

DANKO JONES BELOW THE BELT

Danko Jones, 1996: “I got a white Cadillac ... I keep the back seat for lovin’”
Danko Jones, 2010: “I can screw your girl in the back of my Cadillac”

Based on the evidence above, you might conclude that Danko Jones hasn't changed at all over the past decade. But the truth is, Danko Jones has come a long way in the years since first rearing his fedora-covered head in 1996 — and we're not just talking about all the frequent-flyer points he racks up touring all corners of the world.

Twelve years ago, Danko Jones was a hungry lion trying to break free of Toronto's stagnant indie-rock scene. Today, he's a well-fed beast who routinely shares arena stages with the likes of Axl Rose and Lemmy Kilmister. He's a top charting artist in Europe and he's added the titles of “Spoken Word Artist,” “Music-magazine Columnist” and “Internationally Syndicated Radio Host” to his formidable list of aliases (The Mango Kid, Dr. Evening, The Brown Panther).

And he's accomplished all that by staying true to a simple credo: don't fuck with the formula — in this case, Danko's Thick Lizzy riffs, JC's bruising, post-hardcore basslines and drummer Dan Cornelius' craterous stomp, which form the swaggering soundtrack to Danko's inimitable, unflinching dispatches from the frontlines of the war of the sexes. So long as guys keep thinking with their dicks instead of their heads and so long as beautiful women have the power to reduce men to drooling, deviant, irrational idiots, Danko Jones records will continue to sound like Danko Jones records. And we all know none of that is going to change anytime soon.



So, here we are: Below the Belt — the place where the best rock 'n' roll comes from, and the place where these 11 songs hit you. Where the stadium-sized sing-alongs from 2008's *Never Too Loud* might have suggested Danko, JC and Dan had grown comfortable with their stature as one of the most consistent and dependable rock bands since AC/DC and Motorhead, on *Below the Belt* they sound more like the hungry power trio that first broke out nationally in Canada with 1999's *My Love Is Bold* EP, which provided the first hints that these garage-punk noisemakers had the pop chops to go global. That “Like Dynamite” echoes the opening riff to that EP's breakthrough single “Bounce” is but a surface indication of *Below the Belt*'s back-to-basics intent. The real proof can be heard in the way Danko Jones apply their now-well-honed melodic sensibilities to the restless, scrappy energy that defined the band's early years, resulting in power-pop knockouts like “Active Volcanoes” (cut from the loins of Danko's all-time favorite KISS song, “Love Her All I Can”) and the sugar-chocolate-dipped “(I Can't Handle) Moderation.”

But as much as *Below the Belt* captures the sound of classic Danko Jones, it marks an evolution as well. On previous set-list standards like “Suicide Woman” and “Love Is Unkind,” Danko was eager to play the victim, exposing his badly broken heart so that others could learn from his example and not make the same mistakes. But on *Below the Belt*, the tables have turned and now Danko's having the last laugh, whether he's kicking a nagging, sexless lover to the curb (“I Wanna Break Up With You”), basking in the post-breakup sympathy when the ex admits she was in the wrong (“Apology Accepted”) and mocking her to her face when she loses her good looks (“The Sore Loser”).

Now, some of you may interpret this behavior as unduly harsh, but Danko's simply speaking for anyone who's ever had their heart chewed out and spit in their face (i.e., everyone). Because that's his real job — it isn't about being a rock 'n' roll singer or radio host or magazine writer; his job is to say the things that are on your mind but you are too afraid to admit — in other words, to make the impossible seem possible. It's just like when Danko gets up onstage with Lemmy to sing “Killed by Death” — he's living out the fantasy of every kid who's ever bounced around their bedroom with a tennis racket and performed in front of the rock-star posters pinned to their wall (i.e., everyone). For Danko Jones, the true measure of success isn't the gold records, sold-out tours or celebrity endorsements (though he'll gladly take all of those). No, Danko Jones will know his work is done the moment you feel confident enough to join him as he sings: “Look who's smiling — me, motherfucker! And it feels great!”

