

# **Say Anything**

A Goodbye Summation

By

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This is a statement about my current status as a dude and Say Anything's upcoming record and plans as a band.

Our new record is done, and it's called OLIVER APPROPRIATE.

Our plans as a collective are to, kind of sort of, end Say Anything. Or "the first era of Say Anything". Whatever you want to call it, it's that thing. I don't buy that shit when other bands do it, but whatever the fuck works as terminology. I need a break. We'll return one day to play festivals and scoff at our career. But I want to say goodbye.

There will be no full U.S tour to support the record or in the near future. I am done being a touring musician as my main profession. Say Anything is retiring in the sense that Jay-Z did. It's not an indefinite hiatus or a breakup because that's impossible. But we'll get to that.

## Let's start with OLIVER APPROPRIATE.

It's my first truly inclusive Say Anything record. A record with lyrics that can be sung by girls, boys and anyone under the sun without correcting the endlessly pervasive dude pronouns.

My first record, ...IS A REAL BOY, was written as a character. I mean that literally. We wrote a story. We planned on making it a musical.

After that, people thought that character WAS me. In actual reality, there was no Molly, nor any "rough sex". There was very little drug use comparably speaking. I was mostly a virgin until I was in college and pretty much a sad sack and an innocent. Many people took the actual fictional character referred to in the liner notes of that record to BE me rather than a representation of what I kind of am unable to be. Many people have never watched Seinfeld and don't get that kind of thing. Many people don't understand what bipolar disorder is and isn't. I do.

I've spent a long time clarifying this to people. That's okay. I chose to make that record and I don't regret a damn thing in my life. Every record written after ...Is A Real boy was achingly sincere and vaguely, obviously allegorical (as you may have guessed I'm harmless on many levels and I'm a pacifist Gump). The exaggerated emo-guy character disappeared after IARB. I can go on about that record more (please, fuck, don't make me), but instead I'll let you know that I am closing the book on writing as that character in music, ever again. But.... I wasn't ready until last year.

Last year I resurrected him without even knowing that was the case.

Keep reading to see how.... But first, know the end results.

I'm no longer "in a rock band", even if I play in one sometimes. I am closing the book on intentionally triggering my anxieties... one of them being performing. Have you noticed that my onstage "confidence" belies a certain TOTAL FUCKING CRAZINESS? That's because I'm reacting to being in an unnatural state, as someone who is somewhat shy at times. I don't mean it was a lie.... the opposite in fact. It was a dare to connect with those who believed in me.

Say Anything is a collective.

Me and my friends. Like, in the alley and shit. You know the deal. That won't change as long as a single soul has ever been touched by my music or who I am, even after my death. It's not hippie shit, it's literal. I couldn't have done it alone, and yet it couldn't have happened without me.

I can't break up with myself, as much as I have tried.

Let's take it back to the new album.

Again, I wrote it as a character. For the first time since "the Pinocchio record". It's basically what I realized to be a literal sequel to .... Is A Real boy in many ways. This record is the story of what would happen to the Real Boy many people thought I was. His band did well but then fell off, hard. He'd be my age, of course, but he'd still be living in Brooklyn, struggling with financial woes, single and strung out.

Which leads me to liking guys.

## GAY STUFF

I have always been bi-ish or queer or a straight guy who can also like boys. I always talked or joked about it with my friends and found it to be blatantly clear I was. I was bullied for it and called a “fag” (without irony). This is, sadly, common. I’m not special. I even went so far as to tell people I was also attracted to guys repeatedly. They chalked it up to my bipolar shit, which was hurtful. They also minimized it because I found true love early in life, and saw that as a negation of my sexuality, or at least a minimization of my right to even identify as bisexual or queer. Because I don’t want to hook up with guys. But I also didn’t hook up with a lot of girls. I wanted to fall in love with a woman, so I did.

I’ve always been somewhat of a monogamist and my queer experiences were limited and remain mostly emotional ones. I don’t feel threatened or scared because I grew up with some amount of privilege in that regard, coming from a supportive, liberal family. So I’m not minimizing how hard that can be for other people. I get that I have it easy.

I’m head over heels in love with Sherri, who is physical perfection and pure at heart. We aren’t unfaithful. We have been through hell and come out swinging. At 10 years, I have pretty much been with her since I was a little kid (and as a spiritualist, I believe she was with me my whole life and appeared in other guises throughout it). We believe in soulmates. We believe in esoteric big ideas about destiny and even the afterlife. Yes, it’s a Johnny and June-esque situation, though we firmly believe in creating our own stories instead of living in someone else’s, as beautiful as theirs may have been.

Before we get back to “gay”, some people need to understand my spirituality (because society sucks ass).

I’m sorry if my Christian shit confused or confuses people (I’m also kind of NOT sorry at all) but basically I connect with anything I identify with, especially as a born Jew. Jews are taught to think freely. So I went with whatever I wanted instead of what I was told to. Being a punk as well, being okay with religion but not its negative implications or orthodoxy is also super-punk to me, especially since I believe in gay soulmates, a woman’s right to choose, civil rights and everything left-like under the sun.

I believe in anything good. Sometimes I even consider myself a pseudo-aetheist. There is a false god and then God. My God doesn’t have to be believed in to exist in the way I identify with it. It’s all good if it has justice and love and inclusiveness at its heart. So yeah, I’m a queer, Jewish, Christian skeptic pseudo-anarchist with a belief in metaphysics and the application of “magical” stuff. Woof.

So why should you care? Because this all applies to OLIVER APPROPRIATE

Years of being “that guy” led to exhaustion with explaining myself to everyone. So I chose to write a full length about a self-loathing, slightly homophobic misogynist; essentially my opposite as a semi-actually-kinda-gay neurotic moralist who has been married to the female love of my life for ten years.

Why, some may ask? Doest Bemis protest too much? No. Let me try to explain.

My goal, after much reading on the psychology of sociopaths, was to find empathy for someone I would normally loathe, and in the case of this new (but actually IARB-born) character, a true product of the subliminal Millennial Fixation with wealth, power, denial, and the need to possess. I am a Millennial too, but, I’m a good one. I’ve been called a “hipster” and admitted I share characteristics with all that stuff. But I never related to a lot of things my generation is known for.

I started writing this record and then realized I wasn't singing things that were true about myself anymore.

I was writing things about the people I was reading about in books.

So I read more and started to write untrue things on purpose. Fiction. I read a lot about Columbine. I read some of American Psycho again and tried to pay attention harder and laugh a bit with it instead of being vaguely annoyed with the writer. I read and read and read about psychopaths, sociopaths and mean people. People threatened by women. People threatened by gay people. People threatened by themselves and their parents and the world.

I often couldn't relate, but I forced myself to see the world through their eyes. Me, Best Producer Ever Will Yip and my friend, Hero- Rocker Karl Kuehn gave birth to an album in the wake/during the tumult of this. "This" being the "research" it took, essentially recreating addiction on a small scale and diving into darkness.

"THIS":

Many months? A year- long Heath Ledger-esque descent into pain and darkness and snorting antidepressants all day (I don't do coke so it was the only acceptable thing). I've literally had to apologize to my wife for the extent of this to this day, but thankfully we've both fucked up in our own ways (mostly harmlessly) and she loves me despite it. My kids too, because I hide nothing from the world and I want them to know Daddy Beat The Man and lived to tell the tale.

As the good Mr. Carter once said...I did that so you didn't HAVE to do that.

I survived to tell the tale.

This is why I am more careful with myself now. With my sanity, with the proximity of death.

What many will fail to see is that though linked to my mood disorder, this was NOT a bipolar "manic" episode in that I was I was on a lot of medication, I was not smoking pot (though I did in the wake of this for one hot minute and it was terrible and went out the window very quickly). I was getting enough sleep to not develop really delusional thoughts. Instead they were hyper-real, and disturbing. It was a straight mid-life crisis in the form of exploring evil and dissociating with it.

## THE ORIGIN OF OLIVER APPROPRIATE

My album was birthed when I fell in love with an indie-rock band.

Museum Mouth's LP, the seminal ALEX I AM NOTHING, was a revelation to me. I discovered it, became enamored with it and it led me to signing Museum Mouth to my imprint at Rory/Equal Vision records.

On the record, my friend and singer/songwriter/drummer Karl Kuehn detailed his unrequited love affair with a straight dude. That Museum Mouth record is a classic; it feels like home. It's my words from another guy's mouth, because I fell in love and was often hurt until Sherri. That album is so good it's hard to listen to sometimes because of how similar me and Karl are, and also because I have been perceived as a clueless "straight" individual for a long time. Until recently, not everyone knew that I was open with my close friends that I thought boys were cute too but preferred not to fuck them.

I choose not to detail my exact experiments with my queerness or gayness or grayness or even asexuality, my semi-female spirit or any of the things I am proud of. I do know that all of them were enough to let me know I could identify with non-traditional sexuality, but not to a large extent, and remain sort of quaveringly Plain Jane, somewhere floating on a sliding scale.

As Karl's friend and a huge fan of the record and his band, I created an image in my mind of the type of guy who would actually hurt Karl. I wondered if Single Confused Me was ever that kind of guy and decided fuck no.

Karl is a sweetie and the idea of him falling in love unrequitedly bummed me out and reminded me of being heartbroken growing up. In turn, Karl's music and songwriting inspired me as I began to form the character I whose voice defined my new LP. Karl later ended up co-singing, playing the drums and serving as my consultant for our new record, a great friend and somewhat, but not-overly reluctant muse. He guided me towards coming out formally on Twitter and helped me realize I was a good dad and husband and big brother figure. Karl even gave me the honor of contributing the first "Non-Max-Bemis-Written" Say Anything song, "Your Father", in which he plays a fictional but somewhat realistic version of himself, the hero of my latest concept record (which, in this case, is more like some kind of sad myth).

On our "last" Say Anything record, Karl plays both myself and himself. I play the "bad guy".

### OLIVER.

OLIVER is the lead character of the *Say Anything myth* and the foil to "imaginary Karl", who is also kind of "real Max". I sing in his voice. He is the bastard son of Columbine. He's also a thinly veiled critique of new age masculinity. Oliver is the singer of a burnt-out emo/indie punk band past their peak.

He has cheated on every woman he's had a serious relationship with.

He parties too much to the point of hurting himself and others.

A man who kisses boys at beer-soaked coke parties as some kind of ironic joke instead of because *he actually allows himself to find them attractive in an emotional sense.*

See, falling in love with boys has always been a weird pastime for me. And most sane, nice people can do it happily, whether it's platonically or romantically. Oliver (in the loosest sense one can imagine and creatively speaking) showed me what it's like to fear being true to yourself, and know that this is something that is obviously painful and horrible for many people. Because Oliver is a portrait of denial, whereas I'm the pinnacle of whatever-the-opposite-of-denial is (like, I need to get over my problems and shut the fuck up rather than not even knowing what they are). Oliver simply didn't have supportive enough parents for his wiring. My parents were crazy and awesome. I love them despite our typical family shtick. I got over my daddy issues in my twenties while Oliver never did.

Though the meaning and interpretation of every Say Anything song is subjective, the album, in order, chronicles two days in 14 short songs. I think it's our shortest record and the songs aren't long and rambling. It just IS.

## THE STORY

The listener and I follow Oliver over the course of two days.

The first song kicks it off with Oliver waking up on a hungover Sunday in his filthy Bushwick apartment and follows him to a contrived dive bar where he meets the first boy he allows himself to fall in love with, again played by Karl, who expresses his role through vocal counterparts and his drumming.

Oliver, despite having a girlfriend he doesn't really care about, ends up sleeping with Story Karl, which drives him nuts because he won't truly accept that he could love a boy not as a joke or an expression of contrived "experimentation". Oliver just rejects Karl and treats him like another conquest.

After being fired the next day from his vague and boring job in marketing, he feels empty and thinks "maybe this boy is the answer" and regrets his decision. He seeks out Karl, who he assumes will just love him back. Karl rejects him and tells him he's actually sort of into another guy. In a fit of rage, Oliver kills Karl, absconds to a San Francisco and drowns himself, tied to his lover's corpse and a gigantic stone.

The album ends with Oliver's ascension after death and his acceptance of what he's done to himself, Karl, and the world. I would like to think he is reborn and goes somewhere better and since I believe in the power of story, I believe this to be (fictionally) true, since I did write the damn thing.

....I know. I know. Silly and intense as usual. And creepy.

I spent a long time snorting mild but effective antidepressant pills, writing these songs and drinking more than I'm accustomed to due to enduring the writing and recording process. Meanwhile, I was becoming very sick of touring and missing my family all the time. It was the most alienating thing ever. The terrible thing is that this almost killed me and led me to ignore the mounting traumas, insecurities, and hardships of life that accompanied fatherhood. I ended up questioning everything I hold true, and enduring searing stress and anxiety beyond anything I'd known (and you guys know that's saying a lot) . It sucked.

Pause.

Note To The Impressionable Reader:

**DO NOT DO THIS. I DON'T MEAN THAT VAGUELY. IT WAS HORRIBLE. THIS IS WHY HEATH DIED AND WHY I ALMOST DIED. TAKE IT FUCKING SERIOUSLY AND LET'S ALL JUST STOP WITH THE KURT COBAIN NARRATIVE. WE'RE TOO OLD FOR THIS SHIT.**

\*achem\*



Meanwhile, during tracking, my new career writing comic books begins to build. I wanted to write comics way before I wanted to play music. That isn't to impugn my musical career..... I love/loved it. But I didn't have the bandwidth to focus on both things to the extent I was and..... you can surmise that this all became too much for me, or almost so. The day I stopped snorting said drugs all day, stopped gorging on Kratom, stopped disappearing into the abyss, was the day of the birth of my son Charlie. It really happened THAT DAY. That same morning. I looked into his eyes and I knew I was done with that chapter and things had to change, though it would be painful.

I dove headfirst back into life and found it warm and waiting for me to wake up again and confront all my demons. The mess of drugs, considering they WERENT as fucked up as heroin or crack, were not hard to taper off of, despite some wriggling around in bed like Cash towards the end of *Walk the Line*, whacked out on withdrawal and acceptance. Since then, I've been living with almost-crippling PTSD, anxiety attacks, and overcome with emotion. I cry a lot a lot a lot. I began to notice how often I was putting myself in bad positions with music and as a person and began a slow retreat from my former life. We found a (amazing) label for the record but myself and my team slowly realized I was not up for a traditional cycle and...wait... I just wasn't up for any of this anymore.

Say Anything has been a heartfelt, romantic joke. One that posed the question "How long does it take a neurotic to crack?" And it's was funny to see just how much I could go through before I either went of the deep end, died, or just said "fuck it". The answer is.... It took this long. And rather than the latter, I've decided to go with "fuck it".

My wife and I grew even closer through this proverbial waltz through hell, which wasn't hard to do but, still, as usual, I'm lucky she supported me and understood what I was trying to do more than anyone. I realized how loyal my friends were to me and how little they shared with Oliver; how little I share with him, and yet how much I love him despite the evil he let consume his life. I realized that people actually love and care about me and my band for the first time.

If you're a fan and you're reading this, I finally came to love my own band. I mean that.

So that must mean something to you, and closing this chapter is my ultimate way of thanking you and saying "I know you wouldn't want me to be in pain anymore". So if you guys are like my kids, I'm doing this for you, too. And I couldn't have done this, since I was 15, without you.

Let me be more clear about my future plans. Don't make me make a Say Anything pun right now, but I will clarify.

This record cycle is going to be the end of the story that started with IARB. I'm done with traditional music stuff as of a few weeks ago, and though it's sad for my label that it coincides with the album's near-release, I won't put myself in harms way for anything now. The break from performing will be on my own terms. The break from publicity will only be partial but I won't endure bullshit anymore. Say Anything will probably make music again, and I'm not claiming this is our actual last record, but it may be. Who knows. That's up to me and my family.

Dine Alone has got this LP and I trust them. In terms of my family and our relationship with music, we're planning something big for the near future that will probably come before or right after the release of this Say Anything record. It will involve a few projects we've had to shelve for a while and will be family oriented so stay tuned for that. I'll also be writing and producing music, as long as it isn't stressful, and doing Song Shop... in fact, trying to make Song Shop an even more effective organism. Please, please, please support my family in these endeavours as we're embarking on a new journey and we want you with us, but it's risky.

And as for me, READ MY WRITING. Say Anything is a writer's band. So catch up on my comics and know there is more coming. A LOT coming, and not just comics. I'm going to dive in headfirst, just as hard as I did with music, but it's got to be safe and healthy from now on.

What's the real takeaway point of this novella, you may ask? I know it's hard to discern and rambling and long and barely makes sense but... it's a happy ending. I believe in them, like I said.

In the end, I accepted that I was born good and happened to turn out moral and caring and that's all that matters in terms of my growth. Good...well, as good as one can be when you're living in a flawed, fucked up world. Say Anything achieved its own goal. And I'm proud of that. My prediction is that I'm going to live a fulfilling, happy life with my family until my universal, all loving, all-inclusive spirit chooses to take me home.

I'm not a god, but I am a creator. I created Oliver in 2004, though he wasn't named. And I'm sorry, Oliver, but I have to live... and you're fucking dead. Real Boy, you helped save me. It was your purpose in the end. The real heroes of the story are not me and certainly not you, a fictional character.

It's the other members of Say Anything.

You're a member if you love me. It's that simple. So you might be in Say Anything too.

If you are, thank you for everything.

Let's not break up.

Ever.

It's physically impossible and spiritually irrational and thus I have faith it won't happen.

I

LOVE

YOU

For eternity.

Thanks,

MB