



Interview by James Gaden

Hailing from Northern Ireland, Blackwater Conspiracy have just delivered their debut record 'Shooting The Breeze' which features a collection of songs in the Classic Rock vein. With some high profile festival slots on the horizon, Fireworks spoke to vocalist Phil Conalane to find out more.

Despite being a new band, the core of Blackwater Conspiracy may be more familiar to readers than it first appears.

"We had been in a band called Million Dollar Reload a few years ago, which had sort of run it's course," Conalane explains. "We'd done a few tours and festivals over the years and it had come to a natural end. We were done with the 'in your face' Hard Rock stuff, which probably comes as you get older! Our creative process was changing, the songs we were writing, especially mine, were not what we'd been doing up until that point, so once we had finished our shows with Blackberry Smoke and Europe, things changed. We decided to go in a new direction and it would be more appropriate to do it with a clean slate. We came up with the name because we all live in the area of the Blackwater River in Northern Ireland. The songs then came together quickly because we were all on the same page creatively."

Having experience as a working band meant little studio time wasted.

"The guitar player, the bass player and myself have been together a long, long time through different bands and we never really have to jam stuff out, usually someone would bring in stuff to work on. We tend to bring in completed songs, or nothing at all. Bands in the seventies and eighties would go into a studio with nothing and jam shit out for a few months, but in this day and age there's not really the scope to spend that sort of time and money in a studio. It never worked for us anyway, so it's better for someone to bring in a song and say 'Okay guys, this is it' and each guy puts their stamp on it."

The group divided their time between Wales and Ireland in order to make the record.

"When we decided to move forward we picked Rockfield Studios in Wales and laid down drums and bass guitar for maybe fifteen tracks. Then we took it back to Ireland, went into another studio, laid down vocals and guitar and started mixing. We only really spent a week at Rockfield and a couple of weeks in Ireland. I think if you added it all together you're probably looking

at fourteen or fifteen full days. We wanted that sort of live sound and we cut the bass and drums together for that reason. Truthfully, I did vocals at Rockfield as well, but they didn't turn out how I wanted so I went back to Ireland to do them again. That's why we chose Rockfield, it gives you the chance to record everyone live and we didn't want to record individually, it sounds too processed to us. In the old days we were never in a position to spend money on a big studio, we had to make do with what we had. We couldn't afford to record the full band setup so we'd do bass and drums, then add guitars, it would become layered and it sounded processed. We wanted to get well away from that and keep the live, warm sound. We don't want to sound fake, we would rather have warts and all, we didn't care if that guitar was perfectly in tune or if a vocal was perfectly in key, we didn't give a shit, if it was close and sounded good, that's good enough. If you fix everything you can lose the magic. People say seventies Rock records tend to be the best and that's the premier reason why. You could do overdubs for sure, but often there was a feeling of 'You have to get it in this take'. We wanted that."

Prior experience in the industry was also the reason why the band released the album on Bulletproof Records, their own label.

"We have been with labels, we signed with Powerage Records and we were with Frontiers for a while, it was great. It was a good learning experience and as a result unless someone like Warner Brothers come in with a big cheque and giving you free reign, these days we don't think it's worth signing with a label. You get constraints put on you, so if you can do it on your own, do it. When you're the level we're at, you're not going to make any money from it either with a label or on your own, but you should be doing it for the love and the fun anyway. As long as we can do it and don't have to re-mortgage our houses, we'll do it ourselves. When we were with Frontiers, I'll be honest, they gave us quite a bit of money up front, but that's all recuperable, so we didn't make much out of it. In my opinion, if you can find a good distribution company who can get

the record out there to the people who want it, that's all you really need. Distribution companies are very good at helping small bands, we know there's not a lot of money to be made unless you're AC/DC or whatever. For bands like us this was the way to go."

They also made the bold decision to release the record on vinyl with four bonus tracks, despite the increased costs.

"It's expensive for sure," Conalane replies jovially, "but we love vinyl, we know people who love vinyl, so in for a penny... we've put the album out as CD, download and vinyl. As music fans, we buy as much on vinyl as we can. It's a cliché, but we think vinyl sounds better, it's a more earthy, rootsy sound. It's warmer, just more real. If you spend £15 for a vinyl album, you've got something of substance, the artwork, the lyrics, it's great. With iTunes and stuff, this has got a bit lost. Back in the day we found out about music from magazines and from things like 'The Power Hour', remember that? It used to be on late on a Friday night. You'd hear one song that you liked and buy the album on the strength of one song. Now it's the complete opposite, people will go on Spotify, listen to one song, maybe just 20 seconds of one song, make a decision there and then and not buy fucking nothing!"

Blackwater Conspiracy are also looking forward to their upcoming appearances at The Ramblin' Man Fair and Download.

"We really wanted to do Ramblin' Man so we sent our manager out and he said 'You haven't even got the record out yet, you need to build it up' and we totally understood that, but he was able to swing it. Then Download came along too, opening the second stage! To be fair, Andy Copping was always good to us in our other band and gave us a shot, so big thanks to him and our manager for that. We can't wait to play these songs live. There's nothing more disappointing than hearing a record, going to see the band live and the spine of the song is missing, it doesn't sound right. That pisses me off. You won't get that with us!"