

SCOTLAND CALLING: Nazareth's

An EXCLUSIVE Interview with
Dan McCafferty
By Stephen SPAZ Schnee

Although they are one of the most well-known Hard Rock bands in the world, Nazareth is truly one of Rock 'n' Roll's most under-appreciated bands in the U.S.

The Scottish rockers scored a huge hit in 1975 with their version of The Everly Brothers' "Love Hurts," which some have cited as one of the first big power ballads of the Hard Rock era. The band also scored quite a few FM radio classics including the title track to their best-selling album Hair Of The Dog, as well as cuts from albums such as Razamanaz, Malice In Wonderland and Close Enough For Rock 'n' Roll. The band's musical output remained remarkably consistent through the years, yet they were never afraid to try different things. Nazareth never buckled under and put out an album that catered to any particular scene apart from energetic Rock 'n' Roll. However, the band did experiment over the years, adding new and interesting layers to their sound. In vocalist Dan McCafferty, the band had one of the best 'screamers' in the business, but he was also a great singer, too, adding depth to the band's songs by offering varying styles of singing without altering his unique and emotionally powerful voice. Nazareth's original material was always top notch, yet they were never afraid to throw in some unexpected covers – "Love Hurts" and "My White Bicycle" being two examples. Commercial success may have gone up and down over the years, but their albums have always been prime examples of how to make a real Rock 'n' Roll record – give the fans what they want while adding a new stitch to the tapestry. There's a reason that Nazareth are now considered legends.

In the '70s, Nazareth held their own in the presence of contemporaries like Deep Purple, Led Zeppelin, Bad Company, AC/DC and many others. They soldiered on through the years with some line-up changes but McCafferty was always out in front, leading the band since their debut album in 1971. In 2013, McCafferty announced that he was retiring from the band's live duties due to ill health. He had been diagnosed with COPD (Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease), which has affected his ability to tour. With McCafferty's blessing, the remaining members of Nazareth recruited Linton Osbourne to fill McCafferty's place on stage. Thankfully, McCafferty is still firing on all engines and it is he who fronts the band on their latest album, Rock 'n' Roll Telephone. Anyone expecting to hear a band on their last legs will be pleasantly surprised by this, their 23rd studio album, and their best in many years. From the balls-to-the-walls ROCK power of "God Of The Mountain" and "Boom Bang Bang" to the tender "Winter Sunlight" and "The Right Time," this is one hell of a rockin' ride. The Hip Hop beat that sets up "Long Long Time" may surprise listeners, but the track instantly becomes a new Naz classic. "Speakeasy" has a great opening Rock riff and killer chorus that will have you punching the air while banging your head. Rock 'n' Roll Telephone isn't a return to form for the band, because they've never stopped kicking down the doors – however, this album is certainly going to remind people just how vital Nazareth is and has always been. Those waiting for another Hair Of The Dog should have learned a long time ago that Nazareth never makes the same album twice, no matter how commercially tempting it may be. They do what they want for all of the right reasons. If it doesn't come from the heart, then it's not a Nazareth album.

Stephen SPAZ Schnee was able to chat with Dan McCafferty about the Nazareth's past, their new album and what lies ahead...

STEPHEN SPAZ SCHNEE: The album Rock 'n' Roll Telephone has just been released. How are you feeling about album and the reaction you've received so far?

DAN McCAFFERTY: I think it's a great album. I say that about every album we make! (laughs) Well, you don't make an album and think its crap, now, do you? (laughs) Yeah, I think it's wonderful. Of course, this album has special significance for me because I'm going to retire from touring. So, who knows what's next? But I really like it. It's got a good variety of songs...

SPAZ: Some of the performances are pretty powerful whether it's a mellow song or a riff-heavy track. Was the album written before you decided to retire?

DAN: This thing I've got is called COPD. It's not like catching a cold. It's been ongoing for a few years. When we did the record, it was a case of doing songs that we had written, as we always do, and these were the ones we loved. We never had an image, we never followed

a craze. We always did really hard rock stuff and really soft songs because that's what we like. I think that's kind of held us back for a while. We could have done Son Of Hair Of The Dog, but we didn't want to do that.

SPAZ: "Long, Long Time" is interesting with kind of a Hip Hop rhythm. But I realized that you've always been blending genres and taking chances. Do you think that maybe the critics don't really give you guys credit for that?

DAN: They don't get it. It would have been easy for us to try and copy what we've done before, you know? "Love Hurts" cousin, know what I mean? But we've never done that. We've had albums that were heavier. We've had albums that were lighter. Our principle has always been – this is Nazareth, this is what we've written today and this is what you're going to hear. This is what we think is good right now. Okay, some things have been, well, slightly wrong... (laughs) But we felt it was good and honest and we loved it at the time.

I'm proud of everything we've done. I remember sitting at a meeting at our record company in Los Angeles and the powers that be were looking through the charts and saying this is a hit because blah blah blah and then they said, "Why don't you guys do an Eagle's song?" And I'm thinking, if you like the Eagles, buy the Eagles' records. You don't buy a Nazareth record to hear an Eagles song... I really can't see the point in that! (laughs).

SPAZ: Do you think that the critics' view of what the band was about was at odds with what Nazareth is actually about?

DAN: Yes! But critics have got a job, man. When we first started out, we were called 'the band' Nazareth... then it became 'the Rock band' Nazareth... then 'Heavy Rock band' Nazareth... and then 'Heavy Metal' Nazareth. And that's fine. Then in the British and European press in the '80s, the new guys came along and we were called a 'dinosaur.' And in the 90s, we became a 'legend.' A 'legend' is easy, by the

way. You don't have to do anything. (laughs) But I really don't care what critics think!

SPAZ: Were there any songs left over from the new album's sessions? I know that "When I Feel Good" is a bonus track on the 2CD Deluxe Edition and that track is just as good as anything else on the album! I thought to myself, "Well, why did they leave that off the original album?"

DAN: The record company wanted the CD to have 11 tracks, but we wanted it to have 13. I think "When I Feel Good" is great as well. I love it. (Editor's Note: the additional two tracks the band wanted to add are joined by five live tracks on the second CD of the Deluxe Edition)

SPAZ: The album's closing track, "God of the Mountain" is just as powerful, if not more so, than anything you've done over the last 40 years.

DAN: We did that as a favor for a friend. It's actually their manager and he wanted a theme song. He's a big Naz fan, obviously. So, he said "Can you write us a song." And of course, we said, "Yeah, we'll write you a song." We did it for the Austrian ski team, but it could be for any skier. How crazy are they? "Here's two pieces of wood, go down the mountain at 150 miles an hour!" (laughs)

SPAZ: At this point, this might be the last album with the band. Are you pretty proud of your going out on a high?

DAN: Yes. Absolutely. I'm very proud of the album. What a high.

SPAZ: Have you ruled out recording with the band again?

DAN: No, I don't rule out anything. I've been with this band for 50 years. It's just that I really can't go on stage and sing anymore. But I can sing my ass off in the studio.

SPAZ: Do you think there's a certain period of the band that's kind of been overlooked?

DAN: I think, generally speaking, we've been either lucky or unlucky. Depends on how you look at it. We've never been stuck in a genre.

For instance, we did Razamanaz, which was huge in Europe, and Loud & Proud, which was huge in Europe and then Hair of the Dog... and then we did something different because we'd done that already, you know? Let's go somewhere else. Fortunately for us, our fans kind of went with that. I think it's important to be honest and do what you feel is right at the time. But your life changes, you get older, you have different priorities. So, obviously, your music will change, too. And if it's a real band, it will change.

SPAZ: Wasn't the album Razamanaz really the turning point in your career?

DAN: Yes it was. On the first album, Nazareth, we were finding out what we could do and what we couldn't do. By the next album, Exercises, we found could sell tickets. We were a popular band. We were getting bigger crowds and getting better reviews. We were finding our way. When we did Razamanaz, that was the key to Nazareth, really.

SPAZ: Has it been difficult to keep your voice in shape throughout the years?

DAN: I've been so lucky, man! Unless I had the flu or cold or something like that, it was always OK. I didn't worry about it. My voice has been very good to me. I've been really lucky up until now, so I can't really bitch.

SPAZ: There are a lot of people that I run across that have no idea that "Love Hurts" was an Everly Brothers song.

DAN: I know that!

SPAZ: Is it satisfying to know that you took that song and completely made it your own?

DAN: It is! It was actually the first "Rock Ballad" if you look back historically. There's been a million ever since, but it was the first.

I've got to say, it's a great performance by everyone in the band. I think it was because it had the right anguish or anger. It had the right vibe.

SPAZ: What's next for Dan McCafferty?

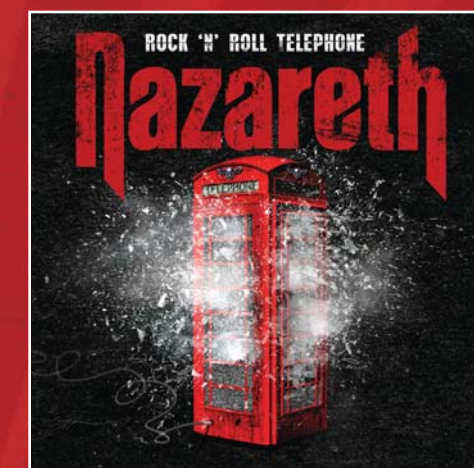
DAN: Well, once this album is out, I guess we're going to have to cut the cord... or not? I'm looking to make a solo album.

SPAZ: Can we look forward to Dan McCafferty going Techno?

DAN: Eh, possibly not. (laughs)

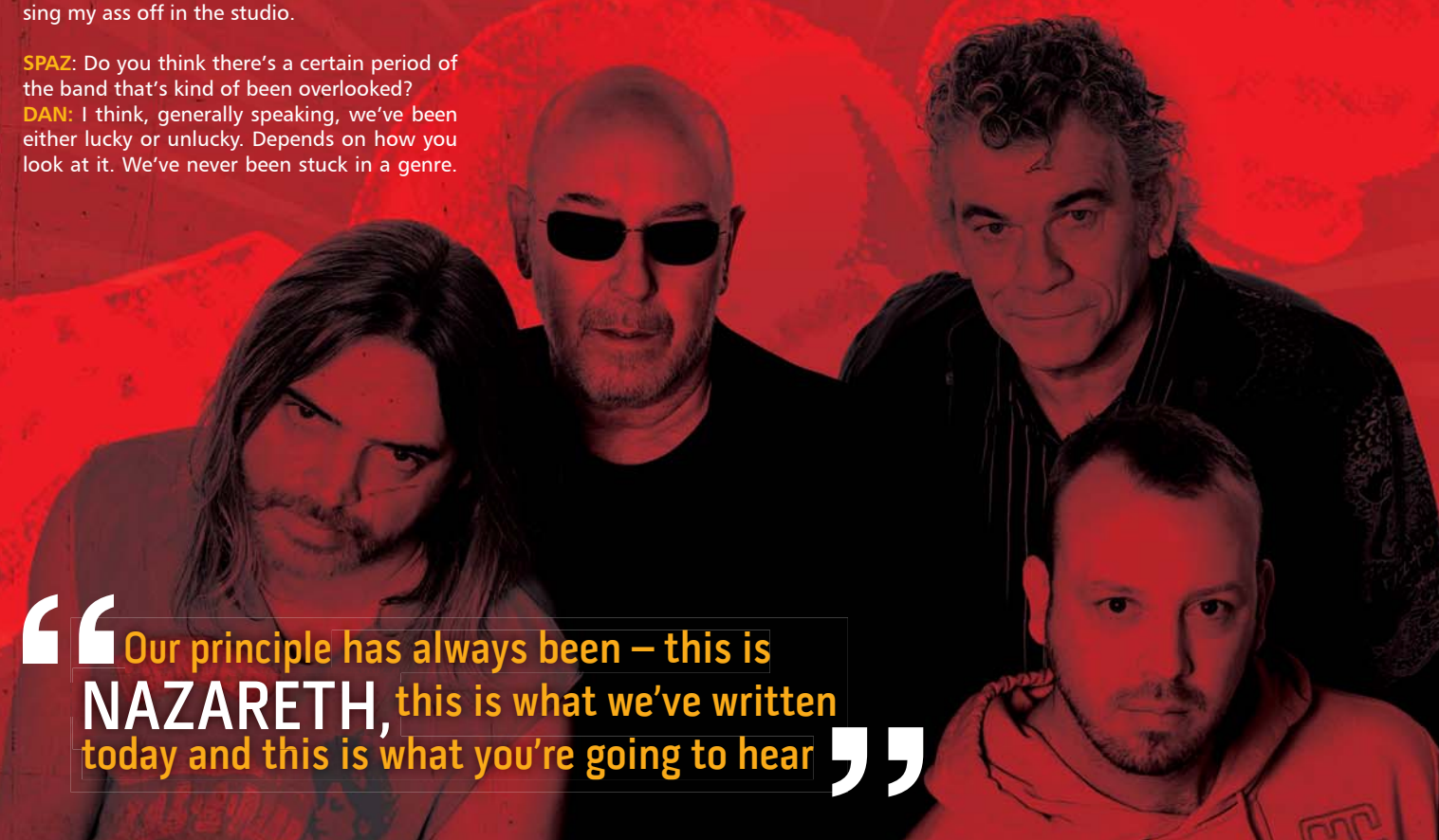
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“Our principle has always been – this is NAZARETH, this is what we've written today and this is what you're going to hear”