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**Interviews: Interview with DeeExpus Founder Andy Ditchfield**

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**Andy Ditchfield:  
The Road Home  
by Tommy "Hashman" Hash**



Progressive rock has found it's way into more melodic pop/rock direction - not per say, in the Harem Scarem/Fair Warning route, but in a different degree, adding the pop sensibility to more technical minded music, and vice versa - where the big prog-rock influence is brought to musician oriented 'singer/songwriter' bands/artists for a whole new approach to the neo progressive rock mantra - think of artists such as The Rembrandts, Jude Cole, & XTC who have always been acclaimed by musicians and add the progressive rock and you have JOLLY, Darwin's Radio, Frost\*, etc...

A new band that is now making waves amongst this scene of bands is **DeeExpus**, the brainchild of multi-instrumentalist, producer, & songwriter **Andy Ditchfield**. Having paid his dues in a multitude of bands over the years, **Ditchfield**, along with vocalist Tony Wright recorded the first album *Half Way Home*, which was well received by the thinking man's rock masses; so well that they were quickly invited to play in Poland to film their live DVD, *Far From Home* - not bad for something that started out as a "one man band." So now, as a full-band has taken shape, a live dates are on the horizon, and a musical focus set on **Ditchfield's** vision, the founder speaks about **DeeExpus**, how it all took shape, the big event in Poland, and what might come about from the band's upcoming record that is in the works...

**DeeExpus** started off life as a hobby in a bedroom in a small flat in Washington, UK around 1999," begins **Ditchfield** about the embryonic stages, "Having played for a number of years with an original band, I thought it was high time to start writing and recording my own stuff which I did for the following 5 or 6 years. The Music was quite commercial but lacked any real spark. Sometime in 2006 a friend of mine gave me a CD to listen to. As we shared a love of Marillion, something new from him was always going to be of interest, so I duly popped it on the car Stereo. I didn't know it then, but that CD was going to evolve my music into something completely new, and provide the spark that id been lacking for the last half a decade. From hearing the opening riff to Blackest Eyes, which was the first track on the CD I knew I wanted to see Porcupine Tree live so I eventually booked tickets to see them at the Carling Academy in Newcastle upon Tyne. The gig was utterly mind blowing and from that moment on, the vision of what I wanted **DeeExpus** to be & exist."

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Of course, one listen to *Half Way Home* you can hear that the melodic approach to the new era of prog-rock has been taken, and when hearing the performance on *Far from Home* you hear that there is certainly something for the 'neo' crowd (& beyond), although these guys are not a Marillion carbon copy; and this day and age, you have bands such as Darwin's Radio, Frost\*, & Tinyfish that are reinventing the prog-rock mantra, **DeeExpus** is be no exception, but it's **Ditchfield's** love of all types of music that has given him the melodic touch toward this sophisticated tuneful approach as he elaborates, "I haven't been a life long fan of one particular genre of music, including Prog, and I don't claim to know a lot of the bands in and around the scene. One thing that is becoming very apparent is the diversity of bands that make this genre so very interesting and appealing. Some of the British bands currently doing the rounds are fabulous and we're slowly but surely becoming part of the scene playing with the likes of Tinyfish, Manning and Touchstone; all completely different styles but all lumped together as "Prog". I think were probably a little heavier than all of those bands for the most part given the PT influence, but then again we have a distinct pop edge to some of the songs. We have our place in Progressive Rock for sure, lets see what the second album brings with respect to fitting a little more snugly into our place in the mold."

It was a diverse set of musical influences, one that might surprise you and one that won't surprise you that inspired the music on the debut record, "The main inspiration for the production was obviously Steve Wilson's production of Porcupine Tree," hints **Ditchfield**, "I love what he does in the studio and wanted an element of that to encroach into what I was doing. That said, a lot of my other influences encroached too. I think you can hear a lot of my AOR influences from my days with The Real McCabe, along with a little Iron Maiden, Joe Jackson and my all time favorites The Crash Test Dummies! It's a weird little jumble of styles, but it seems to work for me."



The *Far from Home* DVD was filmed at the Wyspianski Theatre in Katowice, Poland - it is rare for bands to film & release a DVD early in their career and even film their third performance, but why not? With the band that has been in tow & everybody being seasoned musicians, you would never know it by watching the performance, yet getting a "yes" out of the founder to go ahead with all this soon wasn't immediate as anyone could understand," When we were asked about going to play in Poland to record a DVD I initially thought it was the most ridiculous thing I had ever heard. It was November last year when Metal Mind got in touch and I initially said "no" to the offer. We weren't ready to play a concert and clearly hadn't performed live in front of an audience at all. What followed were a series of emails and telephone conversations before I finally accepted the offer and tied up the deal. I still wasn't convinced that it was such a good idea but thought that it was just too good of an opportunity to miss at such an early stage in the bands development. Still, utter madness!!"

"The Wyspianski Theatre was nearly our second performance, it only became our third as we decided to play a small local venue as we really couldn't shoot a DVD of our second ever performance, now could we?!!"

"Speaking of performance, I have to say it was great fun. The whole experience from leaving home to arriving back home was an absolute blast. It was the first chance we had as a band to spend some time on "the road", and it illustrated to me what a great bunch of guys we had managed to recruit. The lads came together live brilliantly, I thought everyone played well and performed magnificently and I think the footage has captured that well. We all enjoyed being part of the show, and we certainly enjoyed watching the remainder of it."

"From a technical point of view however, I had a bit of a nightmare. My pedal board, which controls my rack-mounted effects, broke on route to Katowice and although it still functioned, I couldn't tell which sound I was using. That knocked me a little and although I spent most of the show squinting to see the rack display, and rushing off to the side to manually twiddle knobs, it was still an awesome and enjoyable experience."

The follow up to *Half Way Home* is in the works right now, it will be more collaborative, as *Ditchfield* played everything on the first, he hints that the band will mostly be playing their own parts on this one - he does not really have an idea on what he wants to do, everything changes day to day, hence the whole idea of being progressive in thinking is also taking shape, " Once again, I have no idea of how its going to pan out," I have no vision as such only to make an album that manages to follow *Half Way Home*." explains **Ditchfield**, "The new album is presently a work in progress and there are various songs and ideas in different stages. We have one song finished, one almost finished and about 8 other ideas including another epic track which I'm hoping will rival *Half Way Home*. I like to work early in the morning when everyone else is in bed and find I'm far more productive if I don't feel I should be doing something else. Consequently, its back to solitude and 4.30am starts for me. "

His writing is also a work in progress, where this too takes a day to day approach, "I find it very difficult to write with other people. I have never been particularly good at "Jamming" or "Improvising". I like to lock myself away and experiment with music, trying different Ideas and taking things at my own pace. That said, everyone has something new and different to offer. Recently I had a session with Marc who came down to record a Keyboard part for the new track. He played some awesome stuff and although the song is written he certainly contributed to the arrangement. Again it's a little early in the writing process to be able to answer this, but I would think that everyone will have some input in one way or another. If its not broken, don't fix it."

*Half Way Home* was released independently, although there has been some interest from a couple of record labels for future releases, being independent can have it's advantages, such as complete creative freedom; but it also has disadvantages - like having a lot of time taken up by running business affairs yourself, time that could have been used to otherwise be creative - regardless, **Ditchfield** says that time will tell what industry path the band will take next.

As diverse as his musical influences and inspirations are, his past as a musician mirrors that, "My first "real" band was a metal band by the name of HoloSade in 1985. The drummer in that band was a very young Michael Lee who went on to play with Little Angels, The Cult and Page and Plant before sadly passing away late last year." says **Ditchfield** about his musical past the led up to **DeeExpus**, "I joined with my mate Paul Thompson on Bass and lasted about 12 months before getting the push, as I really wasn't very good at all. Still, that band kick-started my passion for playing live and I went on to play the local workingmen's clubs for a few years before joining forces with Lee and Jim McCabe to form the Real McCabe. We had some good times throughout the 90's with various trips backwards and forwards to the USA before calling it a day around 1999. Towards the end of my time with the McCabes, I became very disillusioned with the whole business. We had a nightmare of an experience with an independent label in New York, so much so that I quit the band that had been my life for around 10 years. I also quit playing live and just about gave up on "the dream". Around Easter 2007, I decided it was time to make a serious album. Id spent the last 6 or 7 years recording bits and pieces and was curious to see what I could achieve by myself. *Half Way Home* was released in June 2008, and the reaction has been both unexpected and overwhelming. I'm very grateful to everyone who has taken an interest."

And all of this up to **DeeExpus** has helped him build his musical might, "I think my confidence has grown a lot especially in my lead playing," says **Ditchfield**, "I've never considered myself to be a fabulous guitarist but I'm writing more and more challenging stuff and somehow I seem to manage to play it! I love playing Bass too, and fortunately Ian is more than happy to let me write his parts. I'm certainly evolving as a musician but its production where my heart lies."

At this time, **DeeExpus** is his main gig, and the new record will be his main focus, there is interest in working with other artists as he concludes, "Before DeeExpus I used to go out and mix a few live bands which I really enjoyed but now I simply just don't have the time. I would love to produce a band that I don't play in but until the day job releases me from its grasp, Ill just have to wait."

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