

One Eye to Morocco

With a band that's had David Coverdale, Joe Lynn Turner and Glenn Hughes handling vocals for it, to be known as the definitive voice of Deep Purple is quite a feat, and something Ian Gillan manages with ease. He is the man who put down the unique silver throated screams on 'Child in Time', the voice gracing the immortal 'Smoke On The Water' he was picked to be Jesus in the original cast recording of 'Jesus Christ Superstar', he had a jazz rock fusion band before forming his own hard rock tour de force simply known as Gillan, has fronted Black Sabbath and duetted with Pavarotti, such is his versatility.

He has also made an album with Deep Purple bandmate Roger Glover called 'Accidentally On Purpose', released some excellent solo records like 'Naked Thunder' and has just released his latest effort, titled 'One Eye To Morocco' (a title which is explained in the sleeve notes!). Justifiably proud of this mature and diverse album, Ian welcomed James Gaden into his hotel room to talk face to face about it...

First off, I'd just like to say how much I like the new album. It's a really eclectic mix and I thought it had some real identity to it, that you didn't feel you had to be the 'Deep Purple singer' on it, that you could be an artist again in your own right.

Thank you, that's great. I think with Purple it's completely different. The whole thing is more about collective performance than individual performance within that sort of identity... you're waiting for that magic improvised moment from the guitar solo, or the rhythm section nails it on a particular take. Whereas this was made with session players, and they're professionals who should get it perfect every time. I wasn't demanding a histrionic performance from them, I wanted support for the arrangement of the songs that were written. Adding colour, texture, all those other things that they're able to

deliver. After a week's rehearsal, everyone walks in the room, at the same time, playing at the same time, and off they go. So you should get it first or second take, every time. And there is no rock and roll rhythm section here, and all the guitar parts were written, there's a different approach. And there's a rhythm guitar, which used to exist in all music before the Hammond organ and keyboards came along.

I read your sleeve notes for the album, where you said because of an unexpected break in Purple's schedule, you started making phone calls. Had you had in your mind an album you wanted to make, or was it simply because you like to stay busy and didn't want any downtime between Purple commitments?

Well, I write a lot, so I have tons of stuff. I had thirty eight songs in the library at the time in various stages of completion, and in fact I have again now, because I've done another ten songs since this record was finished. I enjoy the writing process - Steve Morris comes down for a couple of days and we sit around... if it's not done in twenty minutes, up to a certain level, if you don't know how it's going to sound by then, bin it, chuck it away. After that it will become a contrivance. So, after that, we'll drink some beer and put the songs in the library. I think music writing takes up ten to fifteen per cent of my writing time. But my creative manager, Michael Lee Jackson, and the other guys were asking when we were going to get into the studio. I never make plans, I just wait

for opportunities to arise, and when it did, I said 'Hey, why don't we do this now?' Then we had to select the songs. Normally when you go into a studio the hardest part is writing the songs. Then you've got to knock them into shape and take the rough edges off. But when songs have been around for a while they sound a bit more natural in the studio.

I know you picked 'One Eye To Morocco' as the benchmark track to determine what else was included - was there anything specific about that song that made you single it out?

Yeah, it was musical... I hadn't written any lyrics for it at the time... I had a melody but no words. Yet there was something about it, it had a kind of exotic, sensual feeling and I felt it would be a good criteria by which to judge the others. So, if it went with that, it was on the album, if not, back to the library. It was a mood thing - I knew I didn't want big rock guitars on there, I knew I didn't want a rock rhythm section, I knew I DID want Nick Blagona to be the producer and I knew I wanted all the parts to be written before we went to record. But I didn't quite know what the result was going to be, because you can't really tell.

Let me tell you, I was in Milan, doing a photograph session for the label, and we rented a villa. It was very cold there, and we had a top class photographer... you know, I really don't like doing photo shoots much. There were loads of girls there... my assistant Sally, a hair girl... for no reason, a make up girl, for virtually no reason, a clothes girl, she was very good, a translator and a girl from the record label. They put the record on to try and get some atmosphere, because it was a cold miserable building, and it was very quiet, nobody was listening to it as such. But I could see out of the corner of my eye, all the girls were together nattering away, and I noticed that all their bums were moving. And I thought... 'Mission accomplished!' (laughs). See, with a Purple record, it's very thrusting, sort of 'grrrr!' and 'Listen to me!' kind of thing, where as this is more intimate and I would say seductive in rhythmic terms. A friend has it on in the room when they're doing the ironing! So, to go back, it's hard to say where you start, but the luxury of having a song to plan things, and then to have material already written, so you could take a fully rehearsed group of session musicians into a studio was fantastic. I could do my parts knowing when I've finished Nick would still be there later on, sprinkling fairy dust on with the production, adding little

percussive elements and doing what he does... the guy's a genius. So song selection was very important, and it was that sensual, slightly exotic flavour I wanted.

I liked the fact there's all sorts of different things on there, like 'Deal With It' which is a million miles from what you normally do, but I thought it just fitted the record nicely. I've listened to the record every day since receiving it, and it is a great album to work to. It's similar to 'Accidentally On Purpose'.

It's exactly the same, in fact a week before... oh sorry, you said 'Accidentally On Purpose', I'm thinking of 'Dreamcatcher'. It is in fact in that same vein as 'Accidentally On Purpose', same producer, same ethos. I was going to say that this sounded like 'Dreamcatcher' before we paid for session musicians and before we got the producer and the label involved. 'Dreamcatcher' was just a collection of demos that really hadn't been developed, similar to what I have in the library now.

I noticed that you often work with Steve Morris, who you mentioned earlier, and while he is credited for writing a lot on here, apart from a couple of tracks, he doesn't play at all on this record. Was that a conscious decision?

Yeah, I wouldn't let the bastard anywhere near the studio! (laughs) When you hear his demos, he loves the axeman, big rock stuff... he's a brilliant guitar player, absolutely fantastic, but he loves giving it some and the big rock sound. He's quite a forceful character, so to get him in a studio it's hard to keep a leash on him. So I thought we'd do it this way, bless him. I think he was camping at the airport waiting for my call! (laughs). So no, we went with other guys, except for 'Deal With It', which Steve plays everything on. It was important to use the right instruments for this album. With a rock band, it is flexible, but ultimately there's only so many things you can do... it's like the cuckoo really, that edges out other species? The Hammond organ and modern keyboards pushed aside rhythm guitar, and there's a lot of rhythm guitar on this record. That's what gives it its subtle pulse. I think sometimes you can overdo the individual contributions from certain instruments. You need a common support.

Which leads nicely to Michael Lee Jackson, who has become quite a musical foil for you. You mentioned him as your creative manager, you've played live with him, sang on his album, and you did his song 'Texas State Of Mind' on this album...

I wanted to steal that song from the moment I heard it. I thought the song was great. We grew up with a lot of these things, but with American blues, Lynryd Skynyrd, Creedence Clearwater, all that kind of thing, is beyond the scope of an English musician because we didn't grow up in that environment, we didn't have that stuff in our blood. Although we're better at the blues than most Americans, but that other stuff we aren't very good at writing. Michael's had an interesting life, both his parents are professors of English at Buffalo university, he's a lawyer and a musician, and my creative manager and musical director. We go down the pub and work things out, but he's a very, very smart guy and he's also someone who goes with the flow. Most things, that develop a life of their own, don't need much more than just a little bit of help, and a guiding hand, and that's what musical projects are like and he understands that. I've got a great team around me who'll listen.

In a band, you'll get five ideas that won't always be the same, and sometimes ideas will die before they can develop. There's a song on this record called 'Change My Ways' which is the oldest song on the album. It must be about ten years old, and it's the only song I've ever taken and done a presentation to Deep Purple with. We were doing 'Abandon' I think, and I picked up a guitar and said 'What about this?' Steve Morse set up, and said, with a smile... I think it was a smile anyway, and said 'So, Ian, you're trying to suggest Deep Purple records this song that only has one chord?' And they all sort of sniggered and walked out. It got left at that, but I always had a faith in it. The irony in it was it did only have one chord, but it was dealing with a juxtaposition of old ideas and new ideas, like cold war, global warming... and me maturing, old ways versus new ways, hence 'Change My Ways'. All of this, trying to express it, while locked inside one chord, so you had to create excitement using vocal breaks, volume, dynamics and things because there was no chord

structure to rely on. So that is the only song I've ever presented to Deep Purple.

I could see that on 'Purpendicular', but I think it's perfect for this album.

Yeah - I like understatement on the record, which I've always enjoyed. I like understatement when it comes to writing - if you want to make a point it's much more effective when people figure it out for themselves than if you ram it down their throats, because sometimes they resent that.

With this being more like a mood record than you've done before, do you think these songs would translate well live, or would you leave them alone because you prefer them as part of a whole record?

Well, I've got an idea that I would like to do a theatrical version of this, together with some songs from my past and Purple that I think would be simpatico. I'd like to do it with a big band, ten, twelve, fifteen, whatever it takes and have the band in silhouette because I think musicians just playing as backup is not always that fascinating to look at. I'd like to have screens with mood images, and have an insane choreographer design something for a dance troupe so I could have whirling dervishes, flamenco, latin and jazz... I don't mean a big song and dance routine, nothing like that, just little flourishes, almost dream sequence type, that makes you think 'Oh, what was that?' The mood of the album is a little theatrical, so I'd like to perform it in a theatre, see how it goes.

I haven't even seen it, and it sounds fantastic! (Laughs) Well, I'd love to do it, but I'd have to find a



promoter. A medium sized theatre, on for a few nights to see how it goes, that would be my dream.

I saw on your 'Live In Anaheim' release, you wheeled out some songs that Purple had never played before. Are you someone who revisits your old work and think 'Wow, why didn't that ever get played'?

I don't listen to them, but they're all there in my head. They're in the memory banks and something will trigger it. A subject may come up, and it'll trigger something that brings something you've done to mind, it's the same with music. When we started playing 'The Battle Rages On' and 'Wasted Sunsets', I thought those to be totally compatible with 'Men Of War'. Michael Lee Jackson had some ideas as well. 'Not Responsible' for example came up, and 'Wasted Sunsets' has come up in conversation with Purple since I started doing it.

Finally, you frequently use your website to write on, so are you a musician who sees the internet as an ally or an enemy? I've heard arguments for both...

It throws up a lot of moral questions, like anything new does. When you have something as revolutionary as the internet, censorship is an issue that comes to mind. When you first open a website, as everyone did ten years ago, you're confronted with an army of fascists that you never had to deal with before. You think 'Oh, I'll open a guest page and everyone can come on and it'll be lovely' and you end up realising the world isn't such a lovely place after all - there's a lot of shits out there! (laughs). They've

formed opinions without really thinking it through, based on allegiance, alliance, lifestyle, and these become opinions. It's like people who have political allegiance because their mum or dad voted for a certain party, or everyone down their street did. So then you're faced with a challenge about your own thoughts on censorship, and how you should deal with it. You think about how newspapers must deal with it - but then you realise that they all have their own agendas and allegiances. You have the option of just having a page where you can write but people can't reply or write letters, which might as well just be an advertising hoarding. It's really a question of doing the best you can and learning as you go. I like to diffuse things with humour - if I get a letter screaming, shouting, calling me all sorts, I just publish the letter as it stands and title it 'Who Do I Think I Am?' (laughs). I let people judge for themselves and it helps diffuse the whole thing.

I mentioned earlier about maybe fifteen per cent of my writing time is on music, probably the same again goes for my website. I enjoy it, it's fun. I probably don't get as much out of it as I should, with fashions such as Youtube, Facebook, all these things have become the new society. I don't know what it means to have maybe two really good friends, as oppose to twenty thousand 'friends', you know? I'm sure it's comforting as a teenager if you feel part of something big. That's what young people have always done with regards to their clothes, lifestyle, culture, and whatever happens, you can't be judged outside of your peer group. And that's why modern art, contemporary art, and modern music cannot be judged objectively because it has no value outside of its peer group. The whole thing comes together from appearance, attitude, and a few years later it's something else as for a new generation.

The internet is very important for other things - it has a collegiate value. You look at ideas in the past that maybe were partly developed in Cambridge, and maybe someone else had part of a solution in New York, or Switzerland or whatever, you put them all together, you can solve it.

The information exchange now is great.

Yes, but not all problems are that practical. Some people solve a problem, and it wasn't really a problem in the first place, they were just working on the wrong hypothesis. Anyway, it's all good fun to me! (laughs)

