

VIBE

ANY TIME
IS PLAY TIME



Mark "Taco" Annino

Photograph By: MATT DOLINAR

By Andrew Nusca

All Mark Annino wants to do is play pinball. As the metal ball cascades down the wire ramp, Annino's eyes lock on its quicksilver hue, tracking it as it flings across the playfield, leaving a fading wake of blinking neon in its path. Elbows out, fingers poised over the triggers, Annino is ready. As the ball hurtles toward dark oblivion, the muscles in each of his forearms suddenly tense. Too soon — the

triggered flipper just grazes its target as it disappears beneath the glass.

Still, Annino can't help but grin. He's just so excited to be here.

Though Annino is in New Jersey, he's far from any boardwalk arcade. Instead, he's deep within the padded walls of The House Of Loud, a recording studio owned by producer David Bendeth, late of Paramore fame.

Annino's Miami-based band Atom Smash is there to record the first four tracks of its debut album, *Love Is In The*

Missile, and Annino is taking a break.

It's well deserved. A month ago, the five rockers landed a record deal with Jive, famous for artists as diverse as R. Kelly and Britney Spears. Now it's February, and the 23-year-old drummer is pulling 14-hour shifts in a recording studio in the dead of winter, 30 minutes from blustery New York City and 1,300 miles away from sunny South Florida.

But Annino doesn't care. He wouldn't have it any other way.

VIBE Marc "Taco" Annino

QUICK LICKS

Transcription by John Natelli

"Ashes"

Annino's groove-laden approach to Atom Smash's riff-based post-grunge is a welcome change from the usual ultra-quantized, overly complex parts often heard in today's crop of hard rock and metal debut releases. This song off the band's debut is as good an example of that as any.

"If I had the choice, I would have stayed in there tracking all night until I had physical fatigue," he says. "I love it. The studio is something I always dreamed of doing, signed to a great label, seeing your record shrink-wrapped. It happened fast. The excitement just gets me going."

It's been one hell of a ride, and a far cry from his childhood in Hollywood, Florida. There, Annino learned how to play drums from his father, who played overseas to U.S. troops stationed in Vietnam. Inspired by the fictional Guy "Shades" Patterson, from the 1996 Tom Hanks film *That Thing You Do!*, Annino got to work, teaching himself by playing along to songs on the VCR.

"I got my first kit when I was in fifth grade, and I haven't stopped playing ever since," he says. "I never had anyone tell me to turn it down. It was, 'No, turn it up.'"

After high school, Annino joined a local screamo group called Unwanted Superheroes. The decision turned a hobby into a career.

"That was the beginning with my real ticket in getting into the music scene," he says. "We won studio time from [Miami's WZTA Zeta] 94.9 FM in a contest called the

Ultimate Band Challenge. We were, like, 14-year-old kids playing our own original music. We won the whole thing and beat out all these older guys. We took the money and made our first record."

The experience would open the door to a two-year stint in a band called Sunday Driver and an audition in 2005 for a band called Recoil. Annino landed the gig. The self-described "arena grunge" group would later change its name to Atom Smash.

"If it wasn't for those younger years and experiences I had, I wouldn't be here," he says. "We were meeting huge bands. We got opening slots for bands like Thursday, Coheed And Cambria — we were young, playing in front of packed clubs. When you're younger, you're practicing for three months for one show. I thought, It must be so cool to play a big show like this every night. I really wanted to do that."

Fast-forward to now, where it's the norm for Atom Smash to share the stage with bands such as Hinder, Buckcherry, Drowning Pool, Hellyeah, and Filter.

"I love the smell and feeling of being on the road," he says. "The smell of gear. Stage lights. Beer. Cigarettes. Loading in and loading out — I'm not gonna lie, though, I can't wait to have a bus. The roughing it, the being in a van, the having no money, the playing in front of ten people, not being home for months — you have to really like that."

Despite the grind, Annino is the first one up each morning, at 8:00. He's still feeding off the energy from the show the night before, and hoping to ride it through to the next gig.

"I hate days off," he says. "I don't like them. I would play every day. I even love overnight drives. I like when we have to play a show and jump in a van to drive 12 hours to the next city without taking a shower. I absolutely love that."

Even when the venues become a blur, Annino says he knows he's absolutely made the right choice.

"On the road, you find out who you are as a musician, how much you would put yourself in a position to play versus doing something else," he says. "It's reaffirmed how much I want to do this. It's like a contract. A reassurance."

INSIDE TRACKS



Atom Smash
Love Is In The Missile
JIVE/SONY

Atoms being the basic building blocks of drum sticks, ear monitors, and all other things we value, it stands to reason that a band named Atom Smash would build its sound on the basics. That means, for instance, that Mark Annino churns out elemental rhythms, so that every beat, kick, and smash delivers with maximum impact. With his kit boosted high in the mix, each detail of his performance both mirrors and drives Alex Zilinski's and Luke Rice's roaring, pulsing guitars. Annino draws from several noble '80s traditions, grafting glam poundings reminiscent of Roger Taylor onto his band's half-grunge, half-stadium sound. In this context, the drums are all about pumping energy into Sergio Sanchez' hyper-dramatic vocals. Aside from one completely unexpected double-kick blizzard that blows in and passes in one snippet of "Sacrifice," every second of Atom Smash might have been tracked a generation ago. And that's fine, apparently, with Atom Smash, who bellow lyrics like "Rocker girl, rock my world" without apology but with a disarming enthusiasm.

Robert L. Doerschuk

VITALS

BAND Atom Smash
CURRENT RELEASE *Love Is In The Missile*
AGE 24
BIRTHPLACE Hollywood, Florida
INFLUENCES John Bonham, Taylor Hawkins, Dave Grohl, Gene Krupa, Buddy Rich
WEB SITE atomsmashmusic.com

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