



UK rockers Skin first burst onto the scene with a bang in 1993, with the 'Skin Up' EP containing the classic song 'Look But Don't Touch'. This was swiftly followed by a hit single 'Money' and their debut album, which broke into the UK top ten. Well received performances at Monsters Of Rock and support slots with bands like Bon Jovi made the future look bright. However, with the arrival of grunge, Skin were dropped by Parlophone after their second album, 'Lucky'.

They still managed a third UK album 'Experience Electric', before wrapping up and calling it a day with a limited edition double live album 'Hasta La Vista Baby'. Much loved and much missed by fans, by 1998, Skin were gone.

Jump to 2009 and the band were asked to reform and perform at Download. They agreed, and such was the reaction the group decided to make a new record and tour once more as a last hurrah. To find out more about that and to discuss the great new album, aptly called 'Breaking The Silence', James Gaden got in touch with chief songwriter and guitarist Myke Gray...

I'm delighted with the new record - especially as I felt it had more in common with the sound of the classic debut record than the darker 'Lucky' or 'Experience Electric' - was that a conscious choice or just how the material came out?

We wanted to make a record that sounded like we did live. When the decision was made to make a new record I listened to all the albums and realised that the second and third albums sounded very different from the first.

We wanted to go back to our roots and take it a step further - we wanted it to sound raw and real.

Was it difficult to get back into the right train of thought of writing for Skin again, after so many years of the band being inactive?

No, the writing just flowed, we knew what we wanted to do and it was like all these songs just poured out. It was very easy - they were obviously locked away waiting to come out!

Was all the material written for the album new, or were any of the tracks dusted off from the vaults?

All the songs were new except for 'Trigger Inside' which I had written about eight years ago, when I was in a very dark place. Dante Bonutto from Universal Records actually picked that song - he said we should put it on the album. Thank you Dante!

I thought the band sounded like they'd never been away - Neville MacDonald's voice in particular still sounds phenomenal. Did it surprise you that the band could find the Skin sound again after all these years?

When we were asked to reform for Download 2009, there was a little apprehension. I drove down to Wales to meet up with Nev. We went to our friend's little home studio and talked for a couple of hours, catching up... Then we picked up two acoustic guitars and played fifteen songs in a row without stopping! It was amazing - from that point on, I have had no worries.

Nev is one of the great British rock singers and he is better now than ever before - and that is saying something!

The first track on the album was a great way to start off - 'Good To Be Back' which is on our cover CD for this issue. Was this one of the first written for the album to get into the right mindset?

Actually, it was the first big guitar riff that I wrote, but initially it was called 'Back In The Ring'. As the album began to take shape, someone suggested that it sounded like the opener, so I re-worked the lyrics... so it was more

in keeping with the opening of a concert.

You've released the track 'Born To Rock And Roll' as a free mp3 on the Skin website - did this help generate interest, and do you find the internet is a big help to get your music out there, or do you think it does more harm than good?

This is a very good question. We initially released it because we wanted to get our fans to film themselves miming to it. We asked for the footage so that we could make a video from it. We had over a thousand downloads but amazingly most of these people didn't buy the album - I think you have two kinds of music fans out there: those who understand that unless you support a band by buying the record the band will cease to exist, and then the people that just get as much free stuff as they can from wherever they can. They don't really think about the consequences of downloading or pirating.

Skin reformed to play at Download in 2009. Did you receive any offers, or consider reforming before that?

We did about seven years ago, but circumstances did not allow it - and in hindsight that was a good thing, this was the right time.

Was the fact that Download has replaced the Monsters Of Rock festival at Donington a factor in the group's decision to perform there, as you were always well received there in the past?

The main factor for us playing Download was that the festival's promoter, Andy Copping, was the man who asked us to reform, as simple as that. He asked us to reform and play on the main stage at Download, which is hard to refuse!

How soon after the Download show did you decide to record a new album?

It was not an easy decision. It was after the headline tour last year - the reaction from the fans was the catalyst. We thought they deserved a new record after all the support they had given us over the years.

Did you consider trying to get a record label to release 'Breaking The Silence', or did you take the approach that the album is one for the fans, so it would be released by Skin independently for purchase via the www.skinfreak.co.uk website?

We did have interest from a major label, it went as far as them listening to the songs and talking about producers, but the general consensus in the band was that we didn't want to sign to a label and have them telling us what to do, regarding touring, promotion, etc.

When we were asked to play at Download 2009 I

actually asked EMI, who own our first two albums, if they would consider re-releasing them, but they said no. And I don't ever want anyone telling me when I can release my own songs, so basically we decided to do it ourselves. We take the risk but in our minds it is worth it for control.

I, like all Skin fans, was thrilled to hear you had reformed. However, the band have made a statement that this will be the last record and have booked a farewell tour for December. Can you explain to the readers the thoughts behind this decision?

With the exception of Dicki all the other band members have careers outside of music - they are very time consuming, plus we all have families that rely upon us. Skin is very time consuming, especially as we take care of it all by ourselves - posting, packing, all the mundane stuff... as well as the song writing, touring etc. And the fact is we don't actually make any money from it. The album cost £20,000 and if no one buys it... we lose it.

We love Skin and our relationship with the fans is amazing - we have done it for two years now, to say thank you and hopefully have a happy ending to our legacy.

The farewell tour will feature your former Jagged Edge band mate, singer Matti Alfonzetti and former Little Angels singer Toby Jepson as support. It sounds like it'll make for a great rock show - what will Skin have in store for the fans?

We want this to be the best Skin tour ever - and choosing the songs will be tough. We are emailing all the Skin fans on our website, our forum, those who bought the album and we're going to ask them what they want us to play. And no doubt Toby and Matti will be joining us on stage at some point.

What would you consider some of the high points of Skin's legacy?

The high point is definitely the reunion - but having a top ten album, playing on *Top Of The Pops*, playing at the Monsters Of Rock festival, touring Japan... all the amazing tours of Britain... supporting Whitesnake around Europe, there were many!

Are there any more Skin releases planned, such as unreleased tracks, live recordings etc, or is 'Breaking The Silence' the final chapter?

We are hoping to make a live album from the farewell tour with a DVD also, but we're still working on budgets so we'll have to see.

What does the future hold for you when Skin bids us farewell?

I will definitely keep playing music. I am writing new songs. I'm not sure in what form they'll come out - time will tell!

I'd like to finish Myke, by thanking you guys for so much great music and for deciding to give us fans one more album and a chance to see you again. I genuinely think after living with the new record that it's the best one the band have made. Do you have anything to say to the fans?

Thank you for your kind words regarding the album - they're very, very much appreciated. This album was inspired by and is dedicated to all the Skin fans that gave us the time of our lives. This is our way of saying thank you - and without you we are nothing!