

Young Satan in

in Stink Bomb Prom

Overture

"It's been a real pleasure getting to know you,
Earth angels."

What the hell is Young Satan in Love? On the surface it's a send up of the story of Genesis (I am referring here to the Old Testament Genesis, though we do begin the album with a song called Phil Collins) and recast as a rock opera performed in bars.

In Eternity a band of outcast teen angels stink bombs the prom (known forever more as the "Big Bang") following a series of adventures tied to the recovery through time and space of a mysterious g-string. The dramatic driver is Satan's alleged infatuation with a new cheruba at Paradise High, the enigmatic Milliscent the Innocent.

Sounds straightforward enough, but like most aspects of the project, nothing is at it seems.

"I hit the Oracle up for an answer.
She demurred and deferred to a dancer."

There are allusions in a couple places to Young Satan visiting an oracle somewhere on the fringes of Eternity. From her he receives a prophecy, never explicitly stated on album but oft repeated in live performances:

“Until you love everyone and everything equally,
you will never love anyone or anything at all.”

Future devil or no, this is a tall order, but the Young Satan in Love phenomenon argues that for better or worse this prophesy is in the end the fate of all those who will walk in Satan’s wake and this includes YOU.

“For you my ding-a-ling rings ever bluely, and it
sounds like this:”

Nobody needs love. You are perfect just the way you are, fuck your little needs. Why do you run around in a self-perpetuated dream groping outwards for what is at your very core? You are an amnesiac wizard in lockstep with an endless parade of clowns lurching down the tightly wound streets and alleyways of your very own Clown Town. You are the mayor of clowntown, in fact, a Mayor McJeez. What you call love is an anvil around the neck you cling to like a life preserver. What are you hoping to preserve, exactly? You don’t even know, but you’re in good company.

“Being the penis pump for inflatable fools? Feels
good.”

Love is all. Want to have it all? Give it all away. There's no other way. This all-inclusive giveaway includes all the clowny little you's inside. Maybe love is an acid bath. That's why nobody really wants it. In the presence of love, there's nothing left to want, and nobody left to want it. Who wants that? We just want to feel good, that's all.

What passes for love on Earth, as it is in Paradise High, is a commodity, the accumulation of which grants access to comforts and thrills that have everything in the world going for them, which is to say they're illusory. Only love exists. Or is it just a word on a page? What's really going on?

"I like to think we're all just God
hallucinating."

Young Satan in Love is a love story in so far as it is recounted in time and space. Stories, like music, don't exist in Eternity, which is to say they do not stand outside time and space.

Stories can act as bridges, though. What we have on our hands is a story we might tell ourselves not so much to keep the demons at bay in the infernal night, but to summon them across a chasm of denial. Denial of what's closer than your breath.

"Yeah, I know I'm a gimp in a race of lock-step
chimps, but if you're looking for a rapid fire
flight risk, I'm Super Pimp."

The loveless Young Satan, scorning the all-pervasive stupor of his classmates, irrevocably separated from them by prophesy, is the awakening angel. No longer bound by delusion, our hero finds himself wholly bound to blow it apart.

Act 1: Paradise High, in Eternity

“Mediocrity is a noose these angels wear as a
medal of honour.”

The first wave of teen angels (the cherubs and cherubas) is nearing the end of their schooling in the Only Way of Eternity (OWE).

What does an angel learn at Paradise High, exactly, of this OWE?

Eternity is shattered into fragments, and from these fragments we get angels, each one a perfect holograph of the original whole. But perfection is not what you think it is.

Paradise High is the first cosmic joke: teach the art of perfection to the already perfect, foster love in the very hearts of its essence, and watch it vanish in a haze of anxiety and desire: the perfect inversion.

Teen angels move about Paradise High preening and posturing like helpless little windup toys the Divine Principal has set in motion, like a grand experiment in setting love free to see if it comes back. Whatever his reasons or goals, the whole thing looks less like God hallucinating and more like he's playing with himself: Paradise high education is the great cosmic masturbation.

The lark of the Divine Principal's is secretly boring him to tears. His angels are parodies of His vaulted essence, causing an apparent crisis of self-doubt. "Why did I bother? Is this the best I can do? Shit, is this the best me I can be?"

"Hallelujah! Dab El-Dooya!"

Our Divine Principal, oft vigilant if not ever, seeks to rectify the situation in a couple of notable ways: He hatches a secret plan to snuff out the Heavenly Host at the purported Big Bang: the covert Big Bust. Simultaneously, he assumes a secret identity as Dab El-Dooya, fellow teen angel and right hand man to Young Satan.

Meanwhile, back at Paradise High, nearly everyone is excited for the upcoming Prom, or Big Bang. From the BB each angel will scatter and become a brilliant star in time and space, the finite universe, so the story goes.

"How do we know she was even talking to you? I
mean, it's not like she has before."

In the waning weeks of school, a select few cherubs have yet to secure dates: this tiny band of misfits is lead by a particularly confrontational teen angel named Satan. His gang consists of fellow underachievers Hecubus, Lil' Leviathan, Pazuzu, and the DP

disguised as Dab.

As the story begins, Satan has recently been re-admitted to school after an extended suspension for disruption. He is allowed to return on the recommendation of school psychologist Dr. Topholes Mephis, who diagnoses Satan with IDD (Interest Deficit Disorder) - not that Satan cares.

We learn, or don't, depending on the particular show, that while on suspension, Satan visited sometimes girlfriend and exotic dancer Dusty, who works part-time for a mysterious older (older when you're in high school, anyways) madam on the outskirts of Paradise. It is to this madam that Dusty refers Satan on the night he receives his prophecy. She is the oracle who sees in his IDD a spark, or bomb of divine proportions: "Universal Love or Bust. Woe to the cheruba who's datin' Satan."

Henceforth Satan walks the halls of Paradise High listlessly, no longer even all that amused by his own antics, seeing the bust for which Paradise High is inevitably headed. He now knows that the Big Bang is the DP's opportunity to scrap the angelic experiment entirely. Ashes to ashes. Dust to dust. Here comes the Big Bust.

"Milliscent is innocent, like a g-string in a
briefcase."

But before he can fret anymore, serious distraction intervenes.

A new cheruba, Milliscent the Innocent, shows up on the morning bus, prompting Satan and Hecubus to serenade her in an ambiguously earnest manner. She later reappears in Satan's homeroom and sits sullenly in the front row, clutching a mysterious briefcase.

Satan is mildly entranced by both the briefcase and the sulking hot-panted novel presence. But the teacher (Zebadaya) is on her case from the get-go, confiscating said briefcase when Milliscent refuses to reveal its contents. Inside the suitcase he finds a lone g-string,, which is passed on to the Divine Principal.

“You’ll learn, they all do. There is no past, no future. Nowhere to go. You are one of us now.”

More than ever taken with the new cheruba, Satan and the boys break into the Divine Principal’s office in search of the errant g-string. Dab inadvertently (or not) flushes the massive Holy Water Closet in DP’s office, thus sucking the whole company of would-be g-string liberators down the Great Cosmic Drain.

Act 2: Escape to Earth

“I want to go with no halo so nobodies know it’s
the Devil show.”

This turns out to be no ordinary toilet drain. It is in fact a portal into space and time, and more specifically to a planet called Earth, populated by Earth angels - doppelgangers for the celestial graduating class, wholly ignorant to their nature as little divinities. They do, however, and curiously, come off as more believable and

authentic "characters" than their counterparts at school. These Earth angels are a hell of a lot dirtier under the fingernails, more frazzled around the edges, and hungry for stink. Not all of them admit this, but all of them exhibit the symptoms.

What's more, our runaway band of angels has been magically transformed from teen angels to middle aged white guys, presumably so that they can get away with virtually anything so long as they smile, nod, and pat people knowingly on the back.

Satan and company quickly realizes their situation presents a golden opportunity to raise a little unsupervised hell.

And it just so happens that they have a heavenly bestowed superpower: the wholly unholy superpower of song and dance. Turns out that, on this planet, they may actually have invented singing and dancing, or at least get some of the credit some of the time. It also turns out that everyone on this planet has heard of Satan, and the reviews are decidedly mixed. Satan thus adopts the pseudonym "S'tan", so as to deflect unwanted attention.

"Blowin' quarters like a rich man on a spree..."

Soon it is apparent that they're going to need this thing called "money" to bankroll the adventure. What's a song and dance angel to do?

"Oral Roberts, Lawrence Welk and me."

And so they write, perform, and sell a couple commercial jingles before hitting on the jackpot notion of hiring themselves out as the This Time Around Bachelorette Party Band, "The antidote to the meathead stripper experience". The band presents stiff competition to a tight market.

The money's good, the girls are happy, and the good times roll, for a short time. At what turns out to be their final gig things fly nearly out of control when some very inebriated clients tug determinedly on the boys' g-strings like start chords on chainsaws, hungry for timbre.

"Nice token resistance, S'tan."

The bachelorette herself in this case pulls Satan's completely off. When he moves in to retrieve it (they didn't pay the "special rate", after all), Satan realizes that this wild eyed woman is in fact the Earthly middle aged doppelganger for new cheruba Milliscent the Innocent!

"W'owe, now hold on a second. I'm being set up!"

Satan's been chasing his own g-string through time and space, it turns out, and he thinks to himself, what a wonderful world. Satan lets the oblivious (obliterated?) Milliscent keep the g-string, for a "price" (he is the Devil, after all).

"I don't know how you got here; I do know you gotta go. Not now, but soon, though."

The boys realize they've had their fun and need to get back to Eternity in time for the Big Bang (though, as we know, there is technically no "in time" in Eternity). And what better send off than an old fashioned Satan-led exorcism?

"And now we will free one of you from the bondage
of your dreary little reality. Who wants to be
set free?"

We've finally arrived at the intersection of narrative and bar show: Young Satan in Love's final show on Earth, culminating in Satan performing an exorcism on an audience volunteer (though in live performances this "volunteer" is often a plant).

If the thought of the Devil himself performing an exorcism seems unorthodox, chalk it up to your conditioning. For a true exorcism is hardly a matter of banishing demons. The one you demonize, like the devil, is the one who sees through your bullshit, the little voice that is unmoved by your personal melodrama.

You need to throw open the door to your demons to clobber the clowns stinking up your very soul, telling you all the stupid stories you take for real. Clowns, not demons, keep you in a prison of self-absorption and delusion.

"Give your demons wings, girl, spread-eagle the
love."

Thus do Young Satan in Love rock shows in this corner of the dream state you Earth angels call home invariably climax in an exorcism abetted by a cross-dimensional inflatable clown friend of the band's named Clobber. Clobber acts as Christ-like stand-

in for the imagined (but very real to them) failings of a brave volunteer from the audience.

"Stare down that puffed-up clown, the smirking
projection of all that's held you down."

Our volunteer is invited to project their winy inner-voices onto Clobber and then clobber him in a ritualistic cleansing of the existential palate. The exorcism ends with the gleeful lynching of Clobber the clown by the gathered mob (the "Fluffa" ritual), where Clobber's head is torn from his body and worn by the one among them brave enough to claim the kill.

Act 3: Stinkbomb Prom

Called back to Paradise High by the Divine Principal, Satan casually returns the g-string to Milliscent (actually the amnesiac bachelorette from Earth) and sets about planning the detonation of a stink bomb at the Big Bang, which will thwart the Divine Principal's Big Bust

and instead scatter the Heavenly Host across time and space.

"I know you're busy, this won't take long. Would
you come to the prom with me, Stinkbomb?"

Does Satan stinkbomb the prom for the sake of reuniting with Milliscent under less heavy guard? Has he fallen in love with Earth? Is he simply the pawn in some greater plan of the Divine Principal's?

We don't get a clear answer. The key likely lies in his prophesy, which is hardly if ever stated at all in the course of the retelling, live or on record. Yet, as Satan tells the Divine Principal in a confrontational moment:

"The further from the center, the more certain
the return."

Whatever the motives, we know the outcome. Satan's prophesy of burning love is his gift to you, Earth angel.

The action finishes with the post-apocalyptic, Earthward tribute to Leroy, a mustachioed earth angel made famous in his hole-throated likeness on cigarette packs. Though in dire earthly straits, Leroy is Satan's crowning exorcism, unmoved by his predicament, more determined than ever.

"Smoke 'til you're through, it's all you can do."

Life is but a dream. Why make it a nightmare? It's the only thing up to you.

Afterward

"Do you ever wonder if any of this is real?"

One listen to the skits, which fills in the narrative along the album's trajectory, reveals a story within a story: a group of friends making an album and acting out in bars and at all ages shows a loosely scripted rock opera called Young Satan in Love, a group of friends embarked on a grand art project.

"Don't forget your dejected sigh."

With few exceptions, the "actors" delivered all lines for skits as they were reading them for the first time, in preparation for a real take that would never be used, if it took place at all. Here I invert the Bressonian (see insufferable art house classic Au hazard Balthasar, for example) technique of draining his actors of all emotional investment through hundreds of takes. We get instead the first read through, with unpredictable results. Skit wrappers, with sound effects and narrative thrusts, were mostly conceived and entirely constructed on these skeletons.

"The world's problems are staged, the powerless
are enraged, I hear our names being paged,
tell'em we're otherwise engaged."

A life-sized art project like this celebrates conscious, creative agency in the roles played and lines delivered throughout this dress-rehearsal we call life: no second takes, no ultimate performance, life as a series of sketches we run through with more or

less self-awareness, connecting the dots along the way using grossly incomplete information. The choices in those connections are entirely dependent on the degree of our self-awareness..

“We’ve been sent here as a warning – not to you,
but to us – that if we don’t tone it down ‘Up
There’, then this is the world that will come
into being. So what do you think we should do?”

In concert and on record Young Satan in Love is an attempt to break the audience through the fourth wall of their own lives, to experience from an awake place a world of simultaneously amped up and shattered illusions.

“...and I said to myself, “‘avoid that guy’”.

A fellow in a demonstrably cheap suit identifying himself as Zebadaya , Head of the People’s Ecumenical Nation for the Interruption of Satan (P.E.N.I.S. from Heaven) hands out religious pamphlets at shows, attempting to engage spectators in a frank discussion as to why they would prefer their souls burn in hell.

“Is this where you want to end up: in bed with a
demon who smells of last night’s whiskey in a
sulfurous heat of ruined bacchanal?”

The effect of all this is polarizing, but what the hell. Love it or hate it, we might as well shake things up. We're not in this world just to suck. We might as well all be conscious of being actors and script our own reality from the available materials, ever prepared to follow twists and turns. Why would you just accept the scripts handed to you? What do you know about the actor reciting those lines? Is he or she anything besides those goddamn scripts?

People ask if we're crazy and we answer back: "Are we any crazier than you?"

"For Satan so loved this world, he gave his only
stinkbomb."

Just as the raw materials of life provide inspiration for art, so too does art bleed meaning into the day to day. Whether they realize it or not the growing cast of artists, audience plants and impromptu volunteers involved in this project are in the process of becoming Young Satan in Love: whether performing jokey, earnest exorcisms, spouting nihilistic verities, churning out face-melter jingles, hiring ourselves out as an actual bachelorette party band, shooting guerilla videos while hosed in thrift stores - the distinction between possible and pissible blur. Where are the boundaries? What the hell is a boundary, anyway?

"Here to give you a fighting chance in a battle
you were born to lose, here to ornament your
stupor, please put your hands together or...pull
them apart."

Taken together, the live performances, the skits, and the antics reveal a meta-narrative cutting close to the bone. On several levels the story is mine: a middle aged man equal parts Satan, Peter Pan, and Humpty Dumpty - devil man child with the creaking joints - wrestling with the meaning of existence, cursed with a terrifyingly true prophesy. The story at every level is about the search for truth and the thrashing of bullshit being the ultimate acts of love, with all the destruction and creation these acts invoke.

"Satan, as an angel you've got wings, but you
can't sustain the mood. When it comes to
commitment, dude, you have a devilish attitude."

I was never particularly interested in Satan until I read the novel *The Master and Margerita* by Mikhail Bulgakov. His Satan (also the inspiration for the Rolling Stone's *Sympathy for the Devil* narrator) is less the personification of evil than a force for outing the conceits, utter madness in people, showing us what is already there, sometimes hidden, sometimes not so much.

If my Young Satan draws out in performance the little...

My Devil is also the winking demon of Aldous Huxley's *Point-Counterpoint*: that little bastard deep inside each of us that never forgets the full extent of our bullshit.

"When you guffaw your eyes become my chainsaws
through the old growth, to get a clear view of
the way back."

I haven't read Paradise Lost but I like to think of this project as a prequel of sorts. This may be my own demon winking, and I like to wink back.

Young Satan also represents my continued wrestling with the ideas - or idea killers - in Jed McKenna's Enlightenment Trilogy. Jed McKenna is the Devil incarnate.

Like the Devil, I don't have much interest in calling out organized religion since it doesn't do to people anything they don't or wouldn't do to themselves. But just to leave no stone unturned, I will say that most fundamentally the Devil as depicted in the Judeo-Christian tradition is the product of a highly successful smear campaign against the pagan god of nature Pan in particular and Nature in general.

"Forget the place I've come from and all the things I've done. So long as we're caressed by the Sun, so long as we are one, Heaven can wait."

The Satan you may know from Sunday school or other similar forums fits perfectly well within the context of our rock opera: all the shame and disorientation that comes of a stinkbomb diaspora we blame on that force most compelling us to realize nobody ever left home in the first place. No wonder the demon winks.

"I am creator of the world. I have lost all illusions of control. Oh, hold on...here they are."

Though I understand why some people take issue with the Robert Johnson myth where he sells his soul to the devil for unearthly musical powers (with all the implied racial connotations), I am inclined to think I would have made the same choice as he and in

fact do make the same choice every chance I get: I, Young Satan, choose this glorious chaotic meaningless mess from which there is no escape, but sometimes reprieve in song and dance. Not a hair out of place in the whole universe, for all the sweat and tears, rhythm and blues. Amen.

Before the Big Bang lay Eternity,

All lit up,

Wildly convulsing.

And with her eyes of a billion stars rolling back,

She reached deep into Paradise High

And drew forth dark angels

(not arch-angels):

A propulsive gift to the Universe.

Bereft of heft,

BB fell back,

Slowly giving way to oblivion,

But not before spying

Five haloed fellows passing by

On the sulfurous steam of a moonbeam.

Surely it was all a dream?