

Joining Jefferson Starship back in 1979, Mickey Thomas became known as one of the great rock singers thanks to his soaring vocals on tracks such as 'Jane'. In the 80s, the band became Starship and went through a metamorphosis which saw them enjoy worldwide smash hits such as 'We Built This City' and 'Nothin's Gonna Stop Us Now' - at the expense of some of their rock credibility. Thomas kept the Starship banner flying for the magnificent 'Love Among The Cannibals' album in 1989 - Starship's last studio album. Starship featuring Mickey Thomas has toured steadily since. Now, with a brand new line up and a brand new record 'Loveless Fascination', a revamped, contemporary, hard rocking version of Starship has landed. James Gaden caught up with Mickey to look back at '...Cannibals' and bring the story up to date.

**It's been a long wait for a new Starship album, but well worth the wait!**

It has been a long time coming and I'm glad you like it. I'm really proud of the record and how it came out. I started making a record many times over the last few years and it had never felt right, for one reason or another. This time, it really came together. I'm really happy with it and I think it will be a surprise for a lot of listeners. It's a little darker and heavier than what people might expect from Starship.

**Before we talk too much about the new album, I'd like to go back in time to my favourite Starship album, 'Love Among The Cannibals'. It's a superb record and I believe that's your favourite too?**

That is my favourite Starship album! I like that one a lot. It wasn't one of our biggest sellers, but it really stands up. I put it on a couple of months ago and I think sonically, production wise, it still sounds fresh all these years later.

**'...Cannibals' was the first album Starship made after Grace Slick left. Did you consider bringing in a new female singer as the band had enjoyed such success with duets?**

We did talk, but really... how do you replace Grace Slick? We figured it would be a less daunting task to move forward and proceed on without Grace, with just me, nobody replacing her. We did that for quite a while. Right now, I've got a great female vocalist in the band and I do think it works better this way, it's closer to the musical identity of the band, from Starship to Jefferson Starship.

**The previous albums 'Knee Deep In The Hoopla' and 'No Protection' utilised a lot of outside writers, whereas '...Cannibals' saw you co-writing four of the songs featured. Did you feel stifled as a writer on the earlier records?**

There were times in the past, with some of the Jefferson Starship records, where I felt they were a bit disjointed. There were a lot of different writing styles in the band, so by the time 'Love Among The Cannibals' came up, I wanted to make a much more cohesive

sounding record. I wanted it to sound like it was all on the same page. I think we achieved that - although we did use a lot of different producers on the album! Overall though, I think the songs and the sounds mesh together really well.

**When Grace left, were you keen to keep Starship going or did you think about going solo?**

Only after '...Cannibals' and a couple of tours - various band members had left along the way. Craig Chaquico and Brett Bloomfield had moved on to their own band, Big Bad Wolf. Then our keyboard player relocated to Los Angeles to do TV scoring, so we were pretty much disbanded in the early 90s. I put together the Greatest Hits album 'Ten Years And Change' which had a couple of new tracks on, but at that point in my mind Starship was pretty much done. I was looking at moving on to a solo project, collaboration, whatever came up. By the mid 90s I found there were so many fans out there who wanted to still see Starship and still hear Starship music. So I reformed the band as 'Starship featuring Mickey Thomas' and I've been doing that almost twenty years now!

**Vocally I thought you were at your peak on '...Cannibals'. Your voice is still in tremendous shape now - how do you keep it going?**

Well, I make sure I drink lots of good Chardonnay (laughs). Nothing really, I'm lucky that I got good genes when it comes to vocal cords. I'm blessed that I've not really lost any of my range; the high end is still there. In fact, I've gained a thickness to my voice. I'm better with my mid range now, I can scream! In the 70s and 80s, my voice was so pure, I didn't have a gravelly aspect which I always wanted to have, so I've learned how to scream too.

**Did you deliberately want to write harder edged tracks for the new record to explore this?**

I think I've come to realise along the way, stopping and starting trying to make a record, I needed to figure out the musical direction. Did I want to try and recapture the greatness of the commercial period in the 80s? Did I want a different sound? Where do I want

to go with it? I did come to a decision to consciously make a darker record, something a bit more unexpected and move away from the commercial side of Starship. I wanted stuff with more of an edge, more of a sombre tone, with some bitterness and anger. That's not what you'd expect from Mickey Thomas! It was fun for me though, to delve into those different areas and the different sides of my voice.

**Did you feel you had something to prove after some of the criticism the band took for some of the pop flavour of the 80s hits?**

I probably did. There's a part of me that feels like the criticism from our most commercial period with those big hits is not completely justified. I understand it, I understand why, but I also feel... as an artist looking back over my career, I love 'We Built This City'. I'm so proud of what we accomplished with that and 'Nothing's Gonna Stop Us Now'. However, those two songs are just a small part of my career. I have a big body of work and I want people to remember first and foremost I'm a bluesy rock 'n' roll singer. So I did want to get back to that with this record.



**You brought in Jeff Pilson as producer, who is well known as the current bass player for Foreigner. He's given the album a great sound. Did you know Jeff prior to working with him on 'Loveless Fascination'?**

No, I knew of him but didn't know him personally. He was a huge part of helping to create the sound of the album. He's done great work not only with Foreigner, but with Dokken in the 90s. He definitely was a big influence on the sound of the album and the direction of the songs. Once I'd met Jeff, everything just clicked. It all fell into place. The album had a shape and a form and we were off and running. He plays bass in Foreigner but he played a lot of the guitars on this album. I don't think people realise what a good player he is. I love how he plays. He puts his playing down, he says "Oh, I can't play very fast." Well that's what's cool! It doesn't sound like 80s guitars, it sounds more like a 70s guitar player. That's what I like about it, it's more melodic, bluesy, almost a slow-hand Eric Clapton feel to it. I

can only take so much of the 'diddy-diddy-diddy-diddy' guitar playing! (laughs)

**Speaking of guitarists, you tragically lost Mark Abrahamian last year, so lead guitar duties are handled by John Roth. Was he your first choice?**

He was the first guy who came to us! I almost felt like Mark sent him to us, you know? As soon as we realised "Okay, we have to carry on", John was the first guy I looked at. He just seemed a perfect fit - not just musically, but personality wise. He's such a great guy. In the back of my mind, I was thinking 'Thank you Mark!' because I'm sure he had a hand in it. He fits like a glove.

**You mentioned earlier you have a new female singer with the band now, Stephanie Calvert.**

That's right, those two big songs I mentioned were duets and I think they work better that way, especially 'Nothing's Gonna Stop Us Now'. I've sung them a lot by myself, I can do that, but I don't think it has the same effect as having the male and female voices working together. Also, Stephanie does some great renditions of 'White Rabbit' and 'Somebody To Love'



in our show, which means we can pay a musical tribute to the entire history of the band.

**How did you find Stephanie?**

Once again, I was so lucky in this regard. Once we decided to bring a female vocalist back to the band again, Stephanie was the first girl I saw! We did a video audition, I checked out her performance and I simply felt we needed to look no further. She just had it. She was living in Las Vegas and as it turned out, right after I saw her audition we were scheduled to play in Las Vegas. She came down at soundcheck, met us, sang a couple of songs - that was it, she was in!

**The duet 'Nothin' Can Keep Me From You' that closes 'Loveless Fascination' is brilliant - that one did sound like Starship, albeit a more modern version.**

Exactly! I'm glad you think that! I did want that to be the last song, because it's sort of like us saying goodbye at the end of the

album - kind of a message saying "Oh, and don't forget, we also do this!" (laughs) I like it because it has sort of a gospel influence, with that epic ending. That's more of a nod to what people consider more of a traditional Starship sound.

**When you said you had a couple of previous attempts to make a Starship album but it never worked out, when did you actually begin work on this one?**

It was about a year ago. We didn't work on it straight through, it was whenever our schedules would allow. Jeff's busy with Foreigner, I'm busy with shows... we finished it in May, doing the mixing. So working on recording, I think we did it in bits and pieces over six months. I felt it came together really fast. Adding up the total amount of recording days, time spent in the studio, I think it will only come to about three weeks. Probably another three for the mixing.

**Did you have any stuff left over?**

Yeah, we have a couple. There's one called 'Karma' which is a Martin Page song - Martin is one of my favourite song writers. We have another called 'Eyes Of Pain' - you can maybe guess by the title that's another dark one! (laughs)

**Are they going to come out on iTunes, or are you saving them for another album?**

I don't know yet. We might put them on a re-release of this album if the demand is there, maybe we'll just put them out there for no reason whatsoever! I might put them up for download on our website and give the fans them for free. It's fun to give away music!

**Have you been surprised by the reception to the album?**

I've been surprised at how positive they all are - everybody I've talked to all said they were pleasantly surprised. That has been unanimous. I've not talked to anybody who seems disappointed by it and you sound the same!

**At first I was quite shocked and I didn't take to it at all. But after another couple of listens I got really into it.**

Yeah! It's kinda cool that you have songs which get better the more you hear them. Albums I've bought often have songs where you think "Yeah, it's okay..." and then later

on you find the songs are coming back to you and you want to give them another listen. I like records like that.

**Is there a plan to do more with this line up or is it too early to tell?**

I definitely plan on touring. We're going to spend all of 2014 working the album with a 'Loveless Fascination' tour. Hopefully there will be a lot more international touring this time as oppose to recent years. We're going to New Zealand in February. I'm really hoping we can get to the UK and the rest of Europe in the summer. We are way overdue to come over there, especially since Stephanie and I have been over playing the Rewind Festival, just the two of us. We'd love to put together a string of summer dates with the full Starship band - watch this space!

