).



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