



James Gaden speaks to Chris Jericho

I've been following Chris Jericho since he made his worldwide television debut on WWE's Raw back in 2000. When I discovered he had a band with Rich Ward called Fozzy, I checked them out and loved every second of it. Since then, I've become a proud Fozzy flag bearer, watching them morph from a covers act into a truly great all original band with a reputation for energetic shows and great songs. I've had the privilege of interviewing Chris on three previous occasions - this time around the charismatic frontman was keen to talk about the band's fifth studio album 'Sin & Bones' just prior to hitting the UK shores with Soil and Breed 77...

I absolutely love 'Sin And Bones', Chris - I gave it a rave review in Fireworks #53. I remember seeing Rich and yourself being extremely excited about it on Facebook in the build up to it's release and deservedly so. I think it's the best thing you've done together - did you work the same way as you did for 'Chasing The Grail', where you wrote sets of lyrics which you then presented to Rich to create music for?

Yeah, that system worked so good on 'Chasing The Grail' we figured we'd do the same again for 'Sin And Bones'. I started writing lyrics around the song titles I'd come up with and handed them over to Rich. Some of them he used, some he didn't. There's a couple of them he had ideas and riffs for, 'Blood Happens' was one that comes to mind. He had a heavy riff so he asked me to write some heavy lyrics to go along with it. We figured out when we made '...Grail' that what we do best is very heavy riffs with very melodic choruses. We kept that template and vibe going for 'Sin And Bones'. We think that's what we do best and also it's what makes us a bit different from the norm.

I think you have even more of the melody and hooks on this record, without losing any of the heaviness. There's some thundering riffs like you say, but some of the choruses - like 'She's My Addiction' for example, that's my favourite! That's got a great hook with female backing singing - that element was not evident on the early Fozzy albums, you've really embraced it now.

Yeah, I wanted a kinda Buckcherry, Guns N' Roses sort of song on there, and 'She's My Addiction' was just a title I'd come up with. I wrote a set of lyrics which I thought were just perfect for that kind of vibe. One thing we wanted to do on this record was to have a certain tone to it. We wanted to match the mood and the vibe of the song. That doesn't mean there isn't a diverse set of songs here, but they have a certain tone.

letter I'd read, written by a D-Day survivor to his mother. I'd found that on Google and I just started writing lyrics based on that. They came out as this long piece and I thought "Oh, well there we go, there's our epic!" It's a challenge when you write a long set of lyrics for Rich, will he find the right mood and vibe musically to fit? I think he did a tremendous job of setting the tone, it's a very visual song lyrically and the music Rich provided works and really fits.

When you have written the lyrics and passed them on to Rich, how does he then present the song back to you? Does he put a demo vocal down or do you lay down whatever melody you feel?

He'll put a guide vocal, using different people we work with to provide that. I have a high vocal style and Rich is quite low. He'll sing some of the parts but most of the time we'll get certain people to lay down the vocal melody to provide a guide for my style. I'll contribute my own ideas but Rich is really good at knowing exactly who I am as a singer, what I can and can't do, what he can push and what will work. I really enjoy singing the melody lines he adds. They are intricate and not easy to sing. If you really study a Rich Ward vocal melody, you'll find unexpected things.

Do you take live performances into account when you lay down your original vocal, knowing some of these songs will have to be performed night after night? Does that influence how you sing them?

Not really, which can be a problem sometimes! (laughs) You do what is best for the song and go accordingly. Certain songs are perfect for me, like 'Spider In My Mouth'. That is just right for my voice, I can sing that any time of the day, even if I have a sore throat, it's fine. Songs like 'Sandpaper' are very high. That's a vocal workout for me. We were playing it earlier in the set on the 'Uproar' tour and I could always tell if I was having a good night or a bad night after performing that. If I nailed 'Sandpaper', I'd know I'd be fine. If I was having some issues with it, I'd know I would have to try harder for the rest of the night. When you choose a set, some stand out, for sure, others like 'Storm The Beaches' are less likely. We might do that live if we did a special show playing the album in it's entirety, but when we've been doing the 'Uproar' tour, we get thirty minutes, so you're not going to do 'Storm The Beaches' because that's a third of your set done!

I interviewed Rich not so long back when the debut Walking With Kings album came out. They have a great singer called Terry Chism and I noticed he's involved on here, contributing a couple of co-writes and helping with arrangements. Did Rich bring him in due to their partnership in Walking With Kings, or did you seek to bring him in after hearing what he and Rich did together?

We usually have a guy who works with us in that capacity - on the last record we had Renny Carroll from Forever Never helping with arrangements and vocal guides. Terry did a lot of the guides on this one. Terry and Rich live very close to each other - Terry's voice is different from mine, but just to hear his melody lines was great. He's also a very talented keyboard player and he did the piano parts on 'Dark Passenger'. He also wrote the whole orchestral part for 'Storm The Beaches' which is why he has a writing credit for that. We love working with other people outside of the band, but they are all part of the family. For Rich to be able to give Terry a call and say "Hey, can you pop round and put down this melody for Chris to hear?" is great.

Speaking of working with other people, you have M. Shadows from Avenged Sevenfold contributing some vocals to 'Sandpaper'. What brought him into the fray?

Matt's one of my best friends and he's a Fozzy fan - when I first heard the demo of 'Sandpaper' I wanted to have like a call/response vocal part on the "Cat scratch, whiplash, witch hunt in black" part. I called Matt and asked if he would be interested. He loved it and said he thought it was the best chorus we'd ever done. He had some ideas of his own and he brought some great parts into the arrangement. He not only did what I wanted vocally, he did other parts I never even asked for. He went above and beyond the call of duty. Even though that song

was earmarked to be our single, he tightened it up and made it even better. It was great to have him involved professionally, creatively and personally.

It was also heard all over the world as WWE used it as one of the themes for their 'Hell In A Cell' Pay-Per-View. They featured 'Martyr No More' earlier in the year at the Royal Rumble and you told me you had to submit the song just like all the other bands and be selected on merit, no favours. You've taken large portions of time out from wrestling and television to concentrate on Fozzy - do you think people are finally accepting Fozzy are the genuine article, a serious metal band, rather than a wrestler's side project, which is how many people wrongly perceived it?

Yeah - I think our longevity alone should prove that. Thirteen years of doing it, six records in and the quality of the albums continue to get better and better. The band are playing more and more, the tours are getting bigger and bigger. The reason for that is this band has always been real - it was never a "side project". I've said it before, I didn't wake up one day thinking "Ooh, I wanna be a singer!" I've been singing and playing in bands since I was twelve years old. I always wanted to be in a rock band and I always wanted to be a wrestler. A cardinal sin, to want to do two things! (laughs) I don't give a shit what anybody else thinks, it's what I wanted to do with my life.

I think when 'Chasing The Grail' came out, that's when there was a real shift. It was time for me to start drifting out of wrestling and Fozzy was doing good, I made a real commitment to the band. My schedule now is completely based around Fozzy's activities. I've been doing it like that for the last three or four years. I came back to the WWE earlier solely because we weren't touring, we were recording 'Chasing The Grail' so I had basically six months off. If I get another six months off, maybe I'll go back again, but right now I have no plans. That's no disrespect to WWE, it's just not where I'm at right now. I don't get hung up on whether people take me seriously or not - there were plenty of people who didn't take Metallica and Lou Reed seriously. Metallica won't give two shits about that, they did it because they wanted to and it's the same for me.

I think it's great you keep so busy, I'm a fan of yours generally, whether it's your wrestling, your music or your books, I've loved it all. I'm quite happy with you dedicating time to Fozzy - as such, you have just toured in the UK again here with Soil and Breed 77. With fans and critics having such a good reaction to 'Sin And Bones', how many new songs have you put in the new set list?

We're doing six when we headline shows and we do five when we co-headline. We'll always try and do at least five, maybe six if we can. That's how we want it - when you do a new record, you want to play plenty of material from it. It is the biggest record we've done, it's the highest charting we've ever had, so we assume we're going to have people who may have never seen Fozzy before. We want to start off on the front foot - we will play something from every record though, we won't deny anything we've done. The focus will be mostly on 'Sin And Bones' and 'Chasing The Grail' however. If you have those two records and like them, you'll enjoy the set. If you don't - you'd better go out and buy them quick!

Are you the sort of band that write songs to order, knowing you need ten songs to make the album, or do you have some leftovers in the vaults?

Well, we actually cut fourteen songs for this record. I was wondering about that the other day. Ten made the record. Two are bonus tracks on iTunes in the US and on the digipack in the UK, which are 'Walk Among The Dead' and our cover of Black Sabbath's 'Fairies Wear Boots'. On the vinyl LP, there's a song called 'Damned' on there. But we did another song called 'These Gallows' and I have no idea where it is. I'm going to ask the record company - it's a cool song. We knew it was a "B-side"... you always start out wanting to write fourteen classics but some inevitably fall short... but that doesn't mean they aren't good songs. They might have just not been right for the record, not having the right mood. I'd like people to hear them, and I don't know where it's gone. That's a really good question - I'll have to ask Century Media about that - what the fuck

happened to 'These Gallows'? (laughs)

As well as the Fozzy shows and the album, you're doing a spoken word show called 'Rock Stars Say The Funniest Things'. Can you tell me what that is?

Yeah, a booking agency came up with the idea to get me, Scott Ian and Duff McKagan to do spoken word shows, each of us on a different night. I'd wanted to do something like that for a while, because when I did my book tours, they'd want me to read a passage from the book. I found that really boring, so I'd do Q&As instead. I had such a great time, I thought it would make a good show. So that's basically what it is - a show that's very audience driven, if people have questions, now is your chance to ask. I'll not deny any questions, I'll say what I think and I'll tell the stories that people want to hear in the entertaining way that I can tell them. I have two books worth of material to discuss and I've been in some form of entertainment for such a long time, some people have been following me for twenty years. Now those fans can ask questions and I get the chance to relive a lot of those moments. I think it'll be a lot of fun. I'm really excited about it. I can't wait to get out there live, without a net. I don't have a plan of what I'll talk about. If people don't have questions, I will have to think up something to do quickly, but I like that sort of thing. I think it'll be a big success, I hope it's the first of many!

Do you have a long term plan of where you want to take Fozzy and how you are going to get there, or did you take each album and tour as it comes?

I take each album as it comes while wanting to make us the biggest band in the world! If I didn't have that attitude, I don't think I should be doing this. We've managed to gain so much respect, credibility and variety I just want to continue moving forward. Each record has been bigger and better than the last, the band is better, on the last tour we did fifteen countries in eighteen months. So I want this to do twice that. Touring the world, doing what I love to do, gaining friends and fans along the way, I just want to keep that going!

You keep making the records Chris, I'll keep buying them. I've loved every one.

Thanks man! You can never underestimate the impact the UK has had on Fozzy. The first time we went there, in 2004, you guys were the first who got what we were doing and really appreciated the band for our music and the entertainment value. It's been amazing for us playing there, time and time again, which is why we'll always play the UK as much as possible. The crowds in the UK are always extra crazy!

Finally, I'm not sure if you remember, but last time we spoke, my brother and I were sat with you in Camden and we presented you with a copy of Hulk Hogan's amazing 1995 album 'Hulk Rules'. Was listening to that part of the inspiration for Fozzy making their best record to date?

(Laughs) Oh, absolutely. With tracks like 'Hulkster In Heaven'... it might as well have been called 'Stairway To Hulkster In Heaven', because that's how monumental it is!



Photo: Allen Ross Thomas