

# BUZZING!

Last year a brand new band exploded onto the scene known as Chickenfoot, sparking a lot of hype due to each individual member of the band being a star in their own right - ex-Van Halen bass player Michael Anthony, ex-Van Halen singer Sammy Hagar, guitar hero Joe Satriani and Red Hot Chili Peppers drummer Chad Smith. Back in issue 36, James Gaden went to London to interview Joe Satriani in support of the album. Shortly after that, he attended the sole UK show at Shepherds Bush which was excellent. Chickenfoot's live reputation impressed virtually all who had seen it, so a decision was taken to capture the band on tour for a live DVD. 'Get Your Buzz On' is the result, a full live Chickenfoot show, backed with an hour long documentary of the band on the road. When offered the chance to talk to the legendary Sammy Hagar about it, James Gaden jumped at the opportunity to phone the enthusiastic Red Rocker to hear his thoughts on the latest product...

Hi Sammy, it's James from Fireworks Magazine in the UK.

How are you doing Jim? Wow, we've got a great connection here, I thought with all the volcano in Iceland going off and stuff, I was expecting a little fuzzi!

I know, I'm just delighted everything has gone through and I've got the chance to talk to you. I'm a huge fan, this is a thrill for me.

Well great, what can I tell you man?

I want to talk about the new DVD 'Get Your Buzz On' first. I got the promo and I was blown away, I really enjoyed it.

Did you see the whole show, or is the promo just part of it?

No, it's the whole show and it has the documentary on it as well.

Oh yeah? (laughs) That to me is the real Chickenfoot. The concert - that's a show. (laughs) The documentary is so natural, the four of us when we get together, we have so much fun, and there's such natural chemistry, unpretentious, funny without trying to be funny, it has its own quirky personality about it. I just love it. I think they should show that in theatres. The concert should be the bonus! (laughs)

I really enjoyed it - I thought Chad wandering the streets asking people if they had heard of the band was very funny! One of the things that made me laugh the most though, because it was so unexpected, was seeing you driving around in a Smart Car!

Well, two years ago my wife, who is much greener than me, wanted an electric car. I said that there was no way I was getting an electric car. I can't do it. I can't ride around in one of them! (laughs) So for Christmas, I didn't know what else to get her, so at the last minute I ran down to the Smart Car dealership close to where I live and bought her a Smart Car for Christmas, all wrapped in a bow. I drove it down the driveway on Christmas morning. She loved it, but I only drive it as a joke! We use it in our videos and stuff because to me, it's like a Pink Panther kind of a thing! (laughs)

Exactly! The last DVD I saw you on was the 'Long Road To Cabo' documentary and you showed the viewers your garage and you had all these souped up sports cars, and I thought "the Red Rocker, the man who can't drive 55, in a Smart Car?" (laughs)

That's because you can't do 55 in a Smart Car! (laughs) One more time, I do not drive that car except for a joke, or a funny situation like you saw, like going to Bob Weir's house! He lives close to me, but to get there

you have to go down these really narrow windy roads and his driveway is horrible, it's the worst driveway in the world. I would never take one of my Ferraris down his driveway, you couldn't do it. It's too steep, it would bottom out and rip my front spoiler off. So, bring out the Smart Car!

Like you say, it made for a very amusing image!

It adds to the humour pal, no question about that! (Laughs)

I thought the whole package was great and very entertaining. When Chickenfoot first started, I interviewed Joe Satriani, and he was as genuinely enthusiastic about the project as you all appeared to be on the documentary. None of it seemed forced, it was like you were almost starting from scratch as you had all been there and done that in terms of success in your own right, and it seemed like you all approached this as a chance to start again.

It's true. The great thing about Chickenfoot is everybody has been there and done that. Nobody is trying to struggle for fame and fortune here. It made it so much more honest than anything I've ever done. When I joined Van Halen way back, that was almost a supergroup in its own way when I joined, because I had a back catalogue so my coming in made it like a mini supergroup, if you know what I mean? We were so determined for me to replace the old singer and for it to be more successful than it was, we were really striving and trying and pushing. Van Halen was a natural band when I joined but Chickenfoot is one step beyond that, if you believe that's possible.

I don't think there's anything else I could do that will cap off my career better than Chickenfoot. I feel so happy about it, and the fact that it has been successful in this market today, in this day and age... people don't look at us like some hot new young thing, that's for sure, but we competed with those bands and held our own. I'm just really proud of it and it couldn't ever have been... if we had gotten together ten years ago, it wouldn't have been this. If we'd done it twenty years ago, it would've

been great, but it wouldn't have been this. We spent every penny on this project. We didn't care about how much we were making, we didn't care about a budget. We decided to make the best record we could make, with the best people in the best studio, and do everything the best. Even down to the production of the DVD, the lights for the shows - we were playing in theatres, sort of two to five thousand seat venues. For a band of our nature, we were flying privately in my plane and all that stuff, it's expensive, but we didn't consider that, we didn't consider making money from this. We had the biggest production we could fit into the damn buildings, we had the best people running the shows... at the end of the tour, we got our cheques and we all went "Oh..." (laughs). I called Joe and asked him if he got what I got, he asked what I got, I told him and he said "I'm afraid so!" (Laughs). It was so funny - as a solo artist, I could make in a week what I made in the whole year with Chickenfoot! (laughs).

We just spent it all - not foolishly, we spent it back on the project. It shows that we did it for love, and when we do it again, we'll do the same thing.

Quite right, I think that's why it was received the way it was. You played one show in the UK, in Shepherds Bush, and I was lucky enough to be there. It's the first chance I've had to see you live because when you were with Van Halen you didn't do much in terms of coming to the UK. I enjoyed the gig and it was so full of energy. When I watched the DVD, the thing that struck me was, apart from how well shot it was, it came across as a bunch of cameras pointed at you and that's it. It didn't seem slick, polished, touched up, it seemed simply like a great live band captured.

Well that's what we tried to do. We spent a lot of time and effort and money on it. We actually shot two shows, and one of them we threw out, because it didn't look that way. It looked too hi-def, the camera operators and the guys working on it tried to make it look too modern. It had this black background and everything looked stark. We thought "man, this is not what our show looks like". That wasn't what people were seeing from the audience. So we tried to make the DVD represent what the audience sees, plus a bit more - like here's a great close up of Joe's hand! (laughs) So we spent a lot of time and energy getting it right.

I think it shows, it doesn't need to look modern, I think it captures the experience I had in Shepherds Bush very well.

I just gotta say on Shepherds Bush, I thought that was a fantastic show, but I was ill that whole time in Europe. I couldn't sing very well, and I'm not making excuses here. If I've got no voice, I'll stand up there with confidence and scream my guts out, trying to hit the notes. At that show, I had a bad chest infection and I didn't know it. I got sick and just got sicker and sicker and by the time I made it to Switzerland for Montreux, I had a fever of 105, horrible sweats and the doctor takes a look and says I basically had walking pneumonia, and if I'd spent another week doing it, I'd have been in hospital. He hit me with all these antibiotics and stuff, and I ended up singing absolutely perfect... on the last two shows! I was so pissed! (laughs) Because I didn't feel at my best in Europe, and a lot of people like you, they haven't had chance to see me.

In Van Halen, we wouldn't go to Europe, we had this fame and fortune thing of "Oh, we can't sell out that arena, or do this, or do that, and we're only going to get this much money?" So between that attitude and our management, we just didn't do it, because it wasn't profitable enough. It wasn't prestigious - how stupid was that? We thought we were hot shit!

I enjoyed the Shepherds Bush show immensely, and if you hadn't mentioned anything, I'd never have known you weren't well.

I was cheating - the band was that good, I knew nobody would notice what notes I was or wasn't hitting because we were so fucking good that night! (laughs) Nobody was listening to what I was hitting, people were just wrapped up in the show, watching the other guys thinking they were amazing. Chad... Chad Smith is the craziest, wildest frigging drummer on the planet. I mean, I think he's the closest thing to Keith Moon ever. When he destroys his drums at the end of the show, he's not copying Keith Moon. He's just fucking crazy!

I remember at the Shepherd Bush gig, he leapt onto his drumstool, lost his footing, fell down behind his kit cutting his elbow, and then popped back up laughing like a deranged jack in a box, and you just said 'He's a crazy motherfucker'. (laughs)

He's always doing stuff that crazy. He'll fall off the drum kit, something always happens. It's exciting though, it adds an edge to it. The guy, his body is all scarred up, it's like he's been in a frigging motorcycle accident! And he doesn't do that in the Chili Peppers. That's what I love, we brought out his crazy wild rock side. The Peppers are crazy and quirky and I love that band, but he's much more subdued there. It was Chad unleashed on tour!

I wanted to call the band the Chad Smith Project originally, that was one of the first names I threw out. He wouldn't go for it, he was too bashful. He thought it would make him sound pretentious, but I thought it was funny. I thought it showed no ego, if we called the band after just one of us. We haven't found our egos yet amongst each other. I'm waiting for it to happen, because it's got to. Everyone has an ego, and especially those at this level of musicianship. But so far, we haven't had any of that, it's so weird. Everyone can just do whatever they want in this band and nobody is saying "Hey, you can't do that!". The others would just laugh at them if they did! (laughs)

When I interviewed Joe, I only had the album as an online stream at the time, so I didn't know who had done what on it. I'd asked him if you'd played much guitar on the record, and he said that he was constantly asking you to and you were shying away from it, which shows no ego from either of you. I could understand you saying "hey, we've got Joe Satriani, what do I need to play for?" but on the flip side you had Joe doing the exact opposite of most guitar heroes, and that's encouraging you to play alongside him.

I didn't play guitar because I had my hands full! Y'know, trying to sing properly in this band, it was a lot like Van Halen in the sense the music was too complicated for me to play properly and sing properly. I felt my job was to provide the best melody, set out the best lyrics with the most rhythmical power that I could... it's very difficult with a band at this level of musicianship. With all the jamming we did, to find words that actually say something but also have rhythmical power, that kicks the song in the ass and makes the groove strong, and add melody on top of that, hell - I didn't have no time or no ability to be playing guitar as well! I was happy that, live, we pulled off a couple at the end like 'Bad Motor Scooter' where I picked up my guitar. It made me look like a hero. (laughs) We waited so long, when I did finally strap my guitar on, I'd get a big roar from the crowd, and I'm looking at Joe every night, smiling at him like "Look who is getting all the guitar love over here!" (laughs) We had a good laugh about it. Joe is just the most amazing guitar player. He can speak any language on guitar.

With the band being so vibrant and impressive live, did you decide to do a DVD early on in the tour, or was it a case of once you were out there and saw how well the band were playing, you thought "Whoa, we need to capture this?"

That's exactly it. We didn't have any intention when we went out. We had no goal except to make a great record. We did that, and then we said, and Chad Smith's first quote about us was "We're not a band until we've done some shows". We all jumped on it, we said we wanted to be a band, not a supergroup. We just wanna be a great, traditional rock band. So Chad said "We ain't a band until we've done some shows", I said absolutely, so we booked what we called the Road Test Tour. We played nine cities, doing small clubs that had maybe eight, nine hundred seats. We really lost money on that! (laughs) We're flying in on a private jet and picking up \$5000 at the end of it! It was so funny, we were the only club band in the world that flies privately and stays in the Four Seasons hotel! (laughs) We had a good hoot at that, but the shows, everyone who saw them, management, everyone, they just said wow! They wanted to start filming immediately. Every night we got better.

We started with a set that was fifty five minutes long. We added 'Bad Motor Scooter' to try and get an hour. We went to the clubs saying "this is just going to be like a test". We just wanted to play in front of some people, so

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Live Photos: © Christie Goodwin





Photos: © Christie Goodwin

it was a cheap ticket price, or some were given away to competition winners from radio stations, y'know? So we aimed to play an hour, and the first night we played about an hour and five minutes. The second night it was an hour fifteen. The next night was an hour thirty, the next and hour forty, and by the time the nine shows were done, our set, of just playing the album, 'Bad Motor Scooter' and Deep Purple's 'Highway Star' as the encores, we got to two hours. We played a two hour show with a fifty minutes of music. Everybody saw that, and management, agents and so forth decided they needed to start filming because every night we were different. We agreed, we weren't going to play the same show... it would be the same songs, but every night was going to be an event. Every night was different.

This DVD, as great as it is... I'm gonna make a statement and you'll probably think I'm crazy! That was a mediocre night. The first time we filmed, it was less than mediocre. It was still great, but we didn't like how it looked and the pressure of having all those cameras around fucked us up. We decided to try it again, so the next time we did it we had thirty five cameras again and we're sitting there - when the camera is there, you'll feel different, you can't help it. That was a good show, I don't think we were ever bad, but I thought it was... a mediocre greatness show! (laughs) Mediocre... mediocreatly great? What could I say there? You British are good at this, can you come up with some fucking phrase that says it!

**It was averagely brilliant? (laughs)**

(Laughs) Yeah, mediocreatly great, the greatest form of mediocrity? Whatever, you understand what I mean! I watch it and I'm happy with the show and I think wow, that's a great band, but I can't help but think "Jeez, I wish we'd filmed Dallas, or Chicago". But y'know, I think I'd always think that. Often the greatest shows never get filmed. We got some B-roll from a lot of the other shows, a lot of the backstage antics were filmed at different shows from the one we play on the DVD.

**Like you say, it's a great band and I think each one of you has raised their game within it. You said you were concentrating on being the best possible lyricist and vocalist for the band, and Chad is showing off his rock chops that most people didn't know he had, Joe plays like a band member rather than a self indulgent lead guitarist that happens in bands sometimes, but Michael Anthony - I think after the way he was treated by Van Halen he's really come into his own, he's just perfect for this band.**

You're so right. There wasn't even a question who the bass player was going to be in this band. When Joe and I first talked about doing this, Chad, Mikey and I had been playing for five years together at my Cabo Wabo, as the early incarnation of Chickenfoot. The three of us just jammed, we didn't really have any songs. We didn't do my songs, we did a little Led Zepplin, we did anything, jammed blues, rock, riffs, whatever. I asked Joe to be in the band, and we started talking, Joe had never met Mike and had never met Chad, so I told him Chad is the greatest

rock drummer that he'll ever play with and Joe was like "The Peppers aren't really that hard rock..." and I just said wait until you hear Chad! (laughs)

And Mike, when Joe heard Mike play, he couldn't believe it. In Van Halen, Mike was always restricted to just playing "boom boom boom boom boom" - y'know? C'mon, Mike's so much better than that. Eddie wanted his guitar melodies, and he was so busy with the guitar, Mike had to really hold it down to just playing the root, because Eddie had a lot of notes going on in there. Eddie is a noodler, that's the word I like to use, he noodles on the guitar. He never just plays a simple "Ba-baaaah!", right? When the others heard Mike in this band... I knew what he was capable of, but Joe was the most impressed. He was like "I had no idea he had this many chops!" This sucker can play anything Joe can play. Mike and Joe worked out all these bass lines... Mike is the fastest learner as a musician that I've ever met. If anyone, be it Eddie, or Joe, they could play the most complex riff, going "do do da da do da do da do da da daa", Mikey will go once, the second time he's got it. And he'll never make a mistake on it. Unless he's fucking trashed, which is possible, that has happened! (laughs) But he's such a good learner, he's very capable, he's a good singer... for him to be thrown out of Van Halen is the biggest joke ever. To me, I can't even respect that band anymore. Come on. Throw me out, yeah, sure, I'm unreasonable sometimes, but Mikey? He never even argues with you! Mike's the first guy there, he knows his parts, and he's the last guy to leave. He's the most dedicated band member I've ever worked with in my life, and the most consistent.

Like I said, first guy there, has his shit together, never, ever says "I forgot my part"... he's like a machine, and he's fun and he's soulful. Why you wouldn't want him in a band, man, I don't know.

**Van Halen's loss is Chickenfoot's gain I'd say.**

(Laughs) Oh yeah - I said that Chickenfoot didn't want to be an opening act for another band, unless it was on a festival, but if we got the opportunity, I'd open for Van Halen! (laughs) Any day... I'd do it for free, I'd pay the whole tour out of my own pocket!

**(Laughs) Ooh, I'd love to see them try and follow that!**

They'd be miserable man!

**Have you started work on the second album yet?**

Yeah, we actually have. We went in the studio for a week, around the end of March to Easter, and we wrote four fantastic songs. We demoed them - I can't say that they're the takes... the drum tracks could be, but the problem is the Chili Peppers are in the studio now and Chad is taken. The Peppers took a week off, and he flew up here so we took the week on! We're looking to finish in September and hopefully it'll be out next year.

Chickenfoot II - I'll tell ya, it's already advanced, with the four songs we've done, it's advanced tremendously. I'm blown away. Joe is one of the greatest musicians you'll ever work with in your life. All I have to say to Joe, is

I give him one seed of inspiration or direction. If I say "Hey, let's do something like Cream's 'Sunshine Of Your Love' or 'I Feel Free' today" and you give him that, he'll come back with an idea that's so original, you'll go "Wow! That's not like what I was thinking, but that's fantastic!" He's quirky, he hears things from another dimension. He thinks something is similar when to me, it's nothing like. You could put on a song and say to Joe "Let's rip this off and do it exactly like that!" and by the time Joe finishes, you've got this amazing tune that's nothing like what you suggested! I can't explain it very well, he's so original with his playing, I love writing with him. Like I said, you give him a seed, he comes back with a fucking forest. He inspires me.

**Are you approaching things any differently for the second album, or are you that pleased with the way the first one went, you'll do it the same way?**

I think we'll do it the same way, pretty much because of the way things are. We got together and wrote two songs of the four with all of us together in a room. The other two... I had this great lyric called 'Come Closer' and I gave it to Joe with a view to trying an Elton John-Bernie Taupin style, where he would write music to my lyric. He wrote this unbelievable frigging music to this song, and we worked that up and it's a goosebump song. There was another song I had which was a straight ahead rocker. That was a seed, I had a breakdown verse and chorus. Joe took it, added a bridge, intro and a solo to it and shit, we knocked that out. They're four great songs, they're amazing. We're shocked that we wrote four songs I like that in five days. They are written, they are ready to go. Very inspirational - so I think with Chad away, Joe and I will get together and maybe put down another ten songs. Then when we're all together in September, we'll blow through them and see which ones work as a band.

The idea was to try and get together more as a band this time is what we wanted to do. On the first one, 'Future In The Past' and 'Down The Drain', especially 'Down The Drain', were just spontaneous jams. That one was just serendipity, we just jammed and made a song out of it. I had to write lyrics to what I was singing and jamming and it was amazing, so fresh. We wanted to do a lot more of that, I'm not sure if we'll get there because of the schedules, but we'll see. We wanna try, and we've done it with two songs for the new one in the five days we were together, but I think a lot will be Joe and I writing together.

**I wanted to ask you, with your last solo album 'Cosmic Universal Fashion', when that came out, I remember you being very happy with it and pleased at how eclectic it was. But quite soon after that the first Chickenfoot album came out and I thought it swung the spotlight away from 'Cosmic Universal Fashion'. You were so enthusiastic about Chickenfoot, I wondered do you see yourself as a solo artist who fronts Chickenfoot on the side, or the other way around?**

Well, I'd rather be in a band any day than a solo artist. I only become a solo artist and go back to that if a band burns out. Like what happened in Van Halen - we got sick of each other, didn't want to be around each other. That's no fun, I can't live like that. I can't do something just for business reasons... I couldn't stay just because we were making a certain amount of money, I'm not one of those guys who could stick it out. That's why I say it was okay for Van Halen to throw me out, because I didn't wanna be around those guys, y'know? (laughs) We weren't getting along and the creativity just dried up. Look at Van Halen, they haven't done a record since... fuck, when? Come on, it's dried up. So I had to go back to being a solo artist, it wasn't that I really wanted to, I had to.

So I was a solo artist again for what, ten, twelve years, and then I started feeling dried up as a solo artist. I didn't have inspiration or drive to do anything. I felt I wasn't growing. That's why 'Cosmic Universal Fashion' was a big step. When I had that track, the title track that the guy sent me the music for from Iraq, it inspired me because it was fresh and cool. I hadn't felt that motivated for quite some time. So I did that, but then Chickenfoot came out and it did step all over 'Cosmic Universal Fashion'. The reason was Chad had a bunch of Peppers stuff in front of him and we had a window to make a record and do as many shows as we could, we wanted to tour the world, so we rushed it out so we could go and play with

Chad in the band. It killed 'Cosmic Universal Fashion', no question about it. I thought 'Cosmic...' was an interesting, eclectic record and the title track and 'Switch On The Light' were cool and I never got to tour that record. The record company sued me because my contract said I'd support the record for a year and not put anything else out, and Chickenfoot came out and they sued me. It was horrible, but it did kill the record... which is a shame because to me, it's one of the most adventurous things I've ever done. Very eclectic, it pretty much showed every side of me.

**That's what I was wondering, that's why I asked if you were looking at having parallel careers as a solo artist and as the singer in Chickenfoot, because not only was 'Cosmic Universal Fashion' eclectic, but your previous solo record 'Living It Up' was more adventurous too, with more country and pop influences, so I wondered if your solo career was an avenue for that and Chickenfoot was somewhere to rock out.**

As a solo artist, I don't wanna say I was tired of being a straight ahead rocker, because I love that more than anything and that's what I went back to with Chickenfoot, that's where my strength is. But you can get a little tired of it. I mean I can't sit there and think "Gee, shall I write another 'One Way To Rock' or 'I Can't Drive 55' or 'Heavy Metal'..." So I wanted to explore some lifestyle songs. I live different now. When I wrote those songs - I'm not like a wannabe rock star, a wannabe famous face like I was when I wrote those old songs, because I've done that now. That's not my goal anymore, I'm there, and I love where I'm at now. So I wanted to explore singing and playing music relative to my real lifestyle now, sort of a grown up rocker. With 'Living It Up', that was the epitome of it. I had just moved to Mexico for a year, took my family down there, and I wrote songs on the beach, sat at the cantina drinking tequila, and just living it up!

I wrote music about it and that album is the manual for the way Sammy Hagar lives! (laughs) My lifestyle is laid out for you there, just follow A, B, C, D, E and it'll take you right down that road! With 'Cosmic Universal Fashion', I wanted to get a bit wacky with my music. I had a new studio, and I went in with the Wabos and experimented with every kind of song I could think of.

**It's good to hear artists trying new stuff and I liked the title track of 'Cosmic...'. I thought it was a good song, it was different and it was a new way for you to work, collaborating with another musician using files sent via the net.**

The guy had four or five other songs that I would've liked to explore, but when I worked on them a bit I thought they were a bit too Middle Eastern, it didn't quite fit, whereas 'Cosmic...' it worked with that nice twist. But that's the only thing I'm interested in musically - if I'm a solo artist I want to explore, and if I'm gonna be in a band, I want a band like Chickenfoot where everyone can play so damn good you just end up so inspired. When Chad kicks off a beat I'm like "Yeah!" Mike comes in on the bass and I'm going "Double yeah!" Here comes Joe on guitar, and I'm going "Shit!" It just makes me wanna sing straight from my heart and soul, nothing else is worthy, if you can't give everything you've got and feel it with goosebumps... that's what Chickenfoot does to me. That's awesome, I live for that. Inspiration is all we want. Any artist on the planet, it's all you need. Otherwise, you're just doing exercises. You can play scales all day long... "do ra me fa so la te do". Right? Or you can go "da da da daa da da daa!" Y'know, that's inspiration, and every artist needs that. And Chickenfoot gives it to me.

**You can tell. The four of you together is fantastic, I'm so impressed with what you've done so far. I'm all out of questions now Sammy, so I'd just like to say thank you very much, I really enjoyed that!**

It was a very soulful interview, it was more like a conversation, and I like those.

**Thank you! I try to do all my interviews that way, keep it flowing and good humoured and more conversational.**

You are gonna get so much more information from an artist by having a conversation with them than by just asking them a bunch of stupid questions. So... congratulations! (laughs)

**Though the untimely demise of Hanoi Rocks left glam fanatics reeling in 2009, frontman Michael Monroe has since unveiled a fresh incarnation, reviving the genre with a much-needed measure of rock 'n' roll sleaze. Aided by the talents of Wildhearts maestro Ginger, long-time bandmate Sami Yaffa, Todd Youth and Jimmy Clark, the Finnish legend's unprecedented burst of creativity bodes well for onstage and studio success alike. Faye Coulman snagged some insider information on 2010's hottest all-star collaboration.**

While the supergroup's iconic line-up smacks of an old school revival, Michael offers understated, rather reserved commentary on the subject.

Speaking in a delicate mix of US and Finnish accents, he remarks: "Well, rock 'n' roll's always been there for me, so I don't know how much of a difference this will make. I never follow trends, though I know there will always been an audience for authentic, honest, balls-out rock. So I always do my thing regardless of whatever scene may be going on."

Testament to this lifelong love of outrageous music, Michael returned to LA in January for his first performance there in twenty-one years. Announcing the band's momentous inception, a press conference hosted by Hanoi-obsessed prankster Bam Margera accompanied the show, luring a horde of rock journalists to the star-studded realms of Hollywood.

Recalling the events instrumental in the project's creation, Michael explains: "Things started coming together in the summer. Sami came over to play with the New York Dolls at the end of July and the Dolls invited me up on stage to jam with them and sing backing vocals. I spoke to Sam after the show and he said he'd love to play with me again. So we started sending ideas back and forth over the internet because Sami is into songwriting nowadays. Around the same time, Ginger and The Wildhearts played at a festival in my hometown of Turku and I went up to kick up the jams with them. The next day, Ginger and me worked on some song ideas. During the fall I went to the States and hooked up with Todd Youth after Sami recommended him as a second guitar player. And in December, when Alice Cooper was playing in Helsinki, Alice invited me up to do 'School's Out.' It was a huge honour to be there," he pauses for a moment in contemplation.

"Anyway, Ginger was at that show and he pulled me aside and told me he would very much like to be part of my band, and that he was planning to put The Wildhearts aside for a while. Technically, he said that he was tired of doing everything himself and instead would like to have others involved in the process."

Sharing a mutual thirst for inspiration, both Michael and Ginger found themselves burdened as influential, though ultimately solitary songwriters. As evidenced by Michael's enthusiastic tone, the dynamic duo's joint efforts have yielded a new lease of life for these formerly jaded figureheads.



"I love working with Ginger because we think very much alike. Just as Ginger doesn't want to do everything himself, I too now prefer to be in a true band situation where everyone is involved in writing, as opposed to just one guy with a vision. It's very inspiring and has given me a new boost of energy. It's definitely a new kind of energy compared to the last couple of years in Hanoi Rocks, which just wasn't working out."

Alongside a wealth of electrifying new material, much of Hanoi's 80s offerings are to feature throughout the band's international tour, culminating for UK fans in a hotly-anticipated date at the O2 Academy Islington. Tailor-made for live performance, the band's current sound positively oozes punk-tinged adrenalin.

"I think it's harder rocking, a bit punkier," Michael considers. "There's also some good melodies and some nice variety in there to keep things interesting. But it's mainly rock 'n' roll and perhaps a little more straightforward than Hanoi was. However, lyrically, it's going to have a bit more meaning. I'll be saying a few things without getting too heavy or political, so I'm not thinking in terms of a concept album. It is not a work of art. It's just good rock 'n' roll and I think fans will get a lot out of that. Live, we'll be playing my solo stuff, material from Demolition 23, and of course the best of old Hanoi from the 80s. So, we can play the best of everything, which is the ideal situation for us."

Where less seasoned artists would no doubt be bewildered by the band's collectively hectic schedule and scattered locations across the globe, rock veteran Michael seems unfazed and eager to press forward with his latest project.

He resumes: "We've been sending stuff back and forth and, as we rehearse, some of the songs are taking on a different shape to what we'd first planned. Although the name of the band is Michael Monroe, we all have a say and everyone expresses how they feel. Though at the moment a lot of the songs are written over the internet with Pro-tools because Sam and Todd are in the US."

Seemingly reconciling old school rock with cutting-edge technology, the band's online songwriting habits are matched by an equally advanced Mobile Backstage application designed to provide fans with breaking news and real time media. Though, ever the traditionalist, Michael regards such modern gadgetry as little more than a "necessary evil." Having risen to stardom in an age where fame was attainable only via a gruelling regime of relentless touring and rehearsals, it seems only fitting that Michael is something of a technophobe.

"I held off getting a mobile phone until 2003," he laughs. "I'm not a huge fan of new technology and was trying to keep things traditional. If my livelihood wasn't based on being a famous guy, I really wouldn't see the need for a MySpace profile, for example. I suppose it's just the way of the world. But despite all this, the only thing that really matters is the music, because after all these years, rock 'n' roll is pretty much the same as it ever was."