

Fozzy

Fozzy are a band that have probably exceeded everybody's expectations. Forming from the result of Stuck Mojo guitarist Rich Ward, WWE wrestler Chris Jericho and whatever other musicians they could grab in order to jam in clubs, the group Fozzy Osbourne were signed to Megaforce Records as a covers act under the shortened name of Fozzy. Rather than just be a covers act, the band created a back story about how they wrote the songs in the first place, but due to a twenty year binding contract that kept them in Japan, their demos were leaked and performed by bands like Twisted Sister, The Scorpions, Motley Crue and many more, who passed Fozzy's material off as their own. Fozzy then "returned" to perform "their" material as it should have been! The idea was fun and spawned an amusing star studded mockumentary and a second album. However, Fozzy, who did actually contribute a handful of their own tunes in with the covers, decided by album number three it was time to ditch the gimmick and go original. This they did on 2005's 'All That Remains', which garnered a lot of critical praise. Now, five years later, their long awaited follow up 'Chasing the Grail' is ready. Long term WWE wrestling fan and fellow rocker James Gaden caught up with Chris Jericho for all the latest...

I began by telling Chris that it is a joy to be able to speak to him again. I mentioned I had actually interviewed him once before, but it was only my second ever interview and my first ever when it was face to face, and it was a little intimidating. "Well thank you," he laughs.

I comment that Chris is on a real roll at the moment - not only was he the World Heavyweight champion at the time of writing (which is still a big deal to all those who dismiss wrestling as fake because it the champions are the ones who are enlisted to do the promotion for the big events and are on TV every single week), he's in one of the headlining matches at the globally watched Wrestlemania event, and he's just made a stunning new

album which really impressed me. I was a big fan of 'All That Remains' but I think this is just as good, if not better.

"Yeah man, we wanted to make this record the best we'd ever done," Chris replies enthusiastically. "We got a lot of praise for 'All That Remains', it helped take the band to the next level so we wanted to continue to do that with 'Chasing the Grail'. We took our time with it, so we could make the material stand out and make the album diverse to show what we could do. And I think that's what we did."

I agree and tell Chris that I noted down that the album was more diverse than I expected. There's stuff on there that is really heavy, like 'Under Blackened Skies', but then there's 'Broken Soul' which I thought was really good, but totally different from the Fozzy

I'm used to. It's a bit of a departure, but still fits in on the record.

"Yeah, that's what I mean," he replies. "We knew this was a big chance for us to really show what we were capable of, so we wanted it to be diverse. We didn't plan that when writing though - like you say, 'Under Blackened Skies' is so heavy, but 'Broken Soul' is our first ballad. And we've got 'Wormwood' - a fourteen minute epic, and we've combined that with songs like 'New Day's Dawn' which is a little Dream Theater-esque type of song. There's definitely a whole lot of diversity here, but it's still Fozzy. We have a lot of influences in the band, between iron Maiden and Judas Priest, Ozzy, bands like that, but we also love Journey, Styx, Bad Company, Pink Floyd, Queensryche, Dream Theater... so you can see elements like that all the way through. But, after being together ten years as a band and making four records, we've got our own style which is of course the most important thing."

I pick up on the fact that he mentioned 'Wormwood' there with it being the epic track to end the record. I ask whether that was planned beforehand, or did the song just evolve that way when it was written?

"I've always been a fan of Rush, Dream Theater... Helloween's 'Keeper Of the Seventh Key', you know, and I wanted to do a longer song. I always have," Jericho replies. "But what happened was, I was thinking about the Book of Revelations and the Bible, and what a great story that is to tell. I mean, there's nothing more heavy metal than that! So I started writing lyrics inspired by that, googling things and the next thing you know I'd ended up three weeks later with ten pages of lyrics. So I thought this is definitely something that's a bit of a handful!" he laughs.

"But it began to be the centrepiece for the record at that point," Chris continues. "It surprised a lot of people too. It takes a lot of balls to do a song that long, and do one that feels like it's only four or five minutes. That's the secret, you've got to be able to do that."

That's exactly the point I was going to make - when I got the album and I saw how long it was, I was a little worried it would drag on, but it doesn't feel anything like how long it is. The mark of a great song for me.

"That's the thing," Chris adds. "I knew we had the players in the band that could handle making something like that, and that's another reason I wanted to do something like that. To have musicians take a song and blow people away is amazing. It takes Fozzy and puts us in a different category too. Doing a fourteen minute song - not just any band would attempt that."

I was amazed at how good the record is, considering Jericho's schedule. I watch WWE all the time and the company air a pair of two hour long weekly shows, Monday Night Raw and Friday Night Smackdown. These shows are in a different town or city each week, and the wrestlers basically tour the country week by week. Most wrestlers are exclusive to one brand or the other, but for months due to storylines Jericho has appeared on both weekly shows, as well as non-televised 'house' shows. So I was wondering how on earth did he manage to fit this in with his wrestling and TV schedule? Does he have his own studio or did he go backwards and forwards to one?

"Rich recorded all of his stuff in Atlanta," Chris explains, "and when it came time for my vocals, we drove down to Tampa where a friend of ours has a studio, and recorded there. The thing about it is it was cool that there was no rush to get it done. We knew it was a big record for us so we wanted to take our time. As a result, we didn't have to worry about any deadlines. We recorded over a six month period. We actually have had the record ready to go for a few months but we wanted to wait and make sure all our ducks were in a row so that when we released it, it had the maximum impact."

I point out that it doesn't hurt that he's gone right back to being one of the top guys on the shows. Being the Champion obviously keeps your profile high.

"Yeah, it's great. It's interesting though, I have to be careful to keep Fozzy separate from the WWE though, because on TV I play a bad guy, so I can't combine the two because there's always an element that people would hate Fozzy simply because they're supposed to hate my character on TV. I have to keep them as separate entities."

The wrestling Pay Per Views that are held monthly have guest theme tunes provided by popular bands, from more modern acts right through to established bands like Lynyrd Skynyrd and Aerosmith. I was really pleased that Fozzy's 'Martyr No More' was one of the theme tunes for the Royal Rumble Pay Per View. I tell Chris I think that's a classic Fozzy song and I was glad they used on one of the biggest global shows like the Royal Rumble.

"Yeah, that was great too. What was really cool though is that no strings were pulled. It wasn't used as a favour or anything like that. We had to submit that song to the music department just like every other band, and they chose that because they liked it. It was cool to hear Kevin Dunn, the producer, say that. I'd told him 'if you don't like it, don't use it' and he said 'Don't worry, we won't!' Jericho laughs.

I thought it was a good fit - it sounded like Fozzy, but it was a good match for the other songs that were played, from bands like Skillet. I'm a big Fozzy fan, and I understand what Chris was saying about keeping the band separate from the WWE, but I always felt Fozzy should have been pushed a bit more on TV.

"You have to be careful though like I said," he replies. "It was great for the band when we first started, we got to play on one of the shows live, but in the long run I think it hurt the band - you know the fact that 'oh, that singer Jericho is a wrestler'. I think a lot of people ignored the band because they thought it was just some gimmick. And yet, here we are ten years later, and people now realise actually it's not a gimmick, that it's a real, legitimate, kick ass rock and roll band. It doesn't matter who the singer is. But there is some prejudice because I'm a wrestler."

I think that's true. I know Fozzy started with a more spoof image, playing mostly covers (fully explained in my original interview with Chris way back in Issue 21) but once the original 'All That Remains' came out I think they proved that Fozzy are a serious band to contend with.

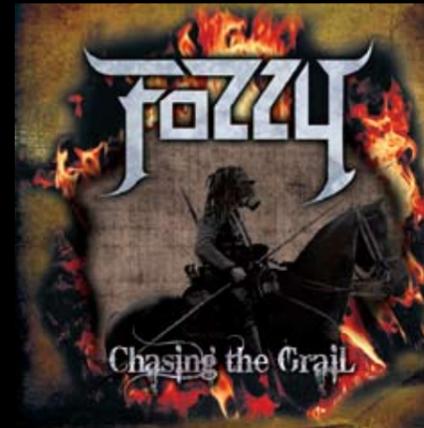
"Exactly! It's interesting because we started as a cover band and we got signed as a cover band. Jonny Z who discovered Metallica and Anthrax signed Fozzy as a cover act. It was weird how we evolved and that's why when our original spoof gimmick had run its course and we were done with doing covers, we didn't want to stop playing as a band. So we decided to go all original material."

I thought 'All That Remains' was easily their best record, but I think this one has probably topped it. I think the strength of the material is as good as 'All That Remains', but it's got more diversity like Chris said.

"I think - obviously, every band says their current record is their best one," Jericho replies, "but for me this definitely is. The main reason is the songwriting process was so different this time around. With 'All That Remains' Rich wrote most of the music and riffs, and I patchworked lyrics and melodies over the top. For 'Chasing the Grail', I gave him fourteen sets of lyrics before Rich had even come up with a riff. So this time he based his riffs and structures on my lyrics. It felt more like writing a song together from scratch."

I was interested who else, if anyone is on the record, because my promo was just mp3's of the songs. I know the band have had several guest guitarists on their previous records to contribute solos here and there.

"The only guest is Jeff Waters from Annihilator," Chris reveals. "He played a couple of solos - he did the solo on 'Martyr No More' and the one on 'God Pounds His Nails'. We wanted someone with a different sound to Rich, Rich is more of a John Sykes type player and



we wanted something on those tracks to do a bit of a shred thing. So Jeff was the perfect guy for it. I've known him years and he was kind enough to oblige. He did a great job."

Chris just mentioned my favourite on the album - I thought 'God Pounds His Nails' was awesome. I inform Chris that I cranked that one up and nearly broke my speakers!

"Oh yeah?" he chuckles. "We refer to that one as 'The Cult on steroids!' he laughs.

That'll be one to put in the live set list. "For sure, yeah. The majority of the set on this tour will be the new material I would think."

I tell him that I saw Fozzy have got three UK dates scheduled in May, and on the London date, they are actually playing two shows on the same day. Why is that?

"We wanted to get to the UK as soon as possible and that was the best time," Chris replies. "We wanted to make the most of it, we've done this before. We do well in the UK so we've played double shows before. We do good business there, we sold out the Astoria twice, sold out Mean Fiddler... sadly those places are no longer with us, so we wanted to do something in London. We figured we'll do two shows in one day, a daytime matinee and an evening show, and switch the setlist around so if people go to both shows they'll hear something different."

On the subject of live performances, I know Chris is very proud of the band as a live act, and they put on a very energetic show. They made a bonus DVD on the

'All That Remains' re-release, of their live performance at Download, but would they look at doing a full scale, multi-camera, official live document?

"Absolutely, we'd love to do something like that, especially if it was a gig with some promise," Chris says without a moment's hesitation. "That's why it was cool to release that bonus DVD of us at Download. Much like this record, we'd have to make sure everything was properly lined up to be able to make it worth doing. I'd definitely like to showcase us, because I do think we're a great live act. We've a lot of energy and always have a great time onstage. It's something I'd certainly look at."

The other thing I wanted to ask Chris was, as well as having the album out and being champion again and being on TV twice a week, he also penned a really good autobiography which ended with him joining the WWE in 1999. As Fozzy's first album came out in 2000, they are only mentioned fleetingly, so I ask if there is a second installment in store which would cover Jericho's time with the WWE and more on Fozzy themselves?

"I'm actually working on the sequel right now. I have been for a year and a half. I'm really getting to the nitty gritty now. I think it'll be great, the stories I have to tell are just as ridiculous as the ones in the first book," he laughs. "It should be out next year hopefully."

I loved the first book, it was right up there with Mick Foley's and Bret Hart's for my favourite wrestling book. The reason why was because it had the Jericho humour all over it, and all the bands he mentioned growing up are all the bands I was into. I loved it!

"Yeah?" he laughs. "Great - I'm aiming to take it to the next level with the next book, especially now I've had chance to meet a lot of those bands. I wanted to write it... I knew wrestling fans would like it, but I wanted it to be a book that people would enjoy even if they weren't that into wrestling. There's a lot of pop culture references and stuff so I'm doing the same with the new book."

I don't think it would matter about if you liked wrestling or not, I thought it was just genuinely entertaining. I especially connected because I love wrestling and most of the bands Chris loves, but anybody into bands like Iron Maiden, Stryper, and pretty much any of the eighties bands would connect with a lot of it.

"Absolutely," Chris replies.

For my final question, I ask Chris if he'll indulge me. His character on TV is an egotistical, self absorbed, pompous, verbose prima donna who claims to be better than everybody else. For the benefit of non-wrestling fans, when wrestlers talk up an event, it's referred to as "cutting a promo", and Chris does this by calling the crowd "gelatinous tapeworms", "sycophants", "hypocrites", "failures" and many other derogatory comments. I personally find the act hilarious, but I appreciate why Chris needs to keep Fozzy separate for those who don't realise he's playing a role! As a fan of his for many years, I ask him if he'd be willing to finish the interview by dismissing me as a parasite or a hypocrite?

"Say that one more time?" he laughs.

So I do - I said as a huge fan, would he slip into his wrestling character and insult me by calling me names? "You want me to call you a hypocrite?" he asks, laughing again.

Yes, please, I reply, like it's a request he must get a lot. If he could just cut a brief promo on me that would just be the best thing ever!

"Well, first of all," he says, speaking a lot slower like his character does on TV, as if everybody has to have everything explained slowly to them because they're dense, "I don't take requests. I'll cut a promo on you when I'm good and ready to!" A little laugh creeps in before he adds, "And in the meantime, you just stand there and keep idolising me, putting me on a pedestal!"

No problem! I thank him for taking the time to talk to me, I really appreciate it.

"My pleasure man," he chuckles. "Keep spreading the Fozzpell!"