



MARCUS BONFANTI

Blues rocker Marcus Bonfanti has been making some waves with his third album 'Shake The Walls', an impressive record harking back to the 70s in style and approach. After reviewing the album last issue, James Gaden got in touch with Marcus to find out more about it.

Can you give readers who may be new to your music a brief summary of your career to date?

When I dropped out of University in 2003 I decided to put a band together and play as many gigs as I could, mainly because that's what all my favourite musicians did, they just played and toured and learned how to do it that way. I got into session playing after that with loads of different people as a sideman, but I got bored of playing the same music every night. I moved back to London to make my first solo record. I got a deal with a small label and 'Hard Times' was released in 2008. I toured it solo - I'd played all the instruments on the album myself because I couldn't afford to pay a band! I started my second album 'What Good Am I To You?' while I was on the road. The label gave me a budget for that so I could employ a band and also record in a studio - 'Hard Times' was done in a friend's front room! That album was released in 2010 and we toured as a band after that pretty relentlessly for two years. In 2012, I signed with a new label and started work on 'Shake The Walls'.

'Shake The Walls' is quite retro, with some Zeppelin touches, old school blues... my favourite 'My Baby Don't Dance' could easily be The Rolling Stones. Was this your aim when writing for the record?

I never set out to make a certain type of album, I just started writing songs on my acoustic guitar. I thought if I get them sounding good with just the acoustic, when I bring the band in, it will sound great. I love Zeppelin & The Stones - I've listened to their music for so long, their influence will always be heard in my music. I've always tried to be original but I'm not afraid to

show people where I've come from. I like to be honest in my lyrics and give people an insight into my life and the same goes for the music. Your comparisons to the Stones and Led Zep are a massive compliment because I've always loved those bands. Jimmy Page is one of the main reasons I picked up the guitar in the first place. Thank you!

'Blind Alley' has a country vibe - is this a genre you'd like to explore more?

Yeah, I think so but I don't think I'd ever want to make a whole country album. I wrote 'Blind Alley' with Sharon Vaughn, she has written so many great country tunes over the years. I wanted 'Blind Alley' to be a tragic sounding love song, it's about following a cause no matter how hopeless it is, right until the very end and being there for someone when they need you, no matter how much it hurts you to do it. I like my albums to have a variety of styles on them.

You recorded at Grange Studios in Norfolk, where the album was done with analogue tape. What were the reasons for that decision?

When I met up with JIGSAW they turned me on to The Grange and thought I should go take a look at it. I'd been wanting to do a record like this for a long time but it wouldn't have been right for my previous two releases. Now I have a band that I've been on the road with for three years, we know how each other plays, the whole unit is really tight. I wanted to capture this on record. When I met Dave Williams at The Grange we talked a lot about how some of my favourite records had been made - he had been involved in some of them! - and how best to capture a band, but not make

a live album. I felt that Dave was the best person to produce it and The Grange was the place to do it. As soon as I heard my music being played off a tape machine I knew I'd made the right decision. It sounded like all the records I obsessed over when I was growing up. There is nothing like analogue recording when it comes to capturing the energy from a group of musicians!

The record has eleven songs, clocking in at 40 minutes, like a vinyl album. Did you have to reign in the temptation to jam?

(Laughs) Yeah man, there's a funny story about that! When we started recording the album we kicked off with 'Jezebel'. We were happy, but we wanted to try another and compare the two takes. Dave told us there was only enough tape in the studio to record eleven songs, so if we wanted to do another we had to record over what we had just done! That set the standard and it was great. We would play a song, look around and if anyone looked unsure then we would wind the tape back and go again. At one point we were recording a song that has an extended outro. During the recording the band was flying and I had lost track of how long we'd been jamming this outro. When we came in the control room to listen back, Dave had to break the news to us that the tape had run out after about 30 seconds of the outro and the five minutes of spontaneous music we'd just played had sadly not been recorded!

The whole analogue way of recording really lends itself to a vinyl release and we will do one before the end of the year. Even the track list reflects that. 'My Baby Don't Dance' is track seven, beginning of side two... you gotta start side two with a big song!

You won the Kevin Thorpe award for 'Best Original Song' at the British Blues Awards for your track 'The Bittersweet' which closes the album...

It was quite a surprise for me to be nominated in that category because at the time the song was only available on a limited edition EP that I sold at gigs. I have no idea how anyone at the Blues Awards got hold of it but I was very honoured! It was great to win as songwriting is something I have really worked on over the years. I hope people liked the song because the lyric is real. It's about life and all its highs and lows, something I think we can all relate to.

What's next for Marcus Bonfanti?

I will be touring Europe around the end of the year and going to the States too. I don't like standing still, I prefer to be doing things. So in amongst the festivals this summer and the touring at the end of the year I'll be getting ideas together for the next record. If I can keep on playing music and releasing records for the rest of my life, I'll be very happy!