

# HAIL CAESAR!

Once upon a time, there was a band called Little Caesar. If you knew them when they first hit the scene, chances are you'll remember them as a group of bikers who played smokey, bar based hard rock with a touch of soul. Sadly, they came to the fore in a world ruled by poodle perms, men in spandex and lipstick, over the top images and antics - and were virtually ostracised as a result. However, in this era of great bands making a comeback, Little Caesar have decided to have another go. Originally releasing their new album 'Redemption' via myspace, those fine people at Rock Candy/Grind That Axe Records have given 'Redemption' a physical release. To celebrate, James Gaden rang vocalist Ron Young (centre) to talk about his career, Little Caesar's back catalogue, what the future holds, and how Ron broke a pool cue over Arnold Schwarzenegger's head.

**Hey Ron. It's great to speak to you, I've been a fan of Little Caesar for ages so I'm delighted that things have come together to give me a chance to interview you.**

It's great to speak to you too, I always like it when somebody tells me beforehand that they like me and what I do - I always know it'll be less antagonistic! (laughs)

**I'd like to start off, instead of jumping straight into the new Little Caesar album, I'll follow an example set out in your sleeve notes for that album... you wrote "If you are hearing our music for the first time..." and it made me realise it was 1992 when the last proper Little Caesar album was released. So I'd like to go back and re-introduce those who do remember you - and give a bit of history for those who missed you the first time. First off, I believe it was you who formed the band initially?**

Yeah, I had played in a band with Tom, our drummer, prior to that, but it was really just me deciding that rather than go out and audition for a million bad bands, I'd just start poking around with guys I knew who had got it down and felt the same way I did about music.

**Was there a specific musical style you were aiming for, or were you more interested in just jamming and seeing what happened?**

The mission statement, so to speak, was to simply put

a band together that played the music that I love, with the attitude and a hybridisation of styles and sounds that I saw really going away, especially in Los Angeles at that time. Just all that great late sixties, early seventies blues based early rhythm and blues adaptations, but done harder, edgier... y'know, a more gritty approach. In L.A. back then it was more pop and fluff... virtuoso type guitar playing over people who play with feeling.

**Yeah, there was a phrase in the sleeve notes in 'Redemption' which summed it up perfectly, where you wrote that it was "style over substance".**

Yeah, it was frustrating! (Laughs)

**Once the band were together and had become Little Caesar, you made an EP called 'Name Your Poison' - was this what led you to a record deal with Geffen?**

Actually, it was a bit more corporately driven than a lot of people realise. We had interest because of a bunch of demos we had done and Geffen knew there would be a lag time involved to make a proper record with a proper producer and all that stuff. They wanted to get something out earlier. So they took stuff from those demos that they didn't feel would be re-recorded for the first album and used those to get something out, get stuff on the Metal Blade compilations, make it organic and very "street"... basically it was a contrived attempt to be organic! (laughs)

**I see - well, I really enjoyed the debut album when that surfaced. Most of the material was, like you say, great rock and roll with that seventies vibe, you could hear influences like Bad Company and stuff like that... but there were some Motown influences in there as well, with the cover of Aretha Franklin's 'Chain Of Fools' for example. Was that something the band brought to the equation, or was that a record company idea?**

I always wanted to be a black guy in 1966, y'know? (laughs). We did stuff like that because when we were trying to write material, we'd sometimes start off just knocking around songs we love and that one stuck with us. We thought it was important to show where we came from. In the sixties and seventies, a lot of acts would do cover tunes. An artist might do a song and three months later someone else would cut their version and nobody thought anything of that. In the late eighties, record companies pushed you to write originals. But we felt there was nothing wrong with taking a song and doing it our own way. It's not just about impressing people with what we do, it's also about our adaptations of stuff we love. That makes a statement as well.

**Yeah - what you did with 'Chain Of Fools' was great, it made it sound like a Little Caesar song, whilst still keeping what was there in the first place. There's no point covering a song if you're going to do it note for note.**

Exactly! And a lot of times that can make a musical statement about who you are and you can proudly wear your influences on your sleeves. I was on a mission back then to point out to people where this music came from. When stuff like that came out in the sixties and seventies, it was basically grittier adaptations of roots based music. There was a lot more reverence at the time, guys like Eric Clapton, Jimmy Page, all these guys really bowed to who went before them and the styles that preceded them. I didn't see any of that going on in the eighties and I wanted to enlighten people to how much great music was out there from different styles that you would be well served to check out.

**Quite right, when I hear great covers like that and I notice it's not a composition by that artist, I'll often find out who did the original and find a**

**new act that way.**

There you go - that was our hope! (laughs)

**With you having that sort of idea, during the eighties when everything was so contrived, did the record company try to interfere with your sound?**

Oh yeah, we had major battles with them! I made reference to this in the liner notes, but when we went in, when the record company were asking us... and I think it was just a token gesture, but they asked who would you like to produce you? We were saying names like Tom Dowd, Ed Stasium... guys that really were still making records but who had produced some of my favourite records of all time. They worked very analogue, very organic, just putting up microphones and capturing the energy of the band. We got in with Bob Rock and he said he would love to make a record like that and he had never gotten a chance, he was too busy trying to be contemporary. Yet once we started making the first record, it all changed, the record company got involved and tried to make it really slick with like a million overdubs. That was sort of the beginning of the confrontation between us and the record label! (laughs) With the first record, I'm not that happy with it. I don't think it's an accurate representation of what the band sounds like live. But you gotta make compromises, especially to the powers that be. It was definitely very difficult for us to try and do what we intended and be appreciated by the record company.

**And it wasn't just the sound that the record company and you disagreed on was it? There were also issues caused by the general biker image you all sported.**

(Sighs) Yeah! There were a lot... at that time... what really bothers me now, in music, nobody sings anymore. Actually, I should say in most popular music that's out there, nobody sings, it's all computer and auto-corrected, nobody is up there naked letting people know 'this is what we do, how we sound and our personalities'. It's all filtered through a lot of stuff. Back then, it was before the internet, before alternative music covered such a wide blanket of terms, before the grunge Seattle thing... it was all about not making a seventies style record, you had to be bombastic and over the top, larger than life, all these stereotypes that I thought were negative for rock and roll. Led Zeppelin, Ozzy... those guys were larger than life not because of their hair or their videos, they were larger than life because they were just larger than life, y'know? They were rock stars. They didn't trash hotel rooms because they thought that was what a rock star should do, or it's what their predecessors did. They trashed hotel rooms because they were crazy guys! All that personality was natural and it just became so homogenised, let's ride motorcycles, tease our hair, look pretty, have millions of girls... because that's what people thought was the way to go. It was an affectation more than real personality.

That filtered into music and it was frustrating for us. We had a really rough time, the record company saying 'wear prettier clothes!' and 'What's with facial hair, what is this, the seventies? Look like girls!' What? That's why I put this band together! I can't look like a girl, I'm not pretty! I'm a dude! (laughs)

**It's ridiculous - if you ask anybody to describe a typical rocker, they're going to describe someone who looks like a biker, which all you guys did, yet that was seen as wrong! Although the biker image did get you a cameo in Terminator 2: Judgment Day though, playing a biker in a bar! Not many people can say they've broken a pool cue over Arnie's head and then been thrown through a window by the future Governor of California!**

(Laughs) Yeah, that was a funny little thing that my friend, Jim Cameron, we were friends at the time... I haven't spoken to him in years, but he actually wrote a part in for me because I had a natural image which he liked. That was one positive thing out of it! We wore oil soaked jeans and stuff because we have passion for cars and bikes, it's who we are and we step onto the stage the same way because this is what we look like, this is what we sound like - and the attraction should be the music speaking to you, not because you think I'm pretty, you wanna sleep with me, you think I'm crazy looking or whatever. And the record company was just horrified by that! (laughs) People were saying 'Oh, they failed because they weren't pretty, they had a hardcore image'. I don't think that's the case, I think you're comparing us to videos you were

inundated with from that time, bands wearing lipstick and big hair all sprayed, spandex... and they're looking at us in jeans like we're the weridos? Wait a minute! (laughs) Every rock guy that I know and I think is cool has a cool car, is non-conformist and isn't pretty. That, to me, is all the representation of the spirit of rock and roll. It's not about teasing your hair, having minders to get you to shows... all those things that to me, were the antithesis of what I consider the spirit of rock and roll. And we were seen as so far from the norm that there was no way we could be palatable. (laughs)

**You followed the first album up with 'Influence'. That was a more hard rocking album, with no Motown feel, no covers... was that a conscious effort by the band to adapt, or record company constrictions on what made it onto the record?**

I think that album was... we were really angry and bitter. It wasn't our best effort because I think the spirit of what we were doing, there were so many things done out of emotion, it didn't keep the band true to it's roots. We didn't want 'Chain Of Fools' to be our first single from the first record, because we just didn't think that it was the strongest track or indicative of who we were, so on 'Influence' we had a mindset of 'We won't give them the opportunity to do what they did to us last time!' - y'know? Things like that diluted the sound and the attitude - and the chemistry, of what we started out as.



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Ron Young

**I really liked 'Influence', I thought it was a stronger album, track for track, than the first one. I liked the harder rocking direction but I did wonder if the behind the scene stuff caused the material to come out that way, or if you were pushed in that direction. But you've clearly answered that for me... and shortly after that the band split.**

Yeah, that was actually kind of happening as the record was being made, it was pretty evident to us. We had a personnel change with Apache leaving the band and having Earl Slick come in. There were so many outside influences - I do love the record and it has some of my favourite tracks on, but as a whole, I just don't think we were really on point to what it should have been. We knew it was never going to see the light of day regarding any kind of promotion and we weren't going to get to tour with it - we knew all this making the record which made it almost an exercise of futility! (laughs) That's no way to go in and try and be creative with anything.

**Absolutely. You next turned up as the lead singer for Manic Eden, which was almost a supergroup of sorts as it also featured Adrian Vandenberg, Tommy Aldridge and Rudy Sarzo, fresh from doing 'Slip Of The Tongue' with Whitesnake. How did**

**that come about?**

I got a phone call just by being in L.A. really. Those guys were working with James Christian from House Of Lords and that wasn't working out for them. They didn't like the direction the music was taking and weren't happy with what he adding from the writing side or the vocal side. Somehow, Tommy got my number and gave me a call. They were working locally so I went down there and listened to their music and got a feel of what I could add to it. I was in a very weird period of my life there! I got involved but Adrian wasn't totally committed to it because I think he was still waiting to go back into Whitesnake. Those guys were more established and from a different school and different place to me and I didn't really fit in with it. I tried to add what I could, but we never got a real chance to gell as a band and take things any further.

**I love that record. I started off as a huge Whitesnake fan and bought the album because those guys had all contributed to 'Slip Of The Tongue'. I'd not heard you before that and it was your work with Manic Eden that made me backtrack and get into Little Caesar. It was a great album for my taste.**

There were a couple of great songs on there, another couple of my favourites on there actually! (laughs) It was just one of those projects that started with the best intentions, but never really went anywhere and had to be filed under 'Oh well!' (laughs) That's just the way it goes sometimes.

**Then you had a stint with The Four Horsemen?**

Yeah, after Frank's tragic situation (Horsemen vocalist Frank Starr was hit by a drunk driver and left in a coma and would sadly pass away months later) Dave Lizmi, who's a buddy of mine, gave me a call and said 'Listen man, we're in a really weird situation and we made this record, we're trying to keep moving forward - we don't know if Frank is going to recover, we've finished a record with him, but we can't tour without him. We don't want a guy to copy what Frank did, would you come in and give your interpretation of the material for us to take on the road and see if people like it?' It was a strange situation but I thought they were a great band who came from the same core principles as me. I respected them and we did a tour that was really well received. We talked about maybe doing a record, but at that point it became one of those things where everybody's personal lives started getting crazy and it never came to be.

**Well that brings us almost back up to date, with the reformation of Little Caesar and the new album, 'Redemption'. It's almost the original line up - there's no Apache, was he not interested?**

Actually, Apache plays on probably eighty per cent of the record. All of them except the cover of 'Woodstock' and 'Same Old Story' I think. Back in the day, Apache was a very eccentric individual and he still has a bunch of issues about how it all went down - not internally with the band, but internally within him about whether he wanted to step back up to the plate and go through all this again. After playing parts for the record he simply said that it was great to play but he didn't want to do it anymore. Not much of an explanation, but we understood, wished him the best and parted ways. Now we've got Joey Brasler and he's a really talented guitar player, comes from the same school as us, totally into tone, different guitars, old amps, great old music... he's totally reverent to Apache's playing, but adds his own spice. He helped keep things going, with the right energy.

**Was there a specific catalyst that got you guys back together? Did it just feel right or did something happen?**

We've been doing shows around L.A. for the last seven years... just rehearse for a couple of weeks, get out, do a live show and it was always great. But we got tired of beating our old songs to death, y'know? (laughs) If we are a band, then we have to write some new music. So we start writing and then we decide well, if we're writing songs, we have to make a new record. A big part of getting together was purely for the love of it. I think everybody was afraid to say 'Do you wanna get back in the studio?' (laughs) It was like 'Who farted in church?' and people pointing the finger! We thought hey, let's do it, we can put out a record ourselves, put it on the internet and we can

do that stuff - it doesn't matter if anybody puts it out on our behalf, we don't need a producer, a manager, an agent, we're just making music with a bunch of guys who want to play it. We agreed to do it, to have redemption for all of the mistakes the first time around, do it purely for the love of each other and the love of the music, the chemistry and make a record. If nobody listens to it and if nobody likes it or even gets to hear it, it doesn't matter, that's not why we're doing it. And because of that, it was a very pleasant experience! (laughs) We found a great engineer to work with called Robin Holden and he's one of these guys who is really knowledgeable about old forms of music - he's not only a great engineer but a great musician in his own right and he became like another member of the band. He was funny and irreverent... he'd go 'Wow, that was one of the worst guitar solos I've ever heard, shall we do that again?' and the rest of us would all be laughing 'No, don't erase it, I wanna hear that shit thing again!' (laughs) We got to just laugh and not take this shit so seriously - and as a result we have made a very honest record. You don't have to like it, but it's honest!

**Well I liked it. I liked everything you guys have done, but this one sounds more live and energy packed than the other two. Less polished which suits the material. Did you end up setting mics up and just playing together?**

Exactly right. It was the kind of record we always wanted to make. That's where the magic is. Take 'Time is On My Side' by the Rolling Stones. The tambourine is so out of time... but it's so great! Or listening to 'Jean Genie' by David Bowie - the bass player goes to the bridge too soon and has to get back on it. But that's the magic of the moment - those imperfections are what makes a band a real band, rather than a sterile performance. Some of the early AC/DC records, the guitar is out of tune... I mean, just out of tune man! But it's perfect! Bon Scott not talking himself seriously, happy with his own imperfections as a vocalist or a lyricist, it didn't matter, the whole unit was just perfect. That's what we wanted to do, just put up microphones, be well rehearsed and do it. Those guys used to cut a record in like two weeks. They didn't care if every single note was perfect, as long as it moved you. That's what we did. We rehearsed in Hollywood and there's a little studio in there with some great old mikes so we went there with Robin. We were very comfortable there and we went to capture what we were doing. If somebody said 'Let's add another guitar part' we'd say 'Well, there's only two guitarists in the band, do we want to add more guitars?' Let there be space, some imperfections, some edge. That's the magic of music.

**It sounds real as a result as well, it sounds like a band that enjoy what they do. It's got a good mix of material - you guys putting your stamps on some covers, stuff that sounds like old Little Caesar, stuff that sounds like Little Caesar but moving forward a bit, I think you've done good for a comeback record.**

The other thing was, too many bands overthink what to do next. Never, since day one, did we think we were breaking new ground. We're just a rock band and here are our influences. There's nothing groundbreaking, we play as us, whether we're in a garage or on a major label. And the weird thing is, after twenty years, we can just make another Little Caesar record. We don't have to think 'Should we have some industrial drum beats in there?', or whether I should I dye my grey hair, go on a diet to get into my old spandex, y'know? No way! People thought we were ugly then, how can we go wrong now? (laughs) We've now got the freedom to make the record with the intentions we had twenty years ago. One of the nice things about it is we go out and do shows, and fans come and bring their kids - and their kids are sixteen, seventeen. They have iPods and are hip to new bands and old bands, because of the internet. The know who Pink Floyd, The Who and Led Zeppelin are. They come out and they are just fans of music. They don't care if I'm their dad's age. They're hipper than the people I knew who were almost fascist in a music sense! (laughs) So it's nice that we can make another record and it's not contrived, we're just a rock band so we can't be pigeon holed as one of those old hair metal bands - we just play classic rock.

**I think you made the right decision to put the new album out originally via your Myspace page to test the water before Rock Candy Records got**

**involved.**

We did it on Myspace because at the time we had a manager and there was talk of hawking around record companies and asking if they wanted to put it out... all of a sudden it started sounding like this big business thing. So we figured we'll put it out on Myspace, get it up on iTunes and see. All of a sudden Derek Oliver got in touch with us - it's taken a while to get it released because of the usual things that have to happen, getting money into the coffers and stuff, so we took it down from iTunes to give the physical release a chance, start a relationship with Derek, make some noise, see if we can raise our profile. It's nice, Derek is one of those guys who does everything for the love of real, honest music, and the legacy of it - so it's great to work with someone who has those intentions.

**Well we at Fireworks are like that - all of us do it for the love of the genre.**

Great - when I grew up on music there were magazines like Circus and Creem, or going down to your local record shop, checking out the new arrivals and what the store owner was playing - and that was it. That's how you found new things, it was like a treasure hunt. Now publications and record companies are competing with the net with independent releases, blogs, web-zines, websites... it's great in one sense but on the other hand people can become overwhelmed. It's hard to find who are the purveyors of taste when anybody can write a blog or a review. To have someone or something that you trust because of how they articulate their feelings to an album, or you know from their reviews that your taste is similar to that of the reviewer, is much more helpful. In the same way a musician has a style a person will like, there will be critics and pundits who can sway someone into buying or ignoring a record - people think 'Hey, when this guy says a record is great, go check it out because he gets it'. That was the function of music magazines and the internet has diluted that somewhat. So it's great to have a magazine like Fireworks which focuses in on acts and will give you things like 'Here's a new band and they sound like Mott The Hoople' or whatever - it helps you get a feel for something without hearing it. To focus on someone obscure, write great stories, it's great, it harks back to the golden age of rock and roll before it became prostituted by corporations. The history is just as important as the music.

**I couldn't agree more. Well, to wrap up Ron, now 'Redemption' is coming out, is this going to be the first of many Little Caesar albums, or are you going to play it by ear?**

Our intention was to simply make music because we like making music, so we'll always do that. We're hoping to get over to Europe and play some live shows, that would be a big hope. If enough people hear about it and like it, to the point where we can get on a plane and play some clubs, then great. We're hoping that happens, but either way, we can basically be self funded now. We can do our records and yeah, there will definitely be more to come. We have no choice, it's what we do! (laughs) It provides a certain need within us all - to play together and make music. Whether it's in a room and nobody cares, or if we put something out and people like it, great. But it's definitely something we have to do for our souls.

**That's great - I for one am delighted that you're back, so you'll always have at least one fan!**

(Laughs) Well thank you! I can't tell you how much I appreciate the support. It took me a long time to realise music and commerce are two different things. There will always be a band that makes really shitty music, for my taste, that will sell millions of records, but it makes no statement about the quality of that genre. It took me a long time to realise that. When people listen to music and are moved by it, that's what counts. It's a wonderful thing, so for us, that's all we're trying to do now - and when I talk to someone like you, who gets it, then it's better than a million units sold.

**Fantastic - thanks Ron, I really enjoyed that. Best of luck with the new record and I'm looking forward to the next one!**

Thanks James, and thanks for your efforts in trying to bring our presence to other people's awareness. We really appreciate it.