

Rolling Stone

Jack Bruce Moves Past Cream: 'It Was Nice to Have a Little Comeback'

The bassist returns with his first solo album in 'Silver Rails,' which features guest appearances by John Medeski, Uli Jon Roth and his son

by KORY GROW

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When former **Cream** frontman Jack Bruce attempts to explain why it has taken him a decade to put out his latest solo album, *Silver Rails*, he says he had merely fallen out of love with the recording process. But he also tells *Rolling Stone* that part of the long wait was because he was "a bit scared" about writing songs again. "It was remarkably easy," says Bruce, now 70, from his Suffolk home. "It's supposed to get harder, but in fact it got easier, which is nice."

Part of the reason why writing *Silver Rails* was so easy for Bruce was because he stepped out of the shadow of his past and did whatever he wanted. *Silver Rails* opens with the relaxed "Candlelight" – which has a bit of a "Calypso, islandy feel," to use Bruce's words – and contains piano ballads ("Reach for the Night"), heavy blues rockers in the vein of Cream ("Hidden Cities," "Rusty Lady" and "No Surrender") and a few newer rock sounds, like the harshly monochromatic "Drone." He recorded the album at Abbey Road with guest appearances by a few famous friends – ex-**Roxy Music** guitarist Phil Manzanera, keyboardist John Medeski, sometime Scorpion Uli Jon Roth, Robin Trower and more – as well as his old friend and Cream lyricist Pete Brown. His wife Margrit Seyffer wrote some lyrics and his son, Malcolm Bruce, played drums.

Now that he's made a new record – and now that he's not waiting around for Cream anymore, following their brief 2005 reunion – he's ready to make another. In addition to playing a few gigs – nothing big – he hopes to venture down Abbey Road again in the winter. "Everybody should be able to go in there and make an album at one point in their life – that's my idea of socialism," he says with a laugh. "Give everybody a Ferrari and let them drive to Abbey Road."

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At this point in your life, what made you want to do another record?

Well, I'm not a kid anymore; I'll put it that way. I've done 14 solo albums, which is quite a lot for somebody who's not that prolific. And it just seemed like a good time to do it. My first solo album was in 1969, called *Songs for a Tailor*, and I used that album as a kind of template to start the juices flowing, just to start the

creative process for this one. But also what I wanted to do was to have a lot of the diverse music I like listening to, not just one kind of thing. I suppose everybody would've liked it if I just had done a version of Cream.

What have you been listening to lately?

I've got a son who's 21, and he played me some things about a year ago. I really liked what he was listening to and I started writing. I got very influenced by a band called Om and a band called Earth, and I liked what they were doing. So I kind of got influenced by those young bands, as opposed to what I've been doing all my life, which is influencing other guys. That led me to write this song called "Drone." It's my version of the drone genre, if you like.

I was thinking "Drone" was more of a comment on war.

There's a Stuka dive bomber on there. That was the kind of terror weapon of its day, 'cause they used to strafé and bomb fleeing civilians, and they had those special sirens built into the plane to actually literally terrify people. So it was a terror weapon, very much in the way I imagine the modern drone is, too.

Beyond Earth and Om, what else have you been listening to?

Well, I tend to listen to a lot of modern classical music – Olivier Messiaen is my favorite dude. I've got a few children, and I listen to whatever they're listening to. My oldest daughter, I remember when she introduced me to Cypress Hill, which was a momentous occasion.

Pete Brown, who wrote many of the lyrics for Cream, contributed to *Silver Rails*. How did you two meet in the first place?

I think the first time I met him, he was living in a cupboard in North London.

A cupboard?

Yeah, he was kind of a Beat poet. There was this poetry and jazz movement going on the time in the very early Sixties. And he was involved in that and I was vaguely involved in that – poetry and jazz. And we just started working together when Cream happened. We had the idea of writing some songs with him, so he came up with the bulk of the work of Cream, the songs of Cream.

Then you two have been working together for a long time.

I was trying to figure out who over here has lasted this long, and I could only come up with **Jagger** and **Richards**. But I don't know if they're actually writing together any more for sure. I'll ask Charlie [Watts] [laughs].

When is the last time you listened to Cream?

I was listening to some live Cream stuff the other day and it was great, and we enjoyed listening to it. And we hadn't played with that kind of passion for quite some time.

What stood out to you when listening to Cream concert recordings?

I think we got into some problems with the improvising, the jamming. That became a bug bearer really. In the same way that the Who had to trash their equipment every night, we had to have a 20-minute drum solo every night. And those sorts of things, if you feel like playing for 20 minutes, why not? But if you don't and the audience demands it, it becomes quite difficult. But what remains from that band, I remember **[Frank] Zappa** called it a "nifty little trio." And I think he had it about right. And what remains is that handful of those songs that people still love. And that's not bad.

In 2008, you said you wanted another reunion but in 2010, you said it wasn't going to happen.

Yeah, I think last year or this year, everybody had agreed about doing it. But then I think Ginger [Baker] upset **Eric [Clapton]** [laughs]. He said something or did something, so it's not happening. It's always been like that. The first time it was mooted was **when we were all "indicted" to the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame**. And that was in '93. And what happened in 2005. That's the way it goes. It's fine. I think we said what we had to say at the time. And it was nice to have that little comeback. For me, that was just about right.

So not everybody is on good terms?

Well, it's like I don't have anything to do with them actually very much. Ginger, from what I've heard, is a bitter old man. And I'm quite a cheerful old chap. I quite like to just enjoy my life. I'm thrilled to make this album. I put my heart and soul into it, and I'm very pleased with the way it came out.

Two songs on your album stood out to me as being very Cream-like: "Rusty Lady" and "Keep It Down."

Yeah "Rusty Lady" has got a link to [Cream's] "Politician," and in fact when I came up with a riff, I said to Pete, I want a modern version of "Politician." Instead, he came out with a song about the death of [Margaret] Thatcher. Which is fine by me. I don't know if that's linked to Cream or not. "Keep It Down" is my take on an anti-heroin song. It's like "Needle and the Damage Done," by **Neil Young**. It's a lament.

Finally, what is going on, on the *Silver Rails* cover?

There's a great artist here called Sacha Jafri. And I just got to know him, and I got the idea he should paint while listening to the album, like a freeform painting for the cover. I think it's wonderful. It harks back to the Fifties kind of Vanguard [Records] and Dave Brubeck, Charlie Mingus, those kinds of things. It's the kind of thing that takes me right back to when I was starting out. He worked very fast. And if you listen to the album, you can see all these little bits in them. You can see all these faces and figures from in the songs. It's quite fascinating.

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