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Interview with Gary Numan

TotalMusic: So, first up, congratulations on the new album, I know you obsess over your constant refining of tracks until you feel happy to let them go, was letting go of this album as much of a wrench as always or did someone have to physically drag it out of your hands again?

Gary Numan: "I was okay with this one actually. It's been such a long time since the last album that it began to border on the ridiculous. I've spent so much time on it, mostly in the last year, that I feel I've got the best out of the songs that I can get. It is hard though to say it's finished and hand it over. Even during the cut I was picking up on things that I could have done differently. It will always be that way for me I think. Not so much searching for perfection as constantly unsure that I made the right choices during the writing and recording."

TotalMusic: This record appears to be another step along the much harder edged industrial rock direction of your latest work but personally I can also hear strong echoes of your early work on this album, was this a conscious act or are my ears deceiving me?

Gary Numan: "No it wasn't a conscious act and I can't hear those echoes but too many people have noticed that same thing for it not to be true. My wife Gemma was the first to mention it nearly a year ago. I think echoes is a lovely way to put it. Although I don't hear them myself those that do seem to think it's a good thing, a good addition to the harder edge that my music has these days. I did work very hard in trying to make sure that every song was packed with melody. The vocals especially. I didn't want it just to be an album of hard noises with no real songs underneath. Maybe it's that concentration on tune and melody that echoes back."

TotalMusic: Why the move away from programmed to live drums (surely machines are so much easier to deal with than drummers)?

Gary Numan: "When Jerome Dillon offered to play drums on the album it had no real drumming on it so it all started with Jerome. When his drum parts came back from America and I added them to the two tracks he worked on the difference was remarkable. I thought the tracks were very high on energy before but Jerome added another level of power that was amazing. After that I got my live drummer Richard to play on another four or five tracks and again it made a huge difference. Some songs still suit a programmed method so live drumming doesn't work better on everything but, when it does, it really does lift the track."

TotalMusic: Tell us about the other people that appear on the album?

Gary Numan: "Steve Harris plays guitar on most tracks and came up with some very cool stuff. Steve has been in the live band for years so it was good to finally get him on record. Same thing with Richard Beasley, my drummer. Some great playing and it was good to finally get him on a studio album as well. Rob Holliday and Monti from Sulpher who were the co producers on the last album have also done some brilliant work on this one. They also produced several tracks in the albums early days, as well as playing on much of it, although I'm keeping the tracks they produced for bonus tracks on alternate versions of the album that are coming out later in the year. Jerome Dillon obviously, who was still in Nine Inch Nails when he played on my stuff, and so managed to

work on my two songs in between NIN tours which was a cool thing to do. Martin and Kimberlee MacCarrick played strings on two tracks and I'm very proud to have them on the album. Andy Gray did some great work on the song 'Jagged'. In fact Andy was the first producer I worked with on the album but time became an issue which was a shame as he's a good friend and very talented. We are working on another album together though so hopefully that will be out later this year as well. Finally of course is Ade Fenton. Ade came in quite late in the day to work on one track and the results were so impressive that I decided to start from scratch and re-record the entire album as well as write a load of new stuff in the light of what I thought Ade could add to it. His contribution to *Jagged* simply cannot be over stated. He was a constant torrent of new ideas and sounds, he worked ridiculous hours and always delivered outstanding results. Considering this was the first album, apart from his own, that he'd ever produced I thought the pressure alone would make him crumble but he rose to it and above it and it was an absolute pleasure to work with him."

TotalMusic: There are some very nice 'world music' (for want of a better phrase) type vibes on the album - like the opening eastern drones on 'Pressure' - where did the influence for those sounds come from?

Gary Numan: "I've long wanted to make an album that uses eastern musical influences and merged them with our western styles. This isn't that album but it does contain a few fledgling ideas in that direction. Some of the vocal lines are attempts to add that flavour but I think 'Pressure' is the most obvious. The intro to the live set is a four minute addition to the intro of 'Pressure' and develops that eastern mix idea far more."

TotalMusic: Taking a few lyrics at random, like 'I'm so cold don't leave me blind', 'I know forgiveness is the door to hell' and 'here is my small black doubt filled by tears cried for you' *Jagged* seems to be coming from a pretty bleak place, one hopes this is writing from observation rather than experience

Gary Numan: "More from memory in many instances. Life is good at the moment. I'm happy with career and family and I have few serious issues to deal with but it hasn't always been like that. Far from it. So I don't need to look too far back to relive things that were grim and unpleasant. Add to that the fact that I've been doing this for a very long time and many people have come into my life and out of it again. Some of them left a lasting impression and often not for good reasons so I can cast my mind back to them as well. Plus I can look around and see a world full of horrors."

TotalMusic: What, if anything do you believe in, especially now you are a family man in these dark and dangerous days of war, famine and frightening natural catastrophes?

Gary Numan: "I have no belief in God, any God. I have little faith, if any at all, in the leaders of the world choosing to lead us through a sense of honour and decency. So things seem a little pessimistic. However, I have lived my life in the belief that if it can go wrong then sooner or later it will, and if it can happen to someone else, then it can just as likely happen to me. So I'm prepared for bad times but trying to ensure that, by cautious planning, I might be able to sidestep them when they seem to be coming my way. It's foolish to blunder through life simply expecting everything to go well, or in some peoples case, to go badly. We do have some degree of control over what befalls us, not total control obviously, but some. We simply need to be aware of what's going on, where it could lead, and to be prepared and to have little escape plans ready and waiting. Then again I'm a paranoid fucker so that's probably all just bollocks."

TotalMusic: The last time we met you were ploughing a resolutely independent course, so how did the deal with Cooking Vinyl come about?

Gary Numan: "It's a label deal in that we, effectively, buy the use of Cooking Vinyl's expertise for the period of the album. They take a fee based on sales and we pay for everything. I like the arrangement actually and I like Cooking Vinyl I'm glad to say. So far they have been a pleasant company to be involved with and their knowledge has been very helpful. My company, Mortal

Records, was looking at setting up various licensing deals throughout Europe but a friend of mine, Doug Hart, who was helping us sort out the best way to move forward, was very keen that we went the Cooking Vinyl route. I couldn't see it at first. It didn't seem like the right move at all. But, eventually, the wisdom of Doug's advice began to make more and more sense and so here we are. So far so good."

TotalMusic: You are still experiencing something of a career renaissance, how does it feel to be an elder statesman in the music business, and how would you describe your career curve since *Pure*, through *Hybrid* until now?

Gary Numan: "I think since *Pure* I've probably done more to kill my career than at any other time. If it wasn't for Steve Malins, who pushed for and put together the *Hybrid* album as a very cool gap filler while I dragged my heels badly on the *Jagged* album, I think it would all be over. It's taken me five years to make *Jagged*, four of those because I was sitting on my arse and getting distracted. The fantastic momentum that was created with the *Pure* album and the way in which my career was turned round and given such a great upwards push was abandoned by me. I just settled back to watch my baby grow and did nothing to capitalise on that change of fortune and, as such, lost most of it. Steve was able to put *Hybrid* out, and the previous compilation *Exposure*, which also helped keep my name around. He also was instrumental in me sneaking in two top 20 singles in that time as well. If I'd been left to my own devices I'd have done nothing but watch my career disappear down the toilet. That said though, I do feel that I've come up with a pretty cool album and I am now firmly back in the saddle and eager to make up for lost time."

TotalMusic: Are the markets in the US and the UK (and Europe), exponentially different for you nowadays?

Gary Numan: America has often been good for me although nothing like the way it could be, the UK has always been the best though, by far. Europe has always been something of a mystery, so full of promise but never quite delivering. The fault is mine entirely. My strategy for Europe, and America to some degree, has been flawed from day one and I'm only beginning to see exactly where I've been going wrong. I only hope I can make good all those mistakes and do something meaningful in both Europe and America over the next few years.

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