

JIMMY BARNES

As the voice of Cold Chisel, as well as a hugely successful solo artist, Jimmy Barnes is an icon of the Australian music scene. Celebrating three decades as a solo artist, Barnes elected to call up some friends to give a fresh perspective to some of the key songs from his career to date. Entitled 'Hindsight', the album is an absolute winner and features a raft of big names, such as Neal Schon, Jonathan Cain, Joe Bonamassa and Little Steven, just to name a few. James Gaden spoke to the vocalist to hear more...

"I'm really thrilled with it," an exuberant Barnes exclaims. "It was a labour of love really. I got in there with Kevin Shirley and a bunch of mates and it all started falling into place. We had a great time making it and I think that shows in the record."

There can be no doubt that there is a real sense of fun about the record with Barnes sounding absolutely invigorated and revelling in the chance to perform with some of his favourite musicians.

"It was all really organic. The record company suggested I get a bunch of bands to do my songs. I didn't want to do that, if I'm gonna get a bunch of bands I like to do my songs, I wanna sing with them! The next move was I was actually in L.A. and Chris Cheney from The Living End was there. He's a good mate and we were out having dinner and I asked him if he wanted to do a song on my new record. He said 'Yeah! I want to do 'Lay Down Your Guns!'. It was sort of a loaded question, I knew he'd pick that. Chris is a really big Brian Setzer fan and Brian played on the original. That was the way it went with a lot of people. There were one or two where I actually picked tunes for them to do: Shihad for example, I sent them 'Love And Hate' because I was dying to hear them play it. But most of the others, like Diesel, he's my brother in law, he lives next door and straight away he said he wanted to do 'I'd Die To Be With You Tonight'. He's played that song a million times with me and my band and when he played it, it sounded completely fresh."

"Fresh" is certainly a word that applies to the album, as this is one of the rare examples of re-recorded songs from an already loved back catalogue where every song is as good, if not better than the original. There isn't one song that hasn't benefitted.

"I think so too," Barnes agrees, "and I think that's one of the great things about the record. I think they were great songs anyway and these artists, my friends, have lived with and grown up with them. They've mucked about with them, jammed on them, they've sort of had a hand in how they went and it was very organic. We had a good idea of what we were going to do before we even started recording. It wasn't taking a bunch of half-baked song ideas and trying to polish them up, they were already really good songs and these guys brought more out of them. When you record a song that's totally new, you get there and you record it and three months later you hear the thing on the radio

and think 'Damn, I wish I'd done this...' It was an opportunity to implement that as well."

For fans of Barnes like myself, the other major appeal was he hasn't just selected "the hits". The well known tracks are nestled alongside cuts from lesser known albums. Two are taken from the 'Love And Fear' record, one I personally believe to be Barnes' most underrated effort.

"I think so too, that was why I included 'Love And Hate'," a clearly pleased Barnes responds. "With 'Time Will Tell', I sent that to Suze DeMarchi of the Baby Animals, that was my choice for them. For me, that's one of my favourite songs. It's one of my theme songs. I had a period where I had done all the wrong things, I deserved a good belting, you know? My mates were all telling me I needed to take it on the chin, take it like a man, get back up and I'll be okay. But I was more along the lines of 'Fuck it, I won't lie down, I'm going to keep marching.' The opening line of the song is 'I will not lay down/With just a whimper'. That's basically my theme song and I wanted that to be the first song on the record. It's my mantra. The Baby Animals did a great job. Dave Leslie, their guitar player, was in my band for many years and Dario Bortolin, the bass player, was with me for ten years. They all know me really well and brought something special to it. Then when Suze DeMarchi opens her mouth, she brings something beautiful to a song. She added a real sass to it and I loved singing with her."

Somebody else Barnes enjoys singing with is former INXS vocalist Jon Stevens, now fronting The Dead Daisies and a reformed Noiseworks. Stevens and Barnes have sung together numerous times live but incredibly had never actually recorded together in a studio.

"Jon's been a mate of mine for many years and he's one of the great singers," Barnes acknowledges. "While I was doing the record, I realised I've never actually had the opportunity to get in the studio and record with Jon. I rang him up and asked if he wanted to sing a song and he said 'Anything you want mate, anything you want!' So 'I'd Rather Be Blind' was that song. It was taken from the 'Heat' record and that's another song, I think it was a jewel that got lost on there. I think between my voice and Jon's we've helped that song shine."

Aside from recruiting friends, family put in an appearance as well, Barnes' daughter Mahalia duets with her father on a mighty

rendition of 'Stand Up'.

"Mahalia's just phenomenal. She's been singing with me and my band since she was about fourteen. She has her own band too now. I used to get her up on stage and she'd be at the back, I'd bring her closer to the front and get her to duet with me, I'd have to have my arm around her and encourage her. Then she started singing a bit stronger... now, I just get out of the way and hide!" he laughs. "She's that good, it's scary! She chose 'Stand Up', again from the 'Heat' album. I always loved it, I remember writing it. It was around an election time and I wrote it as a sort of protest song. My opinion was if you didn't stay on the backs of politicians and tell them what you want, nothing would get done. That was what the song was about and Mahalia thought it was like a protest song from the 70s and wanted to give it a Sly And The Family Stone vibe. When it gets to the chorus it's just flying. Her band is awesome too."

With so many great names adding their talents to the album, sadly one planned duet didn't pan out, as John Farnham was due to add his inimitable voice to 'When Your Love Is Gone'.

"He was going to do it, but there was some falling out between his management and his record company," Barnes explains. "It all got very political so I just said to John that we should stand back, let it go this time, and see what happens further down the line. Record company politics - which is a real bummer, because he's a phenomenal singer and a good mate."

The album is bolstered by a typical excellent production from Kevin Shirley, who Barnes had previously worked with on Cold Chisel's album 'No Plans'. Barnes considered nobody else for the production duties.

"When the label and I settled on the idea, he was the first person I spoke to about it. He was instrumental on how we did it. One of the great things Kevin did, and something I learned, was I like to record quickly, learn the tune, press record and just get it down. Kevin, as soon as you walk in, presses the record button. Everything you do, from the minute you walk in, is recorded. Take the version of 'Love And Hate' with Shihad. I sent the song to Jon Toogood and he sent it to each member of the band. They listened to it individually, they didn't listen to it together. They didn't talk about it either, because they wanted to be totally fresh for the session! They walked in, and the red light was already on, recording. Jonny said 'We haven't played this yet, we wanted the first time we did it to be in front of you.' So I said 'Well I'm gonna sing it with you!' And that is the take that's on the record. It's just on the edge, aggressive, fantastic! That mentality ran throughout the record. People were looking at Kevin saying 'What do you mean I'm done? I've hardly started!' and he would just say 'No, we got it.' Kevin made a point of getting everyone done really quick,

really fresh. Once you start thinking about a song, you start showing off or you become predictable. If you capture it raw, you tend to get the best out of people. I worked with him with Cold Chisel and he's my favourite producer in the world right now."

The good news for fans of Jimmy Barnes is this productive relationship with Kevin Shirley has resulted in a lot more in the pipeline.

"He and I have ideas to do another two records next year," the vocalist reveals. "One will be an original Rock record. The other... I've done three Soul albums, he wants me to do one more, maybe in Memphis. He then suggested we do shows, one in Memphis, one in Los Angeles, one in New York, one in London and one in Sydney. We'll film and record them and make a movie. That would tie everything up and probably be a box set. The Soul stuff was always my side project, the stuff I love to sing. That would be a tip

of the hat to my roots, it would finish it off. The Rock record is half written, and there's going to be another Cold Chisel album too, which Kevin is also producing. He's fabulous."

The sheer amount of quality albums which have Kevin Shirley at the helm is mind boggling, and Barnes discloses there is no big secret about how it happens.

"He works his arse off! When he came in here, he did my record in like ten days, then he went off with Mahalia and Joe Bonamassa. The two of them did this record together with Kevin, it's just phenomenal and they did it in three days, everything done live in the studio, just blistering stuff."

Getting back to 'Hindsight', one track which doesn't feature any guests, or indeed reside on a previous album, is 'The Other Kind'. It's a song which the singer has a connection with.

"Years ago, in the mid-nineties, the

taxman hammered me and I had to sell everything to pay all my bills. I moved to France and while I was there, I was listening to an album called 'The Hard Way' by Steve Earle. 'The Other Kind' was from that album and I loved the lyrics, loved the song and always wanted to do it. I felt it just fitted on this record. I wanted to do one track that was different. The funny thing was, it came around the period when I was writing 'Psyclone'. My song writing had changed, it was more introspective and a lot darker and I was listening to Steve Earle a lot back then. 'Psyclone' was produced by the same guy who did Steve's 'The Hard Way'. When I was making this album, Mahalia told me she had been to the Blues Festival and Steve Earle was there, and had invited me down to his Sydney show to meet him. I went down and it was Steve's last night in Australia. We had a great chat and I told him that 'The Other Kind' had meant so much to me and had really changed how I write songs. He said 'Record it!' so I said 'I will!' If he had been in Australia for a couple more days I'd have had him play on it, but he had to leave the next morning."

A superb version of 'Walk On' can be found near the end of the album, which is a terrific duet between Barnes and another of his offspring, son David Campbell.

"Oh, David's a phenomenal singer. He used to be a full on cabaret singer for many, many years, he did that in New York. I went to see him and I snuck in the back while he was singing. You could hear a pin drop and everyone was just glued to him. There were people crying because he's such an emotional singer. Over the years, he's done some Swing records and he's started singing some Rock lately. 'Walk On' was written by Desmond Child and Joe Lynn Turner, I've always loved it and I put it back in my live set of late. I wanted to give the song another go, I think it was maybe a bit over produced on 'Freight Train Heart', I wanted to strip it back and make it more emotional. David was the first person I thought of so I sent him it and he replied 'Could you pick something higher?'" he laughs. "We had a great time singing it."

With such a great back catalogue of songs to chose from, it would be easy to think that Barnes might have felt there were a couple of omissions, but in actual fact he feels fully satisfied by the finished article.

"By the time we finished recording it felt complete," he says without hesitation. "I sat back and thought, frankly I could do this all day, I love doing this music with my friends, but I think that this collection of songs encapsulates everything I've done over the past thirty years and shows the progress I've made. I've had a lot of fun in those thirty years, but I've also lost a lot of friends... it carried a lot of weight, this record. When I looked at the finished album, I felt it was all there. It's a celebration of blood, sweat and tears."

