

NI ROCKS Interview with PHIL CONALANE (Million Dollar Reload / Blackwater Conspiracy)

Written by NI ROCKS

Friday, 11 January 2019 19:31 - Last Updated Thursday, 07 February 2019 06:54

This week my guest on the Friday NI Rocks Show is singer Phil Conalane of Blackwater Conspiracy and formerly of Million Dollar Reload. We talk about the one-off reunion gig that Million Dollar Reload are playing in The Empire Music Hall in Belfast on Saturday 9th February and about future plans for Blackwater Conspiracy. The re-union features the five original members of the band that recorded the epic debut album “Anthems of a Degeneration”.

The interview, along with 4 tracks from Million Dollar Reload and one from Blackwater Conspiracy can be found on the Rock Radio NI On Demand Player – <http://www.rockradioni.co.uk/hosts/ni-rocks-friday-rock-show.html> (the Show uploaded on 10th Jan).



When I started doing the Friday NI Rocks Show on Rock Radio NI back in 2010 local band Million Dollar Reload were featured regularly and “Tattoos and Dirty Girls” appeared on the very first show. They continued to be included fairly regularly even after the farewell performance by the band in 2015 – in fact they were second on the list of most played bands by the time I reached 400 Shows in August and four of their tracks appeared in the top 25 most played songs.

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Just before Million Dollar Reload performed for the last time on 15th August 2015 I recorded an interview with singer Phil Conalane which you'll find here – <http://www.rockradioni.co.uk/interviews/2161-ni-rocks-interview-with-phil-from-blackwater-conspiracy-million-dollar-reload.html> -

The band re-emerged as Blackwater Conspiracy, releasing their debut EP that same night.

The latest interview will be transcribed and posted here later.

Playlist for the Show

DEF LEPPARD – Let It Go

VAN HALEN – Hot for Teacher

LAST IN LINE – Landslide

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GIN ANNIE – Chains

MILLION DOLLAR RELOAD – Tattoos and Dirty Girls

Interview with Phil Conalane Part 1 (10 min)

MILLION DOLLAR RELOAD – Livin' In The City

Interview with Phil Conalane Part 2 (4 min)

BLACKWATER CONSPIRACY – Monday Club

Interview with Phil Conalane Part 3 (5 min)

MILLION DOLLAR RELOAD – Bullets in the Sky

MILLION DOLLAR RELOAD – The Last Icon (Live)

DEVILFIRE – Bones Don't Break

BURNING RAIN – Midnight Train

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MARIUS DANIELSEN – Rise of the Dark Empire

SECRET RULE – The Endless

DEA MATRONA – Just Wanna Rock

DIAMANTE – Haunted

ADRENALINE RUSH – Stand My Ground

FLOTSAM AND JETSAM – Demolition Man

ALTITUDES & ATTITUDE – Out Here

THE THREE TREMORS – When The Last Scream Fades

TESLA – Song & Emotion

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{youtube}T0WI6-5nAVE{/youtube}

NI ROCKS – Hi Phil, thanks for taking some time to talk to Rock Radio NI. I was wanting to talk later about the upcoming Blackwater Conspiracy album, but first of all lets talk about the Million Dollar Reload reunion show in The Empire in Belfast on 9th February. Is that something that had been talked about for a while and what made the time right for a one-off reunion show now?

PHIL – It's kind of a strange one. As you know the band broke up when Andy left and he's been out of the band for quite a few years. And Davy has been out of the band for almost eight years. The band have continued on in various guises, but Brian and Kieran and I were there for the whole duration. Other members changed, but the chemistry was never the same. Even though it changed and it was still great, it was never the same after Andy and Davy left. We all parted on relatively bad terms; we fell out and we didn't speak. Then we reconnected again with Andy a couple of years ago, just out of friendship; we never really talked about music or putting Million Dollar together or anything like that at all. Then, out of the blue, we found ourselves at a table with Davy as well and we were chatting, shooting the breeze and telling a lot of stories about being on tour etc. Basically, catching up with old friends, and then the idea was just there. We never really had that final show with the original line-up, the proper Million Dollar Reload and we thought about it for a while and decided it would be really cool if we could do one last show for ourselves and for the people who got into Million Dollar Reload in the beginning. We talked about for it a little while and then decided let's go for it! Let's see if anyone is interested! I put a few feelers out for a couple of months and videos and different bits and there seemed to be a bit of an appetite. Then we got the Empire show and just decided to go for it. Within a few hours of the tickets going on sale it went completely bananas and we've been pretty pleased with the response so far.

NI ROCKS – As you mentioned, yourself, Brian and Kie have reunited with Davy and Andy to reform the original line-up. How difficult was that

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on a personal level and also professionally - to gel together again as a band? Did that come easily?

PHIL – On a personal level and friendship level it was extremely difficult to work through that. Not to work through that, but to let bygones be bygones. It is ten years later and we're a little bit older and a little bit wiser, so we don't really hold grudges as much anymore. Once we got the friendship thing back to where it should be, the production and the music thing was a no brainer, easy decision. Once we got the friendship back, the music was easy to follow up. The thing is that everyone is in different projects; Andy is doing his own thing, he's involved in other musical ventures, as is Davy. Then Brian and Kie and myself are Blackwater, which takes up a lot of time. So we've basically had to find a window where the five of us could have that bit of time; because obviously we've rehearsals and putting things in motion. It took a little bit of time to get that all worked out and figured out, but once we got the friendship sorted out, the music was easy. But even if we just got the friendship sorted out, putting Million Dollar back together was never really the priority. We kinda grew up together and done a lot of things together and it was more important to get that all settled and get our friends back together, rather than the band, just to be honest about it.

NI ROCKS - The line-up for the gig in February is that which recorded and released the debut album "Anthems of a Degeneration" back in 2007. What are your memories of recording that first album?

PHIL – Well, Davy recorded "Anthems of a Degeneration", but he was also fully involved in the process for "A Sinner's Saint". There were only maybe one or two songs that Davy hadn't a little bit of involvement in, but Davy left...or was fired or sacked or left Million Dollar (laughs)...whatever way you want it! The memory is quite blurred, but we could say Davy decided it wasn't for him anymore; but up to that point Davy was already in the studio with us for "A Sinner's Saint", so he might as well have been on it. He was there for the writing process so he was involved probably with all the songs.

The recording process with "Anthems" was kind of a new thing; this was in 2005 / 2006 or whatever and it was our first experience of recording in that kind of environment at Neal Calderwood's Manor Park Studio. It was a different situation than any of us were used to as far as a recording process goes. It was all a learning curve, but it's something that we feel we've taken with us down through the years, from that first recording session with Neal Calderwood, we've taken it with us to different studios all over the UK. We learned a lot and recording "Anthems" was enjoyable. No doubt about it, it was definitely an enjoyable experience.

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NI ROCKS – “A Sinner’s Saint” was released in 2012 and you mentioned Davy was involved in the writing of that, but presumably he hasn’t played any of those tracks live before, so it’ll be a first time for those?

PHIL – No, he hasn’t played any of those tracks live yet, but we’ve had a few rehearsals and he knows the songs inside out. To give Davy fair credit where it’s due, he has really knuckled down and learnt those songs straight off the tape. We put the set together and he went away and a week or two later he had the songs nailed. He came into rehearsals and nailed them straight away, with that extra bit of groove; not that we missed, but Davy brings a particular groove to his drumming. He brought that in and the songs took on another life and another bit of chemistry from what they were. Sean was the original drummer on “A Sinner’s Saint” and then Fionnbharr came in for the live situation, so Davy brings an extra bit as well and it’s brilliant to have that.

NI ROCKS – That second album was released through Frontiers and you didn’t have a great experience or relationship with Frontiers. Has that experience influenced how you’re taking forward Blackwater Conspiracy?

PHIL – Yeah, absolutely. A record label comes along and puts a bag of cash on the table and you think this is great; you’re landed! But you soon learn that just because they’ve given you the money up-front it doesn’t really mean anything in the grand scheme of things. They didn’t work the album, it just died on it’s feet. It was a really bad experience with Frontiers as far as we’re concerned. I’ve nothing positive to say about them whatsoever on any level (laughs). It is what it is, But, did we learn anything from that? Absolutely. That’s why, at the moment, we don’t deal with record labels when it comes to Blackwater Conspiracy. We just don’t!

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NI ROCKS – I think I know the answer to this question but I'm going to ask anyway. Any big surprises planned for 9th February?

PHIL – Other than playing a shed-load of songs no-one has heard in a long time? (laughs). Everybody is coming with expectations. The funny thing is that I can pretty much guarantee that 50% of the audience that are going to be there have never seen Million Dollar, because we have found out through Ticketmaster that most of the tickets have been sold in England. Three hundred tickets have been sold so far through Ticketmaster and I think 130 have been sold in the UK, two have been sold in Germany, three have been sold in Brazil and two have been sold in Australia, so work that out!

NI ROCKS – We bought ours in Tenerife, does that count! I was sitting by the pool when I bought mine!

PHIL – At least you got the tickets, that's the main thing!

NI ROCKS – We kicked off with Tattoos and Dirty Girls from the Anthems album – no surprise there really! We'll play another track from that album now. Which one would you like to play and why?

PHIL – "Livin In The City", because it was our first single and we went to London to shoot our first video for that song. It was a good song and it has stood us well. We mixed a little bit of live footage in from the Rosetta bar in Belfast.

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{youtube}xrBWeUUcNI8{/youtube}

NI ROCKS – Our last interview was recorded in The Empire in August 2015, the night that you launched Blackwater Conspiracy. That was my 50th time seeing Million Dollar Reload perform and I thought it was going to be the last until now. It's appropriate really then that The Empire is the venue for the one off reunion. Was it chosen for that reason?

PHIL – The Empire was chosen for a number of reasons. The Million Dollar Reload reunion was offered to us for a couple of different venues, but we all decided that it was either The Empire, or it didn't happen. The reason why was that The Empire kinda became our spiritual home near the end. If the Rosetta had still been going, then the reunion show would have been there, but it's not around anymore. The Empire became the spiritual home for Million Dollar and that's the reason it was The Empire or nowhere. We wanted it on a Saturday night; you know we're all a little bit older now and some of us can't do Friday night gigs...or Sunday night gigs (laughs). It had to be a Saturday night and it had to be The Empire. It all lined up really well and we were able to get The Empire, so we're happy where it is going to be.

NI ROCKS - I know the answer, but I have to ask. There won't be any more "one-off re-union shows" then – it'll not be like Kiss's "farewell" tour!

PHIL – No, this is definitely it. We've got so much else going on. Davy has other stuff going on, Andy has other stuff going on and we've got Blackwater with a new album coming out very soon and we have to work that. It's maybe not a case of we wouldn't want to, but we're just not

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going to have the time to do it. This is the best way to do it – the original five for one more night and that's it.

(More of the interview to follow – listen online in the meantime!)