

DEBORAH BONHAM

INTERVIEW: FIONA MCKEOWN

Deborah Bonham is an amazing woman. She has lived life to the full and all her experiences, ventures and 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 Convent School for girls in Kidderminster, Worcestershire. As a child she lived in the cottage at the back of Old Hyde Farm, Cutnall Green, Worcestershire with her father, John Henry Bonham Snr (known as Jack). Her brother John Bonham ("Bonzo"), Led Zeppelin and his family, Pat, Jason and Zoë 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 flare 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 you also tend to take things out on those that you love. The fact is that if you love each other - you make it back up! 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 Motown, Aretha, Otis and Al Green to Joni Mitchell, Maggie Bell, Fleetwood Mac, Little Feet, Steely Dan, Janis, 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 sent these demos anonymously to record companies?

"Robert seemed the obvious person for me to call and ask advice - which he gave me willingly and he let me make some demos there with Jason and a couple of other local musicians - a guy on bass called Ian Rowley (you may notice that he's still the bass player now!). Eventually when I had some demos we all thought sounded okay, I sent them out anonymously you're right. That was really to by-pass anyone picking up on me just because I was John's sister."

The demos were very well received gaining you your first record deal with Carerre Records. Your first album was released in 1985 and called 'For You and the Moon' and it reached the top 5 in the album charts and was played on Radio 1 and was voted 'Record of the Year' by Musik Mart, Germany. A very successful album within Europe.

"Oh gosh, 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 save getting 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. This didn't work out and you changed labels in 1995 to 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 so it 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 Belfast Festival and a sell out show at the Bottom Line, Shepherd's Bush. You got excellent reviews.

"It 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-

ada, as a special guest of Jason Bonham. This was followed by a special appearance with Jason and his band at the Whiskey 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 last year with Foreigner [Jason again]. You see 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 Dallas, Fort Worth, Houston and New York.

"Again, brilliant. Crowds of girls became my fans and waited 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 played Donnington, Glastonbury and Fairport Convention's Cropredy Festivals to name but a few. Where was your favourite place to play or your favourite band to tour with?

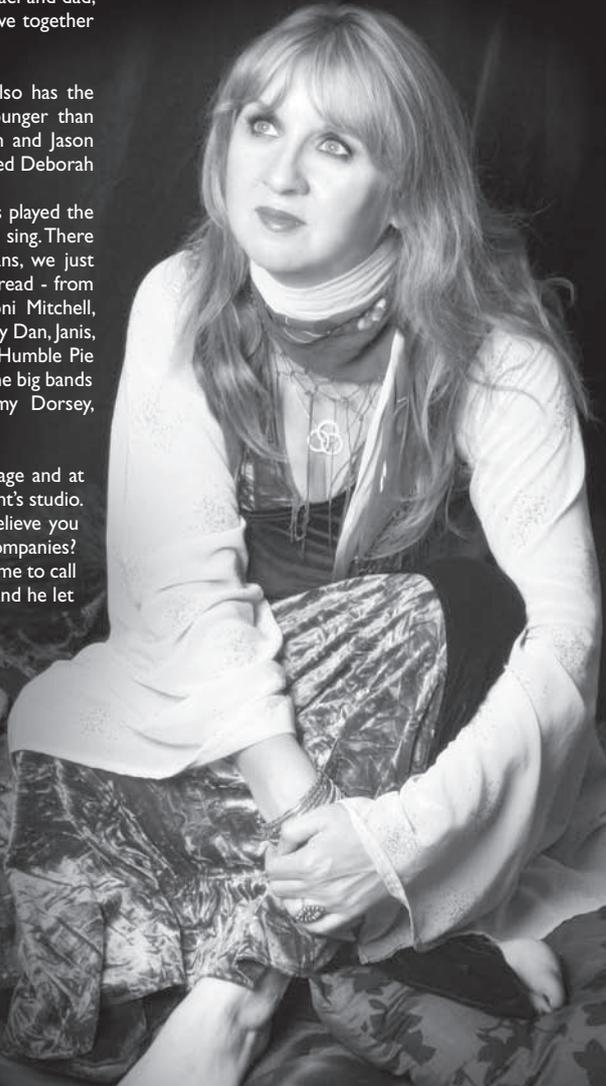
"That's an impossible question to answer! It's all been brilliant - these people have all given me a chance when the record companies wouldn't and again it's quite humbling. Singing 'Can't Get Enough' with Paul Rodgers on the last night of tour though - that was pretty damn special!"

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 at 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. Quite 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 being so very rich look after them. But they don'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 is 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 the Led Zep O2 show and then spending the whole next day entertaining him! We were overwhelmed!"

The next album you released was 'The Old Hyde' in 2004 which featured Mick Fleetwood, Robbie McIntosh (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? It is 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 effect it 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 content only now I've moved forward and become stronger. It deals with the fact that I know I'll see them again sometime, 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 mother living with us, 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 a wonderful new album



'Duchess'. Time can be a healer... you just have to let it."

I believe there are plans to re-release this album?

"If things go according to plan I would love to re-release 'The Old Hyde' - it's a special album for me, always will be and I'm incredibly proud of the songs and the playing."

After releasing this album you toured and had special guest slot's on the Jools Holland Stadium and Arena tour in Autumn 2004.

"It was fabulous and he's a lovely gentleman. Great band - I really enjoyed his show and we've stayed in touch with some of the musicians that he plays with. In fact Derek Nash, who plays sax with Jools, got up with us at the Cambridge Rock Festival last year. We were thrilled - what a fantastic sax player. It was great fun."

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 chopping vegetables for our tea - totally unreal!"

Your latest Album 'Duchess' has just been released (24th June 2008). It is your US debut and is a fantastic album, bluesy and strong, celebrating soul, strength and family. It has thirteen original amazing tracks on it (the digital version includes The Old Hyde Revisited"). The music takes the audience through every emotion and almost emotionally pulls you inside-out, gives you 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 Gerard Louis and guitarist Peter 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: 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 great qualities. Please can you tell me your favourite tracks on the new album and what inspired them?

"Wow, thank you so much! It's truly wonderful to know it's had that effect! Favourite tracks? That's hard because they're all quite special to me; different song - a different mood. But it's all about strength really. I guess I'd 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 of all time with one of the greatest drummers! Yeah, I'll keep holding on!"

'Duchess' is out now on Rhino Records.

JULIAN'S LULLABY

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 us 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 Papamichalopoulou: Vocals, Antonios Chaniotis: Violin & Vocals, Elias Negrin: Guitars & Compositions, Antonis Scarlatos: Keyboards & Arrangements,
A n g e l o

Skouras: Bass guitars and Mario Aronis: Drums.

Talking about ideals; our music attempts to blend raw power, energy and romanticism ... in fact it is a mix of all music elements we love in one pack. There is no specific message we want to stand behind or big words. It is just an expression of our inner selves dressed in melodies and lyrics. It can be aggressive, epic, romantic or an everyday event filtered and exaggerated under an artistic point of view? Call us what you like actually, but at least spread our name!

It is unusual to hear violins integrated with such powerful guitars. Of course, bands like ELO and Germany's Wet Desert have included violins in rock music, but not with such hard rock as Julian's Lullaby. What were the influences and inspirations behind the 'sound' of the band?

'Unusual' is a keyword 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 unique and completely new but at least try to sound different. There is still lots of room for improvement and is very early to talk about an identity after only a 6-track demo. Our influences mainly come from metal, folk and acoustic rock; we are using classical orchestral samples, pianos, strings, flutes and the like. It is fun trying to fit these things into metal! Each one of us has a different background with music projects ranging from classical music, extreme metal, pop, gothic rock and neo-folk. Efrossene and myself for example have done two albums together with another band called Decadence, playing a mix of neo-folk and dark wave. Antonios is also singing with his pop-rock band and plays violin for theatre music, orchestras etc. Antonis our keyboard player has been writing tones of music for a number of projects as well. He is very diverse and competent indeed. He and Antonios on violin are capable of doing amazing things together, honestly! Angelo finally has an experience with a doom/death/progressive metal band and listens to quite peculiar stuff, and also writes own material. We are such a diversity of characters, just like our sound!

And alternating male/female lead vocals is not so usual within a band. Was this always something you were interested in working with, and how is the writing done to allow both singers to succeed? Do you write songs specifically for each singer, or do you decide who is best suited to which song?

Hmmm, this was really risky. At first when I was thinking about it, it seemed a very original idea. You see in Decadence we also had male/female voices but the male was doing the narrative part while Efrossene did the singing. I wanted to take this to a next level. Instead of trying the usual stuff of male brutal/female sweet voices I preferred to try male/female lead singers according to the song needs. This can give us some flexibility when

writing songs but of course can be a disadvantage as you can easily lose direction.

And where does the name 'Julian's Lullaby' come from? It's actually quite a misleading band name, as one might expect soft, soothing music, haha!

Glad to hear that the band name is unusual also! Like I already said, we try to draw attention and what else if not the name for a start? I was thinking for months of a proper one and listed quite a lot before deciding. "Julian's Lullaby" earned more votes, ha ha. It does not mean something specific although has a funny story behind. The other guitar player in Decadence used to call me "July" as a nickname, so initially was thinking of names containing "July" or "Julian". Actually "Julian's Lullaby" is a song written by percussionist Alex Pertout and felt it 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, what is the rock scene like there for a band like Julian's Lullaby?

We only released our demo CD this year and managed some publicity in zines around Greece and abroad. We participated in the "MNR Vol. 3" (US) compilation CD 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 publishing rights I think. Anyhow, we are expecting these to be resolved pretty soon. BUTCHERIAN VIBE mag. (Serbia) also featured one song in last issue's sample CD.

Regarding shows, we did a small acoustic set in May to promote the 'Greektures of the Night' album mentioned above and now we're getting ready for an indie rock fest in Syros island (Greece). The rock scene 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 survive. Mass media only promote pop artists so indie bands have to do everything on their own. Practically very few can make money from music and the vast majority of musicians like us have normal jobs to make a living. Anyway, this is well known or should be to anyone 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 track 'Kiss Me Not Tonight' on this issue's cover CD. Elias promises 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.