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## The Bitter Tears Bio

*"...thank God for the creative, uber-feisty cabaret edge on this [Bitter Tears] local band's country-fried rock 'n' roll."—Chicago Tribune*

"Thanks for ruining my fuckin' night." That was The Bitter Tears' first review: Halfway through their first show, a member of the audience approached them between songs, uttered the above gratitude and turned and walked out. The Bitter Tears songs are obtuse and catchy. Their stage show is uncomfortably fun. If you don't want songs crashing around like curious slob in your head, The Bitter Tears could ruin your night.

Crafting an assault of absurd lyrical undertones, The Bitter Tears started as a country and western band but broadened out into other genres, blending different kinds of pop (country, folk, rock, brass band) while flying by the seat of their pants with whatever direction a song happened to be moving. Scalpone elaborates, "Our major initial influence was Kurt Weill. Weill bastardized many genres, wrote his own orchestral arrangements, and with Bertolt Brecht's lyrics, created a wild combination of darkness, raunchy comedy and acerbic social satire. It's great 'cause it's not some intellectual thing; it comes from the guts. Your liver knows when you've written a good song."

Taken hold by **Alan Scalpone** (vocals, guitar, brass, woodwinds), **Michael McGinley** (vocals, bass, brass, strings), **Bill Borton** (drums), **John Leonard** (piano) and **Greg Norman** (vocals, guitar, trombone), **The Bitter Tears** will release their second album, ***Jam Tarts in the Jakehouse***, on **Carrot Top Records** on **March 3, 2009**.

The music that ended up on the record began when McGinley and Scalpone shared an apartment in Chicago. McGinley describes the environment, "We were the only tenants in the building, except for the mostly-deaf, singing landlord below us. He sang so loud, and so awful, but with spectacular conviction. It was all Spanish so I don't know what he was singing, but I think his delivery influenced us more than we'd like to admit."

The raw material for the record was written late at night and early in the morning, with an orchestra's worth of instruments to help the process along. "We discovered a couple shops that sold battered orchestral instruments for cheap, and we got carried away. They're not that hard to play, at a remedial level, if you don't want anything too fancy to come out of them. We had a dented tuba, three mysteriously crumbling oboes, a cracked violin, two leaky French horns; it was like that 'partridge in a pear tree' song. It got so the floor was covered with instruments that were still somewhat functional, but had been sold to us like scrap. For some reason, their condition and potential excited us."

And those live shows? "It can get strange sometimes...but for us, it's thrilling. We come a little unhinged, and we like degrading ourselves and the audience too. We're not all that unusual really, but still, there's a lot of silence and staring from the audience at our shows, which we enjoy."

Stage appearance and degradation turn some away, but there are those who enjoy the drama and discharge. The lyrics and subject matter are often the entry point: A failed marriage turns to suicide, with the closing refrain "today is not too early to die" ("The Love Letter"); the farmer who loses his faith and wishes to destroy everything he has ever known, his farm, his family, even the three kings who traveled to see Jesus in the manger ("Slay the Heart of the Earth"); the bad advice men give to other men ("Bachelors Say"); the condemning, "Inbred Kings" which opens with the line, "You are not alive."

"It keeps happening that people come up to one of us and say something like, 'I thought you were just screwy when I first saw you, but you know, you actually write really good songs.'"