

Interview with Cristina Scabbia of Lacuna Coil

*Music as a Weapon IV Tour at 1st Mariner Arena in Baltimore, MD
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by Brandon Wu

[unrecorded intro stuff]

You're just coming from Charlotte, right?

Yes.

How was that?

It was awesome. It was awesome. Besides the weather, which was awful. The crowd was really into the show. The whole tour is going great.

You've been in the road for... three weeks now?

Yeah, it's more than three weeks. I can't remember the date, but... it's more than three weeks.

And it's been a good tour so far?

It's been amazing. All the venues are always packed, and the turnout is just good. I mean, the crowd is always reacting in a very good way, and especially for us, I mean, we're playing two of the new songs, so you never know what kind of reaction you're going to get. People [are] loving the new songs, so we're really happy about everything. And we knew the bands before, so it's kind of touring with friends, which always helps.

This is your... fourth tour of the U.S.?

Probably we've done even more. Cause in between Ozzfest and all the different tours we did – you know, Anthrax, Rob Zombie, the Jagermeister tour, Hottest Chicks in Metal, we did a lot of tours. A lot of tours.

And the new album [*Shallow Life*] comes out next week, right, you must be pretty excited about that.

Yup. Yup. In three days it will be out in Italy, actually, that's gonna be the first.

And I know it's been streaming on your Myspace page...

Yeah, we decided to stream it on our Myspace page for like a week.

Does that help with the sales, you think?

Well, the thing is that, from the day that you put the album out, it's gonna be everywhere on the net. So it's much better if you put it out first, so that people can decide if they want to buy it or not. You can never know, I mean, especially, you know, the market is really bad for music, so I really hope that they will understand the importance of buying an album, which is not just making the band rich, it's actually supporting the band.

Sure. And have you noticed with the economy that merchandise sales are down or anything like that?

Actually merchandise sales are still going good. I think that the biggest problem is the sales of the actual support, like the CD. Because of with downloads, it's really difficult to convince people to buy the album when they can get it for free. Especially like young kids that don't have a huge budget – sometimes the prices are insanely high. In America it actually works pretty good because you can buy an album for like ten bucks, which is amazing. I wish it could be like that in the rest of Europe but it's not. Sometimes in Italy you can buy a new album for like 25 euros, which is more than 30 dollars. It's like, are you kidding me? I get why a lot of people are downloading stuff.

Do you have a legal download option?

Yeah, we have iTunes as well, Italian iTunes and other kinds of websites where you can download legally. But, you know, the temptation is really high when you can just get it free with peer-to-peer. It will have to evolve in a specific way, because in the past we had tapes, now we have CDs, so things are evolving no matter what. So I'm sure they will find a solution, because music can't die. And with the downloads, it's going to die, and it's going to die pretty soon if things continue like that.

Well it seems like most bands make money off of the merch sales, tours...

That's probably the main thing for all the bands. I mean, music can never really die. But of course the sales are helping the bands to have the right support to produce their next record. Unless you're U2 or Madonna, you need this money. Not to be hungry for money, because I'm not a millionaire at all, but this is my job and I'd like to be able to get some money just to be able to do it again and again.

Have you gotten a lot of feedback on the new album yet?

Yeah.

Mostly positive?

Uh... I would say that a lot of comments are absolutely positive, and I love the fact that a lot of our fans are able to grow up with us. We've been around for more than 10 years now, and it's great to see that our evolution was their evolution as well. They completely understood that we

don't want to get stuck in the same formula over and over. Um, so a lot of positive comments, a lot of people love the album. Probably the most traditional fans that are still thinking about the first demo tape we put out *13 years ago* hate the album, but honestly I feel this is the most honest way for us to do what we really want to do instead of following the market.

Yeah, I know a lot of metal fans have...

Yeah, some of them might think it's easier. Some of them might think that, yeah, okay, having a big producer will put us on the mainstream right away and we'll become millionaires in a second. But it's actually not like that. It's actually a bigger risk for us to try to change. Because you can be comfortable doing the same thing and be sure you're going to sell those half-million copies and be okay with it, but we just want to communicate a different thing with our music.

But the new songs have gotten a good reception on the tour.

Yeah, very good. Very, very good.

I guess it sort of fits in with this particular tour... it's not a purely metal tour, it's kind of a hard rock—

Yeah, especially Disturbed are a metal band, but still they have a lot of melody, they have a lot of catchy songs. It's the perfect way for us to perform in front of a different audience. That's the reason why you actually tour as a support band, because you want to win over some new fans. It's perfect, because the package is so various, because Chimaira and Killswitch Engage are playing something completely different from us, and Disturbed as well. So it's awesome that the crowd can enjoy a few hours of concert without getting bored and hearing the same stuff over and over.

I'm a photographer, so I'll actually be shooting your set later...

Cool, cool.

As a photographer, one of the things I've noticed about you and your band is that your promo photos often have you in these kind of sexy outfits and sexy poses, but then—

I love to play, but yeah, I'm completely different—

Yeah, but then when you're on stage it's completely different, it's not your image at all.

No, I just love to change. In a way I love to provoke thoughts in people's minds, I love the fact that they expect me to be in a [certain] way and then I'm completely different and they're like, whoa, I was expecting something different. Because you can play in a picture, you can play – like being an actress, you're impersonating a role. If you look at my pictures, I always look different, you know, hair length is changing, the makeup is changing, the dress is changing. In the last photo session we did, we were actually interpreting "The Shallow Life" so I'm the pop princess, you know, big boobs – fake boobs – tiara, all shiny and...

What was that shoot for?

It was basically the official photo session for *Shallow Life*. And Andrea's dressed up as a pimp... we did it on purpose, but a lot of people didn't really get it, and were surprised and like, "oh my god, they've changed their look." Jesus Christ. *Shallow Life*... new pictures... you know, I love to stimulate any kind of thoughts in people's minds, so it's fun, you know, when they expect you to be dressed up all the time and then they see me and they don't recognize me, which is awesome. [laughs]

And then when you did the Hottest Chicks in Metal tour... that's a certain kind of marketing, right—

Yeah but that was ironic, still, there's a magazine, *Revolver* magazine, and it was the main sponsor of the tour, and they just released an issue that was called "The Hottest Chicks in Metal"—

—and you were on the cover—

...and in this issue, there were the bands, so we just kind of did it for that, but honestly we don't really mean that we're the hottest chicks in metal. But everybody was like, "oh, that's how you want to market?" but people are going to do it anyway. They see a band with a chick and there it goes, you know. I don't care anymore about what people think. I just want — I just want peace, I just want to smile about things, I just want to be ironic. You know, there's so much mess in the world that I really don't need to add all the problems coming from us, so I don't care anymore what people think.

So you don't — it doesn't — you don't see any problem with marketing yourself as...

Not at all, because — I'm not — the fact that being a woman, it's even harder, because no matter what you do, you're going to be the focus point. No matter what. You look at a commercial on TV, they're trying to sell tires, and there's a naked woman anyway. So as long as I never do anything in a not-classy way, it's not a problem with me. I never showed my boobs, I never did anything that could be considered... bad, or anything, so I don't care. I mean, it's a representation of art. If I want to take a sexy picture where you don't see anything, but you can imagine something, then why not? I'm still a woman. And they will talk anyway, so who cares. [laughs] I can't prevent that, so I do what I want, as long as I'm comfortable with it and I know what I'm doing and nobody's forcing me to do stuff. I'm fine with it.

Changing the subject — I read something that you are doing — working with some sort of charity doing a water project in Africa. Can you tell me something about that?

Yeah. Yes, it's an Italian project, there's a very good friend of mine called Mario Riso, and this project is called Rezophonic. It's basically a band — well not really a band, it's really like a project — he basically put together more than a hundred artists from the music underground, but also actors, also people well-known from TV shows and stuff. He produced these CDs, and with

the sales of these CDs, all the money goes to this association called AMREF to build wells in a specific part of Kenya that's called Kajado. So far more than fifty wells have been built, and I'm extremely honored and happy to be part of this project. Like every other person, in the beginning I was like, "mmm, I don't know," you never know, there are so many associations that are asking for money, but you never know if it's gonna happen or where this money's gonna go. But I knew the guy, so I inquired a little bit together with him, and with this association which is one of the most famous from Italy. And I found out that it's actually true, it's real, there is actually a well with my name – but it's funny because they spelled it wrong, but it's just funny because most people in Africa cannot really read or write. I thought that it was absolutely sweet. It's so beautiful to think that somebody can now drink, which is something so easy for us – we grab a bottle, we take a sip, we leave it there, and we just go away and forget it – and these people have to walk for miles to drink dirty water. And now they can go out of their houses and actually get clean water. It's amazing.

And do you see yourself going anywhere with that, or is it kind of –

No, no, I still want to collaborate with that. I'm actually talking right now with another charity thing that we're going to do, but for something completely different. It's an association called Keep-A-Breast that tries to raise some funds for breast cancer. They're coming to the tour at the end of the month, so I hope we're going to do something together. We're definitely going to sign stuff, and sell the stuff to raise some funds, and it's exciting, because you just realize that with nothing, you can actually do a lot.

Cool. Sorry, I just thought of something going back, you mentioned *Revolver* – you do a sort of column for *Revolver*, right, and you've been on their cover at least twice. How did that get started?

Well, it started because they just asked me to do it. I was on the cover of the very first issue of Hottest Chicks in Metal, and the second one as well, and they just asked me to do it. I think that it came out because... let me think... I'm not a hundred percent sure, but I think it started because the singer of Lamb of God, Randy, was talking with me on tour and he just found out that I was really good at giving advice and listening... you know, I'm a woman. So he probably spoke with somebody at *Revolver* or something like that. I don't know how, it came out that I like to do this stuff, and so they asked me to do it. It's funny, because it's on the same page as Vinnie Paul, and he gives completely different answers. You know, it's all about "yeah, get her pussy, yeah fuck that!" [in hilarious Vinnie Paul voice] And I'm the opposite, you know, I'm like, well not the wiser part—

Probably the wiser part.

[laughs] But I give the, the romantic touch, you know, you should do this and that. But it's awesome, especially when you get messages from very young people, and they have problems that are absolutely solvable, but it's all a question about growing up. It's so sweet, because I could totally see myself like, oh wow, ten years ago I was like that, so I know what you're going through. It's pretty cool, I love to do that. I hope I'll continue to do it.

So looking forward, I'm sure you have some festivals lined up in Europe.

Yes.

Do you see yourself doing another headlining tour in the U.S.?

I think so. I think so, it also depends on how the album works, but we'll definitely come back. I don't know if it'll be another support for a big act or a headlining tour, but we'll definitely come back. And then we have to go to other places, like Australia again, Canada, Japan, so we have to put together the schedule. I seriously don't know what's going to happen after the summer festivals, you never know, because things are changing so fast.

Do you have a favorite place to play – you've played all over the world...

I love to play America, I love Australia, the place is fantastic. And I love Japan to death.

The fans are crazy, huh?

I love it. I just love it. I've been there for like three days only, but I always love Japan in general, I always love manga, and it's just crazy. It's like being on another planet.

Every band I've talked to have said that the Japanese fans are nuts.

Japan is like being on Mars. In a good way. It's just great. Just the place. And then, I love action figures, and if you kind of have that mentality, you have to love Japan. And definitely the U.S. I feel at home every time I come here.

What do you like about touring here?

I just like the fact that here everybody is really friendly. They don't judge you for how you dress, or – and this is something that happens in Europe, especially in Italy, you know, if you dress in a weird way they just look at you like, "where are you coming from? My God." I just love the fact that Americans are really, really chill and calm and they like to talk, they say hi no matter what, even if they don't know you, you just cross them and say "hey, how are you doing" – I love that.

That's funny, because that's not the stereotype of Americans at all, right.

Yeah, I know, but from my experience at least, I don't know, [maybe] because I've been in a specific environment or whatever, I never really found rude people at all. And then I have so many friends – my boyfriend is American, we've been here so many times, so we're kind of familiar, it's probably the place where we've played the most times.

You're probably tired of answering questions about your boyfriend [Jim Root of Slipknot], but you brought him up, so...

No, no, I actually almost never answer, so it's not a big deal. [laughs]

All right, well, I'm in a long-distance relationship, my girlfriend and I are five hours apart, which is nothing compared to you—

[laughs] I wish it were five hours!

—so that's been hard for us, we've been doing it for four years, and I was wondering, how often do you get to see him?

I actually saw him two days ago.

Well now that you're in America, that makes sense...

I saw him two days ago. I think it just depends – well I think the biggest part that makes everything easier is the fact that we have the kind of job that brings us around all the time. So even if my boyfriend was from Milano, where I live, I would have the same kind of relationship, it would still be a long-distance relationship. And then, it all depends on the amount of love you have, the amount of trust you have in the other person, because I could never be with a person I don't love a hundred percent or wouldn't trust. So I love this connection we created even though we are, like, days apart and tons of miles away, we still relate to each other and want to hear each other... we just found our balance.

Are you able to talk every day?

Absolutely, absolutely. And then, the Internet helps a lot, you know, phone, Internet, we're always in touch. Whenever we can, we see each other. It's a weird situation probably for a regular couple that has no idea what this job is. If I talk to my friends, they don't understand how can I do this job, because they're not in the same kind of situation. We've found our balance.

Well, you answered my question.

[laughs] There you go.

Well... I don't know how much time we have – I was told ten minutes...

[shrugs] It doesn't matter.

Okay. So, what's the weirdest thing that's happened to you on this tour?

On this tour? Hmm. [long pause] I can't think of any. We didn't really do a lot of stuff... when you're in the venue, you don't do a lot of stuff.

So no crazy stories.

No, not yet. Not yet. No, not really, I'm not like a party girl, it's pretty hard to get a good story from me. [laughs] Because I don't drink, I don't use drugs, um... [pause] No nothing really,

besides the fact that Maus, our guitar player, had his birthday and we surprised him onstage. It was funny, because there was this song where all the band starts together and there's like a wall of sound, everybody is doing something. We just counted, you know, the drummer was like "1, 2, 3, 4!" and he started to play by himself, headbanging, and we're just standing there just looking at him, with all the lights on him because of course the light guy knew. That was absolutely hilarious.

How long did he play for? Did he keep playing?

No, no, he just started to play for a few seconds and then he noticed that there was nothing else, so he just turned on our drummer with this face like "what the fuck is going on?" It was just priceless to see that, and then one of the guitar techs came onstage with shots and a cake with candles and he realized it and was like, "oh no." And all the crowd sung happy birthday... but they are the party guys, you know, I'm not really like that. Not at all.

You have a lot of days off in between shows?

Yeah, it depends. You can have five shows and a day off, and sometimes just two and a day off, it really depends. And then we're also having some off dates with Killswitch and Chimaira only.

Right. Yeah, I saw that you're coming back down to Virginia later...

Yeah, we still have another month. Long tour.

I guess playing the shorter sets makes it a little less tiring?

Well, it depends. Sometimes it's even more tiring when you have a lot of days off, because you don't enter into the tour mode – you're just like, okay, I'm the mall mode... the shopping mode... the sleeping mode... it's hard to recharge your batteries, even if it sounds weird because it should be the opposite. I think the best thing is to do at least three shows in a row, three or four, and then a day off, then it works. But when you play only half an hour it's not that hard.

You're playing two of the new songs in a half-hour set, so that doesn't leave too much time for...

For the rest of the songs? Yeah, not really. Not really. We play six songs.

And how far back do you go?

Basically from *Karmacode* and *Comalies* because they're the most popular albums, so it makes no sense unless we're doing a headlining show...

So have you found that if you play some of the older stuff in the U.S. you just don't get as much of a response?

It depends. If it's a headlining show, then yes. But as soon as we're performing in front of a new audience, it makes no sense to promote something that is absolutely old. They can find the discography later on, if they like our stuff they can explore our past as well, but it makes sense to promote the new stuff first.

So you'll play a different set in Italy or in Europe where people know you better?

Well, it depends on how much time you have, as well, and who you're playing with. If you're playing with a more metal band, you try to concentrate on more heavy songs, if other bands are more mellow, maybe you just put a ballad in, it depends. We're always discussing the setlist on every show we play, and depending on how much time we have. If we have an hour, then we can squeeze everything we want, as long as we do the classics, we can do whatever we want.

Now, with the new album, did you write most of the lyrics?

Yeah, me and Andrea.

Is there sort of a concept behind...

It's not really a concept, but there's definitely a line that inspired the album, which is, I mean, it says in the title, "Shallow Life." Not every song is talking about the same thing, because every song has a specific story by itself, but it's definitely a very positive album that absolutely talks about the strength that every person should have in terms of relating themselves with life and standing up for their right whenever it comes to the point that they have to be focused on important things, but at the same time they should learn, as well, to be relaxed, because sometimes it's okay to be shallow just because you need to leave your problems at home for an afternoon and enjoy yourself, not take yourself too seriously. That was kind of the spirit, but it's not a concept album.

It sounds like that's coming from some personal experience. The touring life, right?

Oh yeah. Oh yeah. Yeah, when you start touring, your mentality changes. The fact that you meet different cultures just opens your mind. Opens your mind, because you just learn that you're not living anymore in your own little bubble, but there's so much more to discover, and you have to be more tolerant because everyone is different.

Now, the cover art, how does that fit in? Where did that concept come from?

It actually comes from a graphic designer from our label. We gave the name of the title away to some graphic designers because we wanted to get different feedback and see how people interpreted the Shallow Life thing. Some of the covers were good looking, but they were just good images, good pictures. Like yeah, okay, looks good, but wasn't really communicating anything. So as soon as we saw this one, it was really catchy, and it was really intense, because it was just weird to see a grenade, something really serious, that communicates war or rebellion or whatever you want, and then the crystal base. It was like, well that's perfect.

Just sort of the contradiction there...

Yeah, because of the duality, because it looks like you have to manage it with care or it will explode in your face. Just the mix between something serious and something absolutely shallow, which is shiny and delicate... it was perfect. It was just perfect. It's definitely standing out.

I really only have one more thing I want to ask you, which is about your label, which you mentioned. As far as I know, you're the biggest seller on Century Media. I assume you have a contract with them that has a certain number of albums that you have to do, are you near the end of that?

We still have to do a couple.

Are you thinking, if you continue to do as well as you do, would you be looking to move to a bigger label?

Well, it depends. It depends. You have to see when it actually happens. You can't just rely on the big name of a major, because maybe they wouldn't be able to do a good job for you. But honestly, Century Media now partnered with EMI, so it's pretty much the same thing because EMI is distributing the records everywhere and helping with the promotion and stuff, so it's pretty much the same thing. So we're still with an independent label that can believe in us as a band and not just as a product, but at the same time we have the support of a big major that can distribute the album in a proper way, or at least should, so it's a good combination. So far so good.

So you've had a very good relationship with them, I gather.

Yeah. I mean, they did a very good job, they do a good job for what they can do. Of course, you have to work with the budget you have and with the skills that you have, sometimes people that work in the company are changing and it's not easy, but they've done a good job.

Great. Well, thank you so much.

My pleasure. Hope you enjoy the show tonight!