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TIGER ARMY A NEW ALBUM, LOOK AND ATTITUDE

By Kiran Mehendale

You would think after experiencing more lineup changes than fingers on my hand that Tiger Army would call it a day and end things, but that hasn't happened. This band has gone through so much turmoil and line-up changes. In fact, each Tiger Army album has had a different member with the one constant being vocalist, guitarist, singer and Tiger Army mastermind Nick 13. After losing their drummer Fred Hell and bassist Geoff Kresge in the fall of 2004, Nick could have easily disbanded his creation and moved on to another venture. He decided not to do this and recruited Jeff Roffredo on stand-up bass and back-up vocals and James Meza on drums. This lineup has been together since then and has been touring non-stop ever since. With a new album and a new sense of enthusiasm, Tiger Army is ready to once again show the world why they're one of the best bands that the psychobilly genre has to offer. I had a chance to talk to Tiger Army creator, Nick 13 while his band was on tour in Europe.

Could you briefly explain the history of your band?

We started in late-95/early-96 and at the time, I wanted to start a psychobilly band. Almost no one in the states knew what it was let alone was anyone playing it. We had sort of a revolving lineup. A lot the early members of Tiger Army were friends that just played in the band as a favor to me and eventually, we got signed to Hellcat Records and we found a touring lineup and have gone from there.

How long has this current lineup been together and do you feel this is the most cohesive lineup in your band's history?

Yes, I do. This lineup has been together since September of 04. We've played about 200 shows together.

What are some of your major influences both musically and lyrically?

Lyrically, I tend to be more influenced by literature and poetry than I am by music. Some big ones would be Poe, H.P. Lovecraft, Yukio Mishima and a host of others. Musically, I don't think a lot at this point about my musical influences. It's kind of all over the place. I'm really into the punk rock in the late 70s and early 80s, rockabilly of the 1950s, dark wave and post punk of the late 70's and early 80's.

Is this your first time headlining in Europe?

It's our first large-scale headlining tour over there where we've done various continents, but we have headlined England before. We also did a week of small shows about four years ago in Germany. This is our first time back to the continent in a while. We've played a lot of countries we've never played before like the Scandinavian countries.

How has the tour gone so far?

It's going really well. It's been so long since we've been to the continent and we were never really that established there from touring. I didn't really know what the response would be, but the first 7 shows were sold

out, and the crowds were really awesome. England has been really fun to play. All in all, the tour has gone really well. I did get sick though. I got a throat infection, so I had to take some antibiotics for that and I'm good now.

You guys have a new record coming out on June 5th called *Music from Regions Beyond*. How was the writing process this time around?

It's hard to say. I think this record came a little more slowly than other times but at the same time, I'm happier with the material. It was both harder and easier.

I've heard a couple songs already and noticed they sound completely different from each other. Did you plan on making such a varied record when you were writing it?

Well, I don't think about things like that when I'm writing a particular song, but that definitely was a goal to have a very musically diverse record and I don't think any one song can necessarily sum up the record because each song is a little bit different from the next.

Why did you guys decide to record with Jerry Finn this time around?

This record is the first time I've worked with a producer. I've done the other albums myself. I think with the last record, *Ghost Tigers*, I was happy with it, but I'd also felt like I'd achieved as much as I could on my own and it was important for me to get to that point by myself. I was ready to take the next step sonically and Jerry was just the natural choice....really the only choice. There aren't really many contemporary producers whose stuff I'm really into and Jerry was someone that I got to know through his work with the last two AFI records. I spent a massive number of hours in the studio with Jerry working on the most recent AFI record. I spent 7 full days with Jerry working on technical stuff and during that time, I got to know Jerry and Jim McGrath, the engineer, pretty well to get a sense of what they're like and how they



work and what recording with them was like. I thought we would all get along really well and we did. I think there were a lot of parallel ideas happening when Jerry had a suggestion or something along those lines.

One thing I noticed about your first three records is that they're all titled 1, 2 and 3 and they each have 13 songs on them. I looked on the track listing for the new record and it's not called 4 nor has 13 songs on it. Was there a particular reason you did this?

That was a choice. I think there's some degree of continuity between each record. Each record sounds different, but it's also kind of a natural progression from the record before. That was something that was fun for the first 3 records then at a certain point, I didn't want to be tied down by people's expectations of what a Tiger Army record should have to be.

What was the lyrical inspiration for this record?

There's a song called "As the Moss Slowly Grows" is a song I wrote after I heard about the suicide of a childhood friend. That came about as a response to a particular event in my life. Generally, the way I write is I draw cumulatively from different experiences and not one specific thing and sometimes I don't realize where things are coming from and figure them out later. That particular song is an example of a specific event that really had



an impact on me.

Some of my favorite songs on your other records were the country-influenced songs like "Outlaw Heart," "In the Orchard" and "The Long Road." Is there going to be a song like this on the new record?

Yeah, as a matter of fact it's the song I was just talking about: "As the Moss Slowly Grows." It's similar in instrumentation to "Outlaw Heart" and "In the Orchard." Greg Leisz, a pedal-steel guitarist who's played on every Tiger Army record, came back for this record and was amazing to work with. He's one of the best pedal-steel guitar players on the planet.

Who are some other musicians who have appeared as guests on this record?

In terms of instruments, Greg is the main one that comes to mind. A lot of friends came by to contribute backup vocals. Davey Havoc from AFI, Brandon Schieppati from Bleeding Through and Alan White who's a long time Morrissey co-songwriter did some back-up vocals. It was awesome for so much talent to come by.

What is your favorite song on the new record?

I have a few favorite songs for different reasons. "Hotprowl" kicks off the album after the intro. That song is one of my favorites since it's a lot faster, and it's one of the more heavier/aggressive songs we've done. I en-

joy the fast stuff but I won't write it just to write it. That song really clicked for me and will be really fun to play live.

Anything else you'd like your fans to know about the record?

I think it's our best record. I'm really proud of it. It has the best songs, and I think it's our most diverse record. I think people should really wait until they hear more than just a song or two until they make a judgment on it. It's made in the context of being an album rather than individual songs.

A lot of people want to know this. What's the connection between your band and AFI?

Gosh, it's been ages at this point. We all sort of grew up together in a really small town in Northern California. We were all into punk rock and skateboarding together. There were very few people who appreciated those things in that town and Jade (AFI guitarist) were in a band for two years before he joined AFI.

Wasn't your old bass player in AFI for one or two albums?

Yeah, our old bass player wasn't the original bass player of AFI but he played on the first few records.

After Europe, you guys are headlining the entire Warped Tour this summer. What are your views on the Warped Tour and the

current crop of bands on the tour?

Well, I heard criticisms of it last year that it had gone too far to the emo side. I didn't go to it last year, so I can't comment on that. I do get the impression that they made an effort to have a balanced lineup this year. It's sort of a good balance between old school and new school. I think they've been successful with that. There are bands like Bad Religion and the Unseen who are doing the more traditional punk rock thing and then there's us who don't really fit into any category. That's something I'll know more about when I get out there. It seems to me there's a pretty good range of genres.

Is this your first year headlining the main stage of the Warped Tour?

We did a month on the main stage in 2004 but we weren't considered a headliner at that time. This is definitely the first time we've done the whole tour.

Any touring plans after the Warped Tour? Maybe a fall U.S. headlining tour is in the works?

We are planning to do a U.S. headlining tour this fall. We really don't have any details yet, but that is the plan at the moment.

What is your favorite Tiger Army song to play live and why?

I don't know that I could pick just one. They're a lot of songs that I like playing live for different reasons. A song like "Fuck the World" is fun to play because of the response from the crowd and a song like "In the Orchard" is also fun to play because it's soothing and relaxing and works on a different level.

You guys have been on Hellcat since the beginning. What's your experience been like on the label?

All in all, it's been pretty good. One of the things I appreciate the most about the label is they completely leave you alone as an artist and let you make the record you want to make. I think that's a pretty rare thing. No one from the label heard this record until it was done. I'm glad they trusted us enough to do our own thing.

I know one of your songs was the #1 song on KROQ. Did you ever imagine your bands' song would be #1 on the radio?

Not really. I had hoped that radio would give us a chance to some extent on this record, but it's been the most requested song for 2 weeks. That's been amazing to me. I always felt like there was a lot of love for us from Orange County and Los Angeles and I've known for a long time that we draw a lot more in those areas than a lot of bands on the radio. I didn't expect KROQ to completely embrace the song. They just added it to their rotation and started playing it. It's called "Forever Fades Away." The response from the fans to put it on the air was amazing.

Anything else you'd like to say to your fans?

Yeah, I'd like to thank everyone for their support this year and every year. I'm really excited about the new record, and I hope people will check it out. It comes out June 5th and go to our website <http://tigerarmy.com> or our myspace page <http://myspace.com/tigerarmy> to learn more about the new record and our band. ☐