

Cobra Starship have made their second visit to Australia as part of a super-tour with labelmates The Academy Is... and Panic at the Disco. The band is a riddle wrapped in a mystery wrapped in a purple hoodie -- there's no telling what you might learn about yourself and the world when you set out to interview any of them.

Throwing the fangs up with Gabe Saporta

By Mary Borsellino (mizmary@gmail.com)

It's comforting to know that somebody, at least, is benefiting from the recent rash of disasters befalling Qantas Airways.

"You wanna hear something fucking awesome?" Gabe Saporta asks me. "We came over in this jumbo jet designed for four hundred people, and there were seriously only forty of us on it - just us and The Academy Is... We tried to work out how much each of our tickets would have been worth, considering we could each have a row of our own to stretch out in. I just took a Xanax and slept the whole way. No, that's a lie. I gave all my Xanax to Victoria."

Gabe is Cobra Starship's lead singer; Victoria handles backup vocals and the keytar. Along with bandmates Ryland, Nate, and Alex, they're one of the sassiest acts in modern music, bringing a mix of biting wit, seductive tease, and energetic joy to their shows and albums.

Apart from the plane ride from the USA to Australia, Gabe's not had much luck with sleep lately, though you'd never know it to watch him bounce and dance across the stage throughout Cobra's performances.

"I'm pretty much just running off the energy of the kids in the crowd. They put out so much and I feed off of that. I've had hotel beds for the last two nights but my body doesn't know what to do with a real bed, because we were on Warped tour for months and caught our plane here straight from the last night of that, and so I'm used to sleeping in the little coffin-beds of the bus. Not that I'm complaining about any of that! I don't want it to come across like I'm pulling one of those 'acting is hard!' whines."

The possibility of Gabe projecting any such entitlement is laughably unlikely. Cobra Starship, despite international popularity, are accommodating and generous with their fans above and beyond the levels most other bands could even imagine.

"We wouldn't be anything without these kids; I know that," Gabe explains. "We aren't superstars. I didn't expect anybody in Australia to even know who we are, because we don't sell many records here."

I suggest that this might be partly due to the fact that most of the people I know who own Cobra Starship's two albums bought them directly from their record label's website. Last year the band ran a promotion in which each copy of 'Viva la Cobra!' came with a Polaroid photo taken by the band. Lots of the Cobra fans I know got their copy of the CD in that deal, meaning that many of the Polaroids are now down under.

"That is *crazy*," Gabe says, apparently unable to fathom the scope of the band's fanbase across the world. "And look, I know albums are hard to find here a lot of the time -- they get released later, or not at all, and so kids download the songs instead. I don't give a shit about the downloading stuff, because when an Australian crowd sings along with me at a show, that's fucking mindblowing. I don't care how they got the songs."

Because both Panic at the Disco and The Academy Is... are already running pre-show meet and greets on the tour, there isn't the time or logistics for Cobra Starship to do a formal signing session. So, on the first night of the tour, they could be found at the merch counter in the foyer after the set, giving out autographs and attention to all who asked for them.

This same philosophy of gratitude to fans extends to the band's interactions online, where Gabe and Victoria cheerfully venture into the wilder corners of fandom to interact with their followers. It's not many bands who'd willingly spend time amongst macros and trashy gossip, but Gabe's enthusiasm for a chance to chat with his fans remains undaunted.

"I've got nothing but love in my heart," he explains in response to a comment from me about his positivity and how unlike the negativity which infuses much of the internet it is. "Hate's a waste of time."

Cobra's online life is also noteworthy for the attitude the band displays to slash fanfic. Victoria has been known to leave complimentary feedback on stories starring her, and Gabe has mentioned in a number of interviews his appreciation for the queer-positive message present in the hobby.

I tell Gabe I find this attitude really admirable, since agreeing with the politics of the genre brings along with it the doubtlessly sometimes-awkward fact that these stories are about him having sex with people he actually knows.

After laughing for a little while, Gabe answers in a tone that's lighthearted but sincere. "I'm a fan of anything that can encourage people to be creative," he says. "I'm only able to do what I do now because I was inspired by the bands I grew up listening to. Whatever makes kids think and imagine and create and write is awesome... and if they want to write stories about me sucking my friend's dick, that's cool."

Conversations with Gabe tend to wander to places one might not have guess they'd end up. At one point, we get into a conversation about the band Insane Clown Posse, and how that band's fans have been largely responsible for the continued production of the soft drink Faygo, due to ICP's demands that the fans drink it.

"Oooh, you called them by their initials. You're outed as a fan," Gabe teases. I protest the allegation, and suggest that maybe Cobra could pick a product to endorse in the same way, and

skew the course of capitalism.

"You just blew my mind right there," he replies. "I think we'd do it with string cheese. In Canada they call it cheese string and I got really confused."

The iconography of Cobra Starship is an eclectic thing, encompassing an eighties electronica aesthetic, a two-handed gang sign resembling a cobra snake's hood and fangs - to make the gesture is to 'throw the fangs up', and Gabe's chunky gold necklace featuring a photograph of Justin Timberlake.

"I can't wait for his new CD," Gabe enthuses. "Have you seen 'Black Snake Moan'? It's got Justin Timberlake *and* Samuel L Jackson in it."

Since Samuel L Jackson was also in Cobra Starship's first music video, for the song 'Snakes on a Plane', this puts Gabe only one degree of separation away from JT.

"Yeah, and I've got a friend who knows him. I haven't met him though. I don't think I want to meet him. It'd be hard to live up to the expectation."

I mention that I got some of my friends to listen to the New Jersey band Thursday by offering that the band played its first show in a basement, with Gabe in attendance -- Cobra's first album included the creepy, boppy track 'It's Warmer In The Basement' and, though the Thursday incident took place years before the song was born, it nevertheless ties Thursday to aspects of the Cobra mythology beloved by fans.

"Are you *serious*," Gabe says, disbelieving tone back in full force, unable to believe that there are music fans who've heard of Cobra Starship but not Thursday. For my part, I'm charmed and boggled in equal measures that any band as routinely snarky and effervescent as Cobra Starship could be made up of people this humble and sincere, but that's the truth of it.

And, to answer the most important question of all: what would Gabe do if he faced a zombie horde?

"I'd throw the fangs up," he answers promptly. "Make them all Cobras."