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**Interviews: Interview with FINAL CONFLICT'S Henry Rogers and Andy Lawton**

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## Final Conflict: Their Moment in Time by Tommy "Hashman" Hash



photo by Marta Tluszc

You don't see too many bands out there that feature two guys that share the lead vocal AND lead guitar duties, but **Final Conflict** brings a multiple personalities to the table when it comes to fronting the music, all the while keeping the musical vision in focus. Formed in the mid-80's by guitarists/vocalists **Andy Lawton** and Brian Donkin; England's **Final Conflict** are one of the bands that have been at the center of the wave of neo-progressive rock alongside Pendragon, IQ, & Pallas.

Having released five studio albums and a recent live DVD/CD set known as *Another Moment in Time* (Metal Mind Productions/MVD Distribution); a sixth studio album is in on the way and is expected to be a turning point in the band's career - enhanced by various influences and the band's state-of-the-art Gaolhouse Studios. But don't think as them as just a mere underground band, for in 2007 they received multiple awards at Classic Rock Society's BOTY awards; Steve Hackett was there to present one to them to the band. Off the heels of the release of *Another Moment in Time* and in preparations for the next, both guitarist/vocalist **Andy Lawton** & drummer **Henry Rogers** (who also plays in DeeExpus) speaks about the happenings with **Final Conflict**.

"Going over to Poland was a great experience for the band and all of the people involved with us! It was certainly a learning curve for **Final Conflict** as in 23 years of playing, this was the first DVD the band have done!" begins **Rogers** about playing the Wyspianski Theater, "From setting off to arriving home, the whole experience was one that will never escape our memories; the good times and the last minute mad rushes to ensure that we are ready go on stage! Metal Mind and the whole crew that was working with us were brilliant! All (of them were) so helpful and couldn't do enough to guarantee that we were as comfortable as we could be to perform the gig! I think without this sort of professionalism and generosity the outcome of that night could have been so different in terms of our personal performances. We chose the set list based on what we wanted to portray ourselves as musically. **Final Conflict** write some very diverse music, going from a slightly rockier end of the spectrum to the indulgent 'floyd-esk'. The set list was a good variation of what **Final Conflict** want to be known for, our music is 'more than progressive' and to show this we had to carefully pick songs to put out to our international fan base. For **Final Conflict** as a band this is a fantastic opportunity and we wanted our

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proudest work to go on the Live DVD.

With the exceptions of a few 'punch-ins,' most of the DVD's production was at the helm of Threshold guitarist Karl Groom, who is known for his work on many audio/visual releases, "We traveled down to 'Thin Ice Studios' where Groom did the mixing for us," elaborates **Rogers**, "In all honesty there was not a lot of editing from our point of view that went on in the studio. There was some guitar notes here and there, some bass 'tweaks' and some vocal work to touch up, but besides that nothing apart from the general mixing and mastering process. We really wanted to keep a live feeling from the gig and all of the energy that we created! **FC** have built up a name as a brilliant live band, and it is now our decision to try to keep things feeling a little bit more live on all recordings."



Andy Lawton - photo by Marta Tluszcz

The Wyspianski Theater in Katowice, Poland has become this big center of progressive rock for Eastern Europe, being the counterpart to NEARfest, maybe with a little bit of a 'neo' edge - there is no denying that this particular theater is hallowed ground for prog as **Rogers** states, "We felt and feel very honored to have been invited over to make a DVD there! Yes sure there other bands in our genre that record there but for us that makes us feel that little bit more special, that out of all of the bands in our genre we were picked to be part of this wonderful experience! It is certainly becoming a very sacred place, the more bands that record and play there, the more prestigious the venue will become and very much sought after. The theatre in Katowice is an excellent facility in an excellent location!"

Having been in the band from day one, co-frontman **Andy Lawton** has seen all the scenes changes and the evolution of what has let the band to what they are now, "Whilst the music has grown with the band we have always tried to keep our identity," begins **Lawton**, "from the twin vocals and guitars to the dramatic keyboards. **FC** has always represented the sum of all parts, in other words each individual member has their own influence and style. Personal music tastes range greatly within the band and especially now with two younger members, we have added a further dimension to the overall sound giving the extra drive and energy that comes from a rhythm section that has gelled and has youthful exuberance. We have always tried to introduce new ideas to our music and the new album *Return of the Artisan* will reflect a natural evolution whilst still retaining our identity."

And the inspiration behind the music & lyrics? "It is sometimes difficult to explain lyrics and where they have come from," explains **Lawton**, "The early days of **FC** saw the main lyrical content based around a concept of fantasy and storytelling. "Channel 8" & "The Time Has Arrived" was based around a central character and his dark insecurities that allowed him to witness his own life through a TV channel. *The Quest* album again revolved around a concept but more around real and personal experiences. It is sometimes easier to write a lyric that you have experienced than to try to write something to order. *Stand Up* had a more social edge to it with songs such as "Stop", "Stand Up" and "Days gone by". Personally *Hindsight* was a dark period for myself with regards to lyrics due to circumstances and again this I think is reflected in the lyrical content. It can be frustrating sometimes when a lyrical idea comes into your head and you have no idea why? With me I just try to scribble it down on paper or anything to hand and usually it progresses from there. I do believe that lyrical content does influence the feel of a song when we are writing it in the studio and is part of the song structure."

No band is immune to the rigors of the music industry, the release their album *Stand Up* was delayed by bankruptcy of their original label, it wouldn't officially hit the racks until 1997 - add the current industry troubles with illegal downloading and you have to wonder how an artist can really put up with it, but as **Lawton** says, you really have to have thick skin, expect the unexpected, and tough it out, "If only we knew 23 years ago what we know now! We have had our fair share of misfortune over the years from record company collapse to cancelled tours to personal loss within the band. However, nothing comes easy and we have always come back and continue. It always helps when you know that your music is reaching audiences far and wide and to be honest gives you the extra push that is needed to survive in this industry. I guess that you become immune to the disappointments as you become more experienced, which helps to ease any setbacks. It's not all bad though, if it was, we wouldn't be here!"

When the band takes the DIY approach to recording their own music, they take it to their professional studio known as Gaolhouse, which goes way beyond your bedroom/basement setup - offering up a much more dynamic sound for a dynamic band, when the studio was built in the early millennium, their album *Hindsight* held the advantage of the sonic upgrade, "Well, we have upgraded our studio equipment ready to record the new album *The Return of The Artisan*," returns **Rogers**, "We have invested in new computers, new software and all new hardware units. This should hopefully give us the

time, the freedom and the flexibility to finish the album without any need for concern or worry. We will certainly be maximizing the equipment's potential to create a new 'fresh' edge for **Final Conflict**."



Henry Rogers in Action - photo by Marta Pluszcz

With *The Return of the Artisan* in the works, we can expect an expansion of the **Final Conflict** sound, "(the upcoming album) will have a new sound for **Final Conflict**," elaborates **Rogers**, "There have recently been a lot of new influences taken on board in terms of individual musicians. There is a completely new rhythm section with myself and Baz (Barry Elwood) on bass. The band have upgraded a lot of their own equipment and when we write there are new sounds being created. There are certainly influences from Porcupine Tree in the music but without losing sight of the **FC** style, with the twin guitars and twin vocal harmonies that put a lovely finishing touch to the music. I think that every album is always different, we can still retain the **FC** 'flair if you will' but each album progresses from the last.

At his young age, **Rogers** plays like a seasoned veteran, and has become one of the most admired drummers in progressive rock sparking acclaim from Porcupine Tree's Steven Wilson & Tinyfish's Simon Godfrey - **Rogers** playing live has been great so far, "Gigging abroad has been an amazing experience for the band, being together those long periods of time I feel has certainly brought us together more and now when we go to the studio it's a far more social and pleasurable experience as opposed to feeling we have the task of having to rehearse, write or record. This is a brilliant way for the atmosphere to be, as long as the work is still done! Playing in Lithuania and Poland has certainly raised the profile of **Final Conflict**, with more people now than ever wondering who we are and what we are about. There is a lot of activity on the media outlets such as MySpace (<http://www.myspace.com/finalconflictmusic>) and the website (<http://www.fc-music.com>) which is brilliant news for us as we are getting more recognition, and our sales have increased so much so that we are now having to go back to the printers re-press all of our stocks!"

So what else holds the future for the band - Besides the anticipation for new album, a limited pressing of *Stand Up* (gotta love eBay), a few more gigs might ensue, but the possibilities are endless, especially after the new album gets released, "At this stage it is difficult to see what will happen. We have the new album coming out hopefully around Christmas time, The DVD is opening up all sorts of gig opportunities abroad for us which we will be announcing when they are confirmed, keep checking the MySpace for latest info. We have been made aware that the 'Stand Up' album which has been out of stock for some years now, has become a collectors item, going for over £160 an album on different auction sites! So a planned re-release with bonus tracks (1,000 copies only!!) is also just on the horizon. In the mean time we are just going to keep writing new music, performing around the country, branching out as far abroad as we can and just hope that our ever-growing, supportive fan base continues to grow, because we cannot do any of it without their support."

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