

Going DEF for a Living

The statistics scream out from the sales sheets. Closing in on quintuple platinum in the US (that's five million copies, Jack), and it still won't go away. The aptly named *Pyromania* continues to burn hotter than Ray-gun's trigger-finger, and the boys in Def Leppard aren't yet fully aware of the dimensions of the metal monster they created.

"It probably won't sink in until it totally disappears, and we can sit down and look at what it did," muses lead singer Joe Elliott, tracked down in the midst of a European tour. Could be a long wait, Joe. *Pyromania* is now Polygram Records' most successful rock album ever, and in its wake the earlier Leppard records, *High And Dry* (90 weeks) and *On Through The Night* (36 weeks), continue to hang on to the charts.

The numbers may be a tad confusing, but what they boil down to is the (unpalatable to some) fact that this young heavy rock band ship more units in North America than all the trendy Culture Clubs, Spandau Ballets and Flock Of Seagulls combined. Could this be the real British invasion?

The sustained success of *Pyromania* can obviously be attributed to its skillful blend of classic heavy metal with a melodic, commercial sound reminiscent of the Foreigners of the rock world. So spill the beans, Joe. Was the record a carefully calculated crack at establishing a foothold on American radio, and then on to world domination?

"No, we never thought like that. We just write songs. I'm convinced that lots of American bands sound like that because they try to write commercially. We always write our music in England, and you can't hear American radio there. It's totally different in Britain and so you always tend to have a rougher edge to your music. The only thing that may be slightly aimed at American radio is the production and that wasn't so much aimed at it, it just seemed

to fit in well.

"We wanted to take things further, and make it heavy. Not meaning any disrespect to him, but we don't like that Rick Springfield sound. It's very well-produced, but rather lightweight. We wanted the guitars to CUT, to be HEAVY, but still keep the vocal harmonies. That's something that hasn't really been done since Queen did *Sheer Heart Attack* back in 1974. We go for a big guitar, big drum sound, huge everything. It's a heavy sound, but it also fits on the radio. We have the best of both worlds."

It's hard to consider these friendly young guys from Sheffield capable of the cold-blooded strategems of their American peers, but Def Leppard's North American success has brought on the cries of 'sell-out' from their original English metal fans.

"It's not a case of selling out. If we wanted to do that, we could make it a lot more bland. We're a hard rock band, not Laura Branigan!"

The desertion of young Anglos from the Leppard pack obviously pained Joe Elliott and he can't suppress a touch of bitterness when he notes that they're now returning to the fold.

"We did very well in England when we started off, then lost it totally because they all accused us of selling out to America. Now we're a 100 times bigger than we were then in America and the fans are now coming back. It's a bit hypocritical in a way, but the American thing has recently brought good press and people are now begging us to do shows in England."

Def Leppard's recent Euro-jaunt apparently went well, despite the language barrier. "The crowd reaction is totally different. They go really quiet between songs. I think that's because they don't understand a word I say, but they do go loopy during the songs. The language thing doesn't bother me much. It's not what you sing, it's the way you do it that counts."

Their current rest in England is well deserved. "We've been touring since Febru-

ary and everyone is dying! We'll break until the end of January, then write some more for the next album. Hopefully, we'll begin recording in April," says Joe.

Aaah — the new album. Just how do you follow an album that will soon need a new metal to denote its status? "The only reason it is difficult is that people always say, 'you're never going to be able to follow it up'. You can start worrying about it too much, but we already have some good songs written."

"We don't want to just copy *Pyromania*. We want it to be a natural progression on what we've already done."

For guys so young (19 to 25), Def Leppard seem surprisingly level-headed about their new status as a heavyweight act.

"None of us think we're God's gift to music. You're only as big as your last record. The fact that we're all from a working-class environment really helps. To us, it's not a business, it's just a bit of fun we get paid for. It's an alternative to working in a factory, and when you see it like that, you'll never take it for granted."

Still, the pressures of life in the limelight can lead to explosions. There was that recent



Def Leppard's Joe Elliott

incident in Texas where Elliott stupidly referred to an El Paso crowd as 'dirty Mexicans'. As Elvis Costello discovered a few years back, such outbursts can have severe repercussions.

Without referring directly to that incident, Elliott acknowledges that "because we are so popular now, a lot of people are trying to jump on the bandwagon and accuse us of certain things. They'll catch you on a bad day, and suddenly you're seen as an ego-tripper."

Along with their accessible brand of hard rock, the youthful good looks of the Leppards have contributed to their popularity, and Joe makes no attempt to deny this.

"We're conscious of it as a factor, and we do play on it, but it's all very tongue-in-cheek. Image is slightly secondary to the music. We'd never go on stage looking like tramps. We think it's important to look good when we play live."

This accent on appearance can be traced back to the impact English glam rock had on Def Leppard.

"Our influences are basically all English; from Queen and Zep to Sweet and T. Rex."

"The reason I wanted to be in a rock band was basically that I thought Marc Bolan looked brilliant!"

Young groups like Leppard and Iron Maiden are being hailed as heirs apparent to the aging dinosaurs of hard rock, but Joe Elliott refuses to slag off the balding, beer-gutted brigade of old rockers.

"The main thing is for people to forget about age. Something as stupid as age can put people off your music. There was a definite need for young bands like us, but there's no harm in we young bands growing old. You'll get another new young band coming along to get a new audience. It's the cycle of events."

Even if their phenomenal success continues, don't expect to see Def Leppard as tax exiles in the South of France. For one thing, they don't like the food.

"We just went out for cheese and ham toasted sandwiches, and got a piece of dry bread and three slices of cheese. I can't wait to get back to Sheffield for fish 'n' chips and mushy peas!"

Kerry Doole



Whitesnake

NEW
ALBUM

Slide it in

AVAILABLE AGAIN
CLASSIC WHITESNAKE
'COME AN' GET IT'

DAVID COVERDALE
vocals
JON LORD
keyboards
MEL GALLEY
guitar & vocals
MICKY MOODY
guitar
COLIN HODGKINSON
bass
COZY POWELL
drums


