

RETROSPECTIVE

LOOKING BACK ON CLASSIC ALBUMS WITH THE ONES WHO MADE THEM

In this new feature, Retrospective looks to fondly remember a great album from the past, by interviewing one of its key creators. To kick off the series, we start with Survivor's 'Too Hot To Sleep', their last album featuring the popular writing trio of Jim Peterik, Frankie Sullivan and Jimi Jamison. Featuring a harder sound than the previous albums recorded with Jamison, 'Too Hot To Sleep' is a terrific record with some powerful rockers such as 'She's A Star', 'Can't Get Enough' and 'Tell Me I'm The One' sitting nicely alongside the AOR magic of 'Didn't Know It Was Love' and the more reposeful masterpieces like 'Burning Bridges' or 'Across The Miles'. James Gaden ranks it as the best Survivor record, and his favourite - an opinion shared by vocalist Jimi Jamison. So James got in touch with Jimi to find out more about it...

I interviewed you once before (back in Fireworks #27) and I remember you saying it was the best record Survivor ever made. What was it in particular about that album that made it deserving of that accolade? Because Survivor made a lot of good records!

I think it was because it was probably the heaviest Survivor record, certainly the heaviest one I did. We always wanted to be heavier musically than we were - at least Frankie and I did. I think the same would go for the drummer and bass player also - Jim I'm not sure about, he was kinda content with the hits I think! (laughs). But no, we always wanted to be a heavier band. We had a big female audience and we wanted to push for a more male demographic too. In our hearts, we were all rockers and we wanted to do a heavier style of music - it's more like we did on stage, what we played up there was heavier than the studio albums and had a better feeling all round. I thought. We got that feel on 'Too Hot To Sleep' and that's pretty much why we like it the best,

It was, by far, the rockiest album the group made while you were there. Was there a conscious decision made by the band to harden the sound or was that just the way the material from that period turned out?

We did keep pushing and pushing for something harder - every day we rehearsed as a band, we'd suggest trying something heavier. It was an attempt to influence the writers, of which I was one, to write a little heavier. I wrote the title track of 'Too Hot To Sleep' - I wrote it in Memphis in my home and then brought what I'd done in to the guys and they helped with the lyrics and the melody. It all came together and I think from constantly pushing for a sound like that in rehearsal, it helped subconsciously influence the writers - it certainly did with me.

I'm glad you mentioned your song writing - I was going to ask about that. I noticed that aside from contributing to the title track, you only were credited on one other song, which was 'Rhythm Of the City', whereas on the album before, 'When Seconds Count', you co-wrote almost half of it.

Yeah, that's just the way it worked out. There was no 'George and Ringo get two songs each' or any of that stuff going on! (laughs).

I just wondered, sometimes you hear about people not been given full credit or being shut out of the process.

No, none of that ever happened on the records I did with Survivor. You mentioned I had some co-writes on 'When Seconds Count', I think that's about the most I've ever done! (laughs) I did an album with Joe Walsh once and co-wrote four songs with him - and he didn't put my name on any of them. So I'm glad to have my name on these! (laughs)

For this album, drummer Marc Droubay and bassist Stephen Ellis were not on the record. They were replaced with session musicians. Was there any particular reason why they didn't contribute?

Well, Stephen got sick while we were on tour. He was battling back and forth about something with the rest of the guys and we were about to go on tour and he didn't show up one day. So we had to go and grab a bass player real quick! (laughs) I guess he was unhappy with what was going on when he got well and came back... I'm really not sure how he left, but I know we had to get an immediate replacement on bass.

I was just wondering if it was maybe a political

thing - the album only depicts you, Jim and Frankie and the credits simply state "Survivor is..." and your three names, with session guys underneath. I didn't know if there was some inner turmoil?

Right - well that was the core of the band and for that record, that was all that was left. If memory serves, we had to get another drummer real quick before that tour as well! So on the album... yeah, we had Bill Syniar to handle the bass and Mickey Curry, who worked with Bryan Adams, played drums. We also had Kyle Woodring come in, you can see him on the video of 'Didn't Know It Was Love'.

With the previous two records, 'Vital Signs' and 'When Seconds Count', you had Ron Nevison producing. On this one it was done by Frank Filipetti and Frankie Sullivan. Why was the change made - was Ron not available, or was it deliberate because you were looking for a different sound?

I think it was because we needed a change. We love Ron, he's like family. We brought in Frank Filipetti and boy, he's brilliant. What a brilliant producer! Ron's great too, but in a different way. Frank had a lot to do with the way the album sounds I think. That more heavy sound was captured by him, we trusted him totally and left things in his lap. For example, on 'Across The Miles', he came up with all that percussion stuff that's on there. We came in to put our bits down and he'd already laid down all the percussion instruments at the front of the song. It was unbelievable, it just worked so well with the feel of the track.

That track was quite a departure from anything the band had done with you before - it was almost like a song off a soundtrack as a backing to something visual.

Yeah, that was one of my favourites on the record as a matter of fact. I had a lot of radio station programme directors tell me at one time or another that it should have been a single. I guess there weren't too many singles on that record because it wasn't really distributed very well or properly promoted.

Wasn't it your last contracted record for the label at that time?

Er, yeah, I think it was actually.

That could've been the reason - I've seen bits on the internet and there's a lot of people out there who like the record and there's some speculation why it never took off as big as 'Vital Signs' or 'When Seconds Count'.

That's one reason the band broke up to be honest - we put so much effort into that record, spent so much money on it - we put more into that on every level, including financially, than we did on any of the others. We were really depressed when it didn't really get promoted or do what we hoped. That was a big factor in us going our separate ways.

The album was made in two separate locations, New York and Lake Geneva. Do you have any specific memories of those sessions?

In Lake Geneva, we recorded at what used to be the Playboy golf course - it had a bunny shaped lake and everything! It had a big hotel there and they turned it into a studio. So we recorded a chunk of it there, it was great. The facilities were wonderful, we got plenty of exercise and it's such a beautiful place, Lake Geneva. In New York, Frank Filipetti was based there in Right Track Studios, so we travelled there because he knows the studio like the back of his hand.



With the idea that the album should be heavier, and the material being more guitar orientated and less reliant on keyboards, was Jim Peterik tempted to come out and play guitar as well, add a second part? Or was that always Frankie's domain? I think Jim's a great guitar player.

Oh yeah, he is. Frank did all the guitars on the record - I wasn't with the band when they decided Jim should be stuck behind keyboards, so I can't say what happened there! (laughs). I think that happened early on!

I know! When I listen to Pride Of Lions or The Ides Of March, I thought wow, Jim is really good. He plays lead guitar, he writes great songs for fun, he handles the keyboards... he's really talented and to have him as the guy playing keyboards - it just seems a waste!

I know! He was mainly a guitar player, he learned keyboards to write songs really. I don't get it either, I thought he should play guitar too and we should get another keyboard player. But he'd always say 'Aw, no, I can't...! He was a little intimidated by Frankie I think. But, y'know, he played almost all off the guitars on my 'Crossroads Moment' album.

This is it, the way he plays, the songs he writes, I even like his singing, I think he's underrated as a vocalist. There's not a hell of a lot he can't do!

Yeah, right! I'm trying to talk him into doing another solo record, without putting it out under some band name, you know? Put him up front, singing his songs, get his spirit up for doing it! (laughs)

Yeah - he did 'Above The Storm' on Frontiers a few years back and I thought that was a classy record, I think it was the last thing he did before doing 'Crossroads Moment' with you.

Yeah - he's talented all right. But everybody in Survivor was - we had a lot of great people around us and some great musicians in the band with some good ideas. When I first joined the band, I didn't realise what good writers they were. All I really knew was 'Eye Of The Tiger', I had to buy their old records to check them out. And boy, those guys can write!

No argument there - when you were writing for 'Too Hot To Sleep', do you remember if there was a track that came up which acted like a benchmark or influenced how the rest of the material should sound?

'Burning Bridges' was one of the early ones and that really set the tone I think. We did a demo of it in a little studio and I got it in like two takes I think. It was a hard vocal but for some reason it just flowed, we captured it and it set the tone. I don't know if it was the very first one we cut, but I know we did it very early on.

With you mentioning your vocals there - for me, I think you were at your absolute vocal peak on this album and your solo album 'When Love Comes Down'. Did you do anything differently, or did Frank Filipetti influence how you sang? Or was it just a case of you hitting your natural peak? Some of the notes you nail on there are amazing.

I don't think I did anything differently... I think for how I sing now, I do try and SING more, I have a plateau I've reached now where I can just kinda glide and it comes out good every time! (laughs) Well, I hope so anyway! (laughs)

But seriously, singing has a lot to do with the way you think. It's a very mental process. When I first joined the band, I hit the note in 'Eye Of the Tiger', that high C, really easy. But when we started doing concerts, oh, I would dread having to hit it every night. Once we were doing some shows, and I think it was the eighth in a row, and I tried something different, I figured out a way to do it differently and it came out perfect, without any strain, anything. Because I mentally figured it out, it wasn't an issue any more. Singing is mostly mental really, and the other part is exercise, like exercising a muscle. So I don't know, maybe back then mentally I was happy with my voice.

I guess that makes sense, when a song has a big "money note" like the one in 'Eye Of The Tiger', when you're in the audience you do tend to brace for it and anticipate the singer hitting it. So I'd guess being the singer anticipating having to deliver it, it would be a lot of pressure!

Yeah, exactly. I remember back when I was young and dumb, I went to see Led Zeppelin and Robert Plant was having voice problems, he was hoarse or something. He wasn't hitting all the notes, he was ducking out and going low, and I was there going 'Oh man, I want my money back!' (laughs). I did not get it at all... years later, when I'm having to do it, I thought 'Hey, sorry Robert!' (laughs)

After listening to 'Too Hot To Sleep' a lot in preparation for this interview, the difference in sound and reigning in of the keyboards, it worked so well and it was such a shame that the band never carried on in that direction. With the lack of promotion, there was no real tour to speak of, I think you just played a few support dates with Cheap Trick. I know Frankie and Jim played a lot of this album when they worked with Dave Bickler in the early nineties - how about you? When you went solo, did you want to play a lot of it, or were you so depressed about how it didn't get the proper push, you washed your hands of it?

No, I played a few, I did 'Too Hot To Sleep' and 'Across The Miles' for sure... in fact, we were so happy with the sound of 'Too Hot To Sleep' when we played it live, we decided to add it as a bonus onto my 'Empires' record.

That's right! I was going to ask about that. It's a great version, but the sleeve notes don't state where it was, when it was or anything.

I can't recall for certain - I think it was probably done in Japan but I'm not sure. I can't remember, I'm getting old over here! (laughs) Maybe Europe, but I'd think more likely Japan.

There was also live versions of 'Rebel Son' and

'Burning Heart' on there as well. Were they all from the same gig?
No, I don't think so.

Good, it would be criminal if there was one show of that quality sitting unreleased somewhere! (laughs)

No, there isn't, and I can't remember which gigs the others songs were from either! (laughs)

When you were writing for the album, did you have a lot of songs let over after picking the best ones, or were you the kind of band who usually just wrote enough material?

There were always songs left over - sometimes we maybe just worked them up at rehearsal and then decided not to record them. But for this, no, we had a bunch of material and we left it to the producer to pick the ones which made the record. Ron Nevison came down during pre-production and he gave us his opinion and then Frank Filipetti would decide on which ones we should do. We didn't want that lobbying, political stuff going on when people are fighting over songs! (laughs)

Was 'Velocitized' one of the ones left over, which eventually ended up on the Mecca album? I always thought that would have fitted great on 'Too Hot To Sleep' and wondered when it was written.

Er... no, it wasn't. That was actually written and recorded when I went back to Survivor the first time. I wasn't that crazy about the song myself... it was okay, but I thought we had better stuff. I think we have better stuff than that in the vaults that nobody has ever heard.

Really? Wow!

Yeah, man. I've got like a thousand cassettes - I taped everything we ever did! When somebody was fooling around with an idea at rehearsal or whatever, I'd tape it.

With that being said, and with the producer making the song choices, were you happy with the track listing on 'Too Hot To Sleep', or did you think something was left off in favour of something you weren't that wild about?

No, I pretty much loved everything that made that record. You forget about some songs after a while, but what we had on that record, I was very pleased with. And nobody else was complaining, so I didn't either! (laughs) I'm very proud of that record.

So you should be, that's why I wanted to feature it. It's a fabulous album.

That's great man, thank you. I really wish more people had gotten to hear it, I don't think it reached the audience

ALBUM DETAILS

1. **She's A Star**
(Sullivan, Peterik)
2. **Desperate Dreams**
(Sullivan, Peterik)
3. **Too Hot to Sleep**
(Sullivan, Peterik, Jamison)
4. **Didn't Know It Was Love**
(Sullivan, Peterik)
5. **Rhythm Of The City**
(Sullivan, Peterik, Jamison)
6. **Here Comes Desire**
(Sullivan, Peterik)
7. **Across The Miles**
(Sullivan, Peterik)
8. **Tell Me I'm The One**
(Sullivan, Peterik)
9. **Can't Give It Up**
(Sullivan, Peterik)
10. **Burning Bridges**
(Sullivan, Peterik)

BAND LINE UP

Jimi Jamison - lead vocals

Frankie Sullivan - guitar

Jim Peterik - keyboards

ADDITIONAL PERSONNEL

Mickey Curry - drums

Bill Syniar - bass

Rory Dodd, Tommy Shaw, Ian Lloyd
backing vocals

Produced by Frank Filipetti
Recorded at: Right Track Studios, NYC and
Royal Recorders, Lake Geneva

Released on Scotti Bros/Volcano in 1988

like it should have, and I think a lot of people who maybe would have liked it missed out. You had to be really connected to the music or entertainment business to have even heard about it when it came out.

Well you never know, maybe this article will help convert some people! With the internet nowadays, you can hear or get your hands on a lot of music that was previously out of reach.

That would be wonderful - if people find it and like it, or it reminds them to go back and check it out, then that would make me very proud. It was good talking to you again James, and nice to hear you appreciate the record!

