

FOZZY

Interview by James Gaden. Photo by Adrienne Beaco

Fozzy have come a long way since their first album came out seventeen years ago. Initially a spoof covers band featuring Stuck Mojo guitarist Rich Ward and WWE Superstar Chris Jericho on vocals, the group have evolved over the years into an all original Metal act of increasingly high quality. The latest album 'Judas' saw the title track released months in advance and attracting huge numbers on Youtube, with Fozzy playing their largest gigs to date. Fireworks spoke to charismatic frontman Jericho to find out why.

The call is placed to Fozzy's frontman shortly after the band had finished their UK tour and he was in jubilant mood when asked how the tour has been so far.

"It's been awesome man, the UK shows were really good with probably the biggest crowds we've ever had, I'm currently in Italy and it's sold well here too, so I'm very excited."

The band released the song 'Judas' as a teaser for the new record several months before the parent album landed, which has proven to be a wise move. The combination of the excellent song and striking video hit a chord with the fans, with YouTube views climbing rapidly. The band announced if they hit a million views they would release a 'Making Of' video to show how they filmed it. That target was hit in a matter of days and 'Judas' currently has just over ten million views, making it the biggest thing in Fozzy's catalogue to date.

"It was a really cool moment for us to see all this hard work pay off," Jericho alludes. "'Judas' is massive and right off the bat, right out of the gate it started getting airplay on Rock stations in the States and then the YouTube views started climbing. I think it was the right song at the right place at the right time and it has taken us, as a band, to another level. The great thing was 'Judas' was not the overwhelming choice for the first single, there are a lot of songs we could have chosen. The whole record is packed, we have three or four other tracks locked and loaded, ready to go that we can put out as singles and get people talking. We're putting 'Painless' out as the next single, another track to help people get to know what this current version of Fozzy sounds like, it will continue the vibe and we'll build from there. When it came to putting the album together, it was very much focused on the songwriting, on the choruses and the hooks. We didn't worry if a song didn't have a guitar solo in it, or if we didn't have many drums fills or I hadn't screamed in a track – none of

that mattered, it was all about the songs. We aimed to make the best album possible with the catchiest songs we could and I think we achieved that."

One of the catalysts in achieving this was the band bringing in Johnny Andrews to produce the record, when traditionally Rich Ward would take that role. Andrews has an impressive CV with writing credits for a slew of bands such as Three Days Grace, Theory Of A Deadman, and Halestorm. He also teamed up with Ward to co-write Fozzy's biggest hit prior to 'Judas', the energetic 'Lights Go Out' on the band's previous album 'Do You Wanna Start A War'. Andrews and Ward rekindled their writing partnership on the new album, penning the bulk of the material between them. While Jericho's writing input on this record was reduced as a result, his ego was checked at the door.

"We brought Johnny Andrews in to be our producer and he was the boss, he called the shots," Chris explains. "I've been the principle lyric writer for Fozzy from the start but I gave Johnny lots of ideas, he chose to use three of them and then use some of his own. That's no problem. It doesn't matter who writes the songs, as long as they are the best songs for the record. As the singer, I'm the one who has to sell the songs, I have to bring these songs to life, so I still had to take what Johnny was writing, internalise them and make them mine. That's what I did. Use 'Judas' as an example, they aren't my lyrics but they are relevant to everybody, that's why I think it's so popular. When you think of the lines "What have I become, now that I've betrayed, everyone I've ever loved, I pushed them all away" – we all know about betrayal and in the Bible, Judas was the betrayer, we all know that story. But what if the worst betrayer in your life was you? We've all made decisions that are bad for us, knowing it was wrong, but we did it anyway and that's maybe what 'Judas' means. I think that's why it's become such a huge hit, people can understand that. All the lyrics

Johnny wrote were very dark and very good, and to me, the most important part was I have to sell them to the audience."

For a song to reach ten million views on YouTube is no mean feat and it's a number that would impress anybody. I mention to Chris that if a band sold ten million singles they would be household names, so as impressive as ten million views are, what does it actually mean for a band?

"First and foremost, it means ten million people have played your song," he replies "YouTube is the new MTV, it's how people check videos out now. We played in Amsterdam and we had never been there, I have no idea if they have any Rock radio stations there and if there are, I doubt they are playing Fozzy, but everybody who showed up for that show knew 'Judas'. That's down to YouTube, it's worldwide. There is some monetary gain when you reach a certain number, but the band don't see that, that goes back to the record company, which is fine, because they paid for the thing to be made in the first place. YouTube is a way that people consume music these days, so to get ten million views for a song, bands would give their right nut for that. That's not just a hit, that's a massive hit. And it benefits our other songs too, we had 'Sandpaper' out which managed about a million views originally, since 'Judas' came out that's now increased to four million, so people are checking out other things we've done. A hit video on YouTube makes you a bigger band, you're a lot more relevant when you can bring a huge number like that to the table, nobody can deny you have an audience. Not many bands can reach that number."

As Chris mentioned earlier, it's not like 'Judas' is the only strong track on the record, it's packed with excellent songs. I enquire if Chris or Rich, as the usual leaders of the band, found it tough to take direction this time around.

"It wasn't easy at first," Jericho admits, "but it was the deal we made, we knew that was likely going to be the way it would work so we just got on with it. The best part was the ideas Johnny bought in were off the charts amazing, so once we got into it, the results were already there. You start seeing what he has in mind and you understand his thought processes and mindset. So sure, it was hard at first after being used to Rich handling production, it's tough to hand control to someone else but when the results were as good as they were and an amazing record starts taking shape, after a while all that matters is the finished product. Any issues Rich or I had about giving up power were totally irrelevant once we heard how well the songs were coming out. We had been self producing the band for a long time and we thought perhaps it would give us a boost to have an extra pair of ears in there, someone who can take control from Rich and I. It was an adjustment at first but I looked at it that Metallica had Bob Rock,

Kiss had Bob Ezrin, AC/DC had Mutt Lange, there is a reason you do things the way those guys say. All that mattered was that we got an amazing album and we got that and more."

While Andrews and Ward wrote a lot of the material, I do bring up 'Wordsworth Way' because as a long time fan of Jericho's work, not only as a singer, but as an author, wrestler and Podcaster, I recognised certain things in his lyrics from reading his biographies.

"That's one of mine, I wrote that about growing up and the passing of my mother," Chris says, confirming my suspicions. "It's a pretty deep song, Wordsworth Way was the street I grew up on in Winnipeg, it was something I really wanted to write. I got the idea from the last U2 record, there is a track called 'Cedarwood Road' that Bono wrote about his childhood and I thought it was a really good idea. With 'Wordsworth Way', I'm a big song title guy, when I buy an album by a band I like I always check out the song titles, see what I like best, try and figure out what they might be about before I play it, and 'Wordsworth Way' is the sort of title, if I saw that, I'd think 'I like that, what does it mean, what is it about?' It makes me want to listen to it to figure it out and it's one of the epic tracks on the record, for sure."

With Chris contributing other lyrical ideas that weren't used on the record, I ask if that means the band have some

leftover material.

"No, any songs that weren't working, we stopped doing anything with them," the singer replies definitively. "We wanted an album with eleven singles on the record, and that's what we have. There was a twelfth track, but it wasn't up to snuff in my opinion so we got rid of it. What we have left is eleven catchy songs, any of which would work on the radio."

Fozzy albums often have guests on, playing solos or adding vocals. Past luminaries have included Phil Campbell, M. Shadows and Michael Starr, but that isn't the case here.

"The only guest is the Rap part on 'Three Days In Jail' by Hyro Da Hero," Chris acknowledges. "He came in and did a great job on there. We thought it would be a cool kind of left turn on the record and it worked really well on that song, but he is the only guest, the rest was just us."

As Jericho's schedule is notoriously heavy I ask if the band recorded in pieces from different locations, or block booked some time to record live in the studio.

"We did both, it just depended on everyone's schedules, situation and the song itself," Jericho replies matter of factly. "We have no hard and fast rules about how to record with Fozzy, we do whatever is necessary. If it feels right, it doesn't matter whether we cut it live or piece it together. Our albums are usually a combination of the two."

Jericho is very knowledgeable about music and has a wide ranging taste. I mention that Rich Ward issued a superb solo album in 2005 called 'My Kung Fu Is Good' which stylistically was nothing like Fozzy. I ask if Chris has ever thought about a solo album or whether Fozzy, as a heavy band which can incorporate different styles, is sufficient for his creative output.

"I don't think there would be any reason to do that," he shrugs. "I enjoy working with Rich and with Fozzy, I like being in a band, so I have no plans for a solo record and at this point, there would be no reason for it. The band are bigger than we have ever been and we're all excited to see where it takes us next."

Finally, Fozzy have always prided themselves on their live shows, so I raise the question about if they have discussed doing a multi camera, professionally shot live concert DVD. Jericho's response is most encouraging.

"Absolutely. I think it's something that will happen, we have actually talked about maybe doing something on this tour as it's going so well. We're playing the biggest crowds we've ever had with the strongest material of our career, so it would be great to document a concert. It's just a case of finding the right place with the right crowd at the right time. It's something we're looking at for sure, maybe next year."

'Judas' is out now on Century Media Records.

