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Interview

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A good 'Year' for a trad metal band named Ignitor

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Jason McMaster (above) has been a force behind many quality bands over the years. He fronted the great prog metal band Watchtower and the popular Dangerous Toys in the '80s, and he has recently been involved with extreme metallers Evil United. And then there's **Ignitor**. McMaster sang on Ignitor's last album, a "rock opera" named *Spider Queen*. It received mixed reviews but the band stood behind their convictions. Their latest album, **Year of the Metal Tiger**, is a blast — molten metal in the traditional vein that is a lot of headbanging fun. Besides McMaster, Stuart Laurence and Beverly

Barrington on guitars, Brendan Bigelow on bass and Pat Doyle on drums make up the Ignitor sound on *Year of the Metal Tiger*.

Jason McMaster recently had time to talk with *Powerline* about what makes Ignitor so special:

What is the significance of the word 'Tiger' in the album title?

Jason McMaster: In the Chinese zodiac they use minerals such as metal and animals such as tigers as symbols on their calendar. The significance can be taken many ways, as it might have to do with one's beliefs and the way they celebrate. The songs for this record were written in 2010, the year of the metal tiger, according to Chinese zodiac.

How do you think this Ignitor album differs from the others?

McMaster: It's not changing anything, not re-inventing anything. It's very much a celebration, and a return to true metal for the band. We like to take the reviews from past Ignitor records, pertaining to the influences we hear and that fans hear, and tend to agree that if you like Priest, Accept, Gravedigger, Mercyful Fate, Running Wild and just good old school metal, then you'll like Ignitor. And now you have a few different things to choose from. It would've been real easy for Ignitor to just sound exactly the same all the time.

Do you think the last Ignitor album Spider Queen was a little too ambitious with it being a "Rock Opera" format?

McMaster: Definitely, but I must say we are proud of the *Spider Queen*. We don't hate it because it got bad reviews. It's too bad that old Ignitor fans were expecting something, anything at all, only to be let down a little bit when they had to use their minds to feel the story behind the record. It may have been too long of a story... and not enough guitar solos, seemingly such an easy fix, but we write metal music because we like it and like to listen to it. What's so different about the fans? Nothing, but everyone knows how they want it, or like it. Sometimes something new is something old and familiar, but with a new singer, hard to tell at first.

Stuart Laurence is quite a talent ... guitar, production, songwriting, etc.

McMaster: Stuart is a legend, as well as Pat [Doyle] as he was drummer for Texas punk legends The Offenders — look them up, a total early 80's influential punk leaning to hardcore way early crossover days. And Stuart is a surprise at every turn, writing skills are unabashedly all over the place. He loves KISS and AC/DC, but he is a punk rock king and heavy metal god all in one, very well-rounded rock muso.

And Laurence doesn't seem to take himself too seriously with his lyrics ... sometimes bands get pretty annoying with how serious they get.

McMaster: He is very well aware of the fun you have to have to stay sane. It's obvious that he writes metal music for the love of it. The story lines have depth, and not just blood and guts.



Does it bother you that you aren't part of the songwriting in Ignitor? Do you plan to be in the future?

McMaster: Actually, I have been giving input on the material. Some of the songs [like] "Shadow of the Needle," the concept is mine. Some of the lyrics I have added lyrics ... "Raiders from the Void," "We are Ignitor." Or I fixed a section by changing it up a little bit, but not enough to worry about being credited. I am right at home with Stuart taking all concepts and ideas that he and all of us may have in contributing to Ignitor writings.

I have developed my own sort of vocal sounds just by practicing or doing cartoon sounds with my voice over the years.

There are some songs where you sound like Rob Halford circa "Painkiller." How do you prep your vocals to change to so many different styles? It can't be easy.

McMaster: I have developed my own sort of vocal sounds just by practicing or doing cartoon sounds with my voice over the years. It's no different than what a lot of singers have done. I haven't invented anything new, but metal singers use whatever they've got to create something distinct. I am lucky to just have any range with the shit I put my voice through all the time. But rumor has it that Dio never warmed up. Also, I hear that if you smoke... smoke ... it's all conditioning. If you are a runner, you gotta run all the time. When it's race day, it's just another day. I love Udo from Accept, his voice, but his is natural. Of course, Halford has been called the inventor of the metal tone, and I tend to agree as a lot of metal wouldn't exist without Priest and Halford. Russell [Allen] from Symphony X/Adrenaline Mob has got the best progressive- power metal voice —that has the Halford, the Dio and the gruffness of Udo — that I've ever heard. All control, that guy.

How do you juggle so many different projects? Your life must be hectic.

McMaster: Not at all. I am not so busy as people think ... wait, I am busy as shit but I teach voice during the week, and I play on the weekends. Most of my out of state touring/shows are fly-in dates. But my original bands — Ignitor, Broken Teeth, Dangerous Toys and Evil United —are all releasing new material when they can. So, the writing and recording makes all think that I don't sleep. I do, a little bit. It's all about the calendar. "Where's my fucking calendar?"

Any chance that Ignitor will be the one band you give all your attention to?

McMaster: People in Ignitor are busy enough without Ignitor. It's all about all sacrificing all the time.

I ended up being in Ignitor, simply because they're old friends and they're too good to be auditioning

singers for years and then just falling apart, so I pitched in and fell in love with the material. It's meant to be.

“Heavy Metal Holocaust” is a fun song to listen to. You talk about Heavy Metal rising from the grave and “without metal all is lost.” Metal has made a strong comeback in recent years. It never went away but it did retreat somewhat during the '90s. Had you given up hope in the '90s and what do you think contributed to Metal's dying popularity back then?

McMaster: It's easy to just say that the Seattle movement killed long hair and studs and leather, but the dollar bill blows with the wind and the industry follows it. It's business and all those metal fans and bands that were moaning about it just got pissed because they didn't wanna have to buy all new wardrobe to fit in.

All kidding aside, sure, it was a hard time if you're trying to make a living at writing songs for the radio. Metal didn't go anywhere. It's living in your record collection and in the posters on your wall. It's the frame of mind. But if you own a record and you're too lazy to press play, you call up the radio station to have them play a song that you already bought....you're dumb. That shit is still happening.

There is a need for more traditional metal-sounding bands like Ignitor, don't you agree?

McMaster: I think for a while there were just way too many power metal bands flooding all the mags and labels, but the good thing is there was a lot to choose from. Just like any genre, there is gonna be a shitload of crap and a few strong and long lasting power metal bands. A once not-so-popular style was flooded and fans must wade through it to find what they like. This may have been part of the problem in the '90s with the reason glam metal cock rock and Bon Jovi Guns N' Roses clones and fans of that sort, had to deal with until the bottom fell out and Nirvana cleaned it and shaped it into what it is. I think that White Zombie, Nine Inch Nails and Metallica fans having to actually break the phones at radio to get played and then finally get played on the air by fans demands, is what helped out of all of that back then. Put it this way, the bigger Metallica and metal of any kind, genre good or bad, whether a fan or not, the bigger any extreme music will rise. Look at Slayer? Slayer? At the mall?? See what I mean?

Did the the New Wave of British Heavy Metal have a strong influence on you as a kid?

McMaster: A kid? Well, yes, but the movement wasn't called that yet. It was Thin Lizzy , UFO, and even USA/Canadian rock that sorta changed the way I looked at hard rock or metal music by 1980. By 1981, I was religiously reading *Kerrang!* magazine and learning about other scenes and bands. Even though that's a British magazine it was surfacing bands like Metallica, and letting you know what Riot was up to. Iron Maidens and Def Leppards first records were probably what I would consider my first New Wave of Brit Heavy Metal records, but when you think of early Priest records.....it makes you think, well, that's the same group or genre from the same region. The answer is, yes.

At this point, we are not 18 years old and made of money. Gotta do what makes sense, as well as make great metal for ourselves first. Is that selfish?

What are Ignitor's plans for the future? Touring, more recording, etc.?

McMaster: It's already time to start plans to write new material. We are available for fly-in dates or festivals, or series of regional dates that make sense. At this point, we are not 18 years old and made of money. Gotta do what makes sense, as well as make great metal for ourselves first. Is that selfish?

You are also a music/vocal teacher. What trends do you see with the kids today — as far as where music is headed?

McMaster: Kids are not afraid to say they like pop or hip hop, when they know they're working with a rock vocalist as their voice coach. That's fine with me, there is no filter, and I like that. But once in a while, they want to learn some of the things I can do, and explaining that stuff can be strange. "Can you do cartoon voice?...like Marge Simpson or Yosemite Sam?"...they just look at me like I've escaped from the looney bin.

Axl's point made sense. When you think about his reasons, maybe for not wanting or needing to be there with the ex-bandmates.

One more question, unrelated to Ignitor. Since Dangerous Toys was very influenced by the whole Guns N' Roses phenomenon, what is your opinion of Axl Rose dissing the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame? Strange, cool, indifferent?

McMaster: As far as Axl Rose and the Hall of Fame, I think his letter was very well written, and made me feel for his situation, probably more than ever. He had a chance to explain himself thoroughly. And while I read it there wasn't some hardcore *Appetite* fans chiming in, sayin' "Get over it and get back with Slash, dude."

The Hall of Fame is cool, that there is even something called that. Like it's the hallowed halls of some church from medieval times calling out to all rock gods to express their wisdom to its legions of followers [who are] obsessed....but Axl's point made sense. When you think about his reasons, maybe for not wanting or needing to be there with the ex-bandmates. Bandmates that might have no agenda to get back with GNR, making appearances celebrating part of what they all created. He might just need to stay away from it, and be happy where he is now. Not so strange. Might be a little hard for him to just spit out feelings like that without anger. Kinda cool. At least he told the world he wasn't gonna show up. Fair warning.

Check out Jason McMaster online by clicking [here](#).

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