

American rock band Live were no strangers to success, clocking up sales totalling a massive eight million copies of their second album 'Throwing Copper' in the US alone. With seven albums to their name and an estimated total of twenty million records sold worldwide, they had an impressive legacy. While taking an extended break from Live, guitarist Chad Taylor, bassist Patrick Dalheimer and drummer Chad Gracey began work on a new project. During this break, Live singer Ed Kowalczyk made some demands which turned the hiatus into a permanent break-up, complete with acrimony and pending lawsuits. With Live as good as finished, the trio recruited vocalist Kevin Martin and guitarist Sean Hennesy from Candlebox, who themselves had sold four million copies of their debut record. The resulting supergroup were named The Gracious Few, and they have unleashed an exciting, modern sounding debut album with plenty of classic rock influences infused throughout. James Gaden was suitably impressed, and was more than happy to talk to Chad Taylor all about it. Despite calling on his 40th birthday, from his bed, due to severing a tendon in his leg, Taylor's spirits couldn't have been higher and he couldn't hide the enthusiasm he has for his new band and the music they've made...

Sorry to hear about your injury Chad - however, the good news is, you've just put out a fantastic album, I'm really impressed with it.
Thank you so much, I appreciate it!

I liked the fact that it had a bit more of a classic rock feel meshed with the sound of a modern rock band - it's different to what you did with Live and I must admit I wasn't sure what to expect with The Gracious Few, but I really like this sound you've got. Was it a particular sound you were looking to capture or did it just happen?

I would say that very organically, we moved into this sound. When Chad Patrick and I first started to assemble the first six or seven songs, we did it to go through the motions of just getting used to being in a room together writing. I had stockpiled a bunch of riffs and ideas that I had written over the last ten years and somewhere, in my mind's eye, and part of the reason I was hesitant to play with Chad and Pat again, was I was worried it would just sound like Live. I wanted to make some heavier music. But I quickly figured out that Chad and Patrick were more likely to push me further down that road - a lot of this record is really driven by Chad Gracey's drums. Once we had that sound, we started formulating ideas of who should sing on it. A mutual friend of both mine and Kevin Martin's fortunately spoke up and said I should call Kevin. I was so familiar with Kevin's voice, I knew instantly he would fit perfectly with the music. One of the big dynamic shifts is we don't have to shut the instruments down as much in the verses with this band - we can keep the dynamic up because Kevin's voice comes up and over the band. So that changed the way we played, as musicians. I have to say, on the first day we had Kevin and Sean in the room with us, we basically had an album's worth of songs pretty much written in a few days. It was remarkable - unlike anything I've done in my career.

With you saying about the speed of how quickly the album came together, when I listened to it it had a feel that you cut it mostly live, there's only a couple of fade outs... it reminded me of how Chickenfoot sounded, with all that energy. Was it done that way?

Yeah - every track was cut with all the band in the same room. There's very few overdubs - from a rock and roll standpoint, it's about as pure as you can get. All the guitars and bass are leaking into the drum microphones and vice versa. We just had Kevin in a booth so he could put his vocals down but the band were really going for live takes. There's only a handful of tracks that even used a click track - most of the time we just followed Chad Gracey. It got us back to what I feel are the important roots of rock and roll. Fortunately, we had Jerry Harrison from Talking Heads as our leader and production guru. He totally bought into what we were doing and I wanted to make a record that was part Led Zeppelin, part 'Appetite For Destruction'. I think we landed somewhere in the middle.

I was going to mention Jerry Harrison, from Talking Heads - he worked with you before in Live and he plays a big part on this record. Was he always your first choice for producer?

Yeah, it was very easy to make the choice of Jerry for producer. I met Jerry when I was seventeen and he was easily the most successful musician that I knew. Interestingly enough, I was a fan of his from The Modern Lovers. I had to research Talking Heads to figure them out. I was more into punk as a kid so I knew Jonathan Richmond and The Modern Lovers. By the time Talking Heads were big I was into the more English bands of that time. Of course, I eventually went back to Talking Heads and realised what great records they made! (laughs) Now here I was in the room with a guy who was in both bands. The other thing Jerry brings is Jonathan Richmond left The Modern Lovers to pursue a solo career, David Byrne left Talking Heads to pursue a solo career, and of course Ed Kowalczyk left Live to pursue a solo career. Jerry had been through all this before so he could give us advice on how to recover, strive, not hold grudges, that kind of thing. He was more than a producer, to me, he was a musical father figure. I can't begin to express how critical it was to have Jerry on board - he also taught us to trust Kevin and Sean, let them bring in their ideas. We had some resentment I think, probably stemming from what happened with Ed, it was like a boyfriend/girlfriend dynamic. You know when someone treats his new girlfriend badly because of something the old girlfriend did? So we had to be careful with that, and Jerry helped keep it real and keep us straight.

Another huge part was the engineer, Karl Derfler who worked with Live on 'The Distance To Here' - Karl is Tom Waits' number one guy. Having that influence there - everything Tom Waits does is organic. Having Karl engineer us was so



essential - if Jerry and I differed, Karl would help out. If in doubt, we'd ask what Tom Waits would do, and do it that way. We wanted to leave mistakes and flaws on the record, which goes away nowadays with people editing on Pro-Tools. We wanted the instruments to bleed through, have some imperfections. Karl did some phenomenal mixes that are different to this record, which are even more raw.

With you mentioning Ed there, you said that Live were originally on a hiatus, but after what happened with Ed, that became a permanent break up. Once you knew that, did it spur you on to throw yourself into The Gracious Few even more?

Well, I think for us guys from Live, it was hard for us to say 'It's over' and walk away. It was like a marriage hanging on for the kids, and the kids were our fans. My heart hasn't truly been in it for about ten years. I kept thinking 'Oh, we'll turn a new page, we'll do something new' and it just didn't happen. I don't know, anybody who has been in a really bad relationship, when you were in it, it's really hard to tell that it's bad. As soon as you're out of it, you're like 'Whoa, that was fucked!' (laughs) So, for us, including Ed, we were all in a relationship like that, it wasn't working, it was just completely dysfunctional. Once we got out, Ed got what he wanted which was a solo career, we got what we wanted. To be fair to Ed, I don't think he knew how to tell us he wanted to go solo. That's what happens when friendship and loyalty are mixed in - like a husband and wife thing. All we wanted was a band! When Ed did go, all of a sudden, he had his solo career, I had a band... why didn't we do this before and save each other all the grief and crap? It didn't end pretty I know, but that's rock and roll! (laughs) People's expectations of musicians are the same as their expectations of politicians - they expect it to be messy and nobody being careful. The reality is, rock and roll is built on emotion. In my opinion our music had become really formulaic, even when we were listening back to new songs, I'd know what chord was coming next, we'd do a quiet chorus, then a big build up... I was falling asleep! That can't be good! But the thing is, we started as a band of friends, and that friendship held it together longer than it should. Going through the motions - one day I realised that

this just sucks! I feel bad for the fans who stayed with us during those years. I think the last real Live record we made was 'The Distance To Here'. We were lost and couldn't get back on track. We were together for twenty two years, that's a helluva run, I'm proud of that, but for now, I'm 100% into The Gracious Few.

I think it shows, there's so much energy here compared to, like you say, when you've been involved in what you called the more formulaic albums. Also, mentioning things being predictable, Sean Hennesy was added as a second guitarist - I read that was because you didn't want to play solos. Was that the case, and if so, why choose Sean?

In Live, I was a reluctant soloist. My guitar heroes are Keith Richards and Neil Young. They can play solos, but they aren't Eddie Van Halen or Slash or anything. That's not what I do - I was inspired by rhythm guitar. Take the rhythm guitar from AC/DC - that, to me, is the sound of the band. To me, I wanted to be that guy. So I'm starting over with a brand new band, we come to a natural point for a solo to go, I instinctively start and then though 'this just sucks!' I stopped halfway through and said 'I don't wanna do this!' It wasn't fun and I wanted this band to be fun when we're on stage. I wanted another guitar player, somebody who would inspire me. Kevin Martin spoke up and said he'd been playing with Sean for ten years - Kevin found him in a recording studio somewhere. He eventually became a side member in Candlebox and Kevin said he was phenomenal and could play just about anything. It was funny, we had to call his mom to find him! (laughs) But we flew him out on a red eye to Pennsylvania - after fifteen minutes of him playing, the band was complete, we had our sound. It was the first time in my career, I've got a real guitarist to play off of and play with. When we go out live, we've been tossing solos back and forth. I never thought I'd do that - rather than shut me down, Sean has brought me out and I'm having fun doing it. It relieved the pressure on me because I didn't think solos were my skill set. Sean can play his ass off and I learn from him every night. We have two distinct styles and I liked the Rolling Stones, the Brian Jones era. They had two guitars that were fighting each other. A duel - and if you listen to the Gracious Few album, especially with headphones,

you can hear Sean on one side and me on the other, working together, pushing and pulling. We made a concerted effort not to play exactly the same. Even if we play the same riff, Sean plays ahead of the beat and I play behind - it became part of our sound.

What inspired the name The Gracious Few?

Our agent, Jonathan Levine, worked with the Grateful Dead and is a Dead head through and through. He's a legend in the business and I loved to pick his brain. I'd ask about the Dead all the time. He thought part of the reason they lasted so long and became so big was because of the word 'grateful' in their name. It gave an image of down to earth guys with down to earth qualities, not about rock star personas and ego - it was just about the music. I told Kevin that, and he thought it was incredible. When we were thinking of band names I text them to Jonathan and he'd text back 'No, keep going'. We were in a bar near where I live and there were two elder statesmen musicians in there, two old blues guys. We were bouncing names off them, and Kevin said 'Why don't we call the band The Gracious Few?' Instantly every hair on the back of my neck stood up. I text Jonathan and about five seconds later he text back 'That's it!' We all knew at that point, we had struck a chord amongst ourselves. We're all genuinely grateful to have a second chance in our careers. We started talking about a logo and we all wanted to have something as close to The Allman Brothers as humanly possible. We found an incredible kid in Seattle that Kevin knew and asked him to hand draw a logo. That, again, is old school. Once we saw it, that was it, that was the band. Of course, in the modern era of naming a band you have to do stuff like domain name searches and things - back when I started, you came up with a name and you only knew if somebody else had it if you literally ran into them! (laughs) But nobody had that name, so we were thrilled and our fans who are with us now, are the few. Hopefully they'll become the many, but building it now, those people into us from the beginning are the few. People like yourself who are excited about the record, you guys, for now, are the few.

I was going to ask you if you found it difficult going from a band that's sold millions of records, to starting again from scratch or whether you relished the challenge, but the enthusiasm in your voice for this new project has already answered that.

It's interesting, starting our tour in early October, we broke for Thanksgiving but we're seeing crowds build. When we first started, we had a bunch of people stand by the stage and we play nearly two hours - that's a lot of brand new material for anyone to listen to. Now, we're seeing people singing along to maybe seventy per cent of the show. That's a big change. When I was nineteen and having success, I wasn't paying attention. On the first tour I was looking forward to getting out on the second tour, on the second tour I was looking forward to arenas, I never really lived in the moment. Now, I can say, on my 40th birthday, I'm enjoying the moments, the band, the songs, much more. I'm not worried about tomorrow - one day, one song at a time. It's so much more pleasurable and real. With Live, I ended up on MTV when I was eighteen. That's not real. This feels much more tangible, I understand how we get our fans now, where they are coming from. I write to fans on Facebook, they write to me. I understand how we're growing - this is a real grass roots word of mouth thing. But don't get me wrong - without all the things I did with Live, and what the guys from Candlebox did, guys like you wouldn't know about us and be prepared to write about us. It really is the best of both worlds and I know I'm very fortunate.

Thank you Chad, I've enjoyed talking to you and I hope the record does well - it deserves to.

Thank you very much James. We're playing our first UK show at London Barfly on 27th January, so try and make that, I think it'll be a helluva good show. Y'know, you only get one chance to say I saw The Gracious Few for the first time!