



ASOMVEL

Knuckle Duster ~ A testament to the underdog cult heroes of the UK's HM underground!

Bad Omen Records (UK)

Words : TK Smith

ASOMVEL is an incredible story. Twenty years ago they were three blokes from Harrogate, North Yorkshire, UK bonding over Special Brew while taking out their pent-up frustration on ramshackle equipment at an old pig farm. Jay-Jay Winter (vocals/bass), Lenny Robinson (guitar) and Mark Wharton (drummer, ex-Cathedral/Acid Reign) were their names - and so the legend was forged. Drummers came and went, but the nucleus of Winter and Robinson remained true to an idea, a dream and finally a reality when they cut their first demo in 2001. Years of gigs established ASOMVEL as true underdog cult heroes as they fought off the naysayers, trashed the occasional club and drank their way into the hearts of loyal fans. By the time they released 2007's *Full Moon Dog 10"* they were genuine road dogs playing heavy metal the way it was meant to be. Dom Lawson of *The Guardian* wrote,



"The best heavy metal has plenty of dirt under its fingernails: this lot must never be allowed to work in a food preparation area." Two years later the power trio managed to thrash out their raucous debut *Kamikaze* to critical acclaim. "A dream to some...a nightmare to others."

Then, just as the group were poised to make the jump to the next level, bandleader Jay-Jay Winter was tragically killed in road accident. It was a devastating blow for a band of brothers hell-bent on living

the dream. "The band was finished when Jay died," says guitarist and co-founder Lenny Robinson. "There was just no way that anybody could do what he did - he was such a huge personality. At the same time knowing it was over, I knew it had to continue. I owed it to Jay and ASOMVEL. I wasn't about to roll over and let all those bastards that had been waiting for us to quit get the upper hand. The way I saw it was, I'd met Jay, so maybe there was somebody like him out there...I just had to encounter him." It took a while to find just the right guy but when ex-Deathwing bassist/vocalist Conan came along, they knew they'd found their man. "Conan was playing in a band on the same bill as ASOMVEL," says Robinson. "He stuck out from the crowd. He's got charisma and it was obvious he was born to play in this band. You can't argue with fate; things happen for a reason."

Re-constructed and revitalized, ASOMVEL teamed up with Starjack Entertainment to launch the *Full Moon Dog Festival* in Bradford, 2011. To honor Winter and pay tribute to his rock 'n' roll spirit, the three piece shared the stage with such luminaries as Carcass, Anvil and Orange Goblin. "We've been doin' this band for 20 years and we never looked past having a few drinks and playing on that pig farm," says Robinson. "We were in it for the long haul. When it's right, you know it's right." The success of the festival solidified the far-reaching and influential impact of ASOMVEL. A year later, the band did it again making the festival an annual tradition. This time Starjack Entertainment brought in a camera crew and filmed the entire shindig. A 2-disc DVD titled *Madder Than A Full Moon Dog* was released highlighting the gig (Disc 1) with live performances by icons Mercenary, Orange Goblin and ASOMVEL as well as up and comers, Stone Cold Kill, Stiletto Farm, Eliminator, Triaxis, Stuka Squadron, Dark Forest and Screaming Eagles. Interviews, backstage antics and fan pandemonium are spliced into 83-minutes of hilarity, fun and metal to the bone.

The Memorial Disc (2) is a heartwarming dedication to Jay-Jay Winter featuring a riotous montage of the bandleader in action. A narrative interview with Robinson offers insight into the madness of life on the road with a guy who wears a bullet belt for a guitar strap. "He had to believe everything he sang," states Robinson after recounting a number of dangerous stories. "He lived it like he sang it." The official *"Full Moon Dog"* video is included complete with outtakes and bonus director cuts. Hailed as ASOMVEL's "Ace of Spades" - the song has taken on a life of its own. The story is told of Winter, having suffered a broken foot, pulling off the cast so his foot would fit in his boot for the video. Never missing a beat, he played through the pain over numerous takes without a limp. The best quote comes mid-way through making the video when Winter turns to his band mates and says, "We should have listened to the CD before we started shooting." Hilarious!

According to the band's bio, when Will Palmer started up Bad Omen Records in 2013, his soul ambition was to coax a new album out of ASOMVEL. He locked them away in the studio with producer James 'Atko' Atkinson (also front man of Leeds rockers Gentleman's Pistols). "The only songs we had written for the album were '**Knuckle Duster**'



and 'Waster' which we re-wrote for the recording," says Robinson. "The rest of the songs we did in the space of a few rehearsals, very quickly in fact." The band even dug up some of Winter's old lyrics to 'Cash Whore', a song they planned to record before he died. "I re-wrote them slightly," admits Robinson, "then Conan changed 'em a bit and we just banged out the riff in about 10 minutes." Says Conan, "The words to 'Cash Whore' were some of Jay-Jay's final lyrics... it's a great touch to have them on the new album. I was a massive Asomvel fan before I joined, and was a huge fan of Jay so I was really proud to put my voice to his words."

Conan described writing the album. "It really didn't take long at all," says the bassist. "We already had a few new tunes written by the time Will Palmer wanted to sign us... then we just went into overdrive and started banging a load of new ones out. It's amazing how smoothly it all went. The three of us are really onto something special



when it comes to song writing." Digging a little deeper, Robinson talks about the title track. "Knuckle Duster was a song I wrote after Jay died. It's about ASOMVEL coming back even stronger when all hope seemed to be lost." A key figure in the trio was the addition of powerhouse drummer Jason Hope. "There's no way we could've even dreamt of doing this album if we didn't have Jason," says Robinson, "he plays like a demon. On 'Knuckle Duster' he wanted to try a different beat. I joined in and we changed it but kept it very spontaneous. Conan's bass solo came out really good and he's the one playing second guitar under the bass solo."



"Trash Talker" and "Waster" land mid-way through the record like a giant fireball outta the sky. Riff-heavy with a Sabbath-like dirge, both tracks have a sonic density that defies description. "Trash Talker was a riff that I came up with at my place and brought to rehearsal," says Robinson. "I had all the music pretty much figured. Jason and Conan chipped in a few ideas to spice it up then Conan came up with the lyrics. He's got a great knack of using simple language and saying it like it is. As for 'Waster', I came up with the riff while I was just EQ-ing my amp at rehearsal and we took it from there. Conan came up with the lyrics and I threw in a few

lines." Conan adds, "The songs came about differently, either Len would just come out with a riff, or I'd be fucking around on the bass and come up with an idea. As for lyrics... we've had plenty of inspiration lately. There was an abundance to write about from all the scumbags and deadheads we've had to deal with."

The band crafted the album with a nod to the days of vintage vinyl. "Atko told us to think of the tracking order as if we were listening to the vinyl which made it easier to plan out," says drummer Hope. "We needed it to kick off quick and maintain that energy." Side One of the vinyl kicks off with "Dead Set on Livin" and boasts an infectious hook that charges in like a raging bull. Conan belches out a beastly growl as his thick bass beat locks in with Hope's pounding drum in thundering terror. "I'd never written lyrics before," says Robinson, "but I did on this lot. 'Dead Set on Livin', 'Wrecking Ball' and 'Stranglehold' came about 'cos I was angry and in the right frame of mind. Conan came up with some fantastic lyrics too. 'Final Hour' are my favourite lyrics of his." The guitarist admits Conan and Hope made the writing process easy and productive. "If one of us started playing something, everybody jammed to it until we had a song. Some of the songs happened when Conan was fooling around playing a bass run, just a few notes. I'd said 'Keep playing that!' and we'd jam it out."

Production was key to the sonic return of ASOMVEL. "Atko (producer) was on the same page as us," says Robinson. "He understood what it took to get the sounds that make a great record. His band, Gentleman's Pistols, is one of the best bands I've ever seen live, so we already had respect for him as an artist. It was the hardest work I've ever had to do. He pushed me to get to the place I needed to be, so that I could just be a part of the song and give my best performance. He does it all in a very relaxed way too, and we had the time of our lives with him. It's really what we've always needed, but never had. Atko has that ear for things, and the end result is a testament to his production skills." Adds Hope, "We wanted it to have the power that we have live. Atko knew that it needed to be balls out heavy but also gritty as well. We wanted to avoid an over produced clean sound some the over-the-top retro wankers have these days."

Aside from starring in their own DVD, *Madder Than A Full Moon Dog*, the band have been approached to write music for *The*



Calicoon, a horror film starring Dee Snider. They also give tremendous accolades to mates Orange Goblin and Carcass who are not only BIG fans but have given them a leg up on the road. "Ben Ward (Orange Goblin, vocalist) messaged me years ago saying he liked what we were doing," says Robinson. "It was a bit of a boost to get a message like that from someone like him. He offered us gigs and let us open for Orange Goblin on a couple of dates. That really goes a long way with me, 'cos everybody has to start with the shit and wade through it. Somewhere along the line, if you're lucky, a hand will come down and pull you out of it for a while. Orange Goblin helped us out playing Full Moon Dog festival, too. Bill Steer (Carcass, guitarist) is another one. He came to see us in London a few times and we

found out he was a big fan. Then he offered us a gig supporting Carcass. We turned up and he was the first one with his head in the back of the van asking what he could carry. Such a star, but he is totally down to earth."

With the success of *Knuckle Duster*, ASOMVEL may soon find themselves on the fame train. For the immediate future the Full Moon Dog Festival will keep rolling out for Jay-Jay Winter, his band mates, friends and family. "It's a unique atmosphere because of the nature of it," says Robinson. "It's like going back to 1986 for us all, like those old heavy metal nights we all used to frequent." ASOMVEL is managed by Deb Robinson, wife to Lenny and sister to Jay-Jay Winter. The tight knit family bond is the glue that holds them tight against the waves of an ever-changing music industry. A second generation joins the family in the grooves of metal up-starts **Stiletto Farm** and **Stone Cold Kill**. The UK's metal scene has never been in better hands!

Website: [ASOMVEL](#), [Bad Omen Records](#)