

INTERVIEW: HERMITAGE GREEN

It's fair to say that Hermitage Green have definitely been one of the busiest Irish bands over the past two years. From playing Electric Picnic, Indiependence, and touring abroad, they have had a whirlwind of a time, and the band is set to release their first studio album, Save Your Soul, this March.

We caught up with guitarist Dan Murphy to discuss the upcoming album and how the band has progressed both sonically and as a group, and what we can expect from Save Your Soul.

What can we expect from the new album?

You can expect a little bit of what you've heard before. Two singles have been released already - 'Quicksand' being the last one. I think that's a good sign of what's to come because as a track that has kind of folky and acoustic elements to it which is what we came from. But it's got a bigger, I suppose, more commercial sound to it, much more of a studio sound which is something that people won't have heard from us before.

So to answer your question there's a mixed bag there. A lot of the songs have been written by individuals in the band. That usually calls for a couple of different styles. There's some big pop tracks, there's a couple of darker, more acoustic ones, there's one or two ballads and then we've kind of pushed into the rock area as well. There's a mixed bag. It should be fun.

Was making your first full studio album more difficult than you expected?

No, to be honest. There were difficulties but all in all it was a really enjoyable process. We worked with a producer called Philip McGee. He would be best known for Kodaline, The Script, Aslan and a couple of others. This guy is our friend for life. He really encourages a creative atmosphere in the studio. For example, I like having all of my guitar parts down



before we start recording the song. I was trying to explain this to him that I want to have all of this stuff recorded and he was like, "no, don't do any of that stuff. I want us to brainstorm in the studio live. I want the five of us coming up with your guitar parts, not just you sitting at home". He's really good at encouraging that open, everything-is-a-good-idea attitude. It was a really nice way to work.

We also went in there with forty tracks. We're together five years now so it's about damn time we put an album out. We had a lot of material to get through so that was kind of tricky making a call on what made the album. We recorded eighteen songs and in the end we widdled it down to thirteen. There was blood, sweat and tears over what songs didn't get to make it. I think all in all the strongest thirteen made it. They're the strongest songs that represent us at this time.

Do you think that the band's style has changed much since your last album, *Live at Whelans*?

Yeah, massively. *Live at Whelans* was kind of a snapshot of where we were at that time. All we used to do were gigs. We just gigged non-stop. We had hardly been in a studio. We had all these songs that we wanted to get out to people and we didn't have the money or the resources at that time to record a full studio album independently without a label so we said we would do a live album. We used to play all these gigs but people would turn up and they wouldn't know any of our songs, they would know like three songs that we put out on YouTube. At that point in time it was just an effective way to put material out there. It served its purpose at the time and it was great, we got the gig and a tour off the back of it. We were still sort of teenagers as a band when that came out. We were finding our sound, we were juggling a couple of genres, we weren't sure what we were and with this [*Save Your Soul*] we're adults now, I think.

So speaking of playing live, for a while you were known for playing in the Curragower and smaller venues like that. Do you prefer more intimate gigs like that or do you prefer performing to larger crowds?

That's always a hard one to answer. I think we'll all tell you that the ones that really scare you are fifty people sitting quietly in a room looking at you. That completely freaks me out. But they're so enjoyable because they're so intimate.

We played St. Luke's Church in Cork. It's an amazing church and it just opened as a venue there at Christmas and we did two nights there. That's three or four hundred people and it's a seated church and it's really really quiet. There's something quite terrifying about that. You can hear a pin drop. Every

bum note or mistake, which there are plenty of, you know everyone is going to hear it. That makes for a great energy and a great intimacy. It's all the more rewarding then when it goes well.

Then in contrast to that you've got your Electric Picnic and big venues. We played Picnic two years ago now and that was about six thousand people that turned out. That's just madness. It's a great buzz but they're very different, it's hard to compare.

You'll be performing at *Live at The Big Top* on May 1st and the last time you performed there was two years ago with Gavin James and The Riptide Movement. What do you think has changed since the last time?

It feels like yesterday but an awful lot has changed. We're a different band in terms of our sound. We've sort of graduated now, we've finally got our live sound together. We were very much a bar band transitioning to the big stage at that point.

I think [this year] we're going to grab that one by the scruff of the neck, it'll be good fun.

What has been your favourite gig to date?

I don't want to say the obvious ones like Electric Picnic but I mean, that one was quite special.

The church in Cork, St. Luke's, it really is a special venue. How many people get to play a gig in front of a crowd drinking cans in the surroundings of a dilapidated Catholic church? It's pretty unique so that was definitely up there.

We played a festival in the Czech Republic there two years ago. It was absolute madness. There was about three thousand people there and no one spoke a word of English. It was in a town called Ostrava just outside Prague and they have this big festival every year. I don't know how we got booked because nobody

had a clue who we were but they threw us over. They have a real respect for live music there. They just really commit to a live act in a way that you don't really see in other places. Over here, if you had a Czech band coming over they'd go "who are these guys?". Over there they were just really up for it.

What else does 2016 have in store for Hermitage Green?

The album is out on March 4th. Our first single from the album came out at the end of January, 'Make it Better'. Then as soon as the album hits the shelves we're starting an Irish tour which will span over two months. We're going to the middle-east as well so Singapore, Dubai and Abu Dhabi. We're going there in April. Then the summer, at the moment we're expecting to be doing the Irish festival circuit but that will unfold over the next few weeks.

Save Your Soul is available March 4th, 2016.

Article by: Sophie Butler and Kevin Bolger