

We Are Huge Rockstars!



Few bands can claim to release their debut album with their third CD, but essentially that's what Fozzy have done. Now a gimmick free, original hard rocking metal act, featuring gifted musicians like Rich Ward of Stuck Mojo fame, and fronted by a talented and charismatic vocalist in the form of WWE wrestler Chris Jericho (pictured above, centre), Fozzy are set to turn some heads with their latest album 'All That Remains'. The following interview was scheduled for one fall as 'Pretty Boy' James Gaden went one on one with the 'Ayatollah of Rock and Rolla', Y2J Chris Jericho himself.

Chris Jericho is not a man who is easily dissuaded. Starting his pro-wrestling career over fifteen years ago, he was told he wasn't big enough to make the big time. Unperturbed, his charisma and skill ensured he won every major singles title the WWE had to offer, including the Intercontinental title a record seven times and he became the first ever Undisputed Champion. He has his own talk show segment called the 'Highlight Reel' on the flagship WWE show 'RAW' and hosts his own radio slot. With all that, he formed his own band called Fozzy who now seem to have shaken loose the 'novelty/comedy' tag and be taken as a serious hard rocking force.

It's no secret I'm a big WWE fan, and I've been a fan of Jericho since I saw him wrestle. I was as sceptical as the next man when the first Fozzy album came out, but it turns out not only were they a talented band as a cover outfit, they also could pen some mean compositions. Now with the release of their first completely original CD 'All That Remains' (which suitably impressed my colleague Mike Newdeck in the last issue of Fireworks) I met up with Chris before Fozzy's show at the Astoria, which as I state in my review in 'Firin' On All Six' turned out to be probably the best concert I've been to.

The debut album featured the band as a spoof cover outfit with ridiculous aliases (Jericho was 'Moongoose McQueen'), so I asked Chris how the reinvention of the band came about.

"What happened was it was almost a side project," he explains. "A hobby that I had with

Rich. We had a lot of things in common and a lot of musical taste the same and we said what we should do is form a band and have some fun. So that's what we did. We just got together in a garage and started playing some covers like any other band and we did a couple of shows, just playing covers and having some fun. Word of this got out and we got offers of three record deals, from three separate companies, based on who was in it, the covers... that's how it all started and we got signed sight unseen, sound unheard. Because we had Rich and Frank from Stuck Mojo, and me from the WWE."

Catching a break to get a deal was one thing, but Chris wasn't content just being a cover act.

"There's a million cover bands out there, so we came up with a concept to be a little bit more creative. We claimed that the songs were really ours and they were stolen from us. The record company loved that so we made a documentary / mockumentary and that's how the whole thing started."

The concept turned out to be a highly amusing storyline of how Fozzy became stranded in Japan after signing a dodgy contract that trapped them there for twenty years, while acts like Dio, Judas Priest, Mötley Crüe and The Scorpions "stole" the "Fozzy" tracks such as 'Live Wire', 'Ridin' On The Wind' etc and became famous with them. The half hour spoof documentary added to this. Two genuine original tracks did nestle on the first release with the cover versions. Their second album 'Happenstance' included four originals, which in

my view overshadowed some of the covers. I was not alone in this belief.

"As we continued to play, and as the first two or three years of the bands existence went by, we amassed a pretty good fan following," Chris continues. "We had some of our own songs and a lot of people wanted to hear more originals. The gimmick ran its course. We decided we could either continue on writing original stuff, or we could stop playing because the gimmick was done and it we could just say was fun while it lasted."

"We decided it was time to move on," he adds. "We had great chemistry as a band and loved playing together, we had a great fan base and we have some great songwriters in the band. We elected to continue on playing original stuff so it was kind of a natural evolution of the band. It just so happens we had a record deal when we first started, so this is our third record but in a lot of ways it's like our debut because it's our first one with all our own stuff on it."

Indeed, no more is he Moongoose McQueen - he is simply billed as Chris Jericho, and the band don't sound like an eighties hair metal act anymore, they sound like a serious nu-metal outfit. I point out the change of style to Chris.

"Everyone kept saying the covers are cool but the originals are what we really wanna hear. Rich is one of the best songwriters in metal, he had so many songs to write, and we had great chemistry like I said, so it was a natural progression that led us to here. We knew we had one chance to really show what we could do as an original band so we really spent a lot

of time to make 'All That Remains' the best possible record it could be. We wanted to turn a few heads and all across the board reviews from fans and critics have been the same: pleasantly surprised and shocked as to how good the band is. That's a compliment to us because we're showing right away that we have something to say and people are getting into it. A lot of people might not like the band because of the gimmick or because there's a wrestler in the band or whatever, but to me... It doesn't matter if you're a butcher, baker or candlestick maker, it's either good music or it's not. Everybody that listens to it realises it's good music."

I confess to Chris that I bought the first Fozzy album because I'm a fan of his from WWE's 'RAW' show, but I was really impressed with his voice. I was pleasantly surprised to find he has a better range than most rock singers, especially with some of his screams. His vocals on Priest's 'Riding On The Wind' are a very good Rob Halford impression, so I ask him how did he find out he was capable of that?

"Well," he states, "It's not like I just showed up one day and said 'Hey, I wanna be a rock star'! I've been a musician a lot longer than I've been a wrestler. I started playing in bands when I was thirteen years old. I've been a huge music fan since I was eight. All I wanted to do when I was a kid was be in a rock band, or be a wrestler. I went the wrestling route but I still played with bands and recorded my own stuff. Even when I first started wrestling I still had band projects. Nothing as huge or as good as Fozzy but still kept my foot in it because music is a passion of mine. When I got chance to hook up with Rich in 1999, it gave me a chance to slowly but surely realise that this dream of being in a rock band, and playing the Astoria like we are, shows me how far we've come and how far we have to go still. It's a huge honour to be playing with the guys I'm playing with and I've been fortunate enough to live two dreams that I always wanted to do when I was growing up."

I pointed out to Chris that sometimes he combined the two - Fozzy have played live on 'RAW' a couple of times which is what made me aware of their existence in the first place.

"Yeah, exactly," Chris nods. "We do a lot of shows after RAW, so a lot of times I have to do double duty - wrestle and then sing afterwards. It's almost more fun to do it the way I'm doing it at the moment, concentrating on one thing tonight which is the band. It's cool to come here - when we first came to England in February we played four shows and they were all sold out, so it was good to know we had a big fan base. Some are wrestling fans, some are Stuck Mojo fans but the majority are Fozzy fans because they dig the music of the band, which is very important. We have a decent following in the States, but it seems England is our biggest market right now. That's why we're so excited to come back again so quickly to the Astoria, and return again in June to play the Download Festival. It's huge for us and we just want to keep building the fan base to give us chance to keep coming back here. I'm excited to be part of something that's growing. I've put a lot of work into it - we all have. It reminds me of when I first started wrestling. The Chris Jericho name was rising in wrestling and the same thing is happening to Fozzy in the music world. I was told I was too small to make it, but I thought fuck it, I don't care. I'm gonna do it. Same thing with Fozzy. 'You're a wrestler, you can't possibly be in a band.' Why not? My band rules. We'll go toe to toe with any band live, and I think people who come to our shows and hear our music will agree with me on that."



I had no doubts when I witnessed the show. I asked Chris if Fozzy grew to a point where he had to choose between his wrestling career and his band, what would happen?

"I've been wrestling for fifteen years," he muses. "I've been in showbiz for fifteen years. I've done so much in wrestling, more than I ever thought that I would. If the band continues to grow and opportunities came up, I'd be crazy not to go with that. The bigger the band gets, the more chances there are for us to do things. It's exciting and very cool because it's something I always wanted to do. To play with these guys... they're seasoned veterans. Not just their musicianship, but performance wise. I haven't been in music for fifteen years, but I've been in entertainment and a lot of the same principles apply for entertaining a crowd and knowing how to put on a good show. We believe in the music but the show is very important. It's not like we have bombs and pyros, giant hands inflating... we have five great entertainers on stage. I can't think of one show we've ever had, with the exception of when we played with the Murder Junkies, where the crowd didn't have a great time and a lot of fun. I think that's why we're back here so soon, because the fans in England realise that."

With an energised live show, a busy WWE schedule and a radio show, I wondered how on earth Chris could write on an album as strong as 'All That Remains'. He has writing credits on no less than seven of the ten tracks on the cd.

"Rich writes the majority of the songs," he tells me. "He's the master songwriter. He spent a lot of time on the material for this album so we could really turn some heads. I contribute lyrically. Concepts and songtitles are what I'm really into. Songs like 'Nameless Faceless', 'Wanderlust', 'Daze Of The Weak', those were my concepts and lyrics. Rich presents songs and melody lines and I contribute lyrics and my ideas. We go from there. The last two records, we wrote lyrics and melody lines in the studio, but this one, we were ready to go when we got to the studio. We had to get it right and make a statement because we knew we only had one chance, and I think we hit a home run with it."

He's right, it sounds a fresh, inspiring metal record. That brings me to another good original which has yet to land on any Fozzy CD, a track called 'Don't You Wish You Were Me' that the band put on a WWE theme tune CD. I ask him if Fozzy will breathe new life into it?

"Yeah, I've thought about that," he confirms. "It was cool, it was on the WWE record. We're not happy with the production on it. It sounds like we performed it inside of the ring-bell. But it's a great song and people love to hear it, so yeah, maybe we could re-record it and remix it."

With that in mind I presume there must be a grand plan for a whole host of Fozzy albums in the future?

"Absolutely, yeah. 'All That Remains' is the tip of the iceberg," he states proudly. "This was a turning point for us - either it would be a success or we'd pack it up. But it's being a rousing success all across the world. We've just come from Germany, we're back in England, we've got shows booked in the US and Canada, we're going to tour Australia. This is the start for us - like Pantera started out differently then found a groove and ran with it. I think it's going to be the same with Fozzy."

I share a thought aloud with Chris about the original mockumentary DVD. It's tied up in red tape so only a certain amount made it out to the public. If the band are doing well without the gimmick, perhaps it's better not many people saw it?

"Yeah," he says, but he's not convinced. "It's kind of a cult thing, a lot of people heard about it. It was all the rage at Ozzfest a couple of years ago. Zakk (Wylde) watched it on his bus every day, and even Ozzy saw it which was cool. So yeah, by turning over a new leaf maybe it is better if you can't find it, but maybe after a couple more records like this it would be cool to still have it come out. It was such a great piece of work, it's very funny and we had some great guests. Zakk was in it, Mike Portnoy, Dee Snider, Sebastian Bach. It was good as a piece of art and I'd love people to get a chance to see it. Unfortunately, we don't own it, even though we wrote it, directed it, produced it and starred in it. Just one of those red tape bullshit things. Maybe sometime in the future though people can enjoy it, because it is very funny. It was very much a tribute to Spinal Tap, The Blues Brothers, that type of thing. If we did it now, you'd appreciate the bands sense of humour, but back then, that's all that we were about - the gimmick."

To digress for a moment, I tracked down a copy and I have to say, it is hilarious and only endeared me more to Fozzy, which is why Chris is so obviously proud of it.

"We thought about changing the name of the band," Chris adds, referring to the dropping of the gimmick and starting over, "but we'd sold 100,000 records worldwide and we had a brand name as Fozzy. So what are we going to do, change our name to 'Walls Of Jericho' or something like that? Actually, I think there is a band called that but you know what I mean. Fozzy is a strange name, but so is Queens Of The Stone Age. Aerosmith. Def Leppard. What the fuck is a Def Leppard? But you hear a name over and over it becomes natural. So we thought it was better to continue with Fozzy as it is."

So with that in mind, and my conversion to Fozzy utterly without question, I give Chris a final platform to speak before his band rocked the house.

"I'd just say that fozzyrock.com is our website and if you haven't checked out 'All That Remains'.... if you have one of our old albums I think you'll love it. If you haven't heard us before give it a chance and I think you'll be pleasantly surprised like everybody else that's heard it. And just to say thanks to all who've supported us. We really appreciate it and keep on spreading the Fozzpell!"

I know I will, and I'll start by telling readers the video for 'My Enemy' can be viewed at iFilm.com which will give you a taste of the album. Fozzy rock!

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