

deep purple

James Gaden interviews Roger Glover. Photos by Jim Rakete.

After the huge success of their 'Now What ?!' album in 2013, Deep Purple have returned with their superb 20th studio record, entitled 'inFinite'. Consisting of vocalist Ian Gillan, bass player Roger Glover, keyboard player Don Airey, guitarist Steve Morse and founding member Ian Paice on drums, the legendary and iconic band are joined once again by producer Bob Ezrin who has played such a key role in revitalising their fortunes. Fireworks talked with Roger Glover about music past and present, the creative process, 'inFinite' and beyond...

As Fireworks joins the bassist in his hotel suite, there is a large banner depicting the new album. It's a great cover and one of the best images to adorn a Deep Purple album...

"It was actually the symbol, earMusic liked that," Glover explains. "They liked the question mark symbol used on the last album and were looking for something similar. They basically presented the whole thing as a *fait accompli* and we just said 'Okay, great!' Everyone was happy with that."

Aside from being a prolific contributor in terms of song-writing and holding down the bass position ever since the band reformed in 1984, Glover has also been at the helm of the producer's desk for several of Purple's albums. At what point did the band decide they needed an outsider in that role?

"When we had the reunion in 1984 for 'Perfect Strangers', one of the very first meetings we had was to decide not to go any further until we had made some music together, see if it still worked, if we still had it and if we were relevant," he alludes. "The second meeting we had was about who was going to produce it. I said I didn't want to produce it, because it's no fun producing the band you're in. Even though I think I have the overview as producer, I'm still just one voice in five and you end up producing by committee, in a way. It's a lot of work, I don't get paid and I get all the blame," he laughs. "So we decided to produce the album as Deep Purple... but guess what? I did most of the work! Ritchie Blackmore even said to me 'I imagine it will be hard for you not to produce.' It's a natural thing for me."

"Then we began 'House Of Blue Light,'" Glover continues, "and we started with another producer, but I wasn't particularly fond of the choice, it was Ritchie's choice. Time moves forward, we come to make 'Purpendicular' and again, we produced ourselves because we couldn't decide who should take that role. So I did a couple more albums and after 'Abandon' we mentioned again about bringing in an outside producer. I was on board all the way, I don't have an ego thing about being the producer at all."

The band brought in an American, Michael Bradford, who would oversee their two subsequent efforts, but all did not go to plan.

"Michael Bradford is a lovely guy and a very good musician and he did 'Bananas' with us in Los Angeles," Glover recounts. "It was a decent sounding album, but his vision for us was more to do with the past than the future. I remember him saying to us 'Deep Purple is a brand name, you've got to sound like the past!' and I think he really tried to recreate that Purple sound. By the time we got to do 'Rapture Of The Deep' with him, he'd lost interest a little bit and we were doing it on a budget in his home studio, which is not much bigger than a cupboard, and it was a pleasant process. I don't think the album sounds right – in fact, I'm dying to remix it. As much as we love Michael, we had to move on. To be honest, it put us off doing another album for a while, we just toured and toured for several years. Then we had a discussion about whether we should even bother doing another album. Time has moved on, we're living in the digital age, with streaming... would we be better just putting out a song or two every few months? That didn't sit well with me, it may be a bit old fashioned and you

could question whether it will even make any money, but we're an album band and we need to make new music.

"We half heartedly started thinking about a new record," he continues, "but then we played Toronto and Bob Ezrin came to see us. I'm not sure who suggested he came, maybe our agent, but we didn't know him, only Steve had worked with him before. Bob had never seen us play either. He saw the show, we met him the next morning and he said some really great things. He told us 'Forget about the past, forget about hit singles and the radio, just be yourselves'. He said 'What I saw on stage last night was magic, I saw great musicians, spontaneity and the reaction of the crowd. That's what we need to go for.' He used the words 'stretch out', so we did – 'Now What ?!' was the result. Not only is that a great sounding album, which 'Rapture...' wasn't, but Bob is a task master. He doesn't waste time, which is great for us, we'd spend all afternoon discussing whether to use this chord or that riff. He just says 'No, we're not doing that, we're doing this'. It's instant. He's an ever present in the studio and it's like he conducts the band, if you like. It worked so well, we wanted to do it again. I love being produced, I don't want to wear three hats. I can wear two, I can play and I can write. But producing is another hat and I think if you're producing, the other two can suffer a bit. I'm happy to have him on board and we became good friends. At the end of 'Now What ?!' he said 'When is the next one?' He was as enthusiastic as we were!"

With 'Now What ?!' being so well received, some people weren't sure Purple would be able to issue a follow up that would come close in terms of quality, but 'inFinite' is, quite frankly, excellent, which Glover explains in no small part down to Ezrin's help.

"You don't really know when a Deep Purple album is finished," smiles the bassist, "because we go in without much preconception, it's all in the moment. I think this is a bit tougher an album than 'Now What ?!', which was such a great resurgence for us... I don't think we'd seen those kind of chart positions for thirty years, so we were wondering, what do we do next? It's a bit like when you start out, you've had all your life to make that first album, then you've got only a year for the follow up, the difficult second album syndrome. It was like that, it didn't daunt us but we were trying to figure out where to go next. I thought maybe more Jazzy or Bluesy, something different, maybe even acoustic bits. But we started playing and played what we play naturally. If you impose a form before you start recording, it's then a fight, so we just let it flow. With Bob, he's basically like a sixth member of the band. He's a songwriter, musician, he understands harmony and music in general. His expertise comes in really handy and he gets writing credits for that. If he says 'No, you can do better than that', that's a part of the creative process. We all share credit, there is no leader of the band, it's like it was back in the seventies. We've become great

friends and his contributions are priceless. I'm sure we'll do another album together... well I'm not sure, but I'd like to."

Which brings us nicely to a lot of discussions we've seen online, about the possibility that 'inFinite' is going to be Deep Purple's final studio album and the ominously titled 'The Long Goodbye Tour' their swansong. It's time to ask Roger directly if the band have discussed calling it a day, because we can't imagine any of them not doing what they do now. Rather than shy away from the enquiry as feared, he provides a candid response.

"It's not to do with getting bored with what we do or anything like that, it's the fact were at a certain age now. Paicey had a little hiccup last year," he says, alluding to a mini stroke the drummer suffered, which caused him to miss some Purple shows for the first time ever. "Fortunately it was just that, a hiccup, we were back working two weeks later. There's something knocking at the door and we want to know what it is. We will have to finish at some point, but

"We didn't want to say 'this is it, this is the last gig', it's too emotionally difficult to do that. But we know it's around the corner, whether its one year, two years, five years, ten years, who knows? We're just putting ourselves and our fans on notice, don't expect us to last forever. The music will, the music is infinite, but bodies aren't."

Roger Glover

none of us want to. We enjoy what we do and Deep Purple is a massive presence in all of our lives – to have a life without it is hard to imagine. But we have to think about it. We didn't want to say 'this is it, this is the last gig', it's too emotionally difficult to do that. But we know it's around the corner, whether its one year, two years, five years, ten years, who knows? We're just putting ourselves and our fans on notice. Don't expect us to last forever. The music will, the music is infinite, but bodies aren't."

So, have the band tweaked any of the writing processes they go through as they have gotten older, or has Bob Ezrin introduced any particular workflows? The bassist provides a great insight into how a Deep Purple album is made these days.

"When we prepare for a record, we don't really write songs, we let them grow naturally, they come from the music," Glover responds. "As Ian Gillan says, 'Deep Purple is an instrumental band with a bit of vocal on top'. It was really a vehicle for the virtuosity of Ritchie, Jon and Paicey to begin with. It's

almost like a Jazz band, Jazz rock... there's a great deal of fireworks - ooh, fireworks, there you go!" he chuckles. "We rely a lot on spontaneity and how we feel, how we feed off each other. Writing sessions are usually about nine days or so, we record everything on hand-held digital recorders, then assess it, listen to it and maybe have one more session to refine it a bit more. At this point there are usually no words or tune yet, it's just a rough shape of what a song is."

"Then we go to Nashville where Bob is, he lives between Nashville and Toronto, and we'll play the ideas to Bob for a week or so and he critiques them, helps us rewrite bits, and by the time we go in the studio we pretty much know the arrangements. We haven't played the material enough that it's boring, so the four instrumentalists go in and play in the same room, looking at each other. We're very much into doing it live, you feed off each other. That freshness is what we are after and Bob is really into that. If we haven't got a song in two or three takes, we forget it and come back to it another day. We won't keep working on it, it retains the freshness and it's that indefinable quality which makes it feel good. I always think the atmosphere in a studio can make its way into the record and a good producer creates an atmosphere in the studio where musicians are relaxed. When you are relaxed, you're at your best. If you try too hard, and I've been through this, you end up being wooden and miss the mark. The recording was very quick, not much more than a week for the backing tracks, just knocking them out."

"Then there is the next session. Ian and I get together for a week, listen to the backing tracks and figure out what the words and the melodies will be. Once we have lyrics written, we go to a studio. For this one we spent two weeks in Toronto to lay the vocals down, and then we give it all to Bob. He does all the mixing and stuff, we're not there for that."

Which is a surprising comment and shows how much trust they must place in Ezrin. Is it difficult to relinquish so much control when you've been on that side of the desk yourself?

"It's all about trust," Glover nods. "Bob does send me some early mixes, he recognises I'm also a producer and will have certain opinions, but usually they sound good from the get go. And that's it, we don't hear anything else until it's done. The funny thing is, the rest of the band don't know what the vocals are, they haven't heard anything since the backing tracks! It must be quite a moment for them when they get to play it. It's like getting a new record. Bob says it's all trust and respect that works both ways. If he says something we disagree with, we respect the fact he probably knows better than we do. We often disagree among the band half the time anyway!"

Ian Gillan is a pretty prolific lyricist and some songs, like the quirky 'On Top Of The World' are clearly his work, the song referring to a memorable story recalled from





his autobiography. How much input does Glover have, for he too has written a lot of words in his time?

"I think this album is more me than him actually," the bassist remarks. "I can't stop writing, I think I'm a natural song writer more than I am a bass player or producer. I'll present the ideas to Ian and if he likes them, great. If not, I will look at what he's got. It just so happened on this one I wrote quite a lot... 'Birds Of Prey', 'Johnny's Band', 'Get Me Outta Here', 'Hip Boots', they're all mine. You're right about 'On Top Of The World', that was Ian. 'Time For Bedlam', 'The Surprising', they were Ian too. That said, we do help each other out with lines here and there on each other's songs."

It's quite fortuitous that Fireworks is sat opposite the man who wrote the words for 'Johnny's Band' because we wanted to ask if the song was based on any band in particular.

"Yeah, it's all about Deep Purple... it's not, honest!" he laughs. "There was some disagreement in the band whether it should even be on the album as it's more of a Pop song than a Rock song. I can't remember where I started it but I remember watching 'Behind The Music' on VH1, years ago. It was a programme that looked at a band's career. I noticed all the bands basically had the same story... success, failure, drugs, drink, litigation, and then they end up twenty years later playing together again and enjoying it again. It's a universal story and I just wanted to capture that, because most bands go through it."

Unusually for a Deep Purple album, this one contains a cover version, a rendition of The Doors' track 'Roadhouse Blues'. How did that come about?

"We recorded a version of the Jerry Lewis song 'It'll Be Me' on 'Now What ?!' at Bob's suggestion," Glover replies, although the track never made the regular version of

the album, instead appearing on the Deluxe and Gold versions. "He said we should have a go at an old song just for fun, and with that one, we didn't have to learn it, we all knew it from our childhood. So we thought we'd do another, and it was Ian Paice who suggested 'Roadhouse Blues'. He'd played it when he sat in with a tribute band and said it felt good. Bob went 'That's it!' and we got the words from the internet, amazing words by the way, especially the end part, and it was all done live, one take, took us half an hour to finish it."

With so many of them about, a question long term Deep Purple fans have asked is whether the band have any input on the plethora of live releases that come out, or if that's all done via management and labels? It turns out to be a bit of a can of worms.

"We have two distinct camps, the management from the early days and the managers from 'Perfect Strangers'", he sighs. "The old management have released anything they can find and we aren't too fond of that, and we are fighting that. There are things I believe should never have been released, but who am I? I'm just an opinion. We're making progress, but it's a lot of lawyers, it's expensive and I don't want to really get into that because it's a scandal waiting to happen. We are trying to get our catalogue back."

Virtually every version of Deep Purple from Mk II onwards has been represented by live releases, with the exception of the, in our book, criminally underrated 'Slaves And Masters' era, where the band undertook a world tour with Joe Lynn Turner on vocals, who against popular opinion, did a great job.

"Joe is a great singer," Glover agrees. "I never thought of that - we'll have to have a look! I'm not sure if anything was ever recorded from that tour. The same goes for Joe Satriani, although we do have a great

concert with him but he didn't feel he was playing well enough, so he didn't want it to come out. I thought he was playing great and he's a lovely guy and a brilliant guitarist, but we respected his wishes. All these things are steps. 'Slaves And Masters' is usually seen by hardcore fans as a mistake. Paicey was asked a loaded question about his thoughts on it, and he surprised the interviewer, and me, by calling it a very important album which was a stepping stone to something else. Sometimes you need to take a detour to find out what the road is. Some people think it's more a Rainbow album than a Purple album, which depends on your perspective. I actually listened to it again for the first time in years recently, and I thought there was some great stuff on it. I enjoyed it."

Is it a case that bringing in any new band member will revitalise the group for a period and change the sound, which will inevitably upset some fans?

"Yes, the big change was when Steve came in," agrees the bassist. "You can't replace Ritchie Blackmore. Some fans wanted us to get a guy who sounded like Ritchie, wrote like Ritchie, to keep that sound, but you can't be in a band trying to be someone else. Steve asked what we wanted from him, he was surprised when we approached him because the music he had been involved with was nothing like Purple, but that was the most important thing for me. We had to change or die, so we got Steve and morphed into the new version of Purple. There will always be fans arguing about which line up was the best, you can't escape that, but for me it was vital we became something else. I think we made the right decision, this has been the most consistent and stable period of the band's history, which speaks for itself. And with these last two albums, I think we've taken it to a different level."

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