

NI ROCKS Interview with RONNIE ATKINS from Pretty Maids

Written by NI ROCKS

Friday, 05 June 2020 23:50 - Last Updated Monday, 21 December 2020 03:36

“Undress Your Madness” by Pretty Maids was one of my favourite albums of 2019 and the song “Serpentine” was probably the track of the year. When the album was released in November, singer Ronnie Atkins was in the midst of a battle with cancer. A few months later he has made good progress and Pretty Maids have just released the album “Maid in Japan – Back to the Future World” through Frontiers Music. I had the opportunity to chat with Ronnie via Skype on 3rd June. We chatted about the recent Pretty Maids releases, his ongoing battle with lung cancer, the impact of Covid-19, his involvement in the Nordic Union project and more.

You can hear that interview on the Friday NI Rocks Show from 5th June which is now available from our MixCloud page - <https://www.mixcloud.com/NIROcks/interview-with-ronnie-atkins-from-pretty-maids-on-the-friday-ni-rocks-show-5th-june-2020/>



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The interview has been transcribed and posted below.

Playlist

SCREAMING EAGLES – Screaming Eagles

AXEL RUDI PELL – Wings of the Storm

THUNDERMOTHER – Driving in Style

BLACK STAR RIDERS – Candidate for Heartbreak

PRETTY MAIDS – SERPENTINE

Interview with Ronnie Atkins Pt1 (9 min)

PRETTY MAIDS – Future World (Live)

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Interview with Ronnie Atkins Pt2 (6 min)

PRETTY MAIDS – Undress Your Madness

Interview with Ronnie Atkins Pt3 (6 min)

PRETTY MAIDS – Rodeo (Live)

NORDIC UNION – When Death Is Calling

AVANTASIA – The Piper at the Gates of Dawn

BLACKWATER CONSPIRACY – Soul Revolutionaries

KRIS BARRAS BAND – What a Way To Go

SMACKBOUND – Those Who Burn

BLACK ROSE MAZE – In The Dark

ARTIC RAIN – Lost

KROKUS – Fire

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SAXON – Big Teaser

WHITESNAKE – Child of Babylon

SHOTGUN MISTRESS – Save Me From Myself

RESTIVE NATION – Coma

WARKINGS – Warrior

PAT MCMANUS BAND – Belfast Boy



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{youtube}TsBz33HAoh0{/youtube}

NI ROCKS – Hi Ronnie. Thanks for taking some time to chat with us. Pretty Maids have just released a new live album, which we'll talk about in a moment. However, we just played the track "Serpentine" from the band's last studio album "Undress Your Madness". That was my favourite track from last year. Can you tell us something about it?

RONNIE – Well, I can tell you that it was mine too! (laughs). That's actually one of my favourite tracks from the "Undress Your Madness" album. What can I say? It pretty much represents what Pretty Maids has been about for at least the last ten years, or the last era of the band. A good song, good riff, good melodic hook and stuff like that. I think you've got all the ingredients that a good Pretty Maids song should have really.

NI ROCKS – It's a great track and I absolutely love it! I mentioned that there was a new live album. "Maid in Japan – Back to the Future World" was released by Frontiers Music on 22nd May. Most of that album is a live performance of the "Future World" album. What was the thinking behind doing a live album at this point and why did you decide to record it in Japan?

RONNIE – First of all, it was originally meant to be recorded in the Spring of 2018 on the European tour; but I got sick back then in Switzerland. I was actually hospitalised for a couple of days and we had to cancel the last three gigs on the tour. So we had to have a Plan 'B' and that ended up being Japan, because we had never recorded any videos or DVDs down there. It was kind of an obvious choice and since Japan has been like a second home country for the last thirty years. Germany and Japan have always been big markets for us and that was like a tongue in cheek, natural choice I guess. The whole idea actually started in the Fall or Winter of 2017, which was actually the year that "Future World" had its 30th anniversary. We actually do these gigs in Denmark and Scandinavia every year in December – or used to – and just to do something else that year we decided why don't we play the whole of "Future World". Then some promoters from Germany and Japan and requested us to do the "Future World" album there as well. So it's actually like the 31st anniversary (laughs) – anyway! But it was great doing it in Japan and we had a great night. We played for two nights and we swapped around – we played "Future World" in it's entirely both nights and we swapped the

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other, different songs. It was really two great nights with a very enthusiastic audience as always in Japan.

NI ROCKS – You mentioned that there were other tracks. In addition to the nine tracks from “Future World”, there are five other live tracks on the new live album. Was there any particular rationale behind which tracks you added to the setlist?

RONNIE – We chose those songs on the first night, like “Kingmaker”, “Mother of All Lies” and “Bulls Eye” because they had never been released anywhere before. We hadn’t recorded those before that, so that was an obvious choice. On the second night we actually played some very different stuff, back from the 80’s and 90’s –stuff like that. I can’t remember exactly what songs we did; we just played some songs that we hadn’t played in forever. That was good fun and that motivates you a bit to do that. It’s always problematic to pick a set list because we might not always have the same opinion on what songs we should play. It calls for a bit of diplomacy sometimes! (laughs)

NI ROCKS – The drummer on the live album and on “Undress Your Madness” was Allan Sorensen, but he left the band last year. Has the band found a replacement for him yet?

RONNIE – Yeas, we actually got Allan Tschicaja back in - our original drummer. Not our original drummer, but the guy who has been drumming for us since 2005 I guess. He’s actually back in the band. He was just back in the band for a couple of gigs before I got sick, but he was supposed to stay in the band, and still is. I got sick and we had to cancel the whole European tour; all the gigs we had in December last year, and the rest is history. Then the damned corona virus came along and now everything is up in the air and everything so unpredictable. So when people ask me when are you going to go out live, I say ‘well, ask your government!’ It’s as unpredictable for us as it is for everybody else, and on top of that we have this damn cancer that I have been dealing with; which is awful. It’s a pain in the arse, literally! So everything is a little

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unpredictable right now. But we never toured, we never played one single song from the “Undress Your Madness” album, so we’d love to go out and do that, absolutely! Let’s see what happens.

NI ROCKS – You kind of pre-empted my next question which was that normally when you do a new album you go out and tour, but we are in strange times. Are you probably looking at 2021 you reckon before you start touring again in all likelihood?

RONNIE – We’re not going to do any new material until we’ve been out promoting that album. We don’t have any plans for doing that – let’s put it that way. We speak now and then to each other, but we haven’t seen other since August last year, or the beginning of September. Let’s see what happens. We’ve a 40th anniversary coming up before too long and maybe we might do something or record something! I don’t know. We haven’t planned anything, but we’ve got.....for us “Undress Your Madness” is still like a brand new album; we haven’t played a song from it live. I just hope we will at some point hopefully!

NI ROCKS - You mentioned Covid 19 there. How have you been dealing with the lockdown?

RONNIE – Well for me it has just been horrible; as it has for everybody. At first I was in like six months isolation I felt, because I didn’t seen a lot of people. I went to all these treatments and stuff like that – radiation therapy and chemo and that crap. Then this corona thing came along and everyone was isolated. I was looking forward so much to going out and seeing people in the spring and summer for some of the festivals. So it’s been as bad an experience for me as for everybody else. I really feel sad for the whole rock n roll community. Not just for the musicians but for the fans and the crews. This is the time of the season when we make our money, because we might not make anything in October, November and December. For all the people behind the scene – the crews, the agencies etc – that is just a horrible situation and it’s hard to compensate

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for that. And for the fans, some people are looking forward all year to go to Glastonbury or Wacken or whatever – that's their holiday, that's their vacation – and it's not going to happen in 2020. That's something we've not had before.

NI ROCKS – It's a strange situation! Some bands have been doing some live streaming and things like that. Have you given any thought to doing live streaming or Q&As or that kind of stuff?

RONNIE – We haven't really thought about doing anything like that. We haven't talked about it. I did participate in this thing that Chris Laney, our keyboard player and some of the old Pretty Maids members who aren't in the band anymore, did called 'At The Movies'. That was actually the first time that I got out of my house and back into a vocal booth. I did a cover of "We Don't Need Another Hero" by Tina Turner! That's all I have been doing really. We haven't talked about doing anything. These days people are starting to do these drive-in concerts, but that doesn't move me.

NI ROCKS – No, it's a strange concept!

RONNIE – It's a concept and if some people can get some money out of it yeah! But I wouldn't drive into somewhere and watch a concert. The thing about going to a concert is about being together – that's rock n roll. Having a good time together. You can't do that sitting in a car – it doesn't appeal to me. Not at all!

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NI ROCKS – We'll play a track from the new live album now. Do you want to pick a track from that album to play – and tell us why.

RONNIE – I would probably pick the title track "Future World". It's probably one of my all time favourite Pretty Maids songs. That song in particular very much defined what the band is all about. To this day it's one of the songs that I still enjoy playing – one of the songs from back then. You always have certain songs where you think ahh I'm going to do that tonight or ohh we're going to do that again, but some songs you have to play because people expect you to play. "Future World" I still enjoy doing. There are other songs I enjoy doing, but that is probably my favourite track.

{youtube}J38MBUH1Wzs{/youtube}

NI ROCKS – The band's last studio album was "Undress Your Madness", which was released by Frontiers back in November 2019. That was one of my favourite albums of last year. You worked once again with Danish producer Jacob Hansen on that album. You must have built up a very good relationship with him over the last few albums?

RONNIE – Yeah, it was actually Michael Poulsen from Volbeat that introduced us to Jacob back in 2009 when we were in a rehearsal camp for the album that would become "Pandemonium". He came up to the place and he was very familiar with us because he had listened to us – the 80's stuff, "Future World" and "Red, Hot and Heavy". He said yeah that'd be great, I'll produce you; and we thought he was a nice guy. Then we started working with him and the first thing that he did – he has a great set of ears and is an extremely nice guy to work with, and shares the same sick sense of humour that we have (laughs). He started by de-tuning the guitars and gave it a heavier sound and more up to date sound. He basically updated the band. There has just been a good chemistry ever since we started ten years ago. We've worked with him now for ten years – everything I've done, I've done with him for the last ten years, whether it's been Pretty Maids or I've been doing stuff with Nordic Union

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or Avantasia, I've done it with him.

NI ROCKS – Most of the songs are written by you and guitarist Ken Hammer. That's a hugely successful song writing partnership going back well over thirty years now. Do you have an established process for writing together?

RONNIE – Yeah. Basically the way that we record is that I record things on my iPhone and so does he, if he has a riff or something like that. We used to, in the old days, sit down....and actually we've done that every time just before an album – we sit down, just him and me, him on an electric guitar and me an acoustic and we sit playing, throwing ideas at each other. What have you got? What have I got? Then we just write it and we bring the band in for pre-production a couple of stays before we enter the studio. That's what we did last year. We met on January 6th and we met more or less every day for a couple of hours and roll out ideas, and we ended up with what became "Undress Your Madness". Then we went into the studios at the beginning of February and it was basically written in January last year. That's an old formula.

NI ROCKS – It works, anyway!

RONNIE – It works. Why fix it if it ain't broke!

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NI ROCKS – You mentioned your cancer earlier. Just a few weeks before the release of “Undress Your Madness” you announced that you had been diagnosed with cancer. Thankfully your treatment has been successful and you revealed in February that you are now cancer free. That was obviously a very stressful time for you and the family. How are you getting on now?

RONNIE – Well I’m ok now. I had a little fallback two months ago, but the last scans I had were good. My mother died of the same lung cancer. Lung cancer is a fucking serious disease..and cancer in general..but if you could pick between ten, you wouldn’t pick lung cancer I can tell you! If you go in and read the statistics they’re not very good. It depends also on what state that you’re in. I’m positive and I have a positive attitude to it. If I just sat down in a corner and said I’m going to die, I’d probably die pretty soon, but I refuse to. I’ll fight all I can, but I guess I’ve got to have the higher powers on my side too! Right now I’m fine and medics today they’re finding new types of treatments and combinations. So right now I’m on immune therapy every six weeks and cancer is cancer – I’ve got it from now on and I’ve got to live with this kind of pistol against my head, and I’ve got to live my life in stages, live for the now. I’ve always thought I’ve lived for the now and that’s probably why I ended up here; but anyway, I’ve got to live my life in stages until the next scan, because you never know what is going to happen. It’s a mother-fucker disease and that’s all there is to say.

NI ROCKS –We’ve mentioned “Undress Your Madness”, and obviously it has had some very good reviews. Have you given any thought to the next album? You mentioned that you wouldn’t do anything until you’d toured the last album but have you given any thought as to when you might do the next studio album?

RONNIE – No, we haven’t actually discussed it. That’s normally a decision we’ll take when we talk with the record company – or we talk actually between ourselves. Are we ready to do it? Do we want to do it! Basically we’re not doing an album these days to make money. It is really, more or less, an illicit card to go out and get gigs. I think that’s the situation for a lot of people or bands. The thing is now, since we haven’t promoted “Undress Your Madness” yet or since we haven’t played a song from that album, we’re not in a hurry to do a new album. It’s as simple as that. I won’t rule out that there won’t be any new material at some point; not at all. We haven’t broken up.

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NI ROCKS – We played “Serpentine” earlier, but we’ll play another track from “Undress Your Madness” now. Do you want to pick a track and tell us something about it?

RONNIE – Now that you ask me I can’t even remember all the songs because I haven’t heard them for a while! Actually, I thought “Undress Your Madness” was good – the title track. I liked that. It’s got a lot of energy and a good riff and a good chorus. I’d probably pick that one. I think that the album has a little bit of bolder, more melodic stuff, more ballad kind of songs and it’s got the heavy stuff. That’s what we like the balance to be on a Pretty Maids album.

{youtube}I5-bs2iaxJY{/youtube}

NI ROCKS – You mentioned earlier your project with Erik Mårtensson from W.E.T. and Eclipse which was called Nordic Union. How did that project come about?

RONNIE – That was actually Serafino from Frontiers Records that suggested that. First he actually suggested another producer, who I shall not mention, or songwriter and he came up with 10 or 12 songs that I thought were rubbish...to put it that way, and so did Frontiers. So then he suggested Erik Mårtensson and he sent me two songs, one called “Hypocrisy” and another called “When Death Is Calling” back in January 2015

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or something like that. When I heard those songs I thought wow that's good; that's really good stuff. My wife listened to it, because she's a pretty good singer too you know. She said you don't sing on that; that sounds great.....well thank you I said (laughs). But seriously, he's a really, really good songwriter and it just appealed to me and I could hear myself doing that. And we just did it, the first one, without actually meeting at all, until we did a video in Stockholm later that year, in the winter. I'd actually met him once or twice before when we played festivals, I remember we met Eclipse and we talked to them, but I didn't know him at all. So when we did the second album, "Second Coming", we met and we talked a bit more on the phone about what direction it should take and things like that. It probably ended up a little bit more moody, more melancholy, and I wrote more lyrics for that one than for the first one. I guess the first one was the more successful, but I think they're two good albums.

NI ROCKS – They are very good albums. The first was 2016 and the second in 2018. Are we likely to see a third album at any stage?

RONNIE – It has been suggested and I won't rule that out. Let's see what happens. We might make a decision on that over the next couple of months actually. We haven't really decided yet, but I know that there is interest for it. I guess it's up to me and Erik really. He's busy with his things and I'm in the position I am right now where I haven't decided what to do, but let's see what happens. We haven't decided yet, but I definitely won't rule it out.

NI ROCKS – We'll play a track from one of the two (Nordic Union) albums later in the Show. Which one would you like to play and why?

RONNIE – I would probably play "When Death Is Calling" because that is the first song that I really got into when I heard the first demos from Erik. I think that's a great track.

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NI ROCKS – Frontiers, in particular, have a great reputation for bringing musical talent together for projects such as Nordic Union. Is there anyone else that you'd like to work with on something like that?

RONNIE – No. I've been asked to participate in other things, and I've declined some offers, but I don't want to rule anything out. I've enough stuff to keep going. I've got Pretty Maids, which is probably the most time consuming of it all. I'm doing Nordic Union which is basically a studio concept and I've also been touring a lot with Avantasia. So I've got enough. I don't necessarily want to over-expose myself, but see what happens if something pops up.

NI ROCKS – The recent Pretty Maids albums, including the new live release, have of course also been made available on vinyl. Are you a fan of the vinyl format and do you collect vinyl?

RONNIE – I still have my old vinyl collection of about 1,200 records and I'm actually glad I never sold them. I haven't bought any recently and actually my turntable doesn't really work anymore and I haven't played it for a long time. Someday I'll listen to all those old records and that'll be fun. Do you ask about the Nordic Union albums?

NI ROCKS – I'm not sure if those were released on vinyl.

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RONNIE – I don't think they are. I don't have them myself, let's put it that way.

NI ROCKS – Frontiers are actively signing up a lot of the younger generation of bands that are coming through. Do you get a chance to check-out many of the new bands, on Frontiers or other labels, and would there be any that particularly appeal to you?

RONNIE – To be honest, I haven't heard much. I don't hear much hard rock or heavy metal these days – it's too little actually. I have a tendency, on my older days, to go back and listen to some of the stuff I listened to when I was a kid actually. I listen to a lot of 70's and 60's music and some of my favourite bands from back then; not so much to the new ones. Sometimes I'll listen to something, but I wouldn't be able to say that I've got this new release that's a favourite of mine.

NI ROCKS – That's all the questions that I have for you, but we'll finish by picking another track from the "Maid In Japan" album to play. Which one would you like to play now?

RONNIE – I would play "Rodeo" which is one of the other songs which I always enjoy playing live because we always get the crowd going. It's got a nice groove.

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NI ROCKS – We'll play that one. Thanks very much for taking the time to talk to us.

{youtube}KeqSx40JC-U{/youtube}

{youtube}3v636I5HHew{/youtube}