

Some songs are just classics from the day they're written. One of those is 'Eye Of The Tiger', the masterpiece from the 'Rocky III' film which is one of the most recognised rock anthems ever penned. When you co-write a song like that, you'd think it's a tough act to follow, but when you're a guy who co-wrote 'Burning Heart' for the sequel, and penned 'Vehicle' before either of these songs and find that gets used in a Stallone film as well, it's all in a day's work.

Jim Peterik is that man, and not content with being the driving force behind The Ides Of March, Pride of Lions and his work with his former band Survivor, he has released a new solo album entitled 'Above The Storm' - his first solo album since 1976! James Gaden caught up with the legendary Mr Peterik to talk about his new album, Survivor's new album, and all things in between...

Jim calls me at the agreed time, and after pleasantries are exchanged, I begin by telling him how impressed I am with his new CD. I explain I've been a fan of his work outside Survivor for a long time, and the new CD represents a new sound for him. Some parts of it reminded me of the Ides Of March, and parts reminded me of Pride Of Lions, but the other stuff... it was something else. So that led me to ask is this album made up of songs written over a long period of time and gathered for this release, or did he set aside some time recently to just pen brand new material for this record?

"It's kind of a combination," Jim replies. "It's been thirty years since my last solo album. I took a little detour with a thing called Survivor, just seventeen years," he laughs "and I've been with the Ides Of March now for forty one years... I thought it was time to put together some songs that speak from the heart. Not that I don't with Pride Of Lions, but this was for me to use my own voice, not rely on the great singers I've had to work with.

"I had about three songs I'd written with Johnny and Donnie Van Zant. 'Live Life' was written with Lynyrd Skynyrd in mind, but they didn't record it, so I ended up with a stockpile of songs that didn't have a home. They weren't right for Pride of Lions - I know how that should sound, it's a specific style I write for. Kinda like Survivor side-ways, you know? And I get to write for Toby's voice, where there's no limit. I can write any melody I choose, and he just says 'No problem'. When I write for myself, or Donnie Van Zant, my range is a little bit limited, so you rely on what comes from your emotions to put the message across. If there's one theme that unites this record it's that the songs all come from the heart. They speak about things I really care about and feel passionately about. They weren't written to fit a certain marketplace per se - in fact I was surprised Frontiers wanted to put it out. It doesn't fit with their usual Journey / Toto / Survivor sound - that's not a slam to Frontiers at all, it's just they know their market.

"I casually mentioned to Serafino I was thinking of doing a solo record and I said 'You probably wouldn't be interested in it'. It turned out to be a great psychology because he said 'Well maybe I would be interested in it. Send me some songs'. So I sent a demo of 'Live Life' and a couple of other songs and he emailed me back 'Maestro, I must have this record!'"

We both laugh, and Jim continues.

"That got me really excited, so I started writing for this record about midway through 2005. Give me a little encouragement and I go crazy! Suddenly I was writing a song every other day. I wrote 'In The Days We Have', 'Stand And Be Counted', 'At This Time Of Night', 'A Kiss To Remember You By', 'The God In You' and 'Secrets

Of A Woman' in the space of about three or four weeks.

"Then I started thinking about what songs I had in the can that would follow the mission statement of what I wanted to say. 'Live Life' was a definite because I love the philosophy of the song. I believe that you shouldn't worry about the past, or the future, you should make the most of now, and who knows? It might all work out for you. 'Burning With A Reason' was a statement that ok, I'm fifty-five years old, but I still have the fire, you know? I'm still making new music and I'm still feeling good. That song was written with Donnie and Johnny and was about three years old. I listened to it again, revamped, modified and re-recorded. So there's a few that are maybe three years old, but the bulk of the record was written over the last year."

I agree, commenting that was what struck me when I played the record, as oppose to some of the Pride Of Lions albums. You can tell with Pride Of Lions that some tracks were maybe intended to be a Survivor song at the time, but with this I found it had a fresh new sound. Apart from possibly 'Secrets Of A Woman' which was just pure Ides Of March to me, I couldn't sit there and think 'Oh, that was intended for so and so'. I remark it doesn't sound like his other bands, it just sound like a new Jim Peterik.

"Thank you, that's a real compliment," he says. "We're all a collage of our influences. I have so many influences. First and foremost I'm a fan of great music, and you can't help but put some of those influences in your songs. If you analysed every song, which I don't like to do, you'd find echoes of this and echoes of that. But overall I tried to keep it honest, and production wise I kept it a little more simple, not like Pride Of Lions which tends to be quite ornate and has overdubs and stuff. I went for mostly a guitar orientation with a little bit of keyboards. A pretty honest record."

Usually an album I play has a couple of tracks that stand out from the rest, but with repeated plays I'm hard pushed to pick which I like the best. I tell Jim that lately the two most frequent return visitors are 'Live Life' and 'Secrets Of A Woman'.

"You're right that 'Secrets Of A Woman' is an Ides Of March sort of thing" Jim remarks. "It has something about it that brings me back to it too. Normally when I finish an album I don't wanna hear it for quite some time! This one though, I go back to it, and that's not an egotistical thing, I just enjoy it. Those two you mentioned and 'At This Time Of Night' - it's not going to be a hit or anything but there's something in those songs I like."

It's time to talk about Survivor, who are now without Peterik, but find their new CD comes out at almost the same time. I mention to Jim there might be some comparing, and frankly, after hearing them both, I think his is the better of the two. Jim's very surprised, so I tell him while I love Jimi Jamison's voice, I personally I found his album more interesting.



"That's a real compliment," he enthuses. "I've not heard the new Survivor record yet. I did co-write three of the songs on it, way back in 1993, but I haven't heard how it sounds. I've kinda lost touch with those guys really. Until real recently I hadn't talked to either of them.... I think it was October we ended up on stage together at a benefit for Fergie Frederiksen - you know Fergie?"

I do indeed, I have several CD's featuring the former Toto vocalist. We digress a little about Fergie and his appearance on the 'Mecca' album with Joe Vana before coming back to Survivor.

"Fergie had some medical problems so we did a gig for him," Jim says. "I got up on stage with Jimi and Frankie - it was a little strange, like 'What the heck is this?' But it was a neat way to break the ice because I hadn't spoken to either of them for I think ten years.

"A few weeks after, Frankie called me and told me they were recording three of the songs I'd co-written and sorting out the writers split. It's been ten years since we wrote them, so it was good to speak to him again. But we're not extremely close or anything."

I mention that Frankie actually sings a couple on their new album.

"Yeah, so I heard," Jim replies. "The song 'Nevertheless' is one he and I wrote. I didn't write the other one he sings, the other two I co-wrote were 'The Rhythm Of Your Heart' and 'Fire Makes Steel'.

That makes sense - I thought 'Fire Makes Steel' certainly has the classic Survivor feel to it.

"Yeah, it's got that... the... a bit of... whatever it is!" Jim laughs.

I mention I was used to him as a vocalist with

my Ides Of March records, so I was happy he handled all the lead vocals on your solo album because I think Jim is an underrated singer.

"Oh thanks. I started out as a singer for The Ides Of March, as you're aware," he says. "I felt very much like the frontman of that band in the sixties and seventies. Survivor was a whole different thing. I became mainly the songwriter and keyboard player. On the first album I sang 'Love Has Got Me' and that was it. The image of the band became focussed on one singer. Pride Of Lions was really a chance for me to try out my original concept for Survivor, which was pretty much duets. You've got Toby, but I'm in there too. With this album it was a little scary because I was all alone - sink or swim."

And it's the first time for a long time, I comment.

"Yeah, exactly, although I do have a musical foil with Lisa Mcclowry. She adds the higher sounds - almost the Toby Hitchcock element if you will, where she harmonises with my parts and lifts the choruses."

It's like he anticipated my next question, because I was just about to mention her. I explain on the back of my promo it's listed the musicians, and most of them I'm familiar with from other projects Jim's done, apart from her. I mention how good she sounds on the CD, and Jim fills in the blanks.

"She is brilliant - in fact she's upstairs right now! I have a studio upstairs, and I took a break from doing some recording with her to talk to you. A bit of background on her - she's about twenty seven, twenty eight years old, from Chicago. She's a singer/songwriter - if you seen the 'Sound Of Home' video from the first Pride Of Lions album, she's the girl in it. She's cute, a really nice person - I've been working on an album with her in fact that I hope to get released in Europe. Kind of a rock-pop record.

"I only brought her in to sing a harmony on one song and we blended so well I kept calling her up and asking her to try singing on different songs. Before you know it, she's on almost every track! She's very much part of the sound this record has. The other major part that most records don't have is the B-3 organ provided by Scott May from The Ides Of March. Again, originally I only intended him for one song, but there's something about the organic, very warm quality of a B-3 organ that just fitted with this sound and I put him on every track. So it's different from a Pride Of Lions record - for starters I don't have Toby! And the other reason is it has the female element and the B-3 organ."

While I have the man on the phone, I decided to get greedy with my next question! I ask that now there's another Jim Peterik solo album, and Pride Of Lions still active, and all his other projects, what about the Ides Of March? Will there be a new Ides Of March solo album?

"It's really funny you brought that up. There's not really been much interest in the Ides over in Europe, up until recently. I don't know what's happening - maybe it's American Idol. Bo Bice, who came second, sang 'Vehicle' and it maybe brought the song to a younger audience. I don't know what's going on, but practically every interview I've done, including yours today, has asked about the Ides Of March. Frontiers is my label, and they haven't been too interested in what would probably be termed 'horn-rock', you know? But suddenly with this rekindled interest they are now saying 'well, maybe we will do an Ides Of March record'.

"It's not dead - the group in America is still quite big. We tour all over the States and play maybe forty gigs a year, and I don't think it's out of the question to come to Europe too. It's a great

band and great to play in - the chemistry we have on stage is amazing."

I'm honest and I tell him the reason I asked was purely selfish. I explain after hearing Survivor and getting into them, what I always do is check out the guys integral to that band and see what else they've done. I discovered he came from the Ides Of March and I bought the 'Ideology Version II' album and I loved it. If it's got brass and rock guitars I'm a sucker for it. So I was hoping there'd be more new stuff to come from The Ides.

"Well we've just done a new compilation, kind of a latest and greatest. It's got four new songs on it, some live versions, but we have a new song called 'Come Dancing'. Not the Kinks song, it's the same title though. It's getting some really good reactions here, so I'll send you it. I think you'll like it."

I mention that the first two Ides Of March albums have been officially remastered now as well?

"That's right. A label called Collectors Choice contacted us, and we were thrilled because they do it right. They get hold of the original masters and work from that, they don't do some slack version."

If that wasn't enough, I ask Jim about the upcoming Pride Of Lions DVD.

"It's kind of a two part product," he explains. "A CD version of the concert, just the audio, but there's a companion bonus disk of rarities, out-takes, bonus tracks from Japan and stuff. Some stuff that never made the albums for whatever reason. There's a song called 'Dark Angel' that Frontiers rejected but I think it's really good. When they rejected it I was like 'What, are you crazy?' So that's finally seen the light of day on this disk.

"The other part is the DVD with not only 5.1 sound, but a stereo version, so you get the two separate mixes. We recorded the show in Brussels. It was an especially good night. Great audience, maybe 16,000 people, thirteen cameras... I think we sang and played very well so yeah, that's happening."

I decide to wrap up with a fanstasy question I like to put to people I interview... I ask Jim the amount of stars and talent he's worked with, written with or for, is there anybody out there who he wished he could write with but hasn't for whatever reason?

"Well I have my heroes, but the irony of that is I could maybe get sat in a room with Elton John and we'd look at each other and say 'Well what do we do now?'" he laughs. "You know, I've written with some great people but sometimes it's not how good a writer you are, it's the chemistry that's in the room. I can't mention any names but there's one guy, a famous songwriter, and we were terrible together! Our strengths were the same. He was big on melodies, so was I, and we cancelled each other out.

"Sometimes the best co-writes are not the ones you dream about. I could name Paul McCartney, Elton John or Pete Townshend, but I can't imagine writing with those people because they're too good on their own. I like to find a writing counterpart who makes up for my deficiencies. That's why I work well with 38 Special, or Sammy Hagar. We complimented each other. Sammy was good with the energy and guitar riffs, and I was good at the lyrics and melody. It creates a synergy."

I mention I bought his 'Songwriting For Dummies' book because I try and dabble and I found a lot of his advice really helpful - people who've heard my efforts may disagree but that's neither here nor there.

"Oh, I'm so glad!" Jim exclaims. "I was very



lucky to have gotten the offer to write that book. I've wanted to write a songwriting book for ages but most songwriting books you can't find in stores. It's a very small market. But if you hitch your wagon to the '...For Dummies' series, suddenly you're worldwide. The book's done really well, so I'm really happy to be able to give a little advice to any budding songwriters out there."

I expected I'd covered everything, and as I begin to bring the interview to an end, Jim mentions yet another project on it's way!

"I'd just like to add that the next Pride Of Lions studio album will be starting in June and is planned to be in out January 2007," he states matter of factly.

I never even thought to ask about that because I didn't think he'd have time to even consider it, so I ask how he manages it?

"Well you know, I write everyday," he says. "It's not like I sit down to write, for me my subconscious is far more creative than my conscious mind. So if you just go about your life, enjoy yourself and tune into the universe around you - I know that sounds like bullshit, but just keep your antenna up and the ideas come to you. Keep a tape recorder or a note book with you, log the ideas and when the time is right sit with a guitar or at the piano, play your tape and think 'Oh that was shit, but that bit's good'. It's a constant process. You don't need to sit in a quiet room - you can write anywhere. Well, that's how I do it."

And he does it very well.

FIREWORKS

