

# MICHAEL DES BARRES

*With a successful music career fronting Silverhead, Detective, Chequered Past and famously, the Power Station, Michael Des Barres has also enjoyed a prolific acting career, seeing him appear in hit TV shows and films alongside the likes of Clint Eastwood, Steven Seagal, Sidney Poitier and many more. He returned to music when he released the Faces and Steve Marriott inspired 'Carnaby Street' in 2012 and has just unleashed 'The Key To The Universe', a back to the roots, thunderous Rock record that has seen him receive some of the best reviews of his impressive career to date. James Gaden met up with Michael in London to learn more...*

**'The Key To The Universe' really threw me when I first heard it. I was expecting a follow up to 'Carnaby Street', which I really loved. But this, it's heavier; it's this raw, booming, powerful Rock album, a completely different beast. You recorded everything analogue, with completely different musicians. Why was that?**

I didn't really come up with it on my own. Bob Rose, the producer, is someone I really credit with the inspiration behind it. He called me and said "Come to Rome and make a Rock 'n' Roll record." Nigel [Harrison, ex Blondie and longtime MDB cohort] was going to be there and two guys who I had yet to meet, which was Dani [Robertson, guitarist from the Jimi Hendrix Live Experience] and Clive [Deamer, drums, ex-Portishead and Robert Plant]. Bob said "I want to make a Rock 'n' Roll record with you Michael and I want you singing like you're 21 years old." I just thought "Wow..." As you know, I've been through a lot of incarnations. I've picked up some habits, you duplicate things, you start doing things because you think people will dig them, and you get away from the original intent. The original intent was to sing the Blues and get laid. But other things cropped up, I ended up being a hired gun with the Power Station, it became like a job. I kind of lost the relationship of why I did music in the first place.

When I got there, Bob played 'Johnny', an old Silverhead song which was done on acoustic guitar. So I sang it like I did when I was 21 years old. Bob then said "That's the guy I want to record." So I turned up with 20 sets of lyrics, ready to just be the singer. I didn't want to be cracking the whip, Nigel was there, who was brilliant. Clive Deamer had played with Robert Plant, he's brilliant. I could just sit and listen to him drum. Dani Johnson - incredible. We wrote all but three songs, 'Room Full Of Angels' from Peter Wolf, 'Burning In Water' which was by Jeff Silbar, and 'Can't Get You Off My Mind' which was Linda Perry's. We recorded those songs and it was effortless. If I'm not certain what's going on, I'll choose a voice and I'll be that voice for the record. 'Carnaby Street' saw me choose a swaggering, Faces-like guy, and it was so much fun and the band was great. This though, is a whole other category. It's authentic and it rocks like fuck! I'm the number one most played Rock 'n' Roll artist in the United States at the moment. Six weeks - can you believe that? Extraordinary. It's taking off in Germany where I just did some appearances. Why? Because it's so

infectious. It's addictive - it's like a drug. After having done so many drugs myself, I think I deserve it. (laughs)

**You mentioned Linda Perry's song and it's a great fit. Was that written for you?**

No. I know Linda well, she's fantastic, she's more Rock 'n' Roll than 90% of the dudes out there. She had written the song about a lover of hers who left her. She put together Deep Dark Robot, which was one of her projects and Nigel, being the intuitive guy he is, he was an A&R guy at Interscope for years, he has this treasure trove and when he heard Linda's song he said "That's an MDB song." He brought it to Rome with the

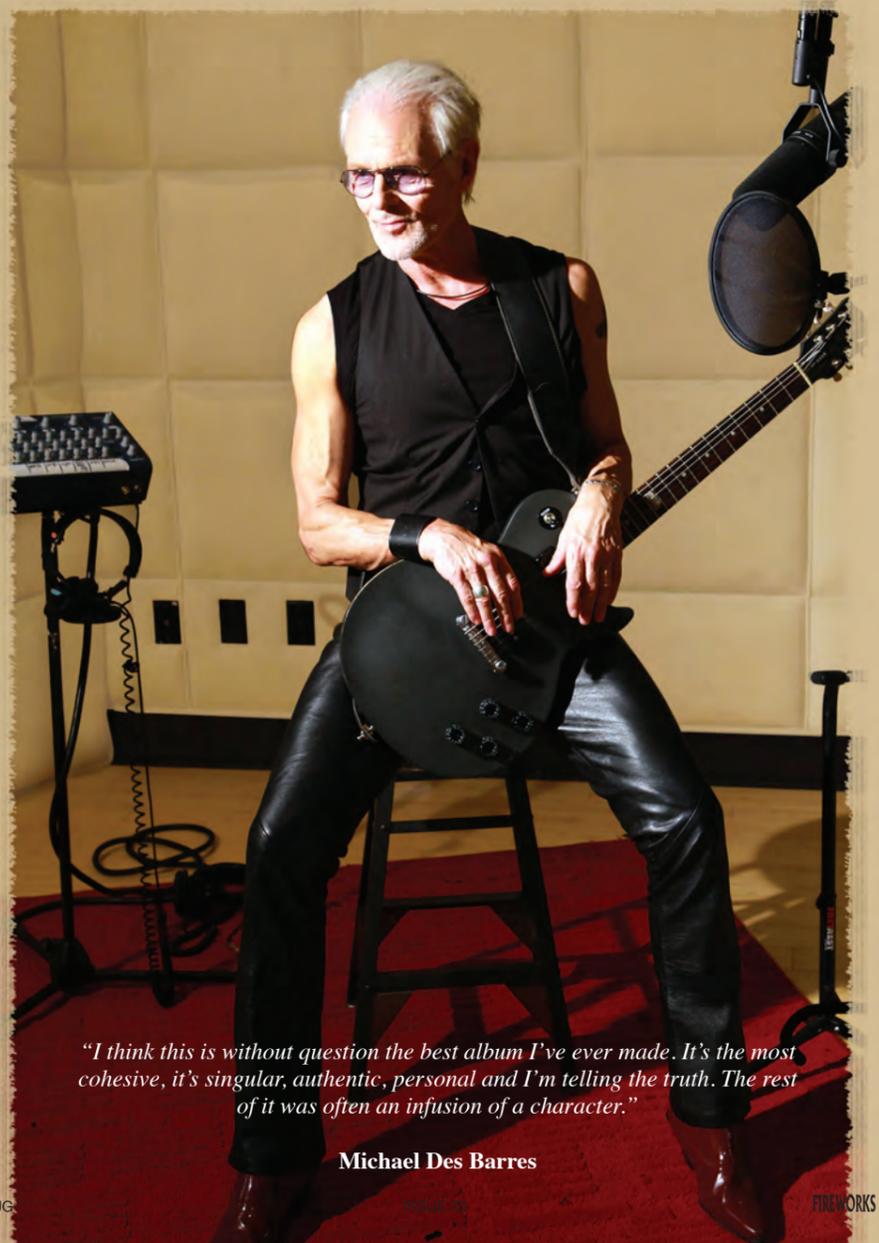
other two covers and we had a starting point, rather than Clive, Dani, Nigel, Bob and I trying to create a sound.

**There's some nice light and shade on the record though, it's not all bombastic. The closing track 'Supernatural Lovers' for example is more Psychedelic Funk.**

Yeah! It has a great groove and I just wanted to talk over it. You know me, I talk a lot! If you listen to the lyrics, I mean every syllable, when we do it live, that will be a chance for me to ad-lib and improvise. There's a lot on this record I've never said before.

**With you recording it all analogue, and with the running time being about 35 minutes which is like an old vinyl record's running time, is that a format you would look at?**

Oh yeah, totally. It'll come out on vinyl in a couple of months. People like to have vinyl - vinyl is rock 'n' roll. That crackle and hiss is as sweet as your first kiss. Analogue is rock 'n' roll. You can't compress it. Compression is exactly what it sounds like - you're compressing the very power you are



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turned on by. The next album I do will be even more fucking hard and loud.

**You seem happier about your music than perhaps at any other point in your career.**

Oh, absolutely. I think this is without question the best album I've ever made. It's the most cohesive, it's singular, authentic, personal and I'm telling the truth. The rest of it was often an infusion of a character. Silverhead were great, but I was 21 years old. That was a swaggering thing and I was learning who I was. This album is very much who I am.

**I keep finding new things about it - on the way down here to meet you, that was the first time I'd listened to the album with headphones...**

Oh my God, a completely different experience! That's a world class producer for you. Sonically, you hear bits and pieces you don't hear from your stereo or in your car. When you put on the cans, you really get the depth of it. You see, it was made in a massive room in this studio which was where Ennio Morricone made all those sweeping soundtracks for those Spaghetti Westerns. It was built for orchestras and it was huge, so in the great tradition of Jimmy Page, where he would record John Bonham in this huge vestibule, we had a similar setup. It's all about where the microphones go, so Bob Rose would literally cup his ear

to figure out where they sounded the best. You're getting the best possible sound - there's no effects on anything. There's no tweaking this, overdubbing that, doubling this... fuck off! You're hearing exactly what happened in that room. Isn't that incredible? That was how Glyn Johns did it, how Jimmy Miller did it, how Sir George Martin did it, all the great producers. They would place the microphones where it felt right to capture the best sound. From Rock 'n' Roll music, to a girl with a cello, if the music is true and authentic, if the artist means it, people will embrace it.

**Technology offers so many choices, you can have so many effects, plugins, unlimited tracks, sometimes people feel that because the option is there they have to use it, and it can lose that spark, become too polished or too overblown.**

I think you've just described 'Chinese Democracy'. Don't get me wrong, Axl Rose is brilliant, I love him, but that was an example of a man who didn't know when to stop. I wanted to do less. Dani fronts the Jimi Hendrix Live Experience and that's why we did 'Supernatural Lover', to allow him to weave in that Hendrix-like wah-wah. He doesn't bend strings like every other guitarist who listened to Buddy Guy. I'm not into those fast, diddly solos. Mick Ronson, to me, was the guvnor. He played the song, just because there is a solo part in a song, that doesn't mean everything has stopped and

all the lights are on you. The band are still playing, so the track is what is important, the solo should pull you in, not be an indulgence. I know what I like. I like Marshall stacks. I like Les Pauls. I don't like Auto Tune. I don't like Photoshop. I don't like Botox. I don't like artificiality.

**It's amazing you've lasted as long as you have in the States then.**

(Laughs) America is very accommodating to the individual, even though it is riddled with artifice. I'm quite isolated from that world because I don't require their assistance, I can be as iconoclastic as I like. This album is a statement of individuality. You can remain an individual even if you're in a relationship. If our society stops producing individuals, it will never grow. I'm a great champion of the individual, whereas most people in America go for what is popular. 'The Key To The Universe' is a statement of individuality. That's why it hurts when a band you take to your heart breaks up. That's the thing with Rock 'n' Roll, usually it ends acrimoniously. Some bands might remain together simply to tour and make money, but it's hard. It is like a relationship. Fortunately, with this band, we had a beautiful locale, new material, everything was fresh, and we didn't stay long enough to get on each other's nerves. That will come later. (laughs)

**An extended version of this interview can be found at [www.rocktopia.co.uk](http://www.rocktopia.co.uk)**



## PYRAMAZE DISCIPLES OF THE SUN

The melodic metal band Pyramaze are finally back with their fourth album "Disciples of the Sun"! The album features the band's new vocalist Terje Haroy who will surely impress many people with his stunning performance! Produced, mixed and mastered by Jacob Hansen [Volbeat, Amaranthe, Evergrey]

Out now!



## WITHIN SILENCE GALLERY OF LIFE

Within Silence is a young promising melodic metal band that are ready to make an impact in the metal scene with their debut album "Gallery of Life"! Perfect for fans of bands like Sonata Arctica, Stratovarius and Theocracy!

Out now!



## DARK SARAH BEHIND THE BLACK VEIL

Dark Sarah is the new project from Heidi Parviainen [ex. Amberian Dawn]. The album feat. guest vocals by Manuela Kraller [ex. Xandria], Inga Scharf [Van Canto] and Tony Kakko [Sonata Arctica]

Out now!

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