

# THUNDER

James Gaden interviews Luke Morley

**Despite playing farewell tours on two separate occasions, the beloved British band Thunder are still active, still making records and still filling venues. When their latest comeback album 'Wonder Days' was released in 2015, it proved a hit critically and commercially, so the quintet of guitarist Luke Morley, singer Danny Bowes, drummer Harry James, bassist Chris Childs and keyboard player/guitarist Ben Matthews have kept momentum going by recording a brand new album, 'Rip It Up'. Fireworks had the opportunity to discuss things with the band's chief songwriter, Luke Morley.**

2009's 'Bang!' album was rumoured to have been the band's swansong record, but six years later 'Wonder Days' appeared and gave Thunder their first top ten record since 1995's 'Behind Closed Doors'. 'Rip It Up' has followed in pretty swift fashion, but Morley is dismissive of any thought of pressure on the group to keep the momentum going.

"We don't take ourselves too seriously, but we do take our music seriously. It's nice to get good feedback, of course it is, but we are quite critical of ourselves. I don't feel any pressure on me because I write songs, that's what I do, I'd do it whether I get paid for it or not, the fact I do get paid for it is just a bonus for me!"

In Fireworks #68, Morley and Bowes explained to us that 'Wonder Days' was recorded in batches and this proved to be an effective method, so it's no surprise the band followed the same process for their latest effort.

"It was basically three sessions over a six month period. It really helps me massively," Morley explains, "because I'm the person who writes the songs, which is one thing, but I produce the records as well, so creatively it can be difficult to wear two hats. This way, we can go in, record a few songs and then I can go in and change something or make something a bit better. It also means if we go in to record a song and we don't think we've quite got it, we can go ahead and try again at the next session. There's lots of reasons why it's a good way of doing things, we discovered it sort of by accident but it definitely works."

All the new songs are penned by Morley, which is no surprise as he has written every original Thunder song either alone or as a co-write, from day one. I inquire if the other band members have ever tried to lighten the load with their own compositions.

"I've a little studio at home and I'll do everything," Morley replies. "Often I'll use a drum machine to stick a basic groove together, although I do play the drums. I've not done it for years, but I used to play them in bands when I was a kid, as well as some bass, I'd turn my hand to anything to do it. I have what I'd call a working knowledge of the instruments, so I'll basically do a fully executed demo, bring it to the guys, they'll all go away and learn it, then we'll go into the studio and thrash it around. Obviously at that point little things will start changing, but not that much, because you have to remember we've been playing together a long, long, long time. I know pretty much exactly what each of them are going to do, what Harry will play, what key suits Danny's voice... it's like an old pair of shoes, it just fits nicely. It saves me time too, by doing a full demo, if there's a specific thing or a characteristic on the demo I really like, instead of trying to recreate it, I'll just use it from the demo - particularly on the guitar solos, if I do them at home I tend to do them without thinking and sometimes you can get incredible results. If you're relaxed you can do your best stuff so quite a few solos you hear on this new album, I did them at home. I thought 'I'm not going to be able to play that any better!' so I just took it straight from the demo."

Morley mentioning laying down drum tracks segues nicely into a question about one of the new songs 'There's Always a Loser', which is a classy Thunder ballad, but underpinned by a huge, almost Led Zeppelin like percussive sound.

"It's an interesting song, that. My original take on it was just piano and vocal that I did at home, and it was in a different key. It was almost like a Bill Withers sort of Soul song, I didn't really envisage Thunder doing it. But when we got toward the end of the album, it was pretty much done but I felt it just needed one more track, something else with a different element. I went back through my notes and bits and pieces. I found that track and thought it was a really good song, so I had to figure out how to 'Thunder-ise' it. So I started by moving it to a key that suited Danny's voice and I thought the piano had to stay, because I didn't hear it as a guitar part. So to make it a bit more impressive I thought I'd try some huge drums. I tried it at home with some samples and thought it could work. So when we got into Rockfield studios, I had Harry just do it in a big, noisy room, but I got him to play it twice. We double-tracked him, so effectively you're hearing two drummers on there, which is why it sounds so big. Sometimes when you layer things up, especially guitars and vocals, it can make things smaller but in this case it worked. People don't often double-track drums and it can be quite tricky but Harry keeps time like a metronome. Even he had to get his head around it, but once he did, it worked. And of course the piano used on that song is the one at Rockfield, the same piano 'Bohemian Rhapsody' was recorded on, so that song has a lot of interesting parts to it!"

I make an observation about the new material that some of it stays well within the classic Thunder boundries, but others have something a little different, and I highlighted the break in 'The Chosen One' as an example, as it reminded me of the 'Theme From Shaft'.

"I can't believe you picked up on that!" Morley laughs. "It's quite funny actually, when we got to that break it sounded a bit busy when the whole band played it, so I took a few bits out and it made more sense. We did actually talk about going down that route and putting some strings on there and going the whole hog, but I thought that was maybe making it a bit obvious and the reference is there, people with keen ears like yourself will pick it out and think it's like something from a Blaxploitation film. That's quite cool though, I was a teenager and I remember seeing 'Shaft' at the pictures, I love that music, I'm a big fan of Isaac Hayes."

Not content with the regular album, the band have put together a series of interesting bundles and formats where you can buy the album on CD, vinyl and even cassette, as well as adding some enticing extras, such as the double album 'Live At The 100 Club' and a website exclusive EP called 'Broken Mirror' with four new, non-album songs.

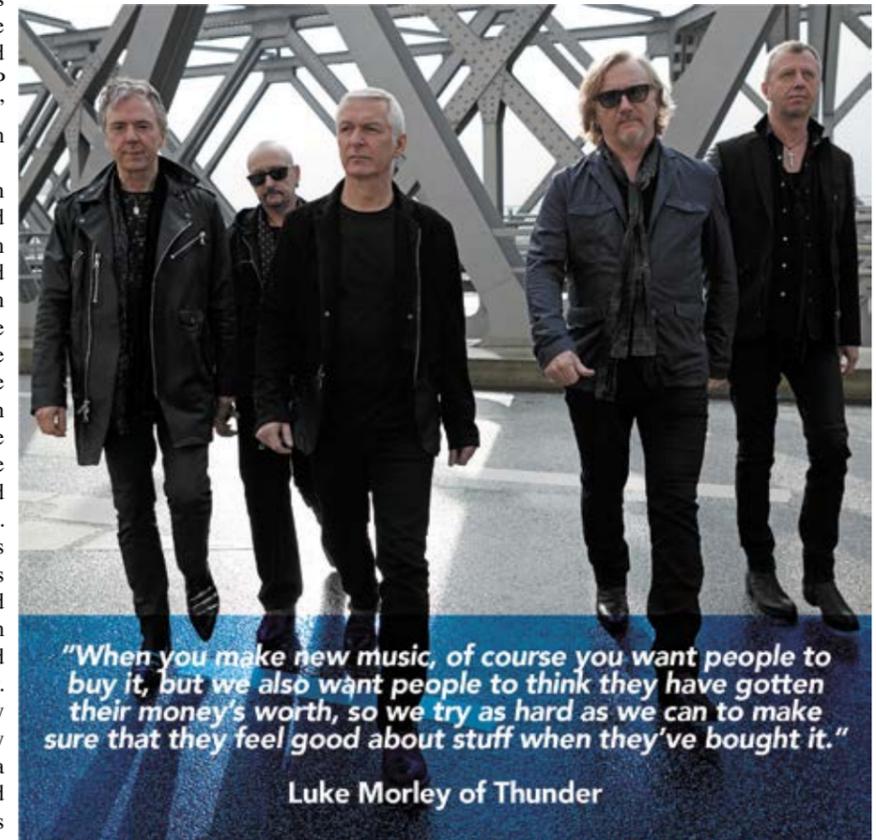
"It was a really tough choice this time, we had sixteen or seventeen songs we felt really good about, so the 'Broken Mirror' EP consists of the ones that didn't make the final cut. That said, the quality is still pretty high in my opinion, we were really happy with those songs too, so we wanted a way to release them. Nobody really bothers with singles these days so we felt this was a good way of grouping them together and it offered good value for money. It's something that really matters to us. We're very lucky that we've had a loyal and very dedicated fan base over the years and one of the reasons

is because we are conscious of the fact people don't have a lot of money. When you make new music, of course you want people to buy it, but we also want people to think they have gotten their money's worth, so we try as hard as we can to make sure that they feel good about stuff when they've bought it. We are very pro-active in that sense, with the artwork and things like that, it's something we care about deeply. Everything we do affects people's view of us, so we want a high standard that we're pleased with and that people will spend their money on and feel like it was well spent."

When 'Bang!' was released, the opening track 'On The Radio' lyrically speaks about how little mainstream support the band has received, yet despite that they have had a string of Top 40 singles, top ten albums and fill venues consistently. I ask the song-writer if he is frustrated Thunder

didn't get that mainstream support afforded to other acts, or if it's a source of pride they have achieved all of those things without it.

"Bit of both really," he says without hesitation and a chuckle. "I'll tell you a story, we're very friendly with the Iron Maiden guys, they've been around a long time, even longer than us! Their manager said to me one day 'Fuck Radio 1 and Radio 2, they never played anything of ours and we've never needed them. You must never forget you're making music for the punters, not for the radio' and I think he's exactly right. If you start to try and make records that you think radio will like, you'll end up chasing your tail in ever decreasing circles. Who knows, maybe Radio 2 might pick up on a track from this new album, but I can't afford to worry about that as a writer. I have to do what I think is best for us, and the more exposure it gets, the better, but I won't lose any sleep if it



doesn't make mainstream radio!"

Fortunately, there are other outlets these days like Planet Rock, who recently played 'Backstreet Symphony' in its entirety as the result of a listener's poll. I query if Morley has an opinion on which is the band's best record.

"I think when people vote in those kind of polls, nostalgia plays a huge part. It's not always about the music, it can be about their recollections, what they were doing when it came out, what age they were, so I don't think they are the most objective of polls! It's nice a lot of people like 'Backstreet Symphony', but it's been around a long time and people have developed a fondness for it. That's great, God knows I'm very grateful. Do I think it's our best album? I don't know, it's not for me to say really. You can't stand still as a songwriter, you have to keep moving forward, I think it's a dangerous thing to be content with your past. It's horses for courses really, I know

we have people who come to see us and they haven't bought an album since... 'Laughing On Judgment Day'!" he laughs. "Amazing really, but I don't care, as long as they keep coming. Not everyone can embrace change, people sometimes need time to adjust to new things, but for us as a band, it's our lifeblood, we have to keep moving forward with new music, try and stay relevant by making new records."

"With that in mind, I've always taken the view that our live set needs to be a great set, so I tend to forget which albums the songs are from, what's important is that it's a great live show. There's some songs we have to do of course, or there would be a major furor, but I don't feel hamstrung by the past in that sense. On the last tour for 'Wonder Days', I think we did seven songs from that album, in a set of fourteen, so that's half the show. I dare say this time we'll put in more new stuff, some stuff from 'Wonder Days' - that doesn't leave a lot of room to represent another nine albums! There will be old favourites, of course there will, it's all about making that hour and forty minutes entertaining, musically complete, people have to come away feeling they saw a really good show. We always get the odd complaint like 'Oh, you didn't do 'Better Man...'' or 'She's So Fine' or whatever, but I can't listen to all those people, I'd be a nervous wreck. We have to do what pleases us first, if we put together a show we enjoy performing and think is well balanced, then we'll do it better and it'll be a better show for everybody."

'Rip It Up' is out now and has reached at number

three in the album charts, the band's highest position for over 20 years. For details on the album bundle options, visit [www.thunderonline.com](http://www.thunderonline.com)

Thunder promote 'Rip It Up' on the following dates:

MARCH 2017

Fri 17th - Manchester Apollo **SOLD OUT**  
Sat 18th - Sheffield City Hall **SOLD OUT**  
Sun 19th - Newcastle City Hall **SOLD OUT**  
Tue 21st - Leicester De Montfort Hall  
Weds 22nd - Glasgow Clyde Auditorium  
Fri 24th - Cardiff Motorpoint Arena  
Sat 25th - Southampton Guildhall **SOLD OUT**  
Sun 26th - Ipswich Regent Theatre **SOLD OUT**  
Tues 28th - London Eventim Apollo  
Thurs 30th - Dublin Vicar Street  
Fri 31st - Belfast Mandela Hall **SOLD OUT**