

Merciless. The title of BODY COUNT's latest album sums up Ice-T and his Grammy-grabbing crew to a T. They've persevered over social opposition, numerous personal tragedies, and an army of naysayers to emerge bloody but unbroken. In fact, they're stronger than ever for it: just check BODY COUNT's latest 11-tracks-in-the-clip, *Merciless*. "We had a string of one-word albums," says Ice-T. "We had *Bloodlust*, we had *Carnivore* and that word, *Merciless,* just bumped into my head. It's really about that point where you can't take any more and you're done. Like the song says, 'I got no more fucks to give.' When you push a person to that point, it's too late to ask for mercy. I was watching a lot of movies like *Hostel*; a lot of cruel torture movies when I was writing the album, and I was like, 'These people are cold-blooded.' That's what triggered that whole energy."

The ride to *Merciless* wasn't an easy one. Just as BODY COUNT was bracing for the release of their last album, *Carnivore* with North American and European dates and television appearances booked, the world shut down – literally a week after the album's March 6, 2020, release date. That left a lot of unfinished business for BC. "This was difficult," says Ice. "We had just finished *Carnivore* and we got to do maybe one show and then had a full, global shutdown. We had 30 shows in Europe. *Carnivore* was received well but we never actually got to play it. Then, we got a second Grammy nomination, we won it and then we went back to the label, and they said, 'Give us another album.' Basically, go shit out another one when we were fresh out of ideas. Cool. I had to give myself a little time to figure it out because even when the label was ready for another record, I wasn't."

In the middle of Ice-T's grueling schedule which also includes acting on TV's *Law & Order* ("I act for the money, I do the music to stay sane," he admits), BODY COUNT teamed once again with producer Will Putney (Knocked Loose, The Ghost Inside) to begin the grind of piecing riffs and ideas together. "I start with tracks first," Ice reveals. "I challenged Will Putney, Vince [Vincent Price - bass]) and Ernie [C.-guitar] to make instrumental tracks so good that I don't have to sing on them. That's my agenda. Give me some grooves. It's about catching a vibe. When you hear a band like Six Feet Under, you can't understand what the vocals are - you're catching a vibe. Then the tracks tell me what the song is about." No question, the tracks on *Merciless* speak for themselves. "My band has to have a pretty thick skin!" Ice smiles. "We went through a lot of ideas and a lot of material – and riffs and songs that made it to the record were just the ones we kept."

From *Merciless'* grindhouse-style interrogation scenario that opens the record to the first song, "Merciless", the mood is set. Says Ice: "'Merciless' is made off one note which is basically, the bent note from [Black Sabbath's'] 'Iron Man'." "Psychopath" featuring Fit for An Autopsy vocalist Joe Bad is BC on maximum killing overdrive. The pissed-off aggression of "Lying Motherfucker"; or "The Purge", an homage to the ultra-violent film series which also features George "Corpsegrinder" Fisher from Cannibal Corpse, makes no bones about it. Start to finish, with *Merciless*, BODY COUNT is back for an even bloodier murder spree than anything they've done before.

When asked if having a 2021 Grammy win for the *Carnivore* track, "Bum-Rush '' inspired Ice and BODY COUNT to go harder, the rap legend and hardcore growler pulls no punches. "To win a Grammy is a weird thing," he admits. "To win a Grammy, you're getting voted on by people in an academy. It's not fans. It doesn't have anything to do with record sales. It has to do with people in the industry looking at a record for artistic merit. ['']Bum-Rush"] was BODY COUNT's second Grammy nomination [the first being 'Black Hoodie' from 2018's *Bloodlust*] and I think with both records that got picked had a lot to do with the timing of what was going on in the country. On the other album, I felt 'No Lives Matter' was better than 'Black Hoodie' but I think 'Black Hoodie' struck a nerve. During the time we made 'Bum-Rush', the turmoil was there, and it seemed current to what was going on. I was happy with the accolade but it's a weird accolade."

Merciless' "Fuck What You Heard", with its looping mantra of: '*Democrips and Bloodpublicans…*' is Ice-T unloading a round of lyrical bullets at the state of the nation and the looming presidential election. "In my crowd I have Democrats and I have Republicans," he admits. "I've always been Independent in my thinking and a lot of the things I think are straight down the line." However, BODY COUNT's unexpected take on Pink Floyd's "Comfortably Numb", Ice sums up as the career milestone that, "Could potentially be my masterpiece." BC's long-gestating take on the 70's classic not only came to fruition during the recording of *Merciless,* but also grabbed the ear of one of its authors who unexpectedly joined BODY COUNT on the track itself – Pink Floyd guitarist, David Gilmore.

"I've always wanted to cover that song," says Ice. "I loved the bassline. It reminds me of the end of *Scarface*. We did it and for a minute we didn't think we were going to get approval from Pink Floyd. Everybody said, no, it's not going to happen. Then, Jorge, our manager, makes a call straight to David Gilmore and he goes crazy over the record! Not only does David Gilmore go crazy over the record, but he also immediately says, 'I want to play on the record!' It went from almost, 'No' to, 'Oh hell yes! ' I know [David Gilmore] listened to the words, he heard what I was saying and that's a real heavy record where I'm basically saying that the world is fucked up and as long as we got a roof and we go a TV we're numb to the wars, to what's happening right in front of our eyes – and if God is watching us, he's probably sick of us as a species."

For BODY COUNT, it's been a history of being both respected and feared – a barbed-wire thread that stretches from *Merciless* back to Body Count's origins as a project between Ice and Crenshaw High friend, Ernie C. Their first shot fired, the song, "Body Count", was a mission statement on Ice-T's 1991 *O.G. – Original Gangster*. That's the blueprint that BC has been running on for thirty five-plus years. They touched a nerve with their first, self-titled 1991

album and its divisive track, “Cop Killer”, that inspired hatred, fear, and paranoia, but also inspired generations of bands to follow. What they took from growing up with Black Sabbath and then being inspired by fellow L.A. legends like Slayer and Suicidal Tendencies has only upped the ante for generations of homies and hardcore fans.

“I think BODY COUNT is a band that turned the corner for a whole new style of metal,” says Ice. “When I started listening to metal, no disrespect, but Pantera was wearing spandex! We came out and said, we’re gonna look the way we look, L.A. cats in khakis but we’re gonna play metal. When we hit the first Lollapalooza stage in 1991, nobody had ever seen that. This is pre-Rage,this is pre-Limp Bizkit, a lot of the bands that came behind us that looked like skaters than heavy metal artists. Korn, all of them. When I did BODY COUNT, I was intentionally trying not to do the thing they called rap-rock. I didn’t need to do rap rock because I’m a rapper. I’m listening to New York hardcore, Sick of It All, Biohazard type shit. They weren’t singing, they were barking the lyrics. We broke the mold 30 years ago for what metal looked like and I think we brought together a lot of people – metal, at that point, was pure white. We came out and said, ‘Fuck that.’

“The first groups we went out with were D.R.I. and Exodus,” Ice recalls. “We played to a room a full of skinheads and before we went on, they were throwing up the, Fuck you’ signs. By the time we went into the first song, a big pit opened and I’m like, OK, we can pull this shit off. We knew we were jumping into an uphill battle, but we did it anyway.”

Make no mistake, BODY COUNT is better now than they’ve ever been and *Merciless* makes no bones about that. “You gotta remember that for about 10 years, BODY COUNT was gone – but nobody took our place.” The current line-up including surviving OG’s Ice, Ernie C. and Sean E Sean joined by bassist Vincent Price, drummer Will “Ill Will” Dorsey, Juan “Juan of the Dead” Garcia and backing vocalist Little Ice, has been locked in since BC returned in with 2014’s *Manslaughter*. After the death of three original members, two to cancer and one to a drive-by, Ice put the band on lock-down. When he assembled a new squad, it was with more firepower than BODY COUNT ever had in its arsenal.

“The rebirth of BODY COUNT was *Manslaughte*r and when we first got with Will [Putney],” says Ice-T. “Early BODY COUNT records, we were producing ourselves, we didn’t have a metal producer. Then, BODY COUNT started taking hits. The hits were real, they were deaths. We went into mourning, but once Vince and Juan and those guys got into the band, we had a cohesive team to make records. Trying to get better with every record isn’t that easy but I think we’ve got our momentum. BODY COUNT hasn’t felt this good in years. I think *Merciless* says it all.”