

DON AIREY

After contributing to so many classic records with so many legendary artists, Deep Purple keyboard wizard Don Airey has taken time to record another solo album named 'All Out'. Packed with vibrant tracks featuring Don's Hammond organ to the fore, the album is a neat mix of instrumentals, original songs and even a Hendrix cover to boot. Backed by an all star band and featuring an array of top name special guests, James Gaden got in touch to hear all about it.

I've been listening to your album and I really rather like it.
Oh, right. Good!

Are you pleased with how it has come out?
Oh yes, definitely.

I was impressed by the mix of material - I've not heard one of your solo albums before and wasn't entirely sure what to expect, but I was pleasantly surprised at how rocky and song orientated it is. I thought you got a good mix of instrumentals with vocal led songs.

That's right, I tried to make it almost half and half really.

I thought it was a good juxtaposition - it probably happened naturally because of your sound, but I found some of the instrumentals had a Deep Purple vibe to them. I was intrigued by the title though - when I saw it was called 'All Out' I thought it maybe meant it was an all out rock record, but the track 'Right Hand Overture' suggests a cricket theme?

Yeah, it's both! (laughs) One of the parts of 'Right Arm Overture' is called 'All Out' and that track does refer to cricket - when you go into bat the umpire says "Right arm over, six to come" or whatever, so 'Right Arm Overture' is a play on words of that. But it also refers to how we recorded it - most of the album was recorded live, the bass, drums and Hammond anyway. Most were done in one or two takes to really try and capture the excitement, as well as the musicianship of the guys playing.

Oh yeah, I was really impressed with the line-up you have on there... I'd seen Darrin Mooney with Gary Moore when he had Scars on the go, I know Laurence Cottle form his spell in Black Sabbath and Rob Harris from Jamiroquai, because I like some of their stuff. I know of Carl Sentence on vocals because I mentioned to you the first time I interviewed you, I'd seen him with the Whole Lotta Metal show alongside Matt Moreton from Phenomena and Tony Martin from Black Sabbath. He was great and I noticed he is heavily involved in the co-writing of the songs with vocals on this album.

Yes, he co-writes four or five tracks on there, we've written quite a few together now actually. We've always got on, I've known Carl about five years and we like working together. He's a great singer and a talented lyricist - he's just great.

When you work with Carl, are you the sort of partnership who send stuff back and forth to each other, or do you sit down together to write?

What I do is journey to him - he lives in Leicestershire, so I drive up there, have a cup of coffee and he plays me whatever he's got and puts it on a disk. I then take it away with me. I'm usually there for about half an hour or so. Then I take it home and sift through his ideas and turn maybe two or three pieces into a song. Then I'll go back to him with that and he'll put a melody and lyrics to it. That's the usual style we work.

It works very well, there were some cool songs on there - my favourite being 'People In Your Head'. And with the instrumentals, the way they fit together with the rock stuff with Carl, it meshes really neatly... yet when I looked up 'Estancia' I discovered it was from a ballet from the 1940's! Did you have to work hard to make it sound right for the album or did it just come out

that way because of the musicians involved?

Oh, the Alberto Ginastera piece. Yes - it's a piece of music I've always loved, 'Estancia' - the whole suite. Keith Emerson tackled one bit of it on his last album, so I thought 'Well, I'm not standing by and letting that happen'. (laughs) So I decided to tackle the opening! but there wasn't a great deal of preparation to it. We tried it a couple of times, just Darrin, Laurence and myself, and we found an intro for it, shortened a couple of bits, decided where to put the solos and just went for it. Really, none of us knew what was happening! (laughs) It's quite a difficult thing to play on keyboards, but I think we managed to capture the excitement of it. It's raw, the organ is full on and the drum mic's are picking up some of the Hammond, because I'm quite loud in the studio. It was a difficult piece to do, but I really like the way it came out.

I do too - it's rare for me to enjoy a lot of instrumentals, I'm much more into songs with vocalists. usually an album with two instrumentals is about my limit but with yours, I didn't really notice that there were more than two because they complimented the rest of the material so well. That's a compliment, because I was just enjoying the record for what it was. Also there's a great cover of Jimi Hendrix's 'Fire' included - what made you chose that?

I forget what we had been working on, it might even have been the day we tackled Ginastera, but we went to the pub for a pint, came back and... it's a version we'd been knocking around for a while and we just played it, I think it was one take, just my, the bass and drums. Rob Harris came in afterwards and added the guitar and Carl put the vocal on at the end. It was a real hell for leather kind of thing.

I thought it worked well - that's my favourite Jimi Hendrix song, I think it's quite underrated. People often cite 'Purple Haze' or 'Voodoo Chile' or whatever, but you captured the intensity of it.

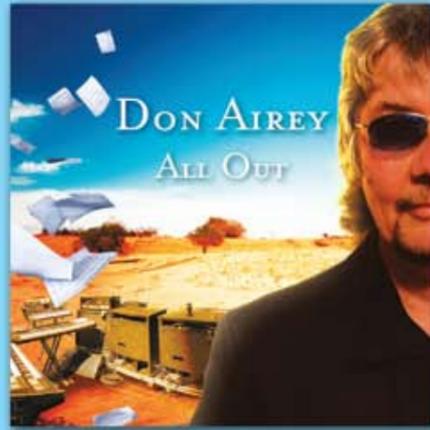
Yeah - it's like all great songs, it has an elasticity about it so you can take liberties and make some of it your own. But the more you make it your own, the more it's Hendrix's, know what I mean? (laughs)

I have to mention the album's closer, 'Tobruk', which is the epic of the album, spanning about ten minutes. I was wondering how that started life - was that Carl's idea and you built from there, or more your doing? Where did the inspiration come from?

Most of the ideas of that were mine, I had a specific idea about trying to create what it was like to have been at the siege of Tobruk during the Second World War, in music and sound. The ideas for the lyrics, there's a book about Tobruk written by someone who was there and the ideas for the lyrics were from that. I gave Carl the book to read and he got the suffering, the air of how difficult it was to have been there for 246 days, he really captured that. The line 'We started out as ordinary men' actually comes out of the book. It was written by an Australian who looked as the regiment marching past him, all hollow, sunburnt and resolute after the horror they had been through. The notion that they started as ordinary men, but weren't ordinary any more, it was a wonderful thing and I was pleased we could incorporate it into the song.

Obviously, you are on the road with Deep Purple for a large portion of the year, so do you write on the bus or anything? Because I'm quite impressed how you've amassed this material and recorded it in what must have been a short time.

I'm always recording sound checks. Usually, I'm the



only one at sound checks with Deep Purple! (laughs) Sometimes the drum tech will play drums and our guitar tech is quite a fine player so I'll jam with them and a lot of ideas come out of that.

Right - well, like I say, it's impressive how cohesive it is, it doesn't strike me as a cobbled together album.

You're thinking about it even when you don't realise you're thinking about it, do you know what I mean? There was a melancholy air about the three instrumentals and 'Tobruk' is a pretty bleak concept, it's not about something very nice. I wanted to use those and the other thing I knew I wanted to do on a record was record the Hammond to get the best sound I could out of it - before either it or I go! (laughs) The way it's going, I think it'll outlive me!

(Laughs) I think you managed it, it's a vibrant sounding record, it sounds quite live and as you said the bass, drums and Hammond were all pretty much recorded that way, it hasn't lost any urgency in the final mix.

That's all credit to Chapel Studios and the engineer Ewan Davies. They have about twenty grand's worth of microphones just hanging in the air, aside from the usual close mic stuff. Those in the air are expensive microphones to capture the ambience of the band playing. That's what I wanted to use. I had quite an array of stuff - I was using two very powerful 147 Leslies, and the organ also went through a Marshall stack in the guitar room, AND it was going through a Hughes and Kettner Puretone amp. It wasn't quiet! Laurence Cottle was going through an Ampeg bass amp, so we really were trying to be loud. So there was no re-doing solos or stuff, it was go out there and be counted! (laughs)

I notice you have some great guest guitarists on here too - your brother Keith, Bernie Marsden and Joe Bonamassa. When you were putting the album together, did you have them in mind for specific tracks?

Joe, I was very keen to meet him. Purple met him in Rome, we had a night off and Joe was on. I phoned up his record company, got us tickets and we went to see him. We met him before the show and he was a very charming guy. During the show we were in the second row, right in front of him and he wasn't fazed in the least. It was a great evening, so afterward I broached the subject and asked him if he wanted to play on a track. He said "Oh, just send it over" and I sent it to Kevin Shirley's place in Malibu where he was working. About a day later it came back and it was just splendid! We put it in and Ewan Davies said it was the easiest guitar track he'd ever had to do. It just came leaping off the computer - wonderful.

To be honest, I'd missed his solo work, it wasn't until Black Country Communion, because I'm a huge Glenn Hughes fan, that I heard him. Since then I've listened to his solo work and he is an awesome player.

I've know about him for quite a long time - he just gets better all the time. I played with him at the Royal Albert Hall on Friday, at the Sunflower Jam. He was just fantastic - he takes the bull by the horns. He played a Gary Moore track, 'Midnight Blues'. It was very touching, beautifully played.

I think Joe has picked up the mantle of blues guitarists where Gary Moore left off.

Yes, in fact I had quite a long chat with him and he's very open about his debt to Gary. Very open indeed.

On your album, there's a track called 'B'Cos' which is almost entirely instrumental, but has the one word "because" spoken by a young boy called George Dransfield - who is he?

(Laughs) Oh, he's the son of Andy and Louise Dransfield who own Chapel Studios. He's seven years old, and I asked him to do that one word for the track. It was a big deal for him, but we were both very pleased with it in the end.

I take it he is the little boy pictured in the back of the booklet, wearing the shades and throwing up the Dio devil horn hand gestures? (laughs)

Yes, that's him, he made it into the booklet - and quite right too, after the stress I put him through!

Did he need numerous takes to get it right? (laughs)

He did about five I think, he kept trying to "act" it, but I said not to worry, just say it and that's what I used.

Was the whole album done in that one studio then, or did you assemble bits elsewhere first?

I assembled some of the keyboards in my own studio - the air raid on 'Tobruk' for example was mostly done in my studio. Some of the synth stuff was done there, but most of it was done at Chapel. I just love the vibe there, there was a great work ethic because they have such great sound there.

Lately, since 'Rapture Of The Deep' came out, we've had Ian Gillan release 'One Eye To Morocco', Roger Glover has done 'If Life Was Easy' and you've finished 'All Out' - is it necessary to do your own projects in order to stay fresh for Deep Purple?

It's nice to keep your hand in, recording. Out on the road, it's very easy to forget what brought you there, which is the records. If you want to keep touring, you need to put out a good record every now and then. With Purple albums now, there is a four or five year gap between them so it's nice to do a record in between times.

The rule is we can't really play on each other's albums - I contributed one overdub for Roger's record, but the thing about working together on a recording that isn't Deep Purple is not really allowed under the terms of the Purple recording contract, but that's good, because when you come back and you do get together, it's a nice surprise, you forget how good it is.

As you're one of the top keyboard players in the business and you've played with just about everybody who is worth playing with, what keyboard players do you look up to?

There's a lot - I've listened to Jon Lord with nothing but admiration. He was playing at the Sunflower Jam as well - he was just magnificent. He jumped on a Hammond and did a solo that was just so top drawer... it was beautiful. Rick Wakeman was playing too and I've always admired what Rick did with yes, that was fabulous. But the person I admire the most

is Keith Emerson, I have to say. Just for his work with The Nice and the early E.L.P. stuff - his composing puts him in a different category to Jon or Rick. He's someone I really think the world of. Other people I like are from other genres. Bill Evans, the jazz player, I have a stack of his live stuff, he was a wonderful pianist. Jimmy Smith of course, Jan Hammer, Chick Corea. I think those guys have inspired me the most over the years.

With your brother Keith, he's as talented and in demand on guitar as you are on keyboards. Were you always into those respective instruments, or have you ever dabbled on guitar and vice versa?

No, I picked up a guitar once, it was Gary Moore's Les Paul. I strummed a single string, thought "Ooh, that's good" and that was about it. I've never tried playing one, no.

I just wondered - some musicians try a few things before settling on one instrument, some are drawn to one from the word go. I was just curious with yourself and Keith being so well respected on guitar and keyboards respectively if you'd ever crossed.

No - Keith couldn't get on the piano at home when we were younger, because if I wasn't on it, my other brother Paul was, so he had to find himself a guitar! (laughs)

Recently Deep Purple have been playing with an orchestra - what did you think of the shows?

It was one of those things where you thought "Ooh, is this going to work out?" but it really did work out. It was a great thing to do. We've just toured America with it, got great reviews, great turnouts and a great reception. It really gave the band a kick up the arse too.

Last time we talked, you mentioned you were working on a book. Is that still on the go?

Yeah, I stopped working on it for a while because I was reviewing it and thought that maybe I shouldn't put it out, because the people in it are my friends and you're telling people things that maybe you shouldn't be telling. But since Gary died, I was so shocked, I thought that maybe people should have the chance to hear more about this guy that they maybe didn't know. So I've started up on it again.

One final question, more for my own personal interest than anything else - whether you can even answer it I don't know. Out of all the people you've worked with, who would you rate as the

best singer?

The best singer? Ooh... it's very hard to say. Graham Bonnet comes to mind - in his heyday, when I was in Rainbow, he was quite astonishing. The last gig he did with the band was the Donington Festival and Ozzy was there. Ozzy described it as the greatest performance he'd ever seen by a singer. But it's very hard to pick one - Ian Gillan is just so impressive, to do it night after night. I've just been working with Danny Bowes who is superb. Comparisons are odious, it's not good to compare people. I just feel lucky to have been there with some of these guys, to witness it. It's difficult to detach yourself from working with them.

I mean David Coverdale, there's another one. He's done some extraordinary things on record. He gets some bad press really, he's extraordinarily underrated, the talent he's got, the ability he has to deliver a vocal, deliver a song.

I think what maybe started it was when he went for the more American market and had his blonde hair and started singing in a higher key, some people accused him of trying to be Robert Plant. Before that he was always touted as a top blues rock singer and I think there was a bit of backlash at him "selling out" to make it bigger. Another one I'm a big fan of who you worked with is Joe Lynn Turner.

Yeah, he's an tremendous singer...

And Jimmy Barnes, another of my favourites because you did Living Loud with him...

Not forgetting Jimmy Barnes! (laughs) Jimmy is amazing, he doesn't even need a microphone really. God he's loud!

Oh, I know! I saw him in Newcastle last week and it was the loudest gig I'd ever seen. My ears rang longer after that than any other show I've seen!

Is he on tour?

He was, he only did about four shows. He played at the Hope Festival, then did Newcastle, Glasgow and Shepherds Bush. That's how well promoted it was - obviously you had no idea, I only found out because I went on the Shepherds Bush Empire's website to book for Mr Big and saw Jimmy's name listed. But it was great - he blasted through a great set of stuff, not solo spots, just class song after class song.

Oh, heavens. I'd loved to have gone and seen him. He's a fantastic pro.

I really enjoyed that Living Loud record, I was hoping there would have been a second one but I guess you're all too busy?

I don't quite know what happened. I think, when I went to work on it, Bob Daisley and I spent so much time laughing about the old day, I think the record company thought they wouldn't get another one out of us! (laughs)