

CHICKENFOOT

There has been a buzz on the internet about a group that was forming called Chickenfoot. This oddly named band is comprised of the legendary Sammy Hagar on vocals, Red Hot Chili Peppers drummer Chad Smith, and Sammy's friend and former Van Halen bandmate Michael Anthony. Expectations rose even more when six string superstar Joe Satriani (third from left) was named as the guitarist. As you'll see from the album review elsewhere, their self titled debut album has proven very popular with writer James Gaden, so he and his brother Buz went to meet Joe and find out more about rock's newest 'supergroup'.

Buz: I've got to say I'm totally blown away by the album. It's probably the best rock album I've heard in the last ten years or so!

James: Yeah, the production, songwriting and performance are just monstrous!

Wow, I'm really happy to hear that!

Buz: Ok, you've probably had this question countless times already, but where did you get the name of the band from? Was the unusual name done by choice to get people talking about it?

(Laughs) Y'know this band, I just learned the true story about the name! Chickenfoot was Sammy Hagar's first band name. I don't know if they played a lot, or did much, but I believe it was the name of his very first band. Even he didn't tell me that, I found out last night off his manager! Sammy has a curious chicken tattoo on his arm, that looks like it's a million years old, so I guess he must've gotten it when he was really young. Usually his shirt is down, so I only see the feet coming out, so I assumed the name was something to do with the tattoo, but the tattoo is probably to do with his first band.

It was a codename because we didn't know if it

was going to work, so we had to call it something. We went with Chickenfoot, and it just kind of stuck. When we tried to think of serious names, it seemed too serious, y'know like we were trying to be professional about it! (Laughs). Chickenfoot seemed to be so completely free of pretence.

Buz: We know you always wanted to be part of a supergroup, and you were in Deep Purple for a bit, but circumstances prevented you from joining them full time. How did you come to be involved with Chickenfoot?

Well I got a call out of the blue from Sam, which wasn't unusual because we'd worked together before, and we live in the same town. Anyway, he called and was all excited about this gig he was doing in Vegas with his band, and he asked if I'd come down at the end of the show and jam, as Mike and Chad were going to be there too. So I thought it sounded like fun, and met them down there. Going into it, it was just going to be one of those friendly jams, but as soon as we started playing the energy level in the audience and the band was just something I'd never experienced before. We did three songs, and when we came off stage we all had that look like something

special had just happened, and we needed to follow it up with something. Nobody really wanted to say it, because we didn't want to jinx it or anything, but it really was a feeling of "wow, what just happened?".

The next thing that happened was I met up with Sam, to see if we could write songs together. And we wrote a lot of songs, within an hour, and realised things were really taking off. So I went back home, made some demo's really quickly, then I had to go out on tour, because I was releasing 'Satchafunkilus' and we had a European tour that started in April.

So I was off doing that, Sam was doing his thing on tour, but inbetween these tours of ours we would jump into this Chickenfoot idea. We'd review our demos, then if I was home, I'd write some more songs, and we'd get together. The key was, everytime we got together the tape was rolling, or the hard drive was spinning. Some of that stuff wound up on the record, because it was so good. So we just kept that going until we got to the point where we had to put our foot down and say "ok, all of us for ten days in the same town, let's make a record".

James: That was one of the things I was really interested in actually, how the songwriting came about. On the album I thought certain parts were pure Sammy, and some funky bits which were probably Chad, and of course a lot of the riffs attributed to you. So were you all bringing ideas to the table?

No, some of them were written pretty much right before we recorded them. If you take like the first track, 'Avenida Revolution', I made a demo of that, and it was pretty much complete, but with no melody. It was an experiment to see how dark Sammy would sing, and when he heard the song he said "I love it, I know exactly what it's about, we should record it

right away". So we got together, fooled around with it a while, but I had to go out on tour. Anyway I get an email saying "We've finished it!" and I said "You've finished what?!" So they'd all gotten together in the home studio, and played to my guitar part like I was there, and Chad did the drums completely different, Mike turned the riff around to fit what he would do, and Sammy and Mike did all the vocals. So when I got home I couldn't believe it - it was amazing what the guys had done to this thing! Yet my original guitar had stayed there from beginning to end, so it was unusual, but that's kinda like what would happen, everyone would bring something in, and no one would expect their idea to be followed to the letter. This way it could be reinterpreted.

James: That surprised me, because there's such a huge sound to the album, I envisaged you all in the same room recording it pretty much live?

Well, maybe ninety percent of the album was done that way. I have to say in Sam's studio it's the same thing, we were all about four feet away from each other. There were no clicks, it was all recorded in a very organic way. We just played until we got the right take.

Buz: Yeah, I noticed there are no fade outs on the album, it's so in your face. "Get It Up" is a great example.

Exactly 'Get It Up', the original guitar, bass and drums were done at Sam's studio.

Buz: The first time I heard the album I just thought "this is brilliant!". The album just sounds massive! I notice Andy Johns produced it, was he the only choice, as I know he's worked with you, Sammy and pretty much everyone who's anyone in the rock world?

Well, you're lucky if you can get him. Luckily he was just in the middle of two Steve Miller projects, and I know Steve, I played with him a couple of times. So I called Steve first to say "please can I have Andy for a little while?" (laughs). I promised it wouldn't mess up his schedule, then I called Andy and he was like "yeah, let's do it!". I was very happy with that, because I really felt that he would be the right guy. Not only for the band, because we're all bursting with ideas. Y'know Sammy and Chad they've got more energy than thirty men! So I felt we needed an outside guy, preferably a tall gentleman, with a commanding voice. Andy's like that, so I thought he'd be the perfect guy to come in and say "ok gentleman, calm down and let's get focussed".

Then once the band left, and it was just me and Andy doing overdubs, he's truly brilliant. He's the guy who'll say "let's go and play some keyboards", he'd direct me to play piano, banjo, harmonica, 12 string mandolin, whatever it needed. We would be delicate with it, so as not to mess with the rock and roll sound. But he knows when a song needs a little love in the sonic department, and knows just how to go about it.

On 'My Kinda Girl' there's a piece in the beginning which has got eight harmonica's in it, and I'm playing one note in each of the harmonica's! It was just Andy one night when we were finishing up that song, he just said "ok, indulge me a little bit". He said he had a really weird idea that he'd always wanted to try. So he said bring all your harmonicas, and play one note in each for as long as you can, and we're going to overdub the notes. So we had to be careful to play it exactly right on each one. I didn't know exactly what he was going to do, but we got this sound that was like what a B3 player would play, but it was harmonica's. But it was incredible, what a sound! It made the beginning of that song just work.

James: You guys have gotten the supergroup tag, but with many supergroups it often sounds a bit contrived because record companies have often pushed people together, and you end up with a record that's not as good as the sum of it's parts, but that's just not the case here. On paper it looks good, but this really is a case of it holding up.

Thank you. I think we did the right thing by keeping the project to ourselves, we didn't solicit

funds from a label, saying "pay us and we'll do it". We said we were going to do it by ourselves, pay for it by ourselves, we're not going to find famous songwriters that write hits for other artists. We were going to write the songs ourselves, based on what it sounds like when we play together, and we'll just be a band.

Everyone was relaxed enough, because it wasn't like we needed the band for bread and butter y'know? We all had our own gigs and jobs, so it was really just fun. Then we realised that we could make the album that we've always wanted to make.

The whole idea of a supergroup, we certainly didn't think of ourselves that way. It was an unlikely grouping of four guys, but everytime we would play something we'd be going "hey, you like that too?". And that's what it was, we found out we had this commonality of roots, of loving rock and roll and exotic stuff, electronic stuff, and we were able to pull out of each other. When someone decided to go out on a limb, they were backed up by the others in the band.

James: It was a bit like that with the inclusion of Chad. You wouldn't think of the Red Hot Chili Peppers in the same vein as your work, or Van Halen. I'm a big Glenn Hughes fan though, and Chad started playing with him and they were playing Deep Purple material. So when he joined Chickenfoot, I figured it covered the other side of his taste's.

It's funny you should say that, because we saw Glenn the other night and we're hoping that he's going to open for us on this tour. He's phenomenal.



James: That could be fantastic if it comes off! I was going to ask about the live show as well. Any thoughts about the setlist yet? Is it going to be the full album, or some of it, plus stuff from your individual careers?

Well, we're definitely still discussing the setlist. I'm pretty confident that we'll follow the Chickenfoot road, and we'll play the whole album. We'll figure out a way to get all of the songs to work in the show, so the flow is good, and we'll surprise people with cover songs that seem like they were written for Chickenfoot. That way we can skip those guys having to learn my songs, me having to learn Van Halen songs, and Mike doesn't have to worry about trying to play like Flea, and Chad doesn't have to worry about having to play like Alex etc. I think that we could spend all night doing that, and what's the point? The audience can go and see the Chili Peppers or Van Halen and hear them done properly.

Buz: I agree with you. I think if you played Van Halen stuff alongside the Chickenfoot stuff, it would seem very light in comparison.

I really don't think that you can go out and play another bands songs. These guys have been in bands that have achieved enormous success. The three of us sitting here, have a crystal clear memory of just about every Van Halen song or Chili Peppers song or Montrose song, so why would we want to hear someone play it not right?

Buz: Going back to the album, I think it illustrates the individual abilities of the members

even more. Certainly Michael Anthony, in Van Halen it was all about Eddie, Sammy or Dave, and he was pushed out somewhat. Yet, on this record he really shines.

Mike and Sammy, the two of them together when they sing - it's just magic. You have to imagine that Mike's doing that with his voice, whilst he's doing that thunderous bass thing. It's just him into a bass amp, and he creates all that energy.

We did our first show together about two weeks ago, and it was really amazing to get that Michael Anthony vibe all the time, song after song. He's very impressive.

James: Also on the album I think Sammy has delivered one of his best vocal performances ever. I don't think he gets the credit he deserves as a singer, with him being a guitarist, songwriter and frontman. There are some brilliant vocals on this record!

I agree! His vocal sound, he's singing in a lower register. I think people who he's usually writing with, write for him in a higher register, which was maybe the thing to do back in the day. His low and mid registers are really impressive though, it's even wider sounding. I was happy to hear all of this in the melodies, because I didn't know how he was going to interpret some of the things we'd come up with. But he'd come back and I'd be like "Wow!".

Buz: He must be 60 now as well? I'd put him up there with the likes of Paul Rodgers and Robert Plant, yet he never gets that credit.

He's 61. It's amazing! He's really great!

James: Did he play any guitar on the album?

I kept bugging him all the time. It'd be like I'd written a second guitar part, and I'd be going "let's do it!", basically because I just wanted to say I'd played guitar with Sammy Hagar! (Laughs) He and I were actually trading licks the first time we played, in Vegas, so I just thought he would normally want to do that. All of a sudden though it was the end of the year, and he hadn't played a note, so I said "Sammy, you're not going to play on this record are you?" and he just said "No". (Laughs) So, we're like Sam, you've gotta play during the show, c'mon. On that one show we did he did come out at the end on 'Future Is The Past', because that part of the song really gets huge, and it was either me playing rhythm or the wah wah guitar continuing, so thankfully he started playing rhythm there and it sounds huge! We'll get him playing!

Buz: The album is packaged in heat sensitive artwork. Who's idea was that?

In this world were the actual, physical CD is losing its importance, it was just something that you could do with it. People can hold it, look at it, and want to have it. Todd, our art guy, just came up with this stuff. He made a movie for us, of him holding it, so we could understand what he meant, and of course when we saw it we loved it! Y'know it's great, you put a hand print on it, and it only takes about a second and a half, and you go "Oh my God, there's photos on there!". Just stick your thumb on it, and it will reveal some photo's. I think it's an amazing idea, and I'm really pleased because I didn't like the photo they had of me! (Laughs) So I thought it was great that it was blacked out!

Buz: Well that's us done Joe, thanks so much for talking to us, and we'll see you at Shepherd's Bush!

Thanks guys, it's been a pleasure talking to you too.

Chickenfoot's eponymous debut album is released by earMUSIC on 8th June. Chickenfoot play the London 02 Shepherd's Bush Empire on June 25th. Ticket Hotline: 0844 576 5483 or book online at www.livenation.co.uk.

For further info visit www.chickenfoot.us

