



CHAPTER 18 THEIR AIM IS TRUJILLO

It's difficult to get a sense from *Monster* how exhaustive these auditions were. Like everything else this perfectionist band does, Metallica (and Phil) made the process as painstakingly thorough as possible.

Rob Trujillo joined Metallica with so little time before they went on the road that he wrote the first letter of each song lyric on his forearm in order to remember everything. (Courtesy of Joe Berlinger)



Rob's first meeting with Metallica, before he'd even played a note, took place on a morning in February. There was the usual clubhouse atmosphere at HQ that morning. Kirk had even whipped up a batch of pancakes. When Rob walked in around eleven, there was a palpable feeling that he belonged there, something Kirk noticed immediately.

"Sit down," Lars urged Rob. "You want some food, some coffee or tea?"

"Actually, a tea would be good."

Kirk looked up and flashed an incredulous smile at Lars. "I've never seen you make a cup of tea for Jason, ever!"

The room suddenly grew quiet. "Wow," Rob finally said, clearly unsure of how to react.

"I'm trying to remedy my mistakes from the past," Lars said, heading for the stove. (He was a long way from tricking Jason into eating a mouthful of wasabi.)

Kirk quickly turned the discussion toward surfing. Rob had just gotten back from a trip to Tahiti, so they compared the waves in Hawaii and Tahiti. There was more small talk, Chinese food was ordered, and James got down to business. Everyone, including Phil, sat down at the table.

"So, we're thinking about bass players finally," James said.

Rob nodded. "Getting the ball rolling, huh?"

Meeting with Rob on the first day of auditions with Lars's son, Myles, looking on. Each of the bass player candidates met with Phil and the band before playing a single note. (Courtesy of Bob Richman)



"Yeah, we've been working for a long time, we're jamming, and we want to go out and tour in the summer. There's all this stuff we want to do, but how are we gonna do it, you know?"

Rob looked very serious. "Right, right, right . . ."

"We're going to need a fourth member. It's been in the back of our mind for a long time, and yeah, now is the time. So, you know, I don't know how you're feeling here . . ."

"It's an honor, let me just say that," Rob said, his voice low and smooth. "It's an honor to be here right now."

Lars thanked him.

"It actually feels good to have you here," Kirk said.

"I have the utmost respect for all of you," Rob said.

"Well, we have the same for you," James said. "We're getting the ball rolling, and we've talked a lot about it, man—how to do it, what we should do, what we should not do, what we did last time that didn't work. So we're just going to get some people in, have them in for a few days to hang out. Nothing heavy, we just want to see what the vibe is. 'Cause we know you're a great bass player. It's the vibe that we need to make sure of, 'cause we've grown a lot, man. Jason sparked a lot of, you know, inner growth for us."

"Right, right."

"We've been kind of cleaning house and rechecking ourselves," James said. "And Phil here has helped us immensely."

"Have you met Phil?" Kirk asked.

"Yeah, yeah." Rob and Phil exchanged nods.

"Yeah, Phil has gotten us to turn our eyeballs inside out, man," James said.

"Right, right."

"So beware of him," Kirk said. "Just kidding."

Rob appeared to relax a bit. "He does look a little shady right now."

"That's what I thought," Kirk said.

"Very intimidating," James added.

"Let's put it this way," Phil said. "I was thirty years old two years ago when I started, and now look at me."

"You take all the punishment and absorb it," Rob said.

"That's it."

"I think it's important that, as a band, you need to be a team and you need to be a family," Rob said. "It's good that you guys are communicating, and, as you say, going through transitions and stuff!"

"It came at the right time," Kirk said. "'Cause we were about to really just fragment. We had two choices: to totally fall apart or fall together. We decided to fall together."

"There you go."

"It's pretty amazing what you can avoid talking about for twenty years," James said. "Stuff you don't want to bother addressing, 'cause it might rock the boat. The machine's oiled, and you're running smoothly, and you're afraid to fuck with it, you know?"

Rob nodded knowingly. "Well, when you keep things inside, pent up, it just gets worse, right? Then the volcano erupts."

"Definitely," Kirk said.

James asked Rob about his upbringing. Rob talked about growing up in Venice, California, his parents' divorce, and about his close relationship with his mom. He described the screaming fight he had with his dad, around the time Rob's band, Infectious Grooves, scored a coveted opening spot on an Ozzy Osbourne tour. Rob said it was weird to have things go so sour with his dad just as his professional career was taking off, and how glad he is that they eventually reconciled and now have a great relationship.

Overall, it seemed like he and the guys in Metallica were forming an instant bond. Rob talked some more about how he was used to mediating between conflicting personalities in bands and how he thought that was a natural role for a bass player to fill.

"Oh, there's none of that going on here," Lars said. Everybody laughed.

Talk turned to the musical role Metallica wanted its new member to play. "We're not looking for somebody to just follow the guitar," James said. "When we first saw Cliff Burton, we just went for him, because he had something that could make Metallica stronger. And there's a short list of people who we think can make Metallica stronger now. And you're on it."

Lars added, "You know, it's been about twenty-two months since Jason left, and it's been a pretty long journey to this very moment. And by the luck of the draw, you're the first guy in the door."

Phil had a question for Rob. "It's a tough question for me to throw at you, but I want you to just kinda ponder it," he said. "Having experienced this much, what do you think you could bring to the band that would enhance it?"

Rob hesitated for a second. He mentioned that he had gone from playing in front of huge crowds with Ozzy Osbourne to playing small clubs with Ozzy guitarist Zakk Wylde's band. "We did eleven shows in fourteen days. We only



Metallica's audience at San Quentin. Before entering the prison, we had to sign a form acknowledging the prison's policy not to negotiate with hostage-takers. (Courtesy of Bob Richman)

had a hotel room for two of those days. And maybe three showers. So it was rough. I endured the punishment, because I just love playing. As a bass player, I like contributing to the creative process. I just think it's fun [working] with new people, you know? It's supposed to be fun, right?"

"That's what it's all about," Phil said.

"I think that's really the most important thing: having fun playing," Rob said.

"It has not been . . ." Kirk began, hesitating and letting his words trail off. "It has not been fun sometimes for us in the past!"

"It seems like you guys are having fun now. I mean, just from what I'm hearing and everything."

"It's pretty much the first time it's been consistently fun," Kirk continued. "I mean, it's been fun on other albums for sure," he quickly added. "But this is the first time it's been a real pleasure."

"You were talking about your versatility and resilience," Phil said to Rob. "What about wanting to be part of a permanent band? I mean, you've got lots of different gigs, and some people do better with different projects, as opposed to being part of one family."

It was funny how Phil was making this sound like any other job interview, but Rob took these questions in stride, even if he seemed to be struggling to give Phil what he wanted. “Well, I think if you find your family, a crew of guys you have a connection with, that’s really special. I mean, when you’ve got a good vibe going, that’s the most important thing, so . . .”

“Some people are ready to get married, and other people aren’t,” Phil said. “Some people really like their flexibility and freedom to be involved with different things.” (This sounded to me like a not-so-subtle reference to Jason.)

Lars appeared to bristle at the direction Phil was taking. “Yeah, some people get married and some people don’t,” Lars said. “But some people do the best with whatever’s put in front of them. It doesn’t have to be either/or. . . . I guess in some way I feel kind of protective when you ask Rob a question like that. I just felt like the question had an agenda to it.”

“Yeah,” Phil replied, “the ‘agenda’ was just to find out what he would say.”

“Well, I felt the question was a little . . .” Lars hesitated. “I felt it was a little pushy.”

“Which part of it?”

“I don’t know. I’m touchy in that area. If I was sitting here with us, I would want to be as comfortable as possible.”

When we first pulled into San Quentin, the prisoners thought that Bruce and I were members of Metallica, and a cheer went through the crowd. (Courtesy of Bob Richman)





This photo was taken during one of my favorite moments that didn't make it into the film. In the prison's holding area after playing for the inmates, new Metallica member Rob Trujillo said, "I just popped my cherry with Metallica—playing at San Quentin!" (Courtesy of Niclas Swanlund)

"My motive is not about protecting or not protecting," Phil said. "It's about giving Rob and the band the best shot at understanding each other."

Rob fidgeted a little in his chair. For the first time all morning, he seemed a little uncomfortable.

"This has always been a touchy subject for us," James explained to him. "I know that, for Jason, the straw that broke the camel's back was that he couldn't do side projects. That was the easy thing to blame him leaving on, when, in essence, there was fourteen years of stuff, business and personal things. There's a part of me that still struggles with that, like, Jason split because I questioned his dedication to Metallica, just because he wanted to do other stuff. And it's still tough." He paused. "In my mind, I know that people can jam with other people and still be dedicated as hell to this family. And, you know, it took me doing something else to find that out, you know?"

Considering that Rob was still an outsider, James was being remarkably candid. The "doing something else" clearly referred to his time in rehab, and his fear that putting himself under the therapeutic microscope would put out the fire that fueled Metallica.

“‘Cause I had this big fear of, boy, if I find something else, I might not be as [excited] by Metallica,” James continued. “And that’s not the case. There’s nothing that can ever replace Metallica, you know?”

“Thank God,” Kirk said.

If Rob was put off by all this naked sensitivity from the biggest hard-rock band of all time, who just happened to be considering him as a potential member, he wasn’t showing it. “Sometimes . . . uh . . . when you come back to a situation, you have more fire than you once had,” he offered.

Kirk nodded. “That’s definitely the case here.”

James quickly added that he didn’t leave Metallica to see what else was out there, another apparently pointed reference to Jason. “It’s like, you know, you’re married, but you want to screw around. You know, ‘I want to see how good my wife is by checking out this other chick.’ And that’s not healthy at all.”

I realized that I had heard James use that metaphor before, and then remembered it was during the discussion on the day Dee Dee Ramone’s death was announced.

“Destructive as hell,” Kirk agreed.
