

Germ Busted for Soap



~Profile This! Bolles and girlfriend Cat Scandal with nothing to hide~

Drummer Don Bolles is jailed after police say soap bottle in his car contains illegal drug, GHB

~ By DEAN KUIPERS ~

It was just another average day in the flamboyantly messy life of Don Bolles, once the drummer for the legendarily messy, flamboyant Los Angeles punk band, the Germs. On April 4, Bolles had picked up his girlfriend, the 21-year-old drummer for a band called Civet who goes by the name Cat Scandal, from a Newport Beach rehab, where she had, as he put it, “a day off.” They had just had coffee and were on their way to an Alcoholics Anonymous meeting.

Cat Scandal was riding in the passenger seat of Bolles’s 1968 Dodge Van and they had just crossed out of Newport Beach into Costa Mesa when they were pulled over by police, who told Bolles that he allegedly had a broken brake light.

But what he really had was a crazy old van, a wild Russian fur cap, long hair, and a gorgeous young girlfriend. Bolles called it a classic case of profiling: driving while weird. And then they found the soap.

“It’s hilarious. A Germ arrested for soap,” says Bolles, 50, talking Monday via cell phone as he ran errands for a Friday court appearance. “It’s just ridiculous. I’ve already been in jail almost four days over this, and it’s completely wrong. It’s soap. It’s peppermint Dr. Bronner’s soap.”

As Bolles fished his ID out of what he calls his “man-purse,” policemen allegedly asked him why he was being so protective of his bag. Bolles explained there was nothing illegal in the bag. In it, police allegedly found a small amount of weed, but a legal amount for a medical marijuana user under state law. Bolles has a medical marijuana card, but did not have it on him.

“And then they found the fuckin’ thing full of orange liquid that smelled like peppermint. And so they asked me what it was, and I said, ‘Soap. It says so on the label; it’s in a Dr. Bronner’s bottle.’”

In an e-mail to supporters sent last week, Bolles’s friend Nora Keyes wrote that he only uses Dr. Bronner’s soaps. Which would hardly be unusual, since they’re a popular brand available in stores across America. But police allegedly whipped out their drug-testing gear, a ODV 905 reagents test, and dropped some powder into the soap, and it turned color. Then they told Bolles he was under arrest for possessing a controlled substance: GHB.

“He was arrested for violating 11377(a) of the Health and Safety Code, and that was for the GHB,” says Sgt. Evan Sailor of the Newport Beach Police Department.

Bolles claims he’d heard of the drug but thought it was some kind of steroid, having never tried it. In actuality, gamma-hydroxybutyric acid is an anesthetic once popular with the rave culture for its mellow, friendly vibe as an intoxicant and also called a date-rape drug because, like Rohypnol, it can be undetectable when mixed with water. In any case, Bolles insists that the only thing in that bottle was soap.

Asked whether the police field test had any history of false positives, Sailor says, “Not that I’m aware of. We do our preliminary testing of the substance, and then it’s sent up to the county crime lab for more testing.”

The Orange County Sheriff’s office, which administers county Forensic Science Services, was not able to verify that the case had come to their lab by press time.

Bolles was arrested and eventually ended up in Orange County Men's Central Jail in Santa Ana on \$25,000 bail, charged with felony Possession of a Controlled Substance, misdemeanor Contempt of Court for disobeying a court order, and misdemeanor Violation of a Protective/Stay Away Order. The felony drug possession charge carries a sentence of up to 20 years in prison. The latter two charges were brought by the Orange County D.A. and relate to an incident a year earlier when, after an altercation between Bolles and Cat Scandal, Bolles voluntarily signed a restraining order under which the two can see each other only under restricted conditions.

"It was an amicable restraining order after I got a Disturbing the Peace charge," he explains. "The only thing that brings this into play is the felony drug charge they're bringing now."

Cat Scandal, who also plays drums in the Don Bolles Disaster, was not charged in the latest incident.

"When I first got the call, I couldn't tell if it was a joke," laughs Michael Bronner, vice-president for international sales for Dr. Bronner's Magic Soaps and grandson of soap creator Dr. E.H. Bronner, who died in 1997. "I wish it would have been clearer, because we would have jumped into action sooner."

Listening to the message on his machine, Michael Bronner thought the person was saying "THC," the active ingredient in marijuana. It is a common misconception that the hemp oil used in the soap is psychoactive, but in fact the drug is present in such a minute amount it is undetectable and hemp products have been declared legal to sell in the U.S. under a ruling by the Ninth Circuit Court. That case was also brought by Dr. Bronner's Magic Soaps.

When Bronner figured out what was happening, he called Keyes and offered to pay the bail. By Saturday, however, enough small donations had poured into an online account that Bolles had already paid it. So Bronner has offered to pay the legal bills.

"First and foremost, we feel that we're socially progressive activists, and we want to help this guy out. We want to send a message to the system that you can't just make up reasons to incarcerate people," says Bronner. Then he adds that there's also the product's reputation to consider, saying, "As a business, we want to make sure that nobody can possibly think again that our soap contains GHB. I think it's a little bit of the Swift Boat Veterans for Truth; these ridiculous charges that everybody just laughs about, like, 'Yeah, whatever,' and all of a sudden people started believing them. We don't want that."

Bronner said he had never heard of any of his company's soaps or other products testing positive for GHB or any other drug.

In a statement released Wednesday, David Bronner, Michael's brother and president of Dr. Bronner's Magic Soaps, said: "We cannot imagine anyone putting GHB, or any other drug for that matter, into a rinse-off soap product that is lathered and rinsed off the body immediately. The Newport Beach police should see how much of a buzz putting beer in their shampoo gives them, and get a grip and apologize on their hands and knees to Mr. Bolles."

Bolles, whose real name is Jimmy Michael Giorsetti, is due at a pre-trial hearing on Friday, April 13. He took his stage name from an investigative reporter at the Arizona Republic who was famously car-bombed in 1976 and died, but first blamed his death on the Mafia.

"I'm not angry at the cops. I'm angry about a system that would do this to an innocent person," says Bolles. "If I had been the real Don Bolles, who was a journalist, all I'd have to do is tell exactly what happened. In this case, the truth is so outrageously on my side that I don't even need to be sensationalistic about it. It's just a case people need to know about." ★

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