



Bon Jovi

Ask A Silly Question...

Around the time of the late 80s, Bon Jovi shared the top slot as the kings of melody-drenched heavy rock with Van Halen. They came shining like a drunk's red nose, in a genre increasingly choked with talentless hair bands like Europe and the re-emerging Whitesnake.

Halfway through 87, Bon Jovi's debut album, *Slippery When Wet*, dropped like a bomb on music fans looking for something more than white sneakers and posing pouch posturing in their diet. It produced the monumental tracks 'Livin' On A Prayer' and 'You Give Love A Bad Name'. *New Jersey*, from 1989, delivered the hit 'Bad Medicine', and saw them take a more blues-rock approach. This was further expanded on with *Keep the Faith*, Bon Jovi's last studio album, released in 1992.

Last year, though, things turned bad. A greatest hits compilation, *Crossroads*, sold by the truckload, but spawned the single 'Always' — the kind of seriously nauseating ballad that is written by a band suffering a crippling lack of inspiration. Come yule-tide, they released the truly tragic 'Please Come Home For Christmas', which signified the last nail about to be hammered into the Bon Jovi coffin.

So, just when you think it's all over, they go and release *These Days*. While it falls some way short of being a total return to form, the

album sees them shift in a pleasing blues/R&B direction, while still keeping their hand in on the pop-metal tip.

Late last month, Bon Jovi guitarist Richie Sambora phoned *RipItUp* from his hotel room in Tokyo. In the background is what sounds like a harem of giggling geishas. Sambora noisily guzzles a drink throughout the interview, and half-heartedly feigns interest in my questions. No problem, he's been taking part in these little chats for almost a decade, and can be forgiven for having switched to auto-pilot long ago. As a result, though, we play dumb and dumber.

The new album sounds good, pretty rockin'.

"Yeah, mine and Jonny's R&B influences are really coming out on this record. In New Jersey there's a lot of R&B and blue-eyed soul going on, then you have the Philadelphia R&B blues sound, which is right next door to us. So, all that stuff is coming out now. Stylistically, Bon Jovi just tries to be diverse every time."

Maybe you'll go grunge for the next record?

"Yeah, I'm into grunge. I think it's very, very good, but I think it's just like any wave or any fad that comes in. There's always four or five great bands that are the forerunners of it (guys like Stone Temple Pilots [what?!]), who will end up with the longevity, then there's the other bands that come behind them, and those will be the bands that will fall to the wayside soon-

er or later."

Bon Jovi have surfed a particularly large amount of musical waves, don't you think?

"Well, we have a constant evolution. We're not the kind of band that re-invents itself — we're just a rock 'n' roll band. I think every one of our albums is different to the next, and I think that's why we're still around after all these years, and still very successful. As far as the albums that we make, I think throughout all these different movements over the past 12 years, we just remained ourselves, and I think that's why we've kept our fans and why we've got new ones."

Sambora yawns, and receives a round of giggles as a reward. At this point, Bon Jovi are 11 shows into a world tour that will stretch to the end of the year. They've returned to the hectic pace of the *New Jersey* tour, when they would nail 250 plus shows in seven or eight months.

You recently got married, and now you've left home to tour for a year. How's that feel?

"Well, we're not the kind of band that sits around, and touring is such an expensive proposition nowadays that if you don't work, you're losing a lot of money. Most bands that do stadiums or arenas, they average two or three shows a week. We average four or five."

In response to evasiveness, *RipItUp* has no problem taking the *New Woman's Weekly Idea*

Day approach.

How is married life? Any problems?

"No, things are fantastic. Before the start of the tour, I'd been spending a lot of time with my wife [that's Heather Locklear!]. She's on a TV show [*Melrose Place*, folks!], so she has to spend a lot of time in California. I'm very, very happily married, it's going really well."

Are you playing any dates with Motley Crüe on this tour?

"No, I don't expect so. Do you know what? I have to go right now. I've got to do a TV interview. But you tell everybody in New Zealand that we're gonna be down there real soon, and we're looking forward to playing and having a good time."

Okay, I'll tell everybody, and I mean that.

So we didn't bond, and Sambora could have done that interview with his mouth closed. Them's the breaks. But he's on the road, on tour, and away from home and the one he loves. It all seems so simple from the outside, but when you're a member of Bon Jovi and in the eye of the hurricane, the world around you is probably chaos.

The constantly evolving, different sounding, R&B influenced, rock 'n' roll album *These Days* is out now.

JOHN RUSSELL

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