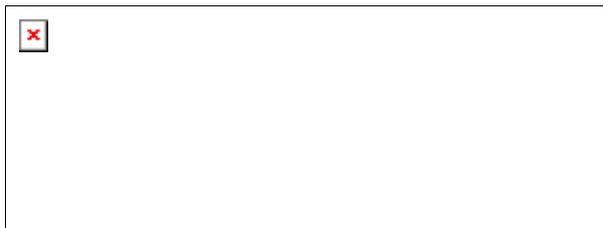


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A while ago I was very positively surprised by the new studio album by the once Dutch hope in darker days Highway Chile. I never thought that after such a long period of silence there would be another release by these old-timers. ‘Keeper Of The Earth’ can easily face the competition with most of the foreign releases and has put the Dutch metal scene somewhat stronger on the map. Drummer Ernst van Ee explains why they have decided to give it another shot and what the plans for the near future are.

Text: [Sjak](#)

Ernst, in 2002 after a long period of inactivity it was decided to do a reunion tour with Highway Chile. Why was that decision taken and did you intend to release a live-album from this tour right from the start?

The idea was coming from guitar player Martin Mens and me. We ran into one another quite often during concerts and such and the music from our time started to become popular again. So the idea was formed to start doing something with Highway Chile again. At that time I was in a band called Blind Justice and I persuaded two of those guys to participate in this reunion idea of Highway Chile (Attila Szabo – guitar and Edwin Den Haag – bass). I knew Robert already a long time, because of several things we had done together and he was willing to take on the vocal duties. We then tried to find out if there was still interest from the clubs for Highway Chile and that proved to be the case. So we started to rehearse, put a set list together and booked a number of gigs. As such we also got in touch with the guys from New Road Studio who are specialized in recording and releasing live albums. They were interested in making a live album from this reunion tour and we recorded two gigs in Wychen for that. Those gigs were used to create ‘On The Road Again’, which was then released by the New Road Studio label.

Were the original members of Highway Chile not interested in the reunion tour, since you more or less recruited three outsiders for this?

I knew already that our guitar player Ben Blaauw, who I used to play with in Helloise as well, was not interested in playing heavy metal music anymore. The rest of the original band members I simply couldn’t get in touch with. It seems that our vocalist at that time Armand van der Stighel is now a TV cook somewhere in America, so we had to get other guys in to

make the reunion tour possible.

After ‘On The Road Again’ it again got awfully quiet around the band. Was the reunion tour meant as a one time experience or were there other reasons for this period of silence?

There was not really a specific reason for that quiet period. After the release of the live album, we promoted it some more by means of occasional gigs. We had lots of fun rehearsing and doing those live performances and we just kept on doing that for a number of years.

What was the reason then that the band was motivated again to write, record and release a new studio album?

We came to a certain cross-point where we had to decide if we were going to stop with Highway Chile or really go for it one more time and record another album. We chose for the latter and started working on writing the new material and recording it in the Excess studio in Rotterdam. The overall recording process took quite some time, because the drums were already done at the end of 2006 and we were finished with the record at the end of 2007. Of course we recorded everything in phases, which accounts for the long period of time that it took us to get the record done. Our intention was to first record the new album and then to shop it around with different record companies. If that wouldn't work out, we would release the record independently. Mausoleum Records is a label with a heart for the style of music that we play and when we got in touch with Alfie, he immediately agreed to do this record.

There have been quite some changes though, like the replacement of vocalist Rober Soeterboek by ex-Helloise singer Stan Verbraak. Why this change of singers? Vanwaar deze wijziging?

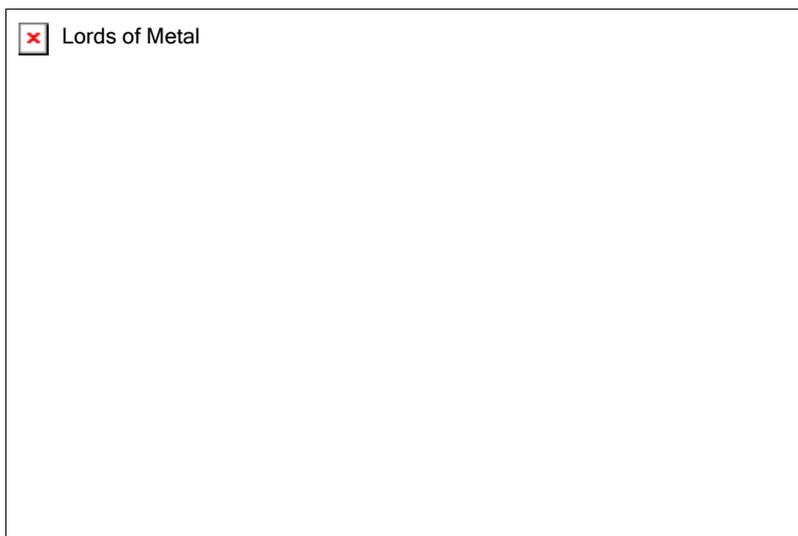
The reason for this is quite simple. Robert had some other things on his mind and didn't have time to do it. We wanted to continue with it, so I just approached Stan and he agreed to step in here.

Also guitar player Attila Szabo has been replaced by ex-Mischief member Gert Nijboer. Your clarification here?

Attila has his own company and he's just too busy with that to be able to combine that with Highway Chile. We knew Gert already and he's a great guy and really into the traditional style of playing which suits the sound of the band. We've also recently replaced bass player Edwin Den Haag by the way, since he suffered from a mysterious disease which resulted in him not being able to play the bass anymore. Therefore we asked Marchell Remeus to step in and he accepted. We already did some gigs in the new line-up and it just sounds awesome.

What kind of target did you set for yourselves with this new record, besides conquering the world?

Conquering the world, well, not really...haha. We didn't set any target to be honest. After deciding to continue with the band, we just wanted to write high-quality songs and create a great eighties record with a fantastic sound.



Besides the new songs we also find to golden oldies on the album in the form of 'Headbangers' and the ballad 'Engless Trail'. Why did you decide to do that and why these two particular songs?

There are two reasons for this: first of all we wanted to create a link between the old and new material. It's been twenty-five years ago that 'Story Book Heroes' was released and for the ones knowing Highway Chile from that period, it might be fun to check out how these older tracks sound like nowadays. Furthermore it could make newcomers curious and that might result in them checking out our older albums. The second reason for adding these songs was that we simply didn't have enough new songs to complete the album. The writing process takes a very long time and we didn't want to wait any longer with releasing the record. The reason that we chose 'Endless Trail' is a simple one: we hadn't written a ballad with the new material and we wanted to have one on there. I believe that Stan did a great job on this one, by the way. 'Headbangers' is more or less our anthem and it's one of the most important songs of the band.

Despite of the fact that Ben Blaauw wasn't interested to become a full-time member of the band, he did play the solo on 'Headbangers'. Why did you ask him to do that and didn't he felt tempted to join after all when he did his solo?

No, he wasn't tempted, but it seemed like a fun thing to do. It was quickly arranged when the idea was there. The same story with Peter Barnauw's guest appearance. He's the co-owner of the studio and when we asked him if he wanted to do a solo on the album, he quickly agreed.

We also find a great version of Rainbow's 'Long Live Rock And Roll' on the album. Why a cover in the first place and why this particular one?

Of course Stan is an enormous fan of Dio and in the past he's been compared to Dio quite a few times. We decided to change it a little bit and make the song somewhat more straightforward, which suits our style a little bit better.

I myself am quite fond of the title track, 'Run Away' and 'Road To Paradise', but what our in your opinion the best songs on the album and why?

I like them all, but especially 'Run Away', 'Keeper Of The Earth', 'Stealing With Pride' and 'Dreaming Of Heaven' are my favourites at the moment. I simply like them because they rock big time and that's what I like. 'Stealing With Pride' in that respect reminds me quite a bit to 'Fighting For The Earth' of Warrior, one of my all-time favourite tracks.

If you take a little bit distance and look back at the end result now, are you then completely satisfied with 'Keeper Of The Earth' or are there still things that you would have wanted to do differently?

Recording a record is always a moment in time and when you look back at it later, there are always things that you would have liked to do differently. I'm very happy though with the end result now, the record has great songs and the sound is also great. It became the record that we hoped for.

What do you think about the reactions from the press and do you have any idea already what the metal fans think about the record?

We're very happy with all the positive reviews that the record is getting. This keeps us very motivated and it gives us the opportunity to do more shows. I hope that the fans will also love the album, but it's still a little bit too early to tell.

What are you planning to do next? Are you going to tour the club-circuit again or do you have some other plans at the moment?

We're thinking about doing a CD-presentation in 013 in Tilburg somewhere in the December time-frame. Furthermore we have some shows planned in several clubs in the Netherlands to promote the album. We're also thinking about a next record and will look after the tour whether that's feasible or not, whether there's still an interest in the band.

Do you also still have some plans for the more long-term future?

We never have had any real long-term target, we just always wanted to have fun in what we're doing and I must say that at this moment we're definitely are having a lot of fun. We just live our dream from day to day and see what comes towards us. On the basis of that we will decide which way we will be going.



<http://www.highwaychile.nl>