

RETROSPECTIVE

LOOKING BACK ON CLASSIC ALBUMS WITH THE ONES WHO MADE THEM

Robert Hart is probably best known for his stint as vocalist in Bad Company, but his career spans an array of terrific records, including the superb 'Under The One Sky' by star studded eighties act Distance. The idea was to call Robert up primarily to talk about that album for this issue's Retrospective, but the jovial vocalist was more than happy to cover his entire discography! As a fan of all things Hart, James Gaden was therefore only too happy to ask the questions...

I'll start at the beginning with Distance. That album was fantastic, I absolutely loved it, it would be a Desert Island disk for me. What I was curious about though, is everybody on that album was known from previous big acts, you had Tony Thompson and Bernard Edwards from Chic, Jeff Bova and Eddie Martinez who had been with Robert Palmer... everyone on there you could trace back to something previously high profile, with the exception of you, who was unknown at that point. So how did you become involved in that group?

You're right, I'd had no track record at all back then. I was signed by Chris Blackwell to Island Music at that point, as a song writer. Bernard had just done Robert Palmer's 'Riptide' album which of course was massive because of 'Addicted To Love' - basically, the record label wanted to keep that band together that played on that record and they were looking for an unknown white singer to front it. Chris Blackwell put me down for it and I flew out to Los Angeles and had an audition for them. That was it! It was the weirdest audition. They just put a backing track on and asked me to quickly write some lyrics for it and sing them! That was it, I got the job! We had great fun making that record, I have a lot of good memories.

I didn't know you had previously been signed up as a song writer, but that makes sense as you co-write all but one of the songs on that record. Were you brought in specifically to be a singer/song writer, or was your writing simply a fortunate extra string to your bow to go with your voice?

No, I think they definitely had an eye on me writing from the off, as well as being the singer. It was a really lucky break for me really.

Did you get a lot of creative freedom with you being the "new guy", not having any previous recording experience to draw upon?

Well, I'd have no problem coming in with complete ideas or whole songs, then we would all sit down and rehearse them up - when those guys started playing my stuff, they had such a distinctive style, immediately it sounded like them, rather than just my input. Unfortunately two of them have passed away now, Tony and Bernard - it's very sad.

I know - I'm a Robert Palmer fan and I enjoyed the Power Station where he, Tony and Bernard worked with the Taylor's from Duran Duran - but while the first Power Station album is a well remembered record, I actually preferred the harder rocking second one, which they did in the nineties, where Bernard plays bass instead of John Taylor. You look at that line up of Bernard, Robert, Tony and Andy Taylor, and there is only one of them left alive. It wasn't that long ago either!

Yeah, I loved that second album too... God, you're right, there is only Andy Taylor left. We'd better count our blessings! (laughs)

With Distance, it was a fantastic album with a fantastic band... yet it was just one record. Was there meant to be more longevity? How come we only got the one album?

I think it was intended to be a one off - the thing was, Warner Brothers at the time were really trying to reform Chic. I think this was a carrot dangled for Bernard really, let him make Distance and do something he wanted, in return for getting back with Chic.

I see - with that in mind then, as you were signed as a song writer to start with, did you have aspirations of fronting a band in your own right

or being an actual artist, or were you happy with your original lot writing for others?

If truth be told, I think my main aim was that I wanted to be a solo artist. That was the aim when Chris Blackwell signed me, the idea was I would become a singer/song writer. But of course, the way it worked out, I spent more time in bands than I ever did as a solo artist! (laughs) Which isn't a bad thing of course, just not what I had planned!

Well, it was actually right after Distance, you made your first solo album 'Cries And Whispers'. That's right, on Atlantic records.

It wasn't a million miles away from Distance in sound, maybe a bit poppier - did you have a specific musical vision in mind, or were you simply trying to write as a natural progression from Distance?

It was poppier... I was signed in America, and a lot of people actually thought I was an American artist. As such, I spent a lot of time over there and the idea was to try and write a soft rock-pop record. I enjoyed making that, I had two great producers on there, Gary Stevenson and Stewart Levine. I was really fortunate to have been able to work with them. I thought it was a good album.

It was, but I thought the one you followed it up with in 1992 was better still...

Oh, the 'Robert Hart' one? Yeah - I was a big fan of Russ Ballard, and to have him on board and to co-write nearly all the songs with him on that, it was ideal.

Yeah - I thought that one had more of a classic rock sound to it. Is that closer to the "true" Robert Hart sound?

I think so, yeah. More of a soulful rock is how I think I would classify it. I think that is what I'm most natural at doing.

On that album, you had a vast array of quality players, from Russ Ballard, Chris Childs, Zak Starkey... how do you get those guys involved? Do you have a direct say, is it all left to the producer or the record company, how does it work?

Usually it's worked out between the artist, producer and the record company, everyone has a say. If you have somebody in mind then you make an approach and for me, fortunately, it has almost always worked out. I was really lucky to have Zak play on it, he's a good friend of mine and we did, we had a lot of great players on that album. We had Paul Stacey too, who went on to play with Oasis.

It was quite successful as well, charting in a few countries. I came to your career out of sync, the first thing I heard of your back catalogue was the 'Company Of Strangers' album with Bad Company. As much as I liked the 'Robert Hart' album, I thought you were a terrific fit for Bad Company in a criminally ignored era. I saw Dave Colwell, who worked with Mick Ralphs and would go on to be in Bad Company with you, was one of the many players on that second solo album of yours - was that how you ended up getting involved?

No, it was really strange - I went to join Foreigner actually! (laughs) I went to New York to do a rehearsal, I spent three weeks with them but it didn't work out for me. It's a different style of singing for me and to try and match Lou Gramm is a very hard task! So, after those three weeks, we abandoned it... however, Foreigner shared the same management as Bad Company, and they were parting ways with Brian Howe. So they asked if I'd prefer to try joining Bad Company instead! (laughs) That was right up my street, and that's how I landed the job.

Ah, I didn't know that about Foreigner... although ironically I know Brian Howe was also in the frame for that job! I've interviewed Brian three times and he mentioned about the shared management and that he had been suggested to replace Lou Gramm, but he wasn't sure because he'd already taken flak for replacing Paul Rodgers and didn't think it was wise to jump to another band and replace another iconic front man!

There you go. What's Brian up to these days? I never actually got to meet him.

You should read Fireworks, we have all the gossip! (laughs) Brian's been in a few times - he put out a really, really good solo album called 'Circus Bar' in 2010 but the problem was, he spent all the time and money getting it right, put it out and in no time it was on download sites and the like. He figured he was not going to sell enough to recoup what he spent, so he decided to call time on his solo career. He put out a superb little EP himself at the end of 2011 - no record label or anything, just doing it digitally via iTunes and Amazon as a farewell. Ironically, he told me that was actually doing quite well! So I'm hoping he changes his mind about stopping recording, I think his recorded output is very high quality.

Yeah, it would be a shame for him to stop - I can understand his view though. It's a terrible situation. I'm glad to hear he's doing okay on his EP though, that's heartening.

Sticking with the Bad Company theme for now, I liked both Brian's and Paul's eras of Bad Company. I'd lean a bit more toward Brian because I heard his stuff first, but both eras were great. When you came in, I think it was a deliberate step to go back to Paul's era...

You're right, they wanted to go back to how the original version sounded. The Bad Company albums with Brian were really well produced, sort of an American top 40 sound, which was working for them, but I think Mick and Simon wanted a more 'back to basics' sound. When we did 'Company Of Strangers', we recorded it at The Manor, in Oxford. It was nice and we just produced it ourselves. I had a great time doing that album and playing in that original style that had made Bad Company's name.

Brian told me that he didn't click on a personal level with Mick and Simon. He felt with their work ethic he had to take on a large portion of the song writing, which subsequently changed the sound, which annoyed Mick and Simon because it didn't sound like the old Bad Company... again, you were contributing songs right from the off. Was that by design or did you have a similar problem?

No, it's so funny, Mick and I got on like a house on fire. They do have a lazy work ethic, it takes time to get stuff out of them, but I think that's basically just down to them being stuck in their ways. I went along with it and we worked well together.

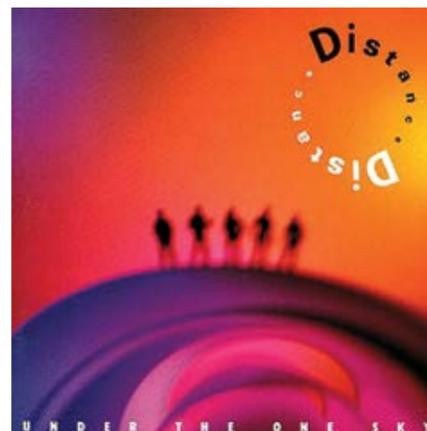
Was it a difficult adjustment for you, going from an unknown singer in a group of stars, to a solo artist, to suddenly being the new singer in a really well known band with a hit strewn back catalogue?

Yeah... they were huge in America. We'd tour and we'd play some massive places, we toured with Lynyrd Skynyrd, it was daunting. But it was also lovely to be in a band where we were all rowing in the same direction. There was a really good band spirit when I was there.

I thought you wrote one of the most authentic sounding Bad Company tracks on that record, which was 'Judas My Brother'.

Oh, you liked that one? Yeah! I really liked that one. I remember taking that one to them and it had a weird guitar riff - Mick had a really hard time playing it. In fact, now I think about it, I'm sure that I played it on the final record. Yeah - that one was 100% my song wasn't it! All the others were co-writes.

That's right - now I know you started as a song writer, I understand why you've always been heavily involved in the writing, no matter what album you were making. I didn't realise you played



on 'Company Of Strangers' though! There's no credit for it.

No, I only really did bits and pieces here and there. On the second album, 'Stories Told And Untold', we did that in Nashville and we have a lot of country people on there, like Vince Gill, Alison Krauss... when I left the band, I actually lived in Nashville for five years, writing songs again for other people. I was with Barbara Orbison, Roy Orbison's widow, I was signed to her publishing company.

As you said, even though the Bad Company era with Brian Howe was successful, with platinum records and hit singles, they wanted you to help them go back to the original sound. Were you aware of Brian's era - was there ever talk of performing any of his songs? Now, the Bad Company website basically pretends that you and he never existed.

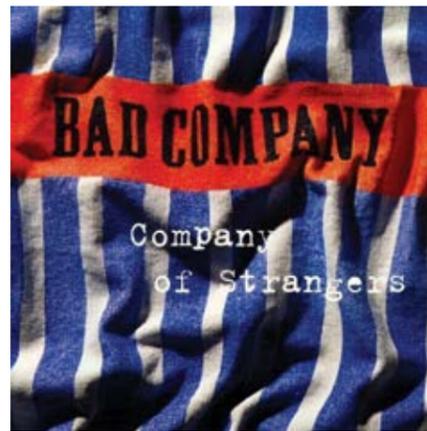
In all honesty, I was only really knowledgeable about the Rodgers era. I did spend time listening to Brian's stuff when I got the job because it had been successful, but we never played any of his songs.

I thought that might be the case - I have a couple of bootlegs of shows with you on vocals, and the set lists are entirely made up of Paul's stuff and tracks from 'Company Of Strangers'. Both shows have different sets as well, you shuffled some stuff around - obviously the staples like 'Can't Get Enough', 'Feel Like Making Love' and stuff are in there, but you've got rarer ones like 'Silver Blue And Gold', stuff Brian never did from the Paul era like 'Seagull', it's a good mix.

Yeah - it was nice for me as well because we got on and there was a good spirit in the band, I could have a say in the set as well. We didn't do Brian's songs, but we all had input and we'd change it around from night to night so we wouldn't get bored. I remember we put 'Deal With The Preacher' in at some shows, drop in songs like that.

'Rock Steady' is one I think you did a particularly good job on. Were there any you were asked to do you felt uncomfortable with?

I loved doing 'Rock Steady', but the only one I had problems with, because I used to have to play piano on it, was the song 'Bad Company'! I wasn't too happy with that, it was the only one I couldn't really get to grips with.



I think that one is pure Paul Rodgers though, it would be hard to put your stamp on it.

Yeah, it's all Paul - and of course, with it being such a big song for them, I had to go through it every bloody night! (laughs)

Sometimes that happens with a change of singer - look at Black Sabbath. All the singers they have had, all of which are better singers than Ozzy Osbourne, but none of them can do 'Paranoid' as well as Ozzy. But for the most part, you nail the stuff - on the Louisville show, you open with 'Can't Get Enough'. Talk about playing the ace first!

Yeah, it was downhill all the way after that. (laughs)

You re-recorded that on 'Stories Told And Untold', doing it in a different style. Did you welcome the chance to do something different with it, or did you think you were on a hiding to nothing trying to redo such a well known track?

It was quite a challenge, because the whole idea of the album was to take some of the old songs and do them a bit differently and sit them next to new songs. The producer, Josh Leo, he is a Nashville producer and he came up with that idea. We just jammed it like that in the studio one day and decided to try and lay it down in that style for the record.

I really enjoyed that album, but it wasn't well received - I don't know whether it was because grunge was starting...

I know, I don't know what happened. We spent a long time on that record and if you listen to it, sonically it's a lovely piece of work. But for some reason it slipped by people. There was some cool, different stuff on there like 'Downpour In Cairo'...

I thought the re-working of 'Oh Atlanta' was phenomenal, I liked it better than the original.

Thank you! I thought that one worked really well, and the guitar solo from Vince Gill on it is fantastic. I thought it was a good record, it's nice to hear you liked it.

All except for the weird bit at the end - first time I played it, I thought it had finished and then it starts up again with a jam of 'Loving You Out Loud' and you singing 'He's a prat'!

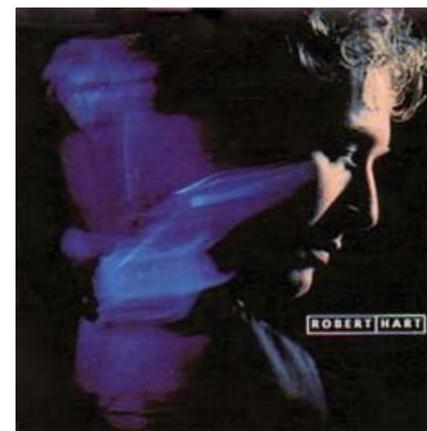
(laughs) Oh yeah! The tape was just left rolling and we were basically just chatting and jamming around! It comes on at the end when you think the record is over, very strange! (laughs)

What happened after that? Obviously that became your last Bad Company album - did you think at the time you were there for the long haul, or were you only contracted to do a couple of records? Because shortly after that, Paul Rodgers came back and they issued the Anthology.

Yeah, and they went out on the reunion tour. I don't think there was ever a plan that the version I was in was going to split up. I think it was simply a case that they were offered so much money to do the reunion thing... that was it. I had my nose put out of joint a bit, so I stayed in Nashville writing for others. We are actually all still good friends now.

Yes, I know you've played shows as X-Bad Company since with Mick and Harry James from Thunder. I was curious about what happened to you during that gap between 'Stories Told And Untold' and your next recorded work, which was the Jones Gang, but now I know! Regarding the Jones Gang... that was superb, that album. You had a great collection of talent, from your Bad Company band mates Dave Colwell and Rick Wills, to guest spots from Ronnie Wood, to Kenney Jones himself. How did that band form?

Bad Company's original bass player, Boz Burrell, had a band with Kenney Jones and Paul Young - not the Sad Café one, the other one. They played a few gigs for charity and Boz told Kenney about me, because Paul was going to leave. I turned up at Kenney's and we had a jam around and hit it off. We started writing but we couldn't get signed for love nor money! (laughs) But then, somebody in America decided to take a punt on us and it ended up doing really well. We did have some good guests, we had Ronnie... in fact, we had The Faces because Ian McLagan



is on there too. We played a bit in America and the single went down well.

Yeah, the single was 'Angel' which you originally did on your Robert Hart album. It's not really any different in arrangement or style or anything, yet it's a hit with the Jones Gang but not when you did it!

No, I know! I covered my own song! (laughs) It's weird... the original version I cut did pretty well in Germany and a few spots in Europe, but nowhere else. When the Jones Gang did it, it did really well in America on the Billboard, but we couldn't get it played here in England at all! Do you know why? Because it "sounded too American". Ludicrous isn't it?

It is - an Australian band I like released a single and one of the Australian radio programmers wouldn't play it because they "didn't like the way the drums came in half way through".

Unbelievable isn't it? It's amazing anything gets played!

There were so many high points on the Jones Gang album, it's hard to know where to start - did you bring in any songs you had maybe thought about for Bad Company or was everything written fresh?

I wrote just about all of the songs for that record fresh, except for 'Angel', which was down to Rick Wills. He'd always loved it and said we should cover it. The other songs, I wrote specifically for that project.

I really liked 'Where Are You' - it seems to lyrically take a swipe at Kenney's stint with The Who, and I think the way you wrote the music gave a nod to the Who in style.

That's right, it was Kenney taking a shot at Roger Daltrey, those two don't really like each other. We spent a lot of time picking out Who song titles to use in the lyrics as you noticed. In actual fact, believe it or not, that song was first written as 'Carry On London'. There was going to be a new Carry On film and they asked me to write the theme song. So the original backing track was for that, I took it, reshaped it and changed the lyrics to be about Roger Daltrey!

(Laughs) That gives it a totally different slant! I imagine the demo is somewhat different to the



finished article!

(Laughs) Oh yes, just a bit! Thank God they never made the film!

The Jones Gang - again, one brilliant album, then silence. Will there be another one?

I don't think so, I think it was a one off. The record company were going out of business. We did receive an offer to make a second one from a different record company, but the deal wasn't so good, it didn't feel right for us so it all kind of fell apart. It's a bit sad really. Who knows, one day, we might get together again. That would be nice.

Yeah, I know you've played some show's at Kenney's Polo Club in the past. What was a Jones Gang set list like then? You had a lot of great stuff to choose from!

We did - it was a great show, we'd do most of the album, then some of my history from Bad Company, some of Rick's by playing some Foreigner and some of Kenney's by doing Faces and The Who. A great set of songs.

That brings us to present day - you're just played some UK shows with Manfred Mann (pictured below, Robert second from the left). Are you planning any new recorded material?

Funnily enough, Manfred wants to do another Earth Band record, we're going to start writing for that. The band sound really good at the moment.

It's rare to have any UK shows from you guys!

That's right, every other week we're playing gigs in Europe, so it's nice to have had four English shows.

How did you end up joining Manfred Mann?

Funnily enough, Jimmy Copley, the drummer, I'd known him years and years, he played on my 'Robert Hart' album. I phoned him up... it's so silly, how things work out! I phoned him up to see if I could get tickets to see Go West! (laughs) They are my mates, and Pete Cox was singing in Manfred Mann's Earth Band. Jimmy asked me if I was looking for a job, because he knew Peter was going to be leaving. It was a simple as that - just by scrounging some tickets, I got a gig with the Earth Band! (laughs)

Well, it's better than that auditioning nonsense so many other people have to go through!

Yeah, exactly! (laughs) So I've been with them for a full year and I really, really enjoy it. The music is good... different to what I'm used to but I think I've managed to make the songs my own now. It's a really good live band if you get chance to see it.

You've performed a lot of stuff from bands I like - from Bad Company, to you mentioning you had auditioned for Foreigner, to singing classic Whitesnake with the Company Of Snakes...

I feel like a footballer, I've been round all the big clubs! (laughs) I've been lucky to do all that - I'm doing a gig with Bernie Marsden as it happens, on the 10th June, for a premiere for the new Tom Cruise film.

Is it 'Rock Of Ages'?

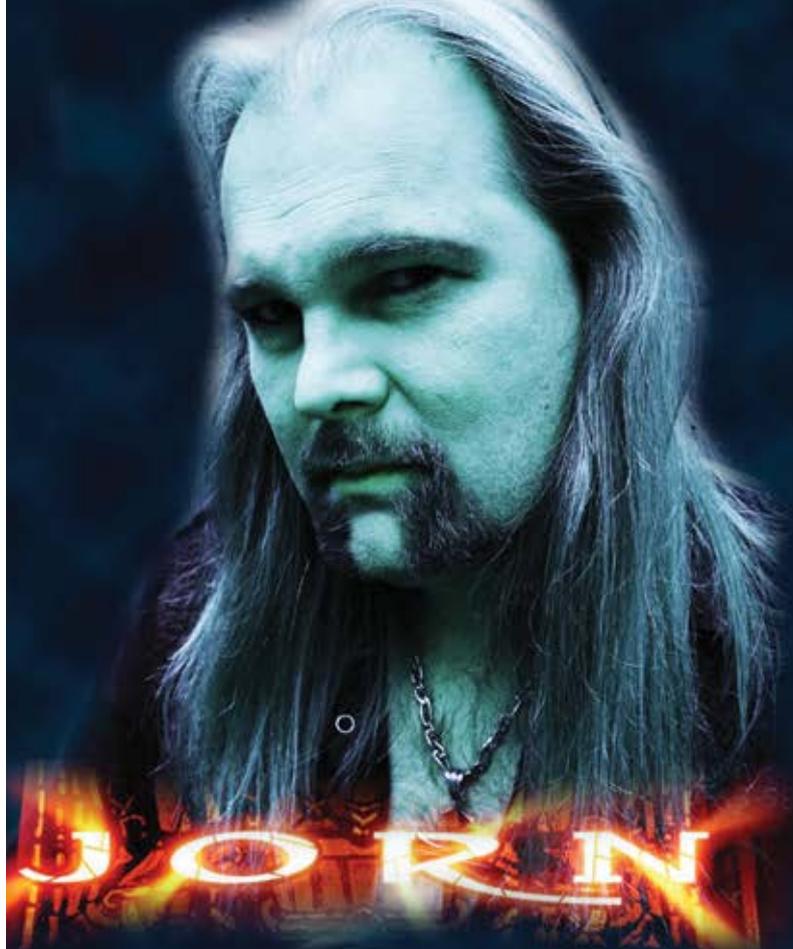
Yeah, that's the one! So Bernie and I are doing the film premiere. I also oddly enough do a blues band with Micky Moody, called The Bad Apples. That's good fun, we've played a gig in Sweden and enjoyed ourselves.

Have you written for anybody else lately, or are you concentrating on Manfred Mann at the moment?

That's my main thing at the moment, although I had a song used in a Cameron Diaz film last year called 'My Sisters Keeper'. It was the song 'With You' which we cut with The Jones Gang. It wasn't our version, it was done by a guy called Jonah Jones, but it made the soundtrack which was nice. I still write, I haven't done it as much recently because I've had nothing specific to write for, but that's changed now Manfred wants to do a record with the Earth Band.

You mentioned to me earlier that you always saw yourself as a singer/song writer, working as a solo artist. Have you any plans to maybe revisit that idea with a new solo album?

I wouldn't mind doing one, I have a bunch of songs that I could easily work up and I've had a couple of decent offers from studios to use them. We'll see, if I get the time. I'd like to, I could even sell them at Manfred Mann gigs if need be, because I think I'll be with them for a while!



INTERVIEW BY CARL BUXTON

When it comes to a list of the world's greatest Heavy Rock vocalists, many people who actually know what they're talking about will have Jorn Lande in their Top 20 for sure, if not their Top 10 of all time. Without doubt a very productive and sought after singer as evidenced by the multifarious bands and projects he's been involved in over the last twenty years at least. It's earned him a comfortable lifestyle that he doesn't take for granted and for a man with his vocal, songwriting and producing talent he has zero ego. It helped that we've previously been acquainted as Jorn could've chatted for longer than he did, but with a new album 'Bring Heavy Rock To The Land' set to be released, we discussed that along with stories about his childhood and philosophy on life, his thoughts about the incomparable Ronnie James Dio and what the future may or may not hold for Masterplan. It was a thoroughly entertaining two hours.

I first met you some fourteen years ago in Bournemouth at a Company Of Snakes gig where we sat down with a few drinks and chatted 'til the early hours of the morning, even writing a few lyrics together on the back of a flyer. How much did that time in the Snakes working with Micky Moody, Bernie Marsden, Neil Murray and Don Airey shape your subsequent musical career?

"I'm not sure if it shaped my musical career because the thing is I learned a lot. When you play with good musicians you get better. The band was great and I had Willy (Bendiksen, drums) with me. The good thing is I got to work with many people who influenced me. Don was a great guy, really nice, and I get to meet him from time to time at festivals, now that he's in [Deep] Purple. He's the same old Don, enjoying his red wine and playing great as ever. All these British bands from the 70s, Whitesnake and Slade, they were all an influence on me. I remember in '73 when the Sweet single 'Ballroom Blitz' came out because my father bought the single and took it home. I was only five but that's roughly when I got into rock music. I remember listening to my father's album because he's a musician as well. I used to go to his rehearsals because they did their own songs. I was lucky to have a father that introduced me to music in a more physical way rather than staying in my room listening to the records, so I got to experience that."

You've always come across as rather a spiritual and/or religious person, with many of your lyrics touching on such subjects. How true is that statement?

"On my mother's side, my grandmother and grandfather grew up on a farm in the countryside and there would be only a few hundred people living in the fields and forests, so I used to stay there a lot growing up, playing in the woods and down by the stream. And I remember the church there where I used to go to Sunday school because it's something my grandmother wanted. So at the time, six or seven years old, I went to Sunday school and learned about the bible, heaven and hell and everything and it just stayed with me. I grew up with all those [religious] elements beside me. I'm not sure if I'm a Christian today in that sense, I questioned everything as a teenager and I don't like the thought of becoming a Priest or something, I just like the symbolism of good and evil because I use it to write. It symbolises everything that someone can identify with and relate to. You can talk about something from the bible and most people will understand and paint pictures [in their head] based on that."

The album cover features a stained glass window and a Priest like figure

