

# HANGAR 18

## THE ROCK IS OUT THERE

In a noisy cafe across the road from RiptUp's central city office, Andrew Featherstone, bass player with self styled "intergalactic rock" trio Hangar 18 explains how the band have moved against the grain of common rock 'n' roll practices. "The first time we went overseas we had one song recorded, and the second time we went with four. We knew it was premature to go without a record, but the international opportunities were there so we decided to go for it. Now we're off again with our first album, and we've already opened the doors in quite a few places."

In the two years since Hangar 18 formed in the West Auckland suburb of New Lynn, the band have made several trips to Hong Kong and the Philippines, and their travels have seen them share stages with Silverchair, Grace Jones, Gene, and strangely enough, Boy George. In mid March, Featherstone, drummer Paul Marshall, and singer/guitarist Paul Ivory head back to Hong Kong to perform showcase gigs, with the intention of creating interest in their recently released debut album, *Grey Area*.

Although Hangar 18 have been active in music circles in Asia, industry recognition at home has been slow in coming. Marshall believes the overdue release of *Grey Area* will finally grease the wheels.

"I think it's taken the time it has here because we haven't had product until very recently. Until we had the album, it's difficult for people to do anything for you when you haven't got anything to give them. Now, we hoping things will start happening pretty quickly."

*Grey Area* was recorded over a 10 month period at Hangar 18's Area 51 recording studio in New Lynn. The band perhaps spent longer than they had envisaged completing the record, says Featherstone, but the motivation was there to do a good job.

"We were a fairly new band when we started recording, but we had all these good things happening to us, so we thought the first record was really quite important." Time out from making *Grey Area* was essential so Hangar 18 could

earn money from gigs and continue to eat, adds Marshall; "All the time we were recording, we were touring in between. We do this full-time, we're so-called professional musicians, so we have to having a living as well."

The trio chucked in their days jobs long ago, and survive solely by gigging and touring, says Marshall.

"We are a live band. We probably work 50 hours each a week on the band, but we only get paid for the two hours we're on stage, three times a week, and that just about scraps us by."

On a business level, Hangar 18's relentless hard work has reaped rewards. The band have scored sponsorship deals with Cathay Pacific Airways and Ansett for international and domestic travel, they are supplied equipment by several musical gear retailers, and also have mutually beneficial deals with motoring, clothing, and footwear companies. In addition, band operations have been equally divided according to individual member's strengths; Featherstone books tours and deals with live promotion; Marshall acts as band publicist, working with press/TV/radio; and Ivory keeps an eye on band accounts, and designs posters and album artwork. Such self sufficiency is necessary for any band who wants to be treated seriously, says Featherstone.

"It's important to have all that sort of thing together, because we're artists, we're songwriters, but ultimately we're still selling a product. A lot of the time you can wait and hope for someone else to make it happen, but from our past experience it doesn't seem a good way to go. This is our career and we treat it as such."

Hangar 18 will be touring in the North Island this month, promoting *Grey Area*, and have more dates scheduled around the country upon their return home from Asia in late March. The trio's expectations for their debut album, both here and overseas are positive but realistic, says Marshall.

"We look at *Grey Area* as a building block, 'overnight success' or 'one hit wonder', those words are not really in our vocabulary. This is a stepping stone to the next album."

"If it doesn't sell like Alanis, that's okay," adds Featherstone, "there's always the next one."

JOHN RUSSELL

# VH TO THE POWER OF 3

Van Halen are coming! After a controversial change of lead singer (Sammy Hagar was replaced by ex-Extreme vocalist, Gary Cherone), the kings of big rock are back with a brand new album and a world tour that kicks off in New Zealand. Eldest Van Halen brother, Alex, had more than a few words to say about their new bandmate and the revitalised power they now have with *Van Halen 3*.



"It's going to be a blast, it's a new season for us, so to speak with a new singer. We just finished the record which will be released on March 17 and we'll take it from there."

*How's Gary fitting in to the scheme of things?*

"Great. When we first got together it was never an issue of his talent. We were mainly interested in whether or not we could get along, because in a band you spend a lot of time together so it's important to get along. If you don't, then things fall apart very quickly. With Gary it was almost instant, we could feel it was right."

*What's the real story behind the short-lived reunion with David Lee Roth in 1996?*

"It wasn't really a reunion. What happened was Hagar had departed on a solo thing, and we wanted to put a couple of extra songs on the *Best Of...* album. [Hagar] wasn't interested and Roth called up, wanting to know how he was being represented on the record. One thing led to another and before you know it, he's singing on a song, but that's as far as it went. It didn't take long to figure out all the reasons why it fell apart the first time were still there — it wouldn't have worked. Of course, Dave took the ball and ran with it, made a big deal of it, and painted a picture which was totally non-existent. Problem is, he goes to his press person and you see it in print, on MTV, and on the news, and people start wondering. The reality of it is, it never happened!"

*Why wasn't 'Hot For Teacher' on the Best Of?*

"It was a tough call to figure out which songs were going to go on there, and obviously we couldn't put it all on. Who knows, maybe it'll be on volume two."

*Are you including more Roth-era material in the live act now?*

"Absolutely. The last 11 years with Sammy, it was very difficult to do some of the earlier material because he wasn't really interested. It got to the point where a lot of the audience were asking for pre-Sammy stuff and to not play it is to deny there was actually a history to the band. Now, it's not an issue because Gary will do it all. Anything that the four of us are in agreement for doing, that's all it takes. Since it's the first time in 20 years that we've been to New Zealand, it's going to be quite a chore to figure out what to play. Maybe we'll play four songs at the same time! Of course, the new record is something that's very fresh in our blood, so we'll want to play stuff from that one too."

*Was it a satisfying album to make?*

"It really was. The more you listen to it, the more things you start to hear. It was the first time that the lyrics came first. Gary wrote them and Ed wrote the music to it, as opposed to the past where Ed, Mike and I would get into the studio and hammer out songs, and then finally vocals would be added over the top. It was a refreshing way to do it and shows how inspirational the lyrics are."

*Who's that singing on the nice final piece 'How Many Say I'?*

"That's Ed. Nothing's off limits in this band. It really worked out best for Ed to sing that song and Gary had no qualms about it."

*Gary's voice sounds a little like Sammy Hagar's.*

"I've heard that comment before but I don't hear it. All that I can attribute it to is that when you're singing in that high register, the voice seems to take on that character. But the voice part is not high for the sake of being high, it just happened that the melody went that way and the only way to get to it was to get up there. You could transpose it, but it would sound different on the guitar and it's odd how everything revolves around how the guitar is tuned."

*Are you still playing on a huge Ludwig kit?*

"I'm still playing Ludwig. It's fairly large, it's enough for me to get around on and it has what I need. It depends who you ask I guess — some people think it's huge, and some people say 'well, I've seen that before!'"

*So Alex, how do you tell the right drumstick from the left?*

"I haven't figured that out yet but I'm having the guy who takes care of my stuff put 'R' on one and 'L' on the other!"

*Will Van Halen be bringing all their stage set down here?*

"As much as we can possibly fit, we'll try and cram it all in there. We're actually going to get there finally, it'll be great. It'll be raw, it'll be fresh — we're very much looking forward to it."

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