



BACK IN TIME

JAMES GADEN INTERVIEWS HUEY LEWIS

With an estimated 30 million records sold, Huey Lewis And The News have achieved huge success with their inimitable brand of good time rock 'n' roll fused with soul and doo-wop influences. Releasing their first album all the way back in 1980 as a six piece consisting of Huey Lewis on vocals, Chris Hayes on guitar, Johnny Colla on guitar and saxophone, Marco Cippolina on bass, Bill Gibson on drums and Sean Hopper on keyboards, the band managed to keep the same line-up together for twenty years. The first album not to feature the original line-up was 'Plan B'. That record saw a horns section added to the group and a more soul and R'n'B influenced sound. After celebrating their 25th anniversary with a live album and DVD, The News are back with a brand new studio record, 'Soulsville', recorded in Memphis at Ardent studios to embrace classic material from the Stax Records era. After getting in touch with Huey's PR guy Alan, I was instructed to call a hotel in London where he would promptly pass me over to the witty and affable vocalist. When a man's voice answered, I assumed it was Alan - which resulted in one of the easiest starts to an interview I've ever had!

Hi, Alan?

Is this James? It's Huey.

Oh! Hi Huey, are you well?

Yeah - you wanna talk to Alan?

No, I was...

Hey, Alan has been here all day, he knows all the answers!

(Laughs) No worries, I just expected him to answer the phone. I'd rather speak to you anyway if truth be told!

Aw, wait until I tell Alan, he's gonna be hurt!

I don't care, you've made more records that I like than he has! (laughs) It's great to have the chance to interview you, I've been listening to you since I was in college.

Well don't you have excellent musical taste!

(Laughs) I keep telling people, it's good you spotted it! I'm really pleased you have a new album out - it's been ages since the last one, 'Plan B', and you brought in the extra horns section for the album. You sometimes had a full horns section live, I remember you had the Tower Of Power for a while, but on record it was usually just Johnny Colla's saxophone. On 'Plan B' you added the full horn section and those guys were on the 'Live At 25' DVD so I think you were already heading in this direction. 'Plan B' was quite R&B influenced, so I think it's helped bridge the gap to this album.

You mean why haven't we had an album out for nine years?

Yeah, that's as good a way to put it as anything!

Well, I'm a fisherman, I've been fishing...

Okay...

...and the fishing was SO good... - no. (laughs) Seriously, we have been writing, but it's hard to write anymore with

be accessible though, hence the Staple Singers thing... and 'Cry To Me', we were going for more of the Soloman Burke version. We wanted people to still be able to connect with it, while giving us the chance to stretch it out a bit, do some Johnnie Taylor. People know his songs like 'Disco Lady' and 'Who's Making Love' but the rest of his work, it's so much deeper and richer than those two.

That's right - and when you look at whose material you have on here, even with avoiding the classics you still have songs by Isaac Hayes, Joe Tex, Eddie Floyd... it makes you realize how many great songs those guys put out.

Yeah! And I must say we had the benefit of a second look if you will. Listening back to the originals for this, we'd hear things now as professionals and think 'Ooh, that's why that wasn't a big hit!' For an example, 'Don't Fight It' - the Pickett tune, it's a great song but the background vocals on the original are frighteningly out of tune! When you hear it - whoa, no wonder that's not one of his best known! (laughs) With the Eddie Floyd tune we re-wrote it just a little bit, with the Pickett tune we did the modulation kind of thing... we did the things that, I suspected, if the original guys had of had more time, they would've done. But they put them out so fast back then...

It was like a conveyor belt.

Yeah, it was.

I saw that you cut the album basically like a ten piece live. Did you just book a block of studio time and bang them out like those guys in the old days?

Yeah... they gave us studio B, we were going to try and get us all on one studio but there's so many of us now, we got studio B over at Ardent. Proper recording studios don't have a lot of business nowadays, so we put the horns section in B with a video feed to Billy, our drummer, in studio A. The rest of us were in A with him and we cut them like that. Then we'd go back and listen to what we'd done. People were allowed to fix a measure or two, I allowed them to do that, but no overdubbing, no re-recording parts. If say the bass player made too many mistakes, we'd all just go back and cut the song again rather than fix it individually. But that almost never happened. We were well rehearsed. The horns section would maybe go by and do the third chorus again or something, but that was about it. A bunch of them, maybe five of them on there were first takes. We'd add the girls for the backing singing, they were overdubbed. Sometimes my vocal was overdubbed, but there's three songs on there, my vocals are the original live first take with the band. With the Otis Redding tune 'Just One More Day', that doesn't have any girls on it, that was a complete live performance from start to finish, no fixes, no overdubs.

Fantastic! Well that's how it should be when you've got a tight band that knows what they're doing.

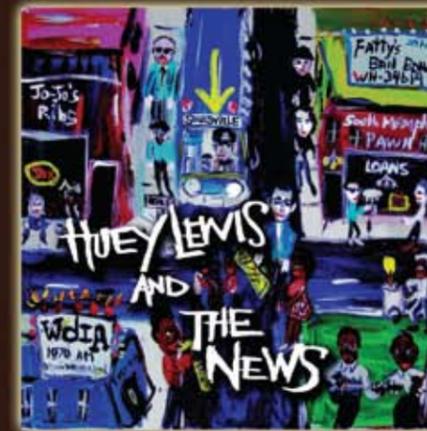
Yeah! And you know what? Man was that fun! It's so much better capturing a performance than creating a song piece by piece.

It feels like you all were really into what you were doing too. It doesn't feel too polished or sterile, it has some warmth to it which is right for the material.

Yeah - it really went down like butter, y'know? The Otis tune was tough, we're careful with this stuff. We were doing an Otis Redding song, y'know? He's a tough act to follow man, there was no way I could do 'Try A Little Tenderness', that's for sure! So we chose this song and I was worried, man. It's tough to do. But we did it in one complete performance and when I played it back, I took it as a signal from the soul gods, saying 'Do it boys, it's alright!' (laughs)

I really enjoyed the album. I saw you got Jim Gaines to produce it, who of course did the 'Sports' album with you. He'd worked with Stax people originally, so was that why you wanted him back in the fold?

Actually, that's why we chose him originally. Our first record was produced by a buddy of mine, Bill Schnee, but it didn't do nuthin'. My manager convinced the record label that we could produce our own records. We needed



a hit and if anybody was going to make a hit, without losing the bands integrity, I wanted to be the one to draw that line myself. So my manager got the label to let us produce the records. We did need an engineer though and one of the ones we used who shared a vision was Jim Gaines. Gaines had cut Steve Miller before that and he was such a funky cat, he wasn't even in the music business anymore. He was living in Oregon, repairing windshields! I asked for him and the label was Chrysalis who were based over here in Britain. They couldn't control us all those thousands of miles away so they said it was okay.

So he did the 'Sports' album with us and would go on to produce Santana and Journey. He's no spring chicken, he's even older than I am! (laughs) He went back to Memphis where he's from and part of the idea of doing this record was we'd go down to Memphis, get Jimmy on board and do it right there in Ardent Studios.

It worked, it sounds great. I remember when you did 'Four Chords And Several Years Ago' you went all out to do that in the same way the originals were done, using the same old gear and old techniques. Did you think about using that approach with this?

Yeah, we did think about it but we elected to just be sticklers musically. Sure, we could've cut it analogue, but digital is good because we knew if we wanted to bring it with us we could, so we just cut with Pro-Tools. We didn't use all the tuning stuff and things that that gear provides, we just recorded ourselves with it. To be really authentic we should've gone analogue but I'm not that strict. We still used old tube mikes and great pre-amps and stuff. But for the recording and editing, Pro-Tools was easier and we didn't have to drag boxes of tapes everywhere we go!

Do you find technology has improved things for musicians or do you think all these advances have hindered growth, with computers being able to contribute so much now? Obviously you've been making records a long time and have done it a variety of ways, so how do you think they compare?



I like it old school, but I don't think I could ever say one way is better or worse. For me, like I say, I just want to capture a performance. Then again, Mutt Lange is a buddy of mine, he produced the Clover records we did before The News came along. Mutt's a guy who does it completely differently. We disagree on just about everything, but you can't say his way is wrong because he's had big hits and people love him. It's just different - for me, it's old school because I like the ambience, I like the feeling of a band playing off each other. I can hear that in the tracks. Most people probably can't but to me, I can tell when a band has cut something as a unit or pieced something together. I like it when it's been captured live.

It certainly works with your band because obviously, the nucleus of The News is still there, you still have Johnny, Bill and Sean who've been there from the very beginning. You're a very tight band and have always been a good live act, so why not do it that way?

Yeah - we can, so why not? By the way, I think we've gotten much better. We're still improving. If there's a little mistake, we actually embrace it. That's easy to do as long as there's only one or two. You have to be good enough to do that. When we started out, we weren't of that mindset frankly, but we are now.

When I was going back through the records, it struck me that because you've had so few line up changes, when Stef Burns came in to replace Chris Hayes, I always look at Stef as the "new guy". But in fact, he's been with you for ten years! (laughs)

(Laughs) Yeah, he has! He's great, he can play anything.

How did you find him?

He's a local guy, he's played with Prince, Alice Cooper... I've known him since before we happened. He's a nice guy, from the East Bay. We auditioned him when Chris left and I didn't think he'd fit, I thought 'Oh, he's worked with Alice Cooper, he's not going to gel with our stuff'. But he's such an accomplished musician, he got it, he knew what we wanted and sure enough he did.

You mentioned earlier about writing and it was difficult in the current market, but you did contribute a new song for the movie 'Pineapple Express' that was out a year or two back. How did that come about?

Right. Well, Seth Rogen and Judd Apatow, along with their music guy at Sony, they were fans and they just asked us. I said sure and asked what they wanted. They told me about the movie and I said we'll if it's all about smoking dope it's gotta be reggae! (laughs) They said that they already had some of that on there, so I basically let them design the tune. We wrote a couple of ideas musically and they chose one - when we got that decision, then we finished it up for them properly.

Which brings me nicely to another film you contributed to, which has just been reissued on Blu-Ray and having a re-release at cinemas. That was of course 'Back To The Future' which you had a cameo in.

Yeah - I do always point out though that 'Power Of Love' was already number one when the movie was released - it was already a hit anyway. But when the movie came out, it became a huge international hit. That really helped our career because we got to tour the world with that stuff and make friends and fans worldwide. I really cherish that. Not to take anything away from fans in America, the fans here in the UK are more discerning and more loyal, the American fans can have a short attention span. The fans over here like us for the right reasons I think.

Are you looking to tour over here to promote the record?

Yeah, we've just been talking about that, that's exactly part of the plan. After you write your article, obviously people will buy the record in droves, then we'll be able to come over in the spring!

So there you have it - please buy Huey's new record so he can come to the UK to play. If you don't, he's going to think it's all my fault.