

MEMPHIS BLOOD

Sweat & Tears

Former Survivor vocalist Jimi Jamison talks to James Gaden.



Back in issue 21, I was lucky enough to land an interview with former Survivor member Jim Peterik. In the same issue we had an interview with Frankie Sullivan of Survivor, which Phil Ashcroft so ably handled. I had originally pitched for it in the hope it would be with one of my favourite singers, Jimi Jamison, but that was not to be.

Jimi left Survivor shortly after, and I kept tabs on what he's been doing, and decided if an interview wasn't offered for Survivor, I'd just have to go out and arrange one myself. And that's exactly what I did - and ended up merely a week later chatting on the phone to Jimi, another of my heroes who lived up to all my expectations.

I was already impressed with Jimi when it came to arranging the interview, because I was put in immediate contact with him to arrange a time, not messing about with middle men. He was very accommodating, and I was due to speak to him at his home. Plans often change though, and I ended up chatting to him in his hotel room in Florida about two weeks prior to Christmas. After pleasantries were exchanged, I figured the easiest place to start was to ask him what he was in Florida for.

"I'm playing a benefit show down here for cancer, that I do every year" Jimi replies. "It'll be a collection of stuff from my back catalogue... I'm there, Mike Reno is on as well, and Chuck Negron of Three Dog Night."

The first thing I really want to get into is Memphis Blood, a new project Jimi is involved in, so I ask him to explain it's origins, and it's purpose.

"Ok, Memphis Blood is a bunch of musicians who have played on multiple million selling records, soundtracks, TV shows... if you see our promo, it's pretty wild," he states proudly. "We've got Steve Potts on drums, who played with everybody from Crosby, Stills and Nash to Wynonna Judd, Dave Smith on bass, Kevin Stewart on acoustic guitar and piano, Tony Black on the other keyboards, Jack Holder on lead guitar and myself.

"We also have a couple of subs who aren't slackers themselves! Bill Marshall is there, who played with Hank Williams Jr. for twenty something years, and Jimmy Buffet stuff... all kinds of things. We just thought we'd put this thing together and play around in a little club downtown, and see what happens. We actually stopped a while back because a tenant above complained, so we haven't played for a couple of months!"

I comment it sounds pretty special, and Jimi agrees. "You should've heard it man, it sounded great."

There's talk of an album from them, but it's early days, so I ask if Memphis Blood will take to the road on a full scale tour, rather than playing one set venue?

"I dunno," Jimi answers. "I'm definitely going to tour with my band, which I plucked people out of that band... to be my band!" he laughs, and from the sound of it, I can't blame him. "It's just a scaled down version of it. If the opportunity arises, we would tour, but these guys are highly paid and in demand musicians, so it's hard to keep them playing around town. We weren't getting paid, it was for fun, a musicians thing. It's hard to keep playing for nothing when these guys are used to making a bunch of money! If the opportunity came to take it on the road, we would, but first I'm taking my band on the road. I don't know whether to call it the Jimi Jamison band, or what! But I think it will be great. We played our first gig on the 20th December."

The next thing to mention is Jimi's return to the charts over the past year - not just in the States, but the UK too. The first one I mention is a duet with a young girl named Whitney Wolanin. Jimi guested on her debut album 'Funkology XIII', a series of classic Motown covers. He performs a duet of the timeless 'It Takes Two' with Whitney, and I downloaded a clip and was very impressed. The duet was released as a single, and in the States it hit #9 at radio on FMOB's AC40 Chart, was a #1 most added song around the US, and spent 20 weeks on the chart. Whitney has a huge, powerful soul voice... and I was staggered to discover when she went in to cut the track she was only thirteen years old!

"She's doing really well man," Jimi says. "God, I think she is about thirteen or something. Her dad is pushing her big time and she's such a sweetheart."

I ask Jimi how he came to be involved in the duet - did he approach Whitney, or was he sought out?

"Well, I was doing a show in Hawaii, and Vincent, her father, is (former Bad Company vocalist) Brian Howe's manager, and Brian was on the show. I got to know Vincent and we became friends - I started doing his Christmas Charity show every year. I said if you need any help with Whitney I'd be glad to help, to get her started, so we did the duet, and Vincent has begun handling some of my business - that's how it got started."

I comment it was nice to hear Jimi try his hand at something more soul orientated, and I thought he and Whitney sounded great together.

"Thanks man! It seems like everybody has cut that song! Rod Stewart did it with Tina Turner, and there has been all kinds of people cover it. I downloaded a bunch of versions, listened to them, and tried to put my take on it."

The other hit in this country was a remix of the Baywatch theme tune, 'I'm Always Here', which received a fair bit of radio airplay, and has proved to be a popular download.

"I heard something about that - somebody sent me an email and said it had broken the top ten. I didn't know anything about it!"

I was extremely surprised by this and mused that it's weird the artist who cut the song in the first place doesn't know about something like this.

"I know, all sorts of licensing goes on and half the time you don't know what's happening. I haven't seen any money from this yet," Jimi laughs. "Ah... story of my life!"

Yet another thing that's brought Jimi's voice back to the people is the Starbucks advert he recently cut. It's a hilarious spoof of 'Eye Of The Tiger', featuring Jimi and Frankie Sullivan with a backing band bearing the Survivor slogan. The character in the advert, Glenn, cracks open a Starbucks drink, and as soon as he does, the unmistakable intro to 'Eye Of The Tiger' starts up. Next thing you know, Survivor are in his front room, but Jimi sings new lyrics, all about this guy Glenn and his trip to work, and achieving ambitions. Wherever Glenn goes, from having a shave to catching a bus, the band are right behind him with Jimi belting out this soundtrack. It's highly amusing, and I asked Jimi about it.

"Yeah," he chuckles. "I gave the money I made from that to a friend of mine... you probably won't know who he is, but he's Larry Finch, a famous basketball player from Memphis State. He ended up becoming the coach, and he had a couple of strokes. He's in a home right now and he can't move, and can't pay his bills, and hospital bills, so I donated my money him to help him out."

"It was a Nashville thing, the version we cut. We got some Nashville musicians to cut it with us, and it had that fun theme."

I told him when I watched it, all I could think was 'How cool would it be to have Survivor follow you to work?'

"Oh, it'd drive you insane!" Jimi bursts out laughing. "It'd be ok for a bit but then you be screaming 'Get out of here!' It was fun to make... people were dying laughing in the street!"

"These jingle guys have a sense of humour - that's why I wore the 'clown outfit' - that purple shirt and everything. I had on my total black, trademark thing, but when I heard how much of a spoof it was, I thought I'd better dress accordingly. It was fun!"

I asked Jimi if the advert was done before or after 'Reach' was recorded, and he said it happened before. That led me to ask if working with Frankie on that inspired the decision to make a new Survivor record, or if there was already one in the pipeline?

"No, we were already going to do a new album," Jimi answers. "This was a job, a money making thing. We only got it because the guy who owns Starbucks is a big sports fan, and they'd never done an advert like this. Somebody said 'What if we got 'Eye Of The Tiger' for the commercial?' and he said 'Let's go for it!' It worked out really well for everybody."

So, with that in mind, I decide now is as good a time as any to swing the questioning round to the 'Reach' album. On first listen I was very disappointed, and after several listens I found I liked all of the songs, but it didn't have much kick considering the last proper Survivor album was the hard rocking 'Too Hot To Sleep'. I ask Jimi what he thinks of the album, because it had only just been released when he and Survivor parted company.

"That's one of the reasons I moved on actually," Jimi responds. "It's a good album, but it could have been better, and I didn't have as much input as I would have liked to have had. I was always told I had a 50% say, but I later found out that I didn't. I felt like I was treading water, and I've been with Survivor for twenty years, so I figured I should move on."

I tell him my opinion of the album and said I prefer listening to individual tracks than playing it as an entire album, because there's too many slow or mid-tempo songs in the middle for my taste.

"Oh, way too many mid tempo songs," Jimi agrees. "I wanted some more upbeat songs. We kinda just rushed through it, you know? I didn't like that. I don't want to rush through anything, I want to take the time and do it right."

I ask how he felt about Frankie Sullivan handling lead vocals on two of the tracks.

Release date: February 16th 2007

www.frontiersin.com

Jim Peterik (ex SURVIVOR) and Toby Hitchcock are back with a brand new Melodic Rock masterpiece. Passionate vocals combined with Peterik's songs and backed by fantastic musicianship make this one of the first contenders for Melodic Rock album of 2007!

Release date: February 16th 2007

The legendary original TYKETTO singer is back with his new solo album: and it's one of the highlights of his career to date. 'Traveller' is an intense and hook laden Hard Rock album and an essential purchase for all fans of quality song writing and Danny's incredible vocals.

Release date: February 16th 2007

EPISODE 3 - THE FINAL SURPRISE
The wait is over: the 3rd episode of Daniele Liverani's Rock Opera is now available. Featuring: DC Cooper (Silent Force; ex Royal Hunt); Daniel Gildenlow (Pain of Salvation); Jori Lande (ex Masterplan, Jori); Andrea Dabayer (Lunatica); Eric Martin (ex Mr. Big); Toby Hitchcock (Pride of Lions). The grand finale is here, don't miss this superb release.

Release date: February 16th 2007

The Classic Rock songbook gets revisited by Tommy Shaw (STYX, DAMN YANKEES) and Jack Blades (NIGHT RANGER, DAMN YANKEES) - another soulful and classy release from those legendary musicians.



"Oh, I don't care!" he drawls, then laughs. "If he wants to sing, then more power to him. One of the songs I actually suggested he try singing, but I guess he got carried away!" We both started laughing, before Jimi adds "He did a pretty good job actually. I'd only heard him practice, and I was a little concerned, but when he finished it sounded pretty good."

The creep in me rears its head and I say that people sharing album time with him on vocals are more often than not going to be second best.

"Well if I'd played guitar, I'd have come off second best!" Jimi laughs.

Recently Jim Peterik had played a show and Jimi was there, and they teamed up for an encore and ran through some Survivor material. The reports I'd read, both from Peterik and fans who were there, said the pairing was stunning, Jamison sounded amazing and the place was electric. I ask Jimi about it.

"Yes - actually it was a benefit show... man, we do so many benefits. It was for Hepatitis C Foundation - you know, Fergie Frederiksen? Anyway, Jim and I got up there, and man, it was unreal. The musicians came out from the back, stood at the side of the stage going 'Hey man, what is this?' They started freaking out, and the crowd starting flipping out. It was great, having your peers go crazy over it. Jim and I looked at each other and said 'Hey, maybe we should keep this band together!'"

"So, we've been talking for the last couple of months. I love Jim to death - he's a great guy, and what a songwriter. We're talking about collaborating on some stuff."

"So, we're in contact - we'll do something. We may not play live together, but we're definitely going to record something."

The notion of a top singer and Jim Peterik's songs made me think of 'Sunstorm', that Jimi's close friend Joe Lynn Turner provided vocals for. I mention to Jimi about the 'Sunstorm' album, and Mickey Thomas' 'Over The Edge' project, and asked him if he'd consider a project similar to the ones his friends had sung on?

"Of course," he responds without hesitation. "I'm pretty much wide open in that respect. I'm for it... if it's good stuff and the fans want it, I'll do it. And with something like that... song writing is hard, man! When you get someone like Jim who can come along and offer you songs of that calibre, you need to take advantage of it."

I reveal to him how much I loved the 'Sunstorm' album, and said that Joe sounded fantastic on it.

"Yeah, Joe is a really good friend of mine. He's such a great singer man... I hate him!" he laughs. "I'm kidding, I love him to death, he's a very good singer."

I question Jimi about the chance of hearing Survivor on the upcoming Rocky film, 'Rocky Balboa'.

"I don't really know," he says. "Maybe 'Eye Of The Tiger' might be interspersed in there. I keep hearing

rumours that they're going to use 'Fire Makes Steel', but I can't say for certain. I'd actually written a song and submitted it to them, but it was already in the can by then. The irony was, they got back to me immediately and loved it, but the film was done, it was in the process of having the distribution sorted out. So I kinda missed the boat on that one sadly."

Another thing Jimi was involved in was a classic album prior to him joining Survivor - the stunning 'Cobra' album. I'd heard it was due to be reissued, so I asked Jimi if it was true and what he thought about it.

"Yes, Rock Candy Records is working on sorting out a re-release," Jimi replies. "Cobra was a fun band. Mandy Meyers is a killer guitar player. In fact, we were the first heavy metal band in Memphis! We weren't metal as such, but compared to what else was out on that scene back then, that's what we were seen as."

As Jimi is obviously pleased it's going to be available again, I ask about the band he was in prior to Cobra - an act called Target, which released two albums. Those albums never made it to CD, so it's some of the only Jamison material I've never heard. I ask if he has any idea if they would be reissued?

"I don't know - they should be... remixed and re-released," he says. "But they never came out on CD... I don't have a clue if that's in any pipeline. It'll probably happen when I die!" he laughs. "Somebody will try and make a buck out of it!"

We start talking about rare items, and I mention I had to hunt down a copy of his solo album 'When Love Comes Down', which was issued in 1991. Being too young to have bought it when it came out, by the time I got around to buying it, it was long since deleted. I found a store on the internet which had it used, but in 'great condition and autographed'. When I got the package, and opened it, it read, on the cover 'Hi Steve, what's new mate! Jimi Jamison'.

"Oh man!" he bursts out laughing. "You mean I autographed it for this guy and he sold it!"

I mean exactly that. It was a rare album, and I saw it and it was autographed. I expected it just to have Jimi's signature on it. I did not expect a message to some bloke named Steve.

This has really tickled Jimi and he is guffawing loudly by now. "Oh, that's... we'll have to try and get you a copy with your name on it! Did you try to erase it off?"

The thought had occurred to me, but it was written in silver pen, so the cover would have perished. It was a non starter.

"Keep that - it's a good conversation piece!" Jimi chuckles. "If you get something autographed, you don't really want them to put your name on it like I did, because then it's personalised - it means something only to you."

Apparently it didn't mean much to Steve. "No, it can't have!" he laughs. "That's funny man. There's actually a store in New Orleans that used to sell stuff like that... autographed stuff but with people's names on. People pull that stunt all the time."

The next logical question is to ask if Jimi will be making another solo album?

"Yeah, I am. I'm talking with a couple of different labels right now to see what pans out. I'm actually really anxious just to get out playing some gigs with my band. But then I'll get in writing mode, and Jim (Peterik) will be writing some, and we'll try and do some together."

I mention his last solo album, 'Empires', which I thought was not only an excellent record, it helped to bridge the gap between Survivor releases, because there was such a void between 'Reach' and 'Too Hot To Sleep'.

"Thanks man," he replies. "That was the best record Survivor ever made."

While most people pick 'Vital Signs' for that accolade, I'm with Jimi - 'Too Hot To Sleep' is bursting with great songs and it's the hardest rocking of

the Jamison era. I think it's easily the best Survivor album.

"I do too, big time. I think the rest of the guys in the band would agree with that as well."

I tell him that the current incarnation of Survivor, with Robin McAuley on vocals, plays 'She's A Star' from 'Too Hot To Sleep'. Jimi tells me that he used to play it with his band, and believes that Robin would do it justice. I reply that from the bootlegs I've heard, McAuley seems competent enough, but he doesn't have the quality of the voice to carry the songs for my tastes.

"They probably need to do another CD, one with new songs built for his vocals. Starting in a band singing other people's songs before they know you is tough... like if you came into Journey and had to sing Steve Perry songs, you'd be saying 'God, it's so high!'" he laughs.

This leads me to one of my favourite questions to ask singers. I ask Jimi if there have been any famous bands he's auditioned for and not gotten the job for, or if he's been in the frame to join, but it's not worked out? I love hearing these stories and wondering what could have been.

"Er... there wasn't a name band I auditioned for I didn't get the job for, but there have been times when I got the job and didn't get to see it through."

I assume he's talking about Deep Purple, because hardcore Jimi fans know he was all set to step into Ian Gillan's shoes in 1990, a job that would ultimately go to Joe Lynn Turner, until Gillan returned for the next album.

"You're right - Deep Purple." Jimi confirms. "Oh yeah, big time. I wanted to be in that band so bad man. Well, I was in it... for a week! The record company called me up and pretty much grabbed me by the collar... it was 'Hey, we'll break your legs if you do it!'"

"I had to call Purple's management, and man, they flipped out. We were actually writing a song together, I have it on tape. Ritchie and I... well we all just got along great. I was told I was the guy, I was in. So when I had to call them up... on man, that was a terrible day. I was in Deep Purple! I was playing with Blackmore, Lord, Glover, Paice... we jammed the old songs like 'Highway Star' and 'Smoke On The Water' of course. And the new song, Ritchie started playing guitar, and everybody joined in, and I started scat-singing over the top. We didn't have a name for it or any words, but it was coming along great. It was wonderful."

I comment that if the job is going to go to anyone, at least it went to his friend Joe.

"Exactly, because Joe is one heck of a singer. 'Street Of Dreams' is one of my favourite songs ever," Jimi agrees.

As a Turner fan, I always thought it was a travesty that Joe only lasted one album and tour, because I thought 'Slaves And Masters' was a great record, and Joe sounded good to me on the tour recordings I've heard.

"No kidding! I never understood that either, he should've have done another one," Jimi says. "But that's the music business."

By this point I've wiped out all the questions I want answering, so I ask Jimi if there is anything he wants me to include in the article.

"I'd just like to let everybody know that I'm still here, and I'm coming back!" he states with an enthusiastic chuckle. "Be on the lookout for some new material, sometime in 2007 hopefully."

You can view the Starbucks advert with Jimi and Frankie on Jimi's Memphis Blood Myspace page:

www.myspace.com/memphisblood (located in the blog named "Glenn")

For fans of Jimi, his Myspace page has a bunch of other rare videos from all areas of his career, courtesy of Youtube.

www.myspace.com/jimijamison