

FOREIGNER



Some bands never bounce back after losing an iconic member, but Foreigner have managed to do just that, by hiring former Hurricane frontman Kelly Hansen to fill the vocalist position vacated by the highly respected Lou Gramm. After a lengthy selection of dates with the band, and being captured on the 'Live In 2005' CD and the 'Alive And Rocking' DVD, the revamped Foreigner line up had chance to record their own album of material, the excellent 'Can't Slow Down'. Now the band have recorded their performance at the historical Ryman Theatre in Nashville, and released it as a DVD - plus a double CD version of the same show with a bonus track is available called 'Can't Slow Down.. When It's Live'. Foreigner fan James Gaden reviewed the DVD in the last issue of Fireworks, and was so thrilled with it, he jumped at the chance to talk to Kelly about it, along with the upcoming plans for the band.

I'm absolutely blown away by this 'Rocking At The Ryman' DVD you guys have put out.

Oh, great! Well thank you.

Yeah - I'm a Foreigner fan and I loved 'Can't Slow Down' - I don't know if you remember or not, but I interviewed you and Mick together when that came out and it was my album of 2010.

In a hotel, in London?

That's right! So I put my name down for this DVD and - wow, I just thought 'how good is this?' I've seen you twice before in concert but I think you just get better and better as the frontman for Foreigner.

Are you saying I wasn't good before? (laughs)

(Laughs) No, I was just so impressed with how comfortable you are now with all these songs and the ease you have on stage. Every time I hear you sing them you seem to handle them better. My first question was about that - Mick told me he likes helping singers and he worked with Lou Gramm closely to help Lou become as good as he did. Did he help you since your appointment?

Well, I've been with the band almost six years now and honestly, Mick and I have never had any discussion about my live interpretations of the songs. There was some speculation by an unnamed person previously that Mick must be telling me how I had to sing the songs. That's absolutely not true. In the studio, when we were making 'Can't Slow Down', of course he was there then, as we were all sharing ideas - myself, Mick and Marti Frederiksen, all discussing how best to do certain things.

He's really good at that kind of thing. But live, no - as far as that goes, Mick told me that it was my thing, it was up to me to do that by myself. And I really enjoyed the confidence he showed in me.

I think you ooze it on stage - as good as Lou was, I don't think he has a great deal of stage presence, whereas you have it in spades and make this version of Foreigner more visual than previous incarnations. You will jump off the stage, wander round the audience, climb rigging, whatever you feel like! I thought the new songs fitted in superbly - like I say, I loved 'Can't Slow Down' anyway, but to take a couple of songs from that, put them in with the classics... they just fit, it wasn't like 'Oh, here's one of the new ones', they just meshed into the show. Were you guys worried whether the new ones would be well received in with all the favourites?

You always have a general sense that some people will really enjoy checking out new stuff, some people will tolerate it and some won't wanna hear anything but the hits. You have to do what you think is right - if you ask a hundred people about whether to put new material in or not, you'll get a hundred different answers. You can't please everyone. So we tried to find the right songs from that record that would represent it well, mesh with the existing set and hopefully, we did a good job.

I think so - in fact, I thought 'In Pieces' was one of the best songs of the show.

You have to remember that that track was recorded by the actual guys who are on the stage - I think that puts an extra element of "us" in there which we can't do on

the ones we didn't write. When we first started playing it we were excited to play something we had done and we felt it sounded great live. That gives it an extra oomph!

Some of the songs have some arrangement tweaks as well - the intro for 'Waiting For A Girl Like You' when it's just you and Mick on keys, or the stretching out in 'Jukebox Hero'... did you guys plan to do things like that or did the show just evolve into it naturally?

Some of them, like 'Waiting...' were arrangement ideas that were used in the past. There is always constant tweaking though. I think 'Jukebox...' used to be even longer. In order to include the new ones though without simply cutting songs, we'll alter arrangements, make something slightly shorter, different things happen. It's all usually about the necessity of making it work time wise. For example, when we tour with Journey, we'll have less time than we would on our own show, that's the deal with package shows. So we constantly have to juggle, readjust and alter to fit the show we're playing.

Another thing that really impressed me was Brian Tichy - all my prior experiences of Foreigner have been with Jason Bonham on drums, but I thought Brian was great. He's since gone to Whitesnake, and you have Jason Suter now...

Actually, we have Mark Schulman now.

Oh, really? You're in danger of becoming Spinal Tap with the amount of drummers you're going through!

(laughs) Fortunately there were no green globules left on the drum seat!

(laughs) Okay, well I'll scratch that question about how Jason was fitting in... Mark used to be in the band before didn't he? Around the 'Mr Moonlight' era?

Right, that's him.

He won't have any problems fitting in then! When you were trying to put new songs from 'Can't Slow Down' into the set, did you have a really hard time narrowing them down or did you find that some just seemed natural choices?

I think we're playing a couple of good tunes from the record... it's just the way it is, you don't lament too much over what you really wanna play, but can't. Sure, there's stuff I'd like to try out, but I'm not overly hurt by it. I'm glad we get to do the ones we do - sometimes we only get to do one new song, sometimes we can't do any, it's just part of the process.

The other major selling point for me on this DVD was, aside from the main show itself... I don't know if you remember but when I did the interview with you and Mick in London I brought up 'Nightlife' and you both started wondering how come it had vanished from the set! And there's a superb version of it here from the PBS Soundstage gig.

(laughs) Right! That day on Soundstage, we knew it was an opportunity to film and record in a high quality. So we were on tour and we came in and did... oh, I can't remember how many, a ridiculous number of songs, all in one go. It was difficult for me, trying to do all these songs, knowing it's being recorded, trying to do them all well and being in the middle of the tour. I was thinking 'Holy shit, how am I gonna get through this?' But it came out really well and Soundstage only had sixty minutes for the show so anything extra we held back for something else.

I liked the fact that it added three songs that weren't in the main Ryman set, rather than you just duplicating tracks there were already there, like so many dubious 'extras' that get added onto a DVD.

Y'know, we do our best to try and give value.

I was quite surprised you chose to film in Nashville - I know it's a music haven, but I guess I always associate it with country music... obviously that's not the case and the place is packed, but why did you chose Nashville? I never pictured it as being a particular stronghold for Foreigner's brand of music!

(laughs) The Ryman is a real historical spot where many legends have played, so that was one thing. The scheduling and where we were at the time was another. To record it there was going to work out well for us, so logistically it made sense and it meant we got to play in a great historical venue. You're right, it has been used for country, but not always. Johnny Cash and a lot of influential people have played there... a lot of stuff goes on there. We really enjoyed it - it's not as grand a looking venue as some bands may want for a DVD, but it's a good, honest, sweaty down and dirty look.

I liked it because the last thing I saw of you guys on DVD was the 'Alive And Rocking' show which was a festival performance - this looked and felt more like a Foreigner show as I know them. Festivals are okay, but to watch, the stage is big and generic and you don't get the benefit of the lights if it's daytime.

Cool - that's good, you've provided me with a bit of insight there I didn't really think about.

As far as I'm concerned, as a concert DVD package goes, you guys have nailed it. The main feature is superb, the extra songs are excellent, you've stuck some promo videos on there and even the interviews with you and Mick, I heard stuff I didn't know. For example, when you were talking about the songs from 'Can't Slow Down' and you said 'Angel Tonight' nearly didn't make the record. I was aghast, and then Mick said it's a good job it did because a lot of people have said it was one of their favourites - I'd be one of those people. To learn it was close to not making the album...

It was weird, some things just weren't working. We were trying different things with it literally up until the eleventh hour. We knew there was something in it, we just couldn't find it. Finally we came up with something that made it fit and that was the version on the album, that's what convinced us to put it on. I remember being in a hotel in Detroit with the Pro-Tools set up, with Marty and Mick, and we were still mixing the record then, going back and forth.

Wow - did you have stuff left over from the sessions, or did you just sit down to write an album's worth of songs?

What happened was we started on ideas, making skeletons of songs before moving on to the next one. We'd then get to a point when we had maybe twelve to fifteen song ideas in that form and we'd start to cull them. We had only a certain amount of time to make the album, we had tours going on in the UK and the US, so we couldn't flesh out full songs all the time. There might be one or two that were just a bit further on than the skeletal stage, if it just clicked, but no, we didn't bother finishing anything we didn't use. You get to a certain point when you have to say 'right, we're moving forward with these ones'. There's always an extra idea there in case your initial ten has one that isn't working, but fortunately we got 'Angel Tonight' right in the end!

Have you guys given any thought, or started work on a follow up album, or are you purely concentrating on your tours at the moment?

We're kinda thinking about an acoustic album. We're in Chicago right now getting ready to film a show for PBS, so while we're doing that we've been milling around that idea. We'll see.

Would that be an acoustic album of past songs, new songs, a mix, or is it too early to guess?

Maybe a bit of both, but I'm not sure.

I think that could be great - as I told you before, the version you guys do of 'Say You Will' is mind blowing. As you said, you've been in the band six years - I personally fully accept you as Foreigner's singer, I'm not hung up on the fact you're not Lou Gramm. Do you find there are people who are dissenting toward you and your position in the band?

The thing is, when you're a singer or in a band, if people don't like you, they don't hang around after the show to tell you! (laughs) The only people who hang out after a show do like me, which means I get a skewed version of what everyone thinks. I only really hear and see the good stuff, fans who are happy with things. I'm sure there are some dissenters out there, but personally, everyone I've ever talked to have been really gracious and positive toward me. There will be people who don't like me in the band, but that's fine, I respect that.

When you share the bill with Journey, Arnel Pineda is in the same boat - he had some pretty big shoes to fill! Are you really looking forward to playing with them and Styx? I'm not a big Styx fan so I can't really comment on them, but my personal opinion is I think you guys will really give Journey some trouble, having to follow you every night - I think you'll blow them away!

(laughs) Well, that's very nice of you to say that! We're really looking forward to it. Foreigner have been playing with Journey for about ten years, and we just did a tour with Styx so they're old friends. It should be a blast. After those shows are done, we have some European gigs to do, then a ten day break, then it's back to the US to play sixty dates with Journey and Night Ranger.

Oh, cool! That should do well.

Yeah, that's takes us through to October.

Fantastic - I hope it goes well. And once again, well done on the DVD, I love it. You just keep getting better and better!

Well I'll try not to disappoint you in the future - you keep raising the bar!

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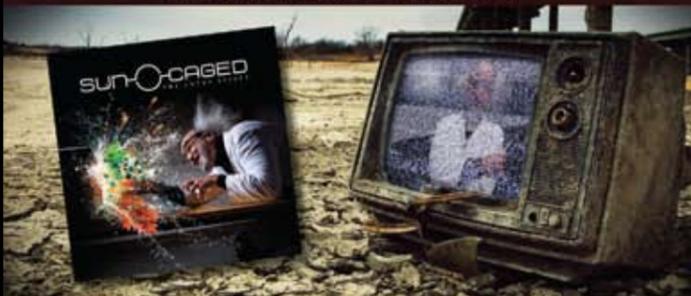
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