



Devil's Train exploded onto the scene in 2012 with their self titled debut album. Made up of members of Mystic Prophecy, Stratovarius, Evergrey and Masterplan, the musicians shared a common vision to make a Classic Rock album to complement their usual Power Metal output. They succeeded spectacularly and with their follow up 'II' out now, James Gaden talked to vocalist R.D. Liapakis to hear all about it.

Let's backtrack a little - when I reviewed the first album I had no prior knowledge of who the members of the band were, or how you got together.

I was playing with Mystic Prophecy in 2010 and we were touring with Stratovarius around Europe. I had an idea about forming a band for more Classic Rock n' Roll, rather than more Power Metal stuff. I came across a guitarist from Greece, a guy called Lakis Ragasas. I was really surprised to find a guy from Greece who could play guitar so well for this kind of music. We started throwing around ideas and we realised we had a common dream of how this music should be. We were working on songs while I was touring with Prophecy and I put the ideas to Jörg Michael, who was playing drums with Stratovarius. He liked them and we just laid down the songs and worked on them together. By the summer of 2010 we started recording and we realised the energy from the songs was so great, it wasn't something that should be limited to a project, this was the birth of a new band. Jörg suggested the former Stratovarius bass player Jari Kainulainen and we had our band!

The new album is a great follow up to the extremely strong debut. I think this one is a bit more Blues influenced, and has a heavier vibe. Do you agree with that?

Absolutely! This time we wanted to go a lot deeper into what we always thought was the roots, the Bluesy essence of the music, the way you handle the melodies. It's what we wanted to do from the beginning and the second album gives us a chance to do that, while keeping things heavy.

Do you get chance to write songs together as a band or are you restricted to working remotely?

Actually Lakis and I managed to work on all the songs together for this record. For the

first album I was working mostly by myself but Lakis and I did just about everything together this time around. We expect the other guys to come in and do what they do best, play and perform in their own style to give it our sound.

I really enjoyed 'Mr Jones', can you tell me about that track?

That one is about the devil. It's the story of the young guy who goes to the crossroads wanting to learn to play guitar and a big black car approaches. The devil is inside and the guy signs a contract to be really successful in his life, be a famous Rock star, have everything he wants but he has to trade his soul for it. The devil tricks him and he doesn't get any of it but still pays with his soul. It's a popular story and a simple idea. 'Mr Jones' is our telling of it, with a Bluesy kind of sound.

I also loved the video for the single 'Hollywood Girl', I loved how it was quite an old school video in its approach.

We thought that kind of song, with that sound, was kind of retro, almost eighties in style, which was going back to the roots of the music, focusing on the melodies and combining it with a heavy sound. Everything was done with a purpose and the video was no different. We had fun!

On the first album you did a terrific cover of 'American Woman', and this time around you include two classics: 'Born To Be Wild' and 'Immigrant Song'. I think both of these sound like Devil's Train songs, rather than covers.

Thank you, we wanted to achieve that. We have a certain style the way we do things and once you understand how the original song works, whether it's Steppenwolf, Led Zeppelin or whoever, you can focus on the elements and put your own take on the whole thing.

How do you choose which songs to cover?

We were just jamming in the studio, rehearsing together and we'd just choose four or five songs we all liked. We did 'Burn' and 'Hush' by Deep Purple, tried a couple of others and we decided 'Immigrant Song' and 'Born To Be Wild' worked the best. We tried them in concert also and people liked them. We decided to record them for the album, no rehearsing, just play them in the studio and the whole thing was so spontaneous and nice.

Have you had much opportunity to play live?

Yes, we didn't have many shows in 2014 but we have toured Spain and played some festivals; we appeared at Vasby in Sweden alongside bands like Europe and Gotthard and we played a couple of shows in Switzerland too. We hope to hit the road again soon. We've got a good response on social media from people in the UK who want to see us, so we'd like to make that happen if we can.

You handled the production for the new album yourself. Is that something you enjoy doing, or a necessity to keep the costs down?

That's exactly it. We worked together on the drums, recording those first, then do some parts at home - bass parts for example are easy to record at home with the computers around nowadays. We did it in the same studio as the first album and it was mixed in Sweden by Frederik Nordstrom. It's really nice to see as we lay the tracks down, there's drums, bass, rhythm guitar and then really only a solo and a voice on top. Really simple arrangements, very raw and direct.

I think 'II' is a worthy follow up to a great debut album, I hope it takes off and we see you on tour and preparing for album number three soon!

Thank you so much, we really put a lot of effort into this album and there was a lot of dedication to the record. This album has as much love as it does energy!