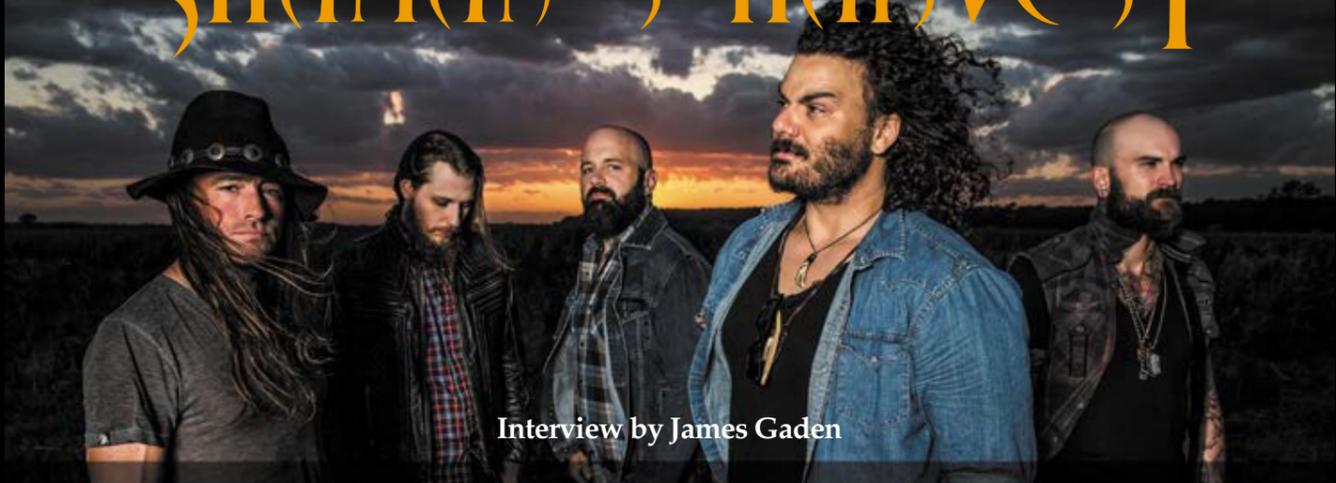


SHAMAN'S HARVEST



Interview by James Gaden

A four piece from Missouri, Shaman's Harvest first struck gold with their single 'Dragonfly' which sold 150,000 copies and made the Billboard charts. After having songs used in various films and TV shows, the band signed to Mascot Records to release 'Smokin' Hearts & Broken Guns' – a well received record which was made under the toughest of circumstances, as vocalist Nathan Hunt was diagnosed with throat cancer. With his health now intact, Hunt and the band have been touring steadily across the US and have just released their newest effort 'Red Hands, Black Deeds'. Fireworks called the singer for a catch up.

We spoke once before (in Fireworks #65) when 'Smokin' Hearts...' came out and you told me that previously the band used to do everything independently. You signed with Mascot to put that record out in a bid to give the band greater exposure – has the label achieved that?

Oh yeah, it's definitely helped and so far they have left us alone to make the records we want to make. I can't tell you many labels who would do that. With this one, they didn't even hear demos, they heard the mastered version! They heard it when it was done because I didn't want anybody to hear it half-assed and they were okay with that. The support that they have given us over the last couple of years has been just connecting all the dots, they've been a huge help.

You wanted to break into the European market a bit more and hoped signing with a label would open some doors. It certainly looks like it's made a difference from what I'm seeing online.

It has, I don't know why or how they did it, but they delivered on that front, we've been trying to get traction there for... man, about ten years, that's been a major goal for us. We've just never been able to figure out how to realise it by ourselves.

You received many good reviews for 'Smoking Hearts...' which was, for many, myself included, a first taste of the band. The new album 'Red Hands, Black Deeds' is quite different, it's a lot darker and has some unusual instrumentation and arrangements on it.

(Laughs) Yeah, you're right, the point of it all for me is to be able to go in a studio

and play, just be experimental. Really, at it's root, that's what Rock And Roll is, to be experimental. You're not supposed to hash out the same shit every fucking record. You should say "I did that, what else?" If beating on a two by four with a turkey leg works, put it on the record! (laughs) This was just like one big science experiment for us.

This one is also a concept record – was that the plan from the off?

No, it was completely by accident. We realised it early on but it wasn't something we considered before we started tracking. We knew each track was going to be so different, the story of how the record makes you feel when you hear it as one piece, that was what would tie it all together. I think that was the thing, having that arc there, that vibe and the push and pull of how you're feeling, it's like having an extra track or another member of the band, it's another element.

You also utilised a more old school approach by using analogue equipment. Had you worked that way in the past?

No, we've never done anything like that before. We'd always intended to do it, but we'd never had the opportunity – mainly because the biggest challenge to do it that way is financial. Everything takes much longer and you have to get the takes right, that's what important. Working this way means there's not a lot of work done in post-production, other than just making it sound good. You've gotta get it right going in. Honestly, we weren't well rehearsed for this record at all. Fortunately, everybody was on their A-game and that was something that fed into the mood of the piece. Morale was up and frankly, we didn't have shit going in to that studio (laughs). We had two songs

before we started tracking. We told the label we had it all, told the producer, but he soon noticed, told us to sit our asses in a room for a couple of hours and fortunately it just started flowing. Something was captured in that moment, we knew it would be different but we had to continue and capture the vibe.

Which two songs did you have to start with?

We had 'Soul Crusher' and 'Tusk And Bone'. But that was it. We used those to figure out what needed to go in between, and it told us we needed to add some heavier shit to the record.

When you made the 'Smokin' Hearts...' record you were diagnosed with throat cancer and ended up making the album while receiving treatment. I hear you're all clear now – has it affected your voice at all?

Oh yeah, totally man. The record was not easy for me to make, I think I had more difficulty singing this record than the last one. I'd been touring pretty much since we last talked, to now! (laughs) We've been doing fucking 250 dates a year, so your voice starts getting like callouses, you know? You start getting locked into a muscle memory thing, which is technically the wrong way to sing, but it's what you have to do to get you through the tour. It's not great for the studio, because you need a lot more clarity there and there were days where I couldn't do shit, I had nothing in the pipes whatsoever. But I didn't know when to stop, I knew we had to get it done, somehow, some way. There was a lot of pressure and it started weighing heavily. When you're out in L.A. and you're spending thousands of dollars a day in the studio, if you miss a day you just threw thousands of dollars

down the drain. I suffered on this record, on the end result you can hear it's a struggle.

That's why I asked, I thought you had more of a breathy tone on this record, but it worked, it suited the songs really well.

Thanks, I agree man, it suited the music and maybe it felt right because that's what was meant to be. I'm listening to it thinking "Man I could've hit that better" – I could hit it better right now, but it needs to have that imperfection. All the best Rock records are like that.

You do have a more light-hearted hidden track at the end, called 'Hookers And Blow'.

(Laughs) Yeah, that's right, it's only on the physical copy, there has to be some sort of reward for people who buy physical music these days. We're just taking the piss out of ourselves, making fun of the gravity of the whole record. It's so weighty, so we put some lighter fare on there as a break for the listener. It basically just totally ruins the mood (laughs). I let my brother listen to the finished record, he was the first person to hear it all the way through and he said "You have to take that last piece of garbage off". I thought if he hates it, I love it!

The album is being issued on vinyl. Was that the reason you recorded it

with analogue equipment, or was the vinyl decision made after hearing the masters?

I went round and round with the label on the last record, I had to throw a big hissy fit, stomped my feet and acted like a child to get the last record put out on vinyl, but it came out like halfway through the album's life cycle, so I think they knew I wanted this one on vinyl from the off. This record is meant to be heard that way. And they went all out man, it's on red vinyl on 180gm, it's awesome.

Vinyl is enjoying a resurgence, a lot of people buy their music that way now.

They do, which is great. For a while it was only collectors, but now real audiophiles are buying it, that's how they choose to listen to their music, which is nice in an industry obsessed with singles where people just jump on Spotify or download a song from iTunes. If you only heard one or two tracks from this record, then I feel it's like you're only getting a chapter or two of a whole book. It doesn't make sense.

Speaking of how music is received, your press release states you've had 33 million streams and 9 million YouTube views. Those numbers sound amazing, if they were album sales you'd be one of the biggest bands on the planet. So what do those numbers actually mean for a band, do you generate revenue

from it, does it help for booking tours...?

If only we'd sold that many albums! (laughs) I have never seen a dollar from a YouTube view, not one. So from a financial point of view, it doesn't help in any way because it doesn't put any money in our pockets. If we get a million YouTube views for a video we think great, slap ourselves on the back and move on. The main plus is it helps with booking tours, it shows promoters that we have an audience, it helps them sell tickets. And if people are streaming songs, it's another way to reach them – like we're on this huge tour right now with Nickelback and Daughtry, and Cheap Trick are joining us soon. All those bands have these huge radio hits, so when we go on I can see in the audience's eyes when we play a certain song they recognize it and think "Oh, this is the band who did this track". They haven't heard us on the radio, so they probably heard it from YouTube or streaming.

What's coming up after the tour, or are you not far enough into it to know yet?

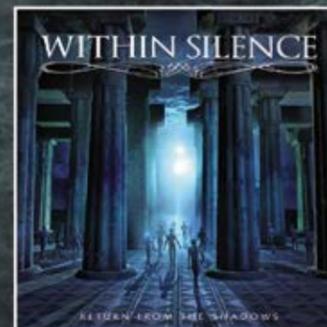
Not really, this tour goes on until October. We started in June, so it's a long time on the road. There are talks for a few other things but we need to decide what we're going to do next. We have four tour options coming up, they all look good tours but we can only take one. Touring is where you make your money these days, playing shows and selling merchandise, so we need to get it right!



POWER QUEST SIXTH DIMENSION

Power Quest, led by founder Steve Williams, return with their 6th album and first since 2011. "Sixth Dimension" is prime time PQ. Melodic, catchy and uplifting which are the trademarks of the PQ sound. Mastered by Jens Bogren [Dragonforce, Symphony X, Arch Enemy]. Power Quest will join Dragonforce as special guests on their October UK tour!

Out October 13th!



WITHIN SILENCE RETURN FROM THE SHADOWS

The young, promising power metal band Within Silence are finally back with their second album! Mixed and mastered by Roland Grapow [Masterplan, ex. Helloween]. Perfect for fans of bands like Sonata Arctica, Theocracy and Stratovarius!

Out October 27th!



METALITE HEROES IN TIME

Female fronted melodic metal perfect for fans of bands like Beyond The Black, Amaranthe and Dynazty! Mixed and mastered by Jacob Hansen [Volbeat, Amaranthe, Evergrey]

Out October 27th!

INNER WOUND RECORDINGS

ALSO COMING OCTOBER 27TH: ANGEL NATION - AEON (FEMALE FRONTED MELODIC METAL FROM THE UK!) WWW.ULTERIUM-RECORDS.COM - WWW.INNERWOUND.COM - DISTRIBUTION IN THE UK BY PLASTIC HEAD - WWW.PLASTICHEAD.COM

