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## Nazareth

Interviewed by Jason Hillenburg



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### Interview with Dan McCafferty of Nazareth from 2014

**MSJ:**

I'd like to thank you for taking the time to talk with me this morning. I've listened to the album and I think it's probably the best Nazareth album I've heard in 20 years.

Well, thank you.

**MSJ:** It's easy to give compliments like that when they're true. So I was wondering what some of your personal favorites are from the album and why?

I can't say. I'm mad for it, I really am. It's Lee and Jimmy who wrote the songs and we just had so many choices and these are the songs we ended up with. I think they all have huge amounts of merit. My favorites change week by week. Obviously, "Boom Bang Bang." That's something that if you're a guy, you can't not like that! I think "Punch a Hole in the Sky" is a great piece of Americana. "Speakeasy," I think my vocal performance is really good! *[laughs]* Listen, I could talk about these songs all day. This album just gets the "likes of me." I'm very proud of it.

**MSJ:** You mentioned something there about the Americana feel of a song like "Punch a Hole in the Sky" and I always thought that was something that distinguished Nazareth from their counterparts in British rock. A lot of British bands will take a stab at doing that Americana kind of thing and it just doesn't come off.

Rock and roll is American. It's one of the best art forms you guys ever invented. About "Punch a Hole in the Sky," we used to watch the Chuck Yeager movie all the time. Can you imagine the balls you must have had to say, "We're going to send you up in this jet plane to try and break the sound barrier"? "What is that, boss?" "We don't know. Off you go now, be a good pilot." *[laughs]* The man's still doing TV interviews – now that's a pair of balls! And we wanted to give it that same kind of anger and excitement.

**MSJ:** Another thing I noticed about this album is its extraordinary focus. I like how it rides a line between classic rock and blues-driven grooves, but sounds completely modern. It doesn't sound like a band trying to revisit 1975. It sounds like a band that knows what it's doing and can present it in a modern way. What was the mood during the recording?

I don't have to answer that question because you just did. Everything you said is dead right. We wanted the soul of Nazareth that's been going a million years or something. It's in songs like "Back 2 B4." You cannot go back. Everyone was agreed on that; all the performers were allowed to do their own things on the tracks. I can have an opinion about Lee's drumming, but I'm not going to tell him what to play; same with Jimmy, same with Pete. And we had the same producer, Yann Rouiller, who's in the band at this point, when we're making this record, he understands where we're trying to go – which is hard to find when a guy's working with different bands and different kinds of music. So the album was like that, totally focused; this is what we want, this is *Rock and Roll Telephone*, and today's the day, so let's do it!

**MSJ:** Nazareth has had a few different lineups in its history, but what do you think sets you, Lee, Jimmy and Pete apart? Not what makes this lineup better, just different?

Two things: chemistry and hard work. Jimmy and Lee are younger guys, but Jimmy's been with us 20 odd years and Lee's been with us 15. Me and Pete have always had that thing we have, when we write together or perform, and these guys got a catch of that and took it for their own. I know it's easy to say about *Rock and Roll Telephone* because it's the new album and I'm doing an interview, but it really is one of my all time favorite Nazareth albums and that's because of what it feels like, not just what it sounds like. That's as much as I can explain it to you. I just think the chemistry in the songs and band, people giving space to each other while talking at times, that really works for this foursome.

**MSJ:** The chemistry is apparent on all three albums this lineup has made together from *The Newz* up to this one. It's easily explained too because, at least with Lee, this music's in his DNA. I don't know if you could've found two better guys to come into this band.

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I don't think so either.

**MSJ: We're going to have to touch on this inevitably, so I think I'll just dive in. How was your health during the recording and did it add any urgency to the recording?**

I kind of knew in the back of my mind that it'd be the last one I did with the band, so that had an effect. In the studio, I was singing all day, but I'd also get ten minute breaks. But when you're on a gig doing an hour and a half of songs with as intense as Nazareth songs are, I couldn't do it anymore. I thought this was unfair. I'd come off stage twice, once in Canada and once in Switzerland, and I thought, well, I've got to hit this on the head because I don't want to be disappointing the people, the fans who paid money for tickets. I was also sensing the tension in the band. The guys are looking at me and thinking, "Is he going to be okay?" I don't mean is he going to be okay to get through the gig. I mean, is he going to be okay? [laughs] I was worried about the effect I was having, I just didn't think it was fair all around. When I was making the album, I had no stress at all, I kind of knew it was the last one I'd be doing because of my health. I had no stress about that either because the album was just so much fun to do.

**MSJ: I can understand that. It didn't overcome your thoughts while making the album. The last time someone left this band was under very tragic circumstances. It's different this time, and if this is a little personal I apologize, but have you reflected any on Darrell Sweet through all of this?**

Of course I have. I think about Darrell every day of my life. It was the worst thing that happened to me in the entire history of the band. Somebody ripping us off, I hate it at the time, it's crap, rubbish. But losing someone, like "bye bye, never see you again," losing them, is different. That's a whole different thing. There's not a day that goes by when I don't think of him, but it's happy stuff, you know?

**MSJ: Yeah. I can't imagine what it's like to live and work alongside someone all those years and lose them like that. It's a blow you probably never recover from.**

You don't go overboard, but you never forget. It's like, everybody knows they're going to lose their parents at some point; I lost mine, and eventually, as they say, time is a great healer. As you go on, all you think about now is the daft poems he used to write, the funny stuff, you don't think about when he was in the hospital, ambulances, and all that stuff. You don't think of what happened to the guy, the soul of this person, who met this tragic end.

**MSJ: I was planning on going to that New Albany show where it happened. I don't live too far away, forty or fifty miles north. When I heard the news about you leaving, I thought, "Well, at least he gets to leave."**

He doesn't blow up. He gets to leave! [laughs]

**MSJ: I read that you called Linton before his first gig. I don't know if that's something a lot of your peers would've done under similar circumstances.**

Well, you know, Nazareth's my band and it's always been about the music. It's not like we had a rock god singer who looked like blah blah and that's why. I'm a two bagger here, you know what I'm saying?

**MSJ: Right.**

It was always about the music. So I called and wished the boy well because I'd love the music to continue, I really would. I want people to hear "Love Hurts," "This Flight Tonight" and "Razamanaz," "Hair of the Dog" and all of that. They're all good stuff, you know? So I figured I've known the boy for a long time, he's local to where I live, I've seen him in blues bands, so it really wasn't a hardship for me, I genuinely wish the boy well. I hope it all goes well, but he's going to get a lot of hassle from people too. I hope they give him a break and it all goes well.

**MSJ: So what would you say to people who think it isn't Nazareth without you and Pete should knock it on the head?**

The music means something to me. "Razamanaz" is still "Razamanaz." "Hair of the Dog" is still "Hair of the Dog." I've seen bands go on the road where there's only one original member like Thin Lizzy. The music's still brilliant. When people go for a night out, they go out to enjoy themselves. I know the purists will say it's not the same without Dan, but there's nothing I can do about that. I've figured that people who go to concerts, we'd come along past your door every two years or something, right? You'd come along, listen to songs that growing up you loved, have a few beers, take your old lady along, or whatever. You'd go home happy and think, "Well, when the boys come home around again, I'll go see them again." And that's basically what a working rock and roll band like Nazareth is about – giving people a good night out.

**MSJ: That's right. It's entertainment, not Shakespeare.**

That's right, it's not exactly rocket science, you know what I'm saying here?

**MSJ: I've only seen a few clips of Linton on YouTube, one from Russia, and he's going to grow into the role.**

Yeah, he's only had a few gigs as of this point.

**MSJ: I understand people's point of view to a point. They hear these songs when they are young, it imprints itself in their memories, and they just don't want to hear it any other way.**

That's right. I'm not in the business of changing human nature though, so I just wish them well. I do hope



the band continues.

**MSJ: I know you've said you want to go on recording. Have you given any thought to what you might do exactly?**

Well, I've got a few offers. I've got one guy who wants me to do some Scottish music and that sounds kind of appealing. There's some other offers, but right now, I'm concentrating on *Rock and Roll Telephone* and its publicity, so once all that has ended, I'll set down and take a look at this stuff.

**MSJ: What kind of regrets, not things you wished you hadn't done, but things you wish you had during your time in Nazareth?**

I think I always tried to take it a day at a time. I'm not saying I loved every minute of it because some days were hell, but most of the time it was alright, and when you look back on the ones that were hell, they're funny now. My one regret is I never got to play in Australia. We were supposed to go a few times, but something happened, so that's the only regret I've got. I loved it, man. Jesus. I got to sing songs I liked, you know!

**MSJ: I've got another question about the album. Were there any songs that didn't make the cut?**

Oh, we've got loads of songs that didn't make the cut, but not for any serious reasons, these are just the ones we really liked.

**MSJ: Lee and Jimmy both seem like they're pretty prolific. They write a lot of songs and have a lot of ideas. You could even tell on the lineup's first album, *The Newz*, that they had given a swift kick in the pants to the band. New guys coming in always revitalizes things pretty quick.**

Absolutely, of course it does. They know what you've done before and they write in that idiom, that vein, you know?

**MSJ: I think my favorite track off the album is "Back 2 B4." I really like it because it seems to bring everything Nazareth does well under one tent. It's got a softer edge, but it also has a rock feel.**

Yes, it brings it all under that umbrella. You can never go back to before and Nazareth's always done ballads, hard rock, and so on. I've got another call coming up, so I need to be going.

**MSJ: One last thing – is there anything you'd like to say to Nazareth fans young and old before you go?**

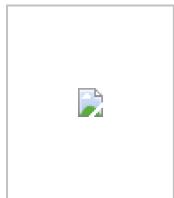
Nazareth fans, young and old, thanks for hanging with me and us all of these years. Enjoy the music and keep an eye out for me!



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