

BLACKMORE'S NIGHT

Blackmore's Night are now in their sixteenth year of existence, proving beyond any doubt that the renaissance influenced project was not just some passing phase for former Deep Purple and Rainbow legend Ritchie Blackmore. He, together with his wife and the band's vocalist, Candice Night, continue to make excellent records, their latest one entitled 'Dancer And The Moon'. James Gaden called their residence to talk to the couple – after a delay getting through, he had to play hardball with Autumn, Ritchie and Candice's two year old daughter, who answered the phone and was not prepared to hand over to Candice without first confirming the identity of the caller!

I was at the 'Knight In York' show when you brought Autumn out on the stage. I can't believe I just talked to her, that's insane!

Candice: Oh, she's incredible. The other day she was quiet so we said to her 'Honey, are you sad?' and she said 'Oh, I'm okay, I'm just pensive.' She's TWO! She came in to watch television and Ritchie had the news on, she wasn't interested and went running out. I said 'Honey, why aren't you watching TV?' and she came out with 'Because that TV is ridiculous and preposterous and I can't watch preposterous TV!' She has us hysterically laughing all the time, because you never know what she's going to come out with, it's just amazing.

Well, I've been listening to the new record and I think that's amazing. This might be my favourite record you've made.

Ritchie: I like it. Once I've recorded something, I tend to take a break from it. Then I hear it in dribs and drabs. For instance it's in the car so every now and again it'll come on. I don't choose to put it on, but I'll hear it and think 'Oh yeah, that's okay...' I'm not one for sitting down and playing back my own stuff, it makes me too nervous.

There's an eclectic mix of covers on this one. My favourite is Randy Newman's 'I Think It's Going To Rain'. It's brilliant, very different to his. How do you decide which songs to cover?

R: If it's something that appeals to me, then I'll play a little bit of it and Candy will

sing along. Then if there is potential, if it suits her voice, we'll look at taking it a stage further. Candy thought about it, way back, because of Bette Midler's version on the 'Beaches' soundtrack. We used to play it in concert sometimes as an extra song if the audience wanted us to play some more. We recorded it years ago but it just didn't work. So we changed it around, put a rhythm to it and that seemed to work much better. There was no point doing it the way it was recorded initially, I didn't see the point in doing it unless we could make it different.

I thought you sang it superbly Candice, I loved the string parts, everything about it was great. Randy Newman, for me, is one of those artists whose songs I like... providing somebody else sings them.

C: (laughs) You see, when it came to Randy Newman, it was a choice between that one, 'I Love L.A.' or 'Short People'. (laughs) We'd do it at outdoor venues like castles if it started raining. The rest of the band weren't familiar with it so it would just be the acoustic guitar and me singing. When we did it like that, it sounded so personal that it was almost like we cast a spell on the audience, they'd go so quiet. We could never capture that magic from the stage version, so we thought we'd take a completely different approach. Ritchie made it up-tempo, added the electric guitar to it, a totally different arrangement.

I loved the re-working of 'Temple Of The King', which is of course an old Rainbow tune. Candice, you've sung lyrics written by Joe Lynn Turner, Ian Gillan, David Coverdale, Ronnie James Dio... are the Dio lyrics the easiest for you to relate to?

C: That's a good question. What I try to do is look at those songs as completely neutral entities. I try not to see them as a Dio song or a Gillan song or a Joe Lynn Turner song... then it would be too intimidating. Ritchie has worked with some of the most amazing singers out there, so to look at them like I could fill any of their shoes would be too intimidating. I would never try to fill their shoes – but I don't think any of them could fill my stilettos! (laughs) I do believe that die hard fans know Ritchie has been involved with medieval and Renaissance music for so long, from the very early days. Anybody who steps on stage to do a ten minute jam on Henry VIII's 'Greensleeves'... they had to know he was involved in that music! When Ritchie was working with Dio and they did songs like 'Temple Of The King' or 'Sixteenth Century Greensleeves' that would give an indication Ritchie went that way. If we do

an older song from Ritchie's repertoire, he always goes for the melodic songs. He doesn't expect me to go out there and start screaming 'Highway Star' or 'Space Trucking'! (laughs) We don't have to worry about going down that avenue! He'll always pick songs he feels are suited for my voice and 'Temple Of The King' is one of those. It's a song we have played on stage when we've taken requests, we were asked for that a lot so we've done it for those fans in the Blackmore's Night style.

A more surprising choice is 'Lady In Black' which is a Uriah Heep song.

R: That started at a castle in Germany... for a change. We were there for two months, mixing. It was a good place to mix, it was out in the middle of nowhere. There was no entertainment, except for a little old radio which I used to listen to. It was like being back in the Second World War, it was great...

C: I don't think I've ever heard that sentence before –

'It was like being back in the Second World War, it was great!' (laughs)

R: I mean it was the austerity that was interesting. I was listening to this radio and this song came on. I had no idea who it was but I really liked it, it was so understated, not overproduced and glossy like everything else. It was just the bare minimum, only two chords. I like songs which are only a couple of chords, it's almost a medieval style, how they wrote back in those days. I was talking to some fans backstage and I asked them if they knew this tune, and I hummed it to them. My immediate thought was to cover it because I liked the simplicity and it had a great melody. They told me it was Uriah Heep. I said I really liked it and they told me it was a big song in Germany. That put me off a bit, I thought maybe I should leave it alone. After a while, we'd have our get-togethers at the local pub with our friends, where we'd take the back room and get out the guitars and things. I said to Candy 'Can you sing that song?' She only knew one verse, because there's like a million words. So we did the one verse and I watched the reaction of friends and people. They seemed to like it, so I thought one day we should record it. I've known Uriah Heep ever since they started, about the same time we started in Deep Purple. We used to rehearse at the same place. We would bump into them all the time on the road. In fact we toured with them quite a few times. I always thought they were a good band, I loved their song 'Gypsy' too. They're very melodic. It was kind of fitting we've covered one of their songs. I also had this medieval riff which I put in to make it a bit different. It's a great position for us to be in. We can do anybody's songs. If I'd have been in Purple and said 'Let's do a Uriah Heep song!' they would have killed me.

'The Moon Is Shining' has been picked out as a single. There is a synth, almost dance element in there. Was that because you were purposely looking to put out a single or just how the track turned out?

R: That's how it turned out – we did it two different ways, which is why it's like the song appears on there twice. It's an old Czech song, the melody. I heard it and thought it was great, we tried the melody as a ballad which is how it was done originally in Czech, way back. I thought it would be interesting if we did a version like that, to do another with a double tempo and a sequencer playing. I like those sequencer sounds, some people call it like a Euro-pop, whatever. I like that stuff, some of it. I like the Pet Shop Boys, believe it or not. One of my favourite songs of theirs is 'It's A Sin'. I listened to the backing of that and told Pat (Regan), our producer, 'Get that kind of sound and tempo, that might work on this song.' At first he thought I was being ridiculous, then he heard it and said 'I see what you mean, it's got a similar kind of rhythm.' So we lent an ear to their stuff for that track. That's my favourite one on the record.

"Had this just been a straight-forward rock band, I'd probably have gotten tired of it and wanted to do something else, play some blues or something. But this music is so varied, we can do anything we want."
Ritchie Blackmore

I think this is one of your most eclectic albums, yet it still is unmistakably Blackmore's Night.

R: We took a lot longer doing this one. We did three sessions of two months, so it didn't become a bore. We've done blocks of three months of our lives and after two months you get sick of recording. You just want to hurry up and finish it. I think it's much healthier and fresher to do it in bits and pieces. You keep the enthusiasm for each song and don't get worn out. The three month block doesn't work anymore for us. You just get fed up being in the studio.

I would imagine it's hard to devote three months to recording when you have young children as well.

R: We lock them upstairs and just put down a lot of food...

C: (Laughs) They're actually really good in the studio.

R: Yeah, they are, they don't want to trash everything. And

they call Pat 'Bap'. So his name is 'Bap' now.

C: Ritchie would bring down beer for Pat, and hand it to Autumn to make the final delivery. That is something to see. 'Here Bap, you look like you need one of these!' (laughs)

This is your first album for Frontiers Records – what made you switch to them?

R: Yeah, we were looking for a different label because we weren't happy with Sony. We thought Sony would do a lot for getting the word out, but I didn't feel they did much at all. They're a really big label, maybe they don't push you unless you're Mariah Carey or Beyonce, I'm not sure. I also noticed when we were out in certain countries, I'd ask if they had our records, but they'd say 'Yes, we have them in the shop, but they're so expensive, we don't make anything from them.' So they'd only have one or two copies, which I thought

was interesting. They were getting the records for €13-€14 and having to sell it for €15 or €16. That's ridiculous for a shop. That was another reason I didn't like Sony. I think they're going through a lot of changes. They're great at pushing Beyonce or whoever the latest one of the week is. Luckily we only signed for one record with them, even though we gave them two with the live album in York. It was basically a way of getting out of the contract, because we didn't want to go with them for this record, so we gave them 'A Knight In York'. It's terrible you have to do these things – I don't want to knock the labels, but at the same time, it's not about music for them, it's all the money side. When we put this project together, we never intended selling a lot of records, we just wanted to have a good time doing it. We still retain that.

There's a bonus DVD coming with the album as well, according to my press release. I've not got it, so what

will be on there?

C: It'll be interview footage, talking about the individual tracks. Also there's some acoustic, impromptu stuff.

Have any of your albums sold better than the others, or do you sell a similar amount each time?
R: I have no idea.

C: I think 'Ghost Of A Rose' has been our most successful so far.

R: 'Ghost Of A Rose' then! It's hard to say, in this day and age, so many people are telling fibs, it's hard to get the truth from anybody.

C: We'll get a number, then the distribution company will give us another number, then we'll find out we've only been paid for a portion of that, so we have to chase that down, and that's just in one territory, then it goes round worldwide and before you know it, you don't know what has ended up where anymore! And then you don't know if it's quarterly, or yearly, or just whenever they decide to send you something – or they forget to send you something so you chase it up... (laughs) We have no idea!

It sounds an absolute nightmare!

R: Oh yeah, when you're dealing with record sales around the world, it's a problem.

C: When you're in the 'music industry', the music needs to be the fun part. It's the industry part that's the problem.

When you make a record, do you make any comparisons to what you've done before or is each one a moment in time?

R: More or less the latter, it's basically your frame of mind at that time. Some people will like the first album better than the second, and vice versa. I can't really pick a favourite. I still really like a lot of stuff on the first album. That was our maiden voyage, it was all exciting.

C: Yes, and it was such a change for you to what you had been doing all those years.

R: Yes, there was a period



in the hard rock days when I was basically disgusted with whatever came out. That was nobody's fault but my own really. I was just playing, bored, it all sounded the same to me. No real excitement there, it was more like 'Thank God, we've finished another one, just get it out.' Things like 'Deep Purple In Rock', 'Machine Head', 'Burn', they were great records, along with 'Rainbow Rising'... they were all exciting. But some of the stuff in between, for me, was not anything to be really excited about. 'Perfect Strangers' I thought that was a very good record. Then the second one, I thought that was really bad. At the time, people thought we'd only stay together for one record. After that second one, maybe we should have called it a day... although I really liked 'Slaves And Masters' with Joe Lynn Turner. But again, I'm heavy into melody. A lot of people didn't like it simply because it was him, which I always found strange.

C: Every song on that album was great, there's not one throwaway.

R: I agree, compared to the one before... I forget what it was called?

C: 'The House Of Blue Light'.

R: Yes - there were no ideas for that one. We were all just in a room, trying to play something.

You end the new album with 'Carry On Jon', a tribute to Jon Lord. Who had the unenviable job of playing the organ?

R: What happened was, I wrote the tune during a blizzard. We were snowed in for like four days, luckily the electrics didn't go off. We were looking at doing an extra track and I said that I had this instrumental. I didn't know what to call it until I played it. When I played it, it seemed to reflect the melancholy of Jon passing. I decided I'd like to have it at the end, like the sound of Jon Lord playing out. Pat Regan is a brilliant keyboard player, so I asked him to put on the B3 sound and emulate Jon's style as best he could. We

were there for hours, copying riffs and syncopations that Jon would do. I'd say 'Jon would play with his right hand and do some staccato syncopation here, and a long run here'... in the end, I thought it was quite funny, it sounds like Jon Lord playing. It is meant as a compliment to Jon. I think he would have liked it - maybe he was playing in spirit. It came out exceptionally close to his style.



Did you think Blackmore's Night would last for eight studio albums, a Christmas album and counting?

C: I know, it's been sixteen years!

R: We never thought of it in those terms. Most rock bands think if they aren't successful, they'll split up. We never thought like that, we always intended carrying on.

C: We put so much into every tour and every CD, it's almost like with each CD, if

that's the only thing we put out, that would be fulfilling enough. Then we put out another one and you feel really good about that one too! Each one is like taking a step, trailblazing and just enjoying the journey. We are kind of always 'in the now', so if you'd asked me sixteen years ago, I'd have had no idea where I'd be. Then again, prior to creating this project, if you'd said that I'd be on stage being the lead singer, I'd never have

give up because I won't give up listening to Middles Ages, Renaissance and medieval music. Had this just been a straight-forward rock band, I'd probably have gotten tired of it and wanted to do something else, play some blues or something. But this music is so varied, we can do anything we want. There's no limitations, so it would be silly to stop playing. I only want to stop if I've been put into a corner, told I have to play the same way for the next record, write another 'Smoke On The Water' or whatever.

C: I still don't know how Ritchie picks out the songs we'll do on stage. Each time we go back out, we add new songs to the set list so it's tricky to know what songs to drop.

R: I always try and include the songs I think people love to hear. Most bands, if you look at the Rolling Stones, when they put in 'Brown Sugar', 'Jumping Jack Flash'... they get to a point where they basically just do the same show. With us, because we're not that well known, we can play stuff that isn't familiar because nothing we've done is written in stone, we don't have a 'Satisfaction' or a 'Smoke On The Water' everyone expects to hear. It's a blessing in disguise - we could do an entirely new set on stage and our smaller audience accepts it as groundbreaking and new. Big stadium bands have to do the same stuff or they're doomed.

Thank you both for talking to Fireworks again, we really appreciate it.

R: I was trying to evacuate my bowels when you called earlier. I was not having a good day.

C: Oh... that's nice information to share.

That's my teaser for the article right there!

R: Evacuating the bowels is very important!

C: You should write an instrumental called 'Evacuating My Bowels'.

That could be the name of your next album...

R: A lot of people would like us to call it that.