DEBORAH BONHAM

INTERVIEW: FIONA MCKEOWN

Deborah Bonham is an amazing woman. She has lived life with passion. The memories, the stories and the emotions can be felt and heard in every song she sings. She has had an astounding life and pulls the audience through the thoughts and feelings of her world. She has rock music in her genes and her quality of writing and performing is right up there with the best. I got the chance to catch up with her recently, Come join the journey...

Deborah was born on the 7th Feb 1962 in Redditch, Worcestershire and attended the Holy Trinity School for girls in Kidderminster, Worcestershire. As a child she lived in the cottage at the back of Old Hyde Farm, near her father’s home, Henry Green, Worcestershire with her father John Henry Bonham Snr (known as Jack). Her brother John Bonham (”Bono”, Led Zeppelin) and her family Pat, Jason and Zoe lived in the main house on the farm. I asked Deborah about her dad and brother working in the construction industry and if they actually built the properties on the farm where she grew up?

‘Yes they did and several others too. I think it gave John something to do when not recording and touring,’ she explained, ‘and he had a flair for it, design exterior and interior. My Dad was a master builder, as was my grandfather. I love restoring and building houses also and have done it a few times, as does Jason, so as well as music I think building is in our genes too!’

Family genes indeed. The Bonham family are very close.

“Well, my family are very close, you’re right and like all families that are close we’ve all been known to have our arguments and fights. But that’s what being close is all about isn’t it? You can let your guard down with those that you love and it is easier to take things out on those that you love. The fact is that if you love one another - you make it all up back. Fortunately, it’s very rare that any of us fall out. Having lost John, Michael and dad, we make the most of every moment we have together - they’re precious you know.”

Deborah’s nephew Jason (John’s son) also has the family music genes and is only 4 years younger than Deborah. While living at the farm Deborah and Jason started to play and record some songs. I asked Deborah how this started.

“We just always loved music - he always played the drums from a baby really - I always loved to sing. There was no ‘let’s get a band together’, no plans, we just wanted to play. My influences were wide spread - from Morison, Aretha, Otis and Al Green to Muddy Waters, Frank Collins, Braxton, Maggie Bell, Fleetwood Mac, Little Feet, Steely Dan,Jon Hendrix, CSNY, The Who, The Small Faces, Humble Pie - you name it, we listened to it. I also loved the big bands like, Harry James, Benny Goodman, Tommy Dorsey, Frank Sinatra.”

Your talent was recognized at an early age and at 17, you recorded some demos at Robert Plant’s studio. He lived in a nearby village to you and I believe you were the first demo he listened to. How did this happen?

“Well, my family are very close, you’re right, and like Harry James, Benny Goodman, Tommy Dorsey, Frank Sinatra.”

“Okay, you know - I’m not crazy about that record. It’s direction everything was not up to me. I was completely taken over by the record company and just told what to do and when to do it. I had no input to get some of my songs on there! I hated that, having all my creative input trampled on. Recorded in Germany, they didn’t even speak English in the recording sessions. The record company eventually was closed in the UK and I was tied with a ridiculous contract that I couldn’t get out of for 10 years.”

After the album you spent time touring the UK and Europe and writing. You also recorded for the Japanese Sam Corporation and were supposed to have visited Japan to do some preliminary promotional work. ‘I didn’t work out and you changed labels in 1995 to re-release the single ‘Perfect World’.

“The problem was there was no budget for me to visit Japan - I actually didn’t get to go there it so fell apart. Perfect World? Well again, struggling to get something somewhere I did a little single deal with a small company called RPM. Great little label run by a lovely guy called Mark Stratford - but again, no budget. It was only a small label so... it wasn’t quite so perfect.”

In 1996 you got a new band together, rehearsing new songs for an album and playing selected gigs such as headlining at The Bellfest Festival and a sell out show at the Bottom Line, Shepherd’s Bush. You got excellent reviews.

“He was the beginnings of the incredible band I have now. The guitarist later became my husband Pete Bullick, Ian was on bass... this was the start.”

The start of great things to come. In 1997 you performed live in the US on LA’s Rockline radio to three million listeners throughout North America and Can-

The US was amazing, but so was Europe when we toured. I got so involved with the problem is we’ve never really played Europe and only certain dates in the UK - I reckon we must be one of the UK’s best-kept secrets! Not for long though I hope...”

You went back to the US after this success and opened for Jason’s band on a three-month tour in Dals, Fort Worth, Houston and New York.

“Again, brilliant. Crowds of girls became my fans and with gifts after to meet me. Unbelievable and humbling - problem was we didn’t have a record deal so... back to that again.”

You have toured with Van Halen, Paul Weller, Humble Pie, Donovan, Foreigner and Donnington, Glastonbury and Fairport Convention’s Cropredy Festivals to name but a few. Where was your favourite place to play or your favorite band to tour with?

“That’s an impossible question to answer! It’s all been brilliant - these people have all given me a chance when the record companies wouldn’t and again it’s quite humbling. Singing Can’t Stand Losing You on the last night of tour though - that was pretty damn special!”

You have a big interest in the Racehorse sanctuary: tell me about your involvement with the Moorcroft Race Horse Welfare Centre? ‘It’s the Racehorse Sanctuary and Re-Homing Centre of which I’m a founder Trustee. I used to work in a racing yard when I was about 16 and it always bothered me as to what happened to these beautiful creatures once they are injured or just finished their racing career so simply they are destroyed sometimes, in horrific circumstances. I decided then that one day I’d do something about that! It’s hard to raise money for ex-racehorses as most people think that the industry itself is too rich look after them. But we can’t and we rely solely on the general public for donations.

We have a support group of members that donate £10 per month - this entitles them to special newsletters, open days and fundraising events. If anyone interested in becoming a support group member please contact info@racehorsesanctuary.org or call 01403 865929.

Paul Rodgers and his wife Cynthia have been wonderful and we’ve just taken charge of a fantastic specially made horse box donated by the Crown Prince of Bahrain, thanks to Robert Plant approaching him on my behalf, giving him a couple of back stage access all areas passes for a Led Zepp O2 show and I whole next day entertaining him! We were overwhelmed!”

The next album you released was ‘The Old Hyde’ in 2004 which featured Mick Fleetwood, Mick McNeil (The Pretenders, Paul McCartney), Robbie Blunt, Dougie Boyle (Both of Robert Plant’s Band) and your nephew Jason Bonham. The album was produced by Mo Foster (Van Morrison, Jeff Beck and Phil Collins) and is filled with bluesy rock and emotive ballads. The famous and beautiful ballad off this album is the title track ‘The Old Hyde’. I believe that you end every gig with this song! Is it a dedication to your Dad and Brother. Can you tell me about this?

“The Old Hyde was the farm that John bought and that he and Dad built, also with my brother Michael. It’s a song about losing them and the devastating emotions I had on me... but it’s about believing that there is an afterlife where we will all get to see our lost loved ones again. I think during the time of writing ‘The Old Hyde’ I was struggling with the fact that no matter where I searched, all over the world, I would never find them and I’d never see them again. I just couldn’t deal with that. “Waiting” from the new album Duchess is the same sort of concept only now I’ve moved forward and become stronger. It deals with the fact that I know I’ll see them again sometimes, only I’m not in too much of a rush now! I’ll wait for when it’s my time! I very firmly love my life now and I’m living it, and embracing it. I have my husband Pete, my horses and living with my horses, dogs and ducks. I have amazing friends and family and I at long last have the record deal I’ve only ever dreamt of, a fantastic band and a great team behind me and I have a wonderful new album as a special guest of Jason Bonham. This was followed by a special appearance with Jason and his band at the Henley A Go Go In Los Angeles, where you were incredibly well received. Was the US different than Europe?

‘The US was amazing, but so was Europe when we toured. I got so involved with the problem is we’ve never really played Europe and only certain dates in the UK - I reckon we must be one of the UK’s best-kept secrets! Not for long though I hope...”

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Thrilled - what a fantastic sax player. It was great fun.”

Fact: Derek Nash, who plays sax with Jools, got up with some of the musicians that he plays with. In ‘The Old Hyde’ - it’s a special album for me, always a challenge to see ‘The Old Hyde’ revisited.”

The music takes the audience through every emotion and almost emotionally pulls you inside-out but you leave a good shake and sets you up better than you started! It is some piece of work. The band on this album are former Humble Pie drummer Jerry Shirley, bassist Ian Rowley, keyboardist Gino Vannelli and guitarist Ray Bullick. I love the first song ‘Grace’ and instantly have to dance from the word go! Other songs like ‘Hold On’ provoke the thought process and others bring you to tears! All pull the emotional chords, as these songs are probably the most intense between the listeners and the band.

You completed further club headline tours in 2005, as well as recording and appearing live with Ann Peebles. “Yes, I sang with Ann Peebles, one of my vocal heroes which was absolutely amazing. She came and stayed at our house and told us stories about Elvis while peeling and chopped vegetables for our tea - totally unreal!”

Your latest album ‘Duchess’ has just been released (24th June 2008) worldwide as US debut and is a fantastic, brilliant, bluesy and strong, celebrating, soul strength and family. It has thirteen original amazing tracks on it (the digital version includes ‘The Old Hyde Revisited’). This album takes me inside-out with every emotion, and almost emotionally pulls you inside-out but you leave a good shake and sets you up better than you started! It is some piece of work. The band on this album are former Humble Pie drummer Jerry Shirley, bassist Ian Rowley, keyboardist Gino Vannelli and guitarist Ray Bullick. I love the first song ‘Grace’ and instantly have to dance from the word go! Other songs like ‘Hold On’ provoke the thought process and others bring you to tears! All pull the emotional chords, as these songs are real-life, real love, real feeling... an awesome work, a magical album and a true treasure in my collection. The song ‘Hold On’ guests drummer Jason Bonham and vocalist Paul Rodgers (Free, Bad Company and Queen) and the song ‘Blue’ guests veteran pedal steel guitarist, BJ Cole. Every track on this album is fantastic and offers its own space to place and sticks to some price tracks on the new album and what inspired them! “Wow, thank you so much! It’s truly wonderful to know it had that effect! Favourite tracks? That’s hard because they’re all quite special to me, different songs - a different emotion, and yes I do have to say ‘Hold On’ because it’s about getting through life’s difficult times and having Paul sing and Jason play drums. I mean, how lucky am I? I just get to duet with one of the greatest singers and one of the greatest drummers! Yeah, I’ll keep holding on!”

‘Duchess’ is out now on Rhino Records.

A “blend of power, melody and dark romance” is how Greek band Julian’s Lullaby describe their music, as they concoct their special mix of metal, rock and folk on their debut release ‘I Can Hear You Thinking’.

Adding violin to hard riffs one minute, offering acoustic folk melodies the next, the band certainly succeed in their desire to offer musical versatility. Bruce Mee hooked up with guitarist Elias Negrin to get the detailed story.

Can you give us some background into the formation of the band, and the ideals you wished to accomplish with your music? The band in fact started as a personal project. I started looking for members only after having completed some songs and felt there was potential for such a formation. That is why it took up quite long to finish the first demo CD. I did not want to rush things and gave to everyone involved, including myself, the necessary time space. After the demo CD was finished we started looking for a complete line-up, so currently it is Efrossene Papanicolaou: Vocals, Antonios Chaniotis: Violin & Vocals, Elias Negrin: Guitars & Composition, Antonis Scarlatos: Keyboards & Arrangements, Angelo Skouras: Bass guitars and Mario Aronis: Drums.

Tell us about your influences and inspirations behind your ‘sound’ of the band? Unusual questions for us. We don’t aim to sound like this or that, band but prefer to have a personality. It is Utopia of course to think we can create something specific although has a funny story behind. The other guitarist player in Decadence used to call me "julian" as a nickname, so initially was thinking of names containing “julian” or “julias”. Actually “julian’s lullaby” is a song written by percussionist Alex Percout and fits so nicely with the whole concept so it just stuck.

The band has been in existence for 4 years now... how you done much/anything outside of Greece? And what about Greece itself, is what the rock scene like there for a band like Julian’s Lullaby? Only released our first demo CD and managed some publicity in Greece and abroad. We participated in the “MNR Vol. 3” (US) compilation album and also did a cover song for a ‘Kiss tribute album in Greece entitled ‘Greektures of the night’, which is still not released however due to some issues with publishers. In Greece unfortunately is mainly run independently, and there is not much room for bands like ours although, many remarkable bands exist and have managed quite a lot. Outside Greek borders but only after they tried really hard. Geography is also a disadvantage for us as we are located quite away from central Europe. Other bands can have their van and tour around but for us this cannot be the case. Scandinavian bands for example can sell thousands of CDs only in their homeland. Major labels in Greece and the audience are not really interested to music outside the pop stuff so it is really hard to make a living. Anyway, this is well known or should be by now, one wishing to start a music band. Looking for fame and money? This is a myth, don’t bother starting at all! To put it frankly everything is against you and its up to you to turn things upside down.

What are the future plans for the band? Plans include finishing our first full-length album somewhere early next year and doing as many live shows as possible! We are not asking for miracles just some space to place our dreams!

The demo CD was recorded, produced and mixed by the band themselves, and you can hear the tracklist is: “I Can Hear You Thinking” is the 2nd track. I am focusing on this track as it is many people consider the album “will sound much better and more polished”, and I certainly look forward to hearing it. Check the band out at www.julian-lullaby.com.

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**JULIAN’S LULLABY**

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