

THE PARLOTONES

The Parlotones, South Africa's biggest selling Rock band, release their newest studio album 'Stand Like Giants' on the 2nd June via earMusic. They were here in the UK in April, where they played at Kensington Roof Gardens, and made history travelling over when they performed a concert live onboard a Virgin aircraft. An intrigued James Gaden caught up with the band's lead singer Kahn to hear more...

I've got to start with the concert on a plane. That must have been very different to you playing stadiums back home?

It was actually very cool. Passengers could request a serenade which we would do by actually going over to their chair. We kinda walked up and down the aisle playing - we could only do about ten songs because we only had a certain window where we were allowed to perform during cruising height. So we started in First Class and made our way down the plane. It was really cool - a first for us and a first for Virgin.

How did you prepare for something as unique as that - or did you just wing it? (Pun intended, but immediately regretted).

(Laughs) Well, we have played a lot of acoustic things, particularly in the States. We'll often play at radio stations where it's literally just an acoustic guitar and a shaker. So we took that approach - two acoustics guitars, our bassist had a tambourine and a shaker and our drummer had a cajón. It was fine in the wide aisle in First Class, but by the time we were in the economy seats, the aisle was so narrow the drummer had to sit in the toilet with the door open. (laughs)

You also played Kensington Roof Gardens in April while you were here in the UK.

That was awesome! What a great place. Playing with ducks and geese and flamingos, all walking around on top of a roof. You actually have to remind yourself you're on a roof - and that you're in England! Those surroundings and some of the architecture are almost Spanish in style.

It was all building up to the album 'Stand Like Giants' which is released in June. When did you start working on it?

We're constantly writing - even when we were recording the previous album, we were writing the songs for this one. There might even be a song that was maybe written three albums ago, but it maybe gets a new approach and suddenly it can make the latest record. Generally I will come in with a basic song, just done on guitar and the band would build on it in a rehearsal space. Then we'll go into a studio and record a track live to get the initial energy. After that's done, then we look at what to fix, what to overdub, what to add. For this record though, because we've been on the road, I'd send my song ideas as files to the guys who would sit with them for a while and work

up some parts. Then we'd take that into a rehearsal space to see how they worked out. Obviously, with technology as it is now, that makes things a lot easier. It means the rehearsal space becomes a lot more productive because when we do meet up, everybody is already familiar with the songs, the structures and what everyone else is bringing to the table.

There are a really wide variety of styles on the new album...

That's the thing, all of us have vast record collections. I have everything from Damien Rice to Andrew Lloyd Webber to Slipknot. None of us are musical snobs, we just love good songs and good melodies. That's central to all of our albums - a strong melody and everything is layered around that. We are constantly learning and experimenting with our current abilities, we like shaping the sonic elements in the studio. There's even a touch of dub-step on the record. Not too much, we don't want to become a dub-step band, but when we were touring there was a period when dub-step was all we heard so we included a little in there.

I loved 'Sympathy With The Cost' because of the string section, it augmented the song so well.

Well the strings were actually added later on. Sometimes when you're in the studio, songs can start to take a life of their own. When we first went in, it was just one acoustic guitar and a voice. It was almost a Folk type of a song, it had a nylon string guitar with picked opening chords. Then we thought it would be cool to borrow from The Beatles 'Eleanor Rigby' and

that led us to the strings. Nothing is ever calculated. Sometimes we play songs live before we even record them, just to get a sense of what works and what doesn't.

I liked the lyrics of 'Slow Assassination', which I took to be a statement on the way the world is at the moment.

Right - we've been very involved in bringing awareness to global warming. There are naysayers but I believe it's happening and we can be part of the solution. I wanted to write a song without it being too preachy - it's more my cynical opinion of what we're doing to the planet.

How does the music scene in South Africa compare to the UK or Europe?

The UK and Europe are way more established with a proper live circuit, with places for beginner bands, medium sized bands, big bands... we have very few live venues in South Africa, which is very sad. It's a lot more difficult for a new band to get going - so many venues open and then close in a year or two. There's not enough of an industry. There are some great artists around there, but I think things are still very much in its infancy. It's very difficult to grow when the market worldwide is shrinking. Take the title track of the new album, which I think reflects where we are as a band. We've always sort of punched above our weight, coming from a relatively insignificant musical market. We're competing against massive bands with major industry support, so 'Stand Like Giants' is an inspirational message to ourselves and anyone else who wants to aspire to something. We spend a lot of time in America and that's the prevailing ideology over there - positive thoughts will get you better results than wallowing in cynicism!

