

This interview was on 6/22/2024 at noon. The interviewee, Tanner Hoffmann (TF), is a member of a few different local bands, a house show enthusiast and host, and a writer for a midwestern 'zine that focuses on alternative music in the area. The interviewer was Cheyenne Antell (CA) from the Portage County Historical Society. This audio was recorded inside of Tanner's living room before a full day of hosting local bands at an event called Pissfest.

CA (00:02): Hello, my name is Cheyenne Antell, could you introduce yourself?

TH (00:05): Yeah, I am Tanner Hoffmann. I am a content editor for Skyward and I have been doing punk music in Stevens Point since 2006.

CA (00:18): That's fantastic, how did you begin playing music, like when you were a child or a teenager? What started you off?

TH (00:26): My great uncle did my parents the misfortune of buying my younger brother a bass guitar. We are a family of four children. I'm the oldest sibling and when younger siblings get something that is special, they don't like to share. So we could not convince him to share this bass guitar so my parents were forced to buy all the other instruments. We got a guitar, we had a drum set. From there I started teaching myself how to play guitar. I had already been teaching myself how to play drums at school because I was involved in middle school bands. If I had down time the band teacher would let me come in and tool around on the drumset, so I started to teach myself that. I started learning how to play Green Day songs on the guitar during the early days of the internet so you could go online and find guitar tabs. That was what kicked everything off. I formed my first band in high school.

CA (01:34): Was Green Day one of those main music influences for you? Who influenced that early music?

TH (01:41): In high school, this was the early days of the internet, so Napster was already dead. Limewire was where everyone went to get music for free. There was a kid at school that wore shirts that had patches safety pinned to them and he seemed very cool. I wanted to be cool so I started emulating some of that and checking out the bands that he was listening to. I would go home and get on Limewire and download Green Day and Blink-182 and Dead Kennedys. I feel like everyone says this, but like, the Tony Hawk Pro Skater soundtrack? It didn't hit me so much then, I wasn't thinking about looking up the bands at the time, but looking back on it, all of those bands I have introduced myself to at some point. I think those definitely shaped those formative years. They've done studies that in your teenage years the music that you're listening to is formative for what you will listen to and enjoy for the rest of your life. That's what I was listening to when I was 14-17, so here I am today.

CA (02:53): Nice. That was your influences when you were younger and during those high school years, were you in Portage County at that time? What brought you here?

TH (03:04): No, like I said, I did band all through school and that was one of the things that I was really good at. I played trumpet. I thought when I was graduating high school and moving on to college that maybe being a music teacher could be in my future. Shopping around for schools; Lawrence has a really great program out in Appleton but as a private college it's way more expensive and we were always kind of on the broke side. Looking at something in the UW system, Stevens Point has one of the best and most robust music programs in the state, if not the best, so it was a no-brainer for me. I came here for school and shortly thereafter I started finding local shows downtown.

CA (03:52): What made you stay? Even though you were finding local shows I know there's bigger music scenes in bigger cities across the state.

TH (03:59): I like the location here. Stevens Point doesn't feel too big. At the time I had a partner who also liked the area and she had a job here, her parents were close, my parents were only an hour away; there were a lot of factors but I was involved in bands at that time, so to leave and find a bigger scene would've meant breaking up everything I had already worked on

CA (04:37): What bands were you involved in around then?

TH (04:39): I graduated in 2011. I was in, if I remember correctly, a ska band called Doctor Cancer and the SKAmbies, and maybe my band Evening Noose was a band at that time, or maybe we were just forming or were about to form. We must have been playing, come to think of it, because a couple of years later would be when other bands formed.

CA (05:15): When you had those bands, you had mentioned you were finding gigs in the area, how did you connect to the local music scene? You had moved here for college so you didn't know the area so much.

TH (05:27): When I came to college, the place you used to go to, I had just missed it, was the Mission Coffee House. Sheldon, the guy who bought it, opened up the Afterdark Coffeehouse. He continued to host shows regularly. At least once a month if not more than that. It was a pretty short walk from my dorm or the house I lived in at the time. I went as often as I could. Back in the day Stevens Point had bigger bands coming through. Mad Caddies, which is on Fat Records, was one that came through. That was before me. I don't know if we had bands that big still coming through, but bands that are on tour, smaller bands, have always come through here. The Afterdark used to be a place they would come to. I remember seeing a band from California there, I remember seeing bands on tour, lots from the Chicago and Minneapolis areas.

CA (06:49): How did you find shows to play? Especially if you were fresh coming into college you were under 21, and how did you find performances to go to?

TH (07:00): I was lucky. When I first started going to shows it was the Afterdark Coffeehouse and, being a coffeehouse, they were all ages. They never even sold alcohol. We could go there and hang out and see the shows and there was never a concern there. I formed my first college band in 2008, that's about right, maybe 2007. The other guys that were in that band were a year under me. I basically walked up to Sheldon, the owner of the Afterdark Cafe, and was like "hey I have a pop punk band, can we come play some time?". Any opportunity I got to play at the Afterdark, I would. DIY punk isn't that different from putting yourself out there in a business setting. You network. You make friends. The people that are coming to the shows are from Appleton or Oshkosh or Madison, Milwaukee. You make friends with them since you shared a bill at the Afterdark and you can say "hey, can you get me a show in Appleton sometime" and you go from there.

CA (08:27): How did you find performances to watch? How did you find other bands to connect to here in Point?

TH (08:33): Again, by going to the shows. I wasn't playing all of them. There were other local bands at the time that were playing them too. One is playing tonight, Sega Genocide. I remember seeing Sega Genocide for the first time and it shifted me because I was going from Green Day / Blink-182 and Sega Genocide is more of a Black Flag / Minor Threat. I wasn't into those bands quite yet. That opened me up to more of 80's hardcore that I hadn't heard before. That was when I met Jim (Fuhrer) and I definitely can think of other bands from that time. There was a band called the Astro Zombies that were local and fun, True Sofastry were really, really good, there was a band called Stormstrike that used to play. Generally when you do these DIY shows you get a couple bands from out of town and a couple local folks to pad it out. Unfortunately, a lot of people when they

pick concerts to go to, they aren't picking concerts for people they have never heard of. If you mix some local flavor and some not-local flavor you get all worlds.

CA (10:00): So I know some of the music that influenced you when you were starting out and just forming your first bands, as you have grown and experienced different things, what influences your music now?

TH (10:15): Punk has always, through and through, been the center of it. I have branched out. If punk has touched it I've probably listened to it. Metal comes from punk. I've listened to plenty of metal. Emo and that kind of stuff has its roots in punk too. A lot of that I've touched and listened to and experimented with, and played it myself. At the end of the day, punk music is what I listen to and embody. Even though I might dabble in other things, it always comes back to that. As far as what influences me... What a lot of people tend to look for in their music, another thing that makes me sad, is that a lot of people, when they're out of their college years, they have decided that "these are the bands that I like" and they stop looking for new bands. If they go to concerts it's because Metallica is on their 40th reunion tour, and I love Metallica so I'm going to go see them. They aren't finding new music anymore and that bums me the heck out because anytime somebody older than me goes "they just don't make music like they used to", they do! You just stopped caring. I'm always on the hunt for new bands. It creates a different problem because now I'm listening to so many different bands that I can't truly love or appreciate any of them. I feel like that might still be better

CA (12:05): If there were people here in Portage County who said they were struggling to find new bands, or they didn't know about the local music scene, do you have any recommendations on how they can start broadening their horizons?

TH (12:17): The internet is great. There's lots of ways to do it on the internet. Regardless of what genre of music might be your preference. If you like punk or you like metal or you like folk or whatever, it doesn't matter, I guarantee there is a website dedicated to spreading news about that genre. If you Google it you will find it. Brooklyn Vegan is one I go to all the time, brooklynvegan.com, and they encompass everything, especially what's new and trendy. They run the gambit too; if Metallica is doing another tour they'll probably talk about that, but they also pay attention to what's new and trendy in music. It's not limited to a genre, they'll cover everything from pop to punk to metal. All of it. A lot of their news I tend to skip because it might not be interesting to me. But the internet is definitely your friend. If you're trying to find stuff that's local. House shows can be a little evasive since we don't want to attract the attention of people who don't hold the same values as us, so if you're trying to break into that scene you need to know somebody. But if you're trying to find somebody to know to get you there, we do shows at bars and things, so if you pay attention to those, they tend to be publicized way better. Go to one of those and make friends with somebody there. They probably have an "in" into the house shows.

CA (13:51): I know that you are involved in our local music scene. You still have bands and house shows and things that you are a part of. Can you explain a little bit on how you are involved in influencing our local music scene?

TH (14:06): Yeah. I have been running a house venue for 10 years, called Hell's Disco, and that's probably my primary contribution that I make to the scene. It was kind of born out of a place where, in 2014 when I bought this house, there weren't a lot of good places to play. The bars had stopped being interested. Brickhaus was a place that for a long time consistently would let us play there, but all of a sudden it stopped. PABS, the bike shop, is a place that let us have shows sometimes and they weren't open yet. There was one other house venue that I know opened up around the same time, but we weren't friends yet, we didn't know each other. When they first started doing shows I didn't know they existed. I found out about them after Hell's Disco had already been established and had been going for a while. I can't say that we were the only place, but at the

time it was the only place that I knew of. That was what motivated me to start it, that there weren't places in Stevens Point any longer to play at, from my perspective. We were looking for a house anyway, we reached that point in our lives, and we had the ability to do it. We had the conscious decision to buy a house that could serve that function and as soon as we were moved in we started doing it.

CA (15:45): Are you involved in any bands currently? What kind of music are you making?

TH (15:49): I make punk music. I am involved in two bands. I play drums for a pop punk band called Wilted. There's a newer project; it's a hardcore band but it's hardcore in the newer sense, not like the 80's sense for people who know what I'm talking about. The word has evolved over time. Nowadays hardcore is almost closer to metal. If you ask me to make the distinction between this newer hardcore and metal, I don't know if I could honestly tell you. It's maybe a little less virtuosic. Metal tends to be very precise and showy with the guitar playing and hardcore is kind of just heavy. I'm in a hardcore band called Nuuu Metal.

CA (17:00): If someone was just coming into the University of Stevens Point or just starting to get into the area, and they wanted to know about the music scene to see if they wanted to get involved, how would you describe the Portage County music scene?

TH (17:17): I don't know if I could speak to the entire Portage County music scene; I don't involve myself much with some of the other scenes. I know we've got a really good bluegrass and folk scene. Punk and metal are almost the same scene. In Stevens Point we don't have a lot of metal happening, that's more in Wausau. Pop and rap I don't involve myself in either. As far as the punk scene in Stevens Point goes, Portage County, inclusive and safe is the name of the game. We're very anti-racist, anti-fascist, anti-homophobic, anti-transphobic, it's very important to us to make sure that everyone feels welcome here and that everyone feels like they can enjoy the music and the community without feeling alienated and threatened by anyone else.

CA (18:31): How would you like to see residents, or people passing through, support local music?

TH (18:38): I recognize that the Stevens Point punk scene is probably not for everybody. But the fact of the matter is, we aren't really harming anybody with what we're doing. In some ways, if what we're doing isn't for you, the best way you can support us is by letting us be. If there's a house show happening in your neighborhood and they aren't doing any harm, don't call the police. If you're thinking "oh this sounds really cool and I think I want to be a part of it", find a way to become a part of it. It's certainly not intended to be gatekeepy. It's just out of necessity; there definitely are problems with a scene like this where a few bad eggs can ruin the whole batch. We do tend to be a little closed off just for safety reasons. We don't want to let people in who don't share our values.

CA (19:45): Do you have any plans for your future with music involvement?

TH (19:49): I'm not going to stop. Not anytime in the near future. I'm not a 5 or 10 year plan kind of guy, but I do know that my bands are going strong and I like being in them, so I don't see them ending anytime soon. As far as Hell's Disco goes, we reached our 10 years here. I don't know if we'll be doing it for 20, but I know we're at least going to do it for 11.

CA (20:21): Is there anything else you want to add about your involvement in this scene or in Portage County that we haven't touched on?

TH (20:29): There's definitely lots of stories and names and bands that I could bring up, but that might be a little rambling. Maybe one of the most important things, since it's something I wanted to say at some point during this interview, is that I had the epiphany that in a lot of ways, a music scene is a lot like why people go to church. I'm not religious and I actually have a lot of problems with religion for reasons that probably aren't necessary to bring up. But in some ways we're not that different. From what I understand about people going to church, a lot of it is for community. These people may not necessarily be your best friends or even be people that you hang out with outside of church, but you know their names and you're friendly with them. Every time you see them you're happy. You see people who go to church and say "we go week after week!" and it's a positive thing. You organize things together, you plan benefits for causes that you care about. Churches do that and the punk scene is very, very similar. A lot of the people that I see, who come to my house when we have house shows or that I see at other shows, are maybe not people that I hang out with on a regular basis outside of the shows but I know them all by name and I love them all very very much. I'm always happy to see them. I care about their wellbeing; I want them to do well and I want things to be good for them. We absolutely get together and support causes that we believe in and want to lift as much as we can. That's a good answer to your question.

CA (23:03): It's good to know that the music scene provides such a strong sense of community for people here.

TH (23:08): I think so. I don't know if everybody has had that epiphany or feels the same, but I think if they thought about it they would probably agree.

CA (23:17): Thank you for your time!

TH (23:18): Absolutely.