



Monster Magnet Chemical Rock

Sometimes, this interviewing game can get a little strange. For instance, I've wound up in a small, empty movie theatre on the A&M Records lot, with Joe Calandra, bass player for Monster Magnet. The theatre was built by Charlie Chaplin for use as a preview theatre, and now, 60-something years on, it's painted a very disconcerting powder blue, and some sort of serious talk with a member of New Jersey's finest hoodlum rock band is meant to take place.

Jump forward to later that night, and the Hollywood Palace. Monster Magnet are playing, and a crowd who were thoroughly unimpressed by Season to Risk's pomposity are now quite simply losing their minds. There's a very trippy light and slide show making the place look like the Fillmore circa 67. In amongst that the band lay down some serious power, while vocalist Dave Wyndorf shows just what greasy metal star power is all about. They are loud, distorted and a whole swag of fun, from the spine crushing murk of the older material to the riff-happy new stuff. It is, as the say, the real cool shit, as only a band whose first release was called *Forget About Life, I'm High on Dope* can produce.

But back to the blue theatre and Joe, who is explaining many things, from the appeal of

mass market bands ('Candlebox? Didn't the record company just make them up?') to just exactly how difficult it is to be one of the era's leading recreational chemical rock acts.

"The record company really doesn't know what to do with the record or even the whole band image. There's not really a neat category out there for it, so they would really try to sell us as heavy metal. This meant you would go into a store and there would be our record next to WASP or something. They can't really put us in an 'alternative' thing either, so it makes life hard for them. The new album is kind of different to the last one too, so just when they think they've got it..."

The new record being, of course, *Dopes to Infinity*, a great sounding assault on your senses. Where previous Monster Magnet albums, like *Superjudge*, were pretty straight up, dense and sludgy, this new opus is sonically a very different kettle of fish. It's a no holds barred attempt at sounding huge, a genuine wall of sound deal.

"That record was totally layered. Actually, it sucked to make that record! It took like two and a half months and the engineers were on every little thing. We would be doing something and the engineer would say: 'OK, stop and listen here — you were a sixty-fourth of a beat off.' We're like: 'What are

you talking about? We can't hear that, so I'm sure no one else will care.'

"Some stuff was fun though. We had tons of amps — rented amps, borrowed amps — tons of fuzz boxes, all this stuff in this huge studio. We could have 14 amps running through splitter boxes from one guitar, and all of them would be mic'ed. That was fun."

This 'overkill for entertainment's sake' attitude is definitely carried through into the band's live performance. The spacemen, drugs and mysticism that riddle Monster Magnet's lyrics are plenty entertaining, but the complete live experience is really helped by a full blown acid-rock light show Hawkwind would have been proud of.

"The light show has got even bigger because we have more money for lights and stuff now. We always wanted film projectors and all that shit going on, but we never had the money. We could only afford these things that sucked. Now we have a budget worked out so the light show is really over the top.

"Our lighting guy, Tim, was actually the first singer of the band. Back then, he sung, Dave played guitar, and so on, and it worked out OK for a while. Trouble was, he couldn't sing for shit. That was all right when we couldn't play, but then we started writing songs and really developing, so we kicked

him out. It was weird for a while, but we talked him into doing lights, and it turns out he's a real artist. He used to have this overhead projector, liquid light thing with oils, and he'd go crazy with it and wind up covered in this shit by the end of the show. It's worked out well though, and it is good having someone who really knows the songs doing the lights instead of some tour guy, 'cause we really want to give the full entertainment package."

So, knowing the album is of the kind that jumps out of your speakers and trashes the room, and with your appetite whetted for the fully metal live experience, just what are the chances of getting to see Monster Magnet live in the antipodes?

"We tried to get something together for down there, but Jon has this stupid ass drug thing. He got caught with a joint or something about 10 years ago, so getting into some places is hard (like Japan, which is almost impossible). They are trying to work all that out, and everybody wants to tour down there. The label is saying: 'Well, you need to sell records,' and everyone I talk to is saying: 'If you tour, you *will* sell records. It would work.' Apparently we're being booked on this *Big Day Out* festival that I hear is really good. It would be cool if it comes off — we're dying to get down there."

KIRK GEE