

NI ROCKS interview with MR BIG frontman ERIC MARTIN

Written by NI ROCKS

Thursday, 17 January 2013 21:05 - Last Updated Thursday, 17 January 2013 23:57

Renowned MR BIG frontman ERIC MARTIN embarks on a solo acoustic tour of Europe during March. This includes just two UK dates, one of which is in Auntie Annies in Belfast on Sunday 3rd March.

Eric very graciously agreed to answer a few questions for Rock Radio NI by e-mail. Trying to cover such a wide ranging career in a few questions was quite difficult but Eric has taken the time to give us some great responses covering everything from Mr Big to other future projects, and talking about "supergroups", his meeting with Bon Scott and his "band that got away" amongst other things . He even found time to tell a joke.



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NI ROCKS – Eric, thanks for taking some time to respond to a few questions for Rock Radio NI. I have to admit that given the range of projects you've been involved in I knew I was going to have problems deciding on what questions to ask you. Doing a little further research only made things worse as it opened up other potential questions. But we'll start with the reason why we're doing this. You're playing in Belfast on Sunday 3rd March as part of your European acoustic tour.

Tell us a little about what fans can expect. Will you be playing solo throughout or bringing anyone along with you? And will you be covering music from the early solo stuff through to the recent Mr Big material?

ERIC – My Mr. Big bro's have got a bunch of irons in the fire that will keep them pretty busy for while so I'll be flying solo this time around. I have no agenda really just having fun, getting out and off the couch and keeping my chops up. My little acoustic tour will feature everything from EM solo to the Mr. Big years past and present. Sometimes I'll meet somebody at the soundcheck or online who knows some of my musical history and wants to jam on a few tunes. The audience loves that stuff and so do I. I toured in November of last year and some of the opening acts joined me on stage. But mostly it's an intimate portrait of a former class clown.

NI ROCKS – I read somewhere that you were half Irish – half Italian. The tour starts with two dates in Italy before coming to Belfast. So confess...what you were really looking at then is a chance to visit some distant relatives, drink some good wine and have a few pints of Guinness?

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ERIC – Oh yeah all that my friend... From Pasta and finding the pot O' gold to shaking hands and kissin' the blarney stone. Ha!! My mother's father was Italian and her mother was an Irish immigrant named Sarah Quinn from where I don't know. My Father was of Scottish decent so I'm kind of a mutt as they say. My wife is Sicilian and as much as I love her Italian cooking there is nothing like a pint of Guinness or five. That reminds me of my favorite joke- So the leaders of the big beer companies meet for a drink. The president of Budweiser orders a Bud, the CEO of Miller gets a Miller, the head of Coors orders a Coors, and so on.... Until it's Arthur Guinness's turn. He orders a soda.

"Why didn't you order a Guinness?" everyone asks.

Guinness replies, "if you guys aren't having beer, then neither will I."

NI ROCKS – Supporting you in Belfast is one of our own guitar legends Pat McManus aka The Professor. Are you familiar with Pat's music or Mama's Boys, the band he played in?

ERIC – Yeah I remember hearing "Mama Weer All Crazee Now" in the early 80's I think, and a bunch of other tunes over the years with a handful of different singers. I could be wrong it might have been the same guy and his voice just changed. I've had that happened to me a couple of times. Pat McManus is a great guitarist and from the interviews that I've seen of him he seems like a down to earth fellow. I would love it if we could play together that night.

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NI ROCKS – “Supergroup” is a term that seems to get bandied around a lot, particularly it seems in recent years, but Mr Big are often referred to as a “Supergroup”. Would you agree that the labelling is more a media thing or is it something that actually registers with the members of the bands?

ERIC – It’s an advertising deal for sure. I sing in a great Rock & Roll band with 3 great musicians. Back in the day when we started out Billy was the famous one in the group because of his affiliation with David Lee Roth, Paul was this new guitar phenom from Racer X, Pat I believe was a session drummer for a ton of artists as well as playing arena tours with John Parr and Belinda Carlisle. He was playing with the Knack before he got the Mr. Big gig.

I had my own band for years and took a stab at a solo career for a couple of albums. My take on the Super Group thing is a band that is thrown together for a couple of albums and disappears without a trace. It’s seems like a kiss of death headline to me.

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NI ROCKS – I don't think I'd be forgiven by some of my friends in the local rock scene if I didn't ask about performing with some of the legends of the guitar world. Have you a favorite story about working with Paul Gilbert?

ERIC – I have worked with a lot of great guitar players but none cooler than PG. He's open minded to anything you throw at him. I love sharing the stage with the Big man but hanging out at his house while he cooks up some breakfast in a Japanese WOK (He's got a passion for cooking) and hitting the studio for a one on one song writing session is my favorite thing about working with him.

NI ROCKS – The re-union of Mr Big in 2009 was long talked about and eagerly anticipated. What was it like getting back in the studio and going out on tour together? It would have been more than 10 years since Paul had left the band. Presumably time had healed the issues that caused the break-up between 1997 and 2002?

ERIC – Yeah I've said it before to friends but after 5 or 10 years you lose the taste for hate and most of the time you can't remember the bullshit anyway or you can't remember what the hell happened and how your life got pulled out from under you. My only regret is that I wish I would have reached out a handful years ago because I really missed being onstage with those guys. All those years of constant touring and staying out on the road forever might have sold some records and made us some money but it took a huge toll on our friendship, which completely sucked. So when we all sat down at Paul's house for a re-union dinner we didn't bring the past up we just said that we want to make it fun and painless and have a goodtime. How hard is that right?

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NI ROCKS - Does the writing process for a Mr Big album entail each of you doing your own individual thing or is it something that you all sit down together to do?

ERIC – Every which way but mainly Billy, Paul & Pat will jam out tunes in the studio in Los Angeles where they live, record them and send the CD's to me in the San Francisco Bay Area to write to (they had a hundred different song ideas for the “ What if” album). That's been our process for years

NI ROCKS – Your solo work has a huge following in Japan and the Far East, as of course did the Mr Big material and you had a very successful involvement in the Tak Matsumoto Group in 2004. How did writing and performing with Tak differ from your previous experiences?

ERIC – Playing with TMG was magical. I played in Tak's group with my dear old friend Jack Blades, he's an awesome bass player with a heart of gold. Brian Tischy and Cindy Blackmon played on the record but my good pal Chris Frazier did all the TV shows,

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videos and the touring. Friendship is the key to everything, Jack, Chris and Tak are really good people to hang with; in the studio, on a tour bus and all the great bars in Tokyo.

Writing was a trip. We all flew to the B'Z (Tak's real band) huge home studio in LA. Tak wrote the whole album in the studio while Jack and I wrote the melody's and lyrics in the living room. We wrote a song a day and recorded that day as well. I did guide vocals and we all fixed some stuff at the end of the week. That record sounded like a million bucks... hmm it might have cost that much too. Touring on the record was only 20 or so sold out shows but a fantastic experience and one that I'll never forget.

NI ROCKS - You released the "Mr Vocalist" series of albums in Japan that involved you covering a wide range of material. The most recent of these albums is "Mr Rock Vocalist" released last year. How did you select what tracks to cover on these albums?

ERIC – Truthfully I don't select any of it... I suggest stuff but I don't have any creative control with the material. I do however write the English words from Japanese to English translations and from a simple synopsis of the tune, the Japanese fans picked all these songs. Uhm.. But SONY picked that awesome moniker. Yikes. It's a hard challenge to pull off but none the less a lot of fun.

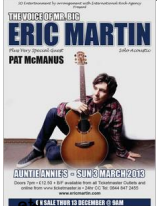
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Eric Martin (left) and Paul Gilbert (right) of Mr. Big in 1997. Mr. Big's lead guitarist Paul Gilbert has since moved on to other projects, but Eric Martin remains a prominent figure in the rock world. He has released several solo albums and continues to tour extensively. You can find more information about his work and upcoming dates at his website www.ericmartin.com.



Eric Martin European Acoustic Tour Dates
March - Madrid, Spain
March - Warsaw, Poland
March - Prague, Czech Republic
March - Bucharest, Romania
March - Avignon, France