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WITH HIS “FUCK KYUSS” MENTALITY NOW A THING OF THE PAST, JOHN GARCIA HAS GOTTEN (SOME OF) THE BAND BACK TOGETHER TO CELEBRATE THEIR LEGACY WITH THE TOURING BEAST THAT IS KYUSS LIVES!. KRIS SWALES TALKS FILLING THE VOID, FRAUDULENT FEUDS AND NEW MATERIAL WITH THE BURLY FRONTMAN.

listen without DISTRACTION

In March 1993, four relative unknowns were plucked from the obscurity of the Palm Springs, California desert to support Metallica – then staking a hefty claim for the title of biggest band on the planet – on their jaunt around Australia on the back of ‘The Black Album’. By the time they called it a day in October ’95, they’d been lavished with praise like “heavier than a truckload of Mudhoney CDs”, “should be measured by Richter not by volume” and “God’s gift to drop D tuning”, the latter from Dave Grohl himself in *Spin* magazine (though in truth they tuned down to C).

And so after four full-length studio albums in as many years, peppered with two collectors’ item vinyl platters which also found their way onto the *Muchas Gracias* ‘greatest hits’ compendium in 2000, Kyuss was no longer a band but a legend – like The Velvet Underground before them, a band whose influence and legacy far outweighed their commercial impact while extant. And like The Beatles, the volume of musical output from John Garcia, Josh Homme, Nick Oliveri, Brant Bjork, Scott Reeder and Alfredo Hernandez post-Kyuss far outweighs that of their esteemed early project.

Also much like The Fab Four, seeing any permutation of those six members sharing a stage, or indeed a studio, looked highly unlikely as Josh Homme’s career trajectory went through the stratosphere with the stoner rock throne’s rightful successors, Queens Of The Stone Age – an outfit which at various stages had included Oliveri, Hernandez and even Garcia himself on the pre-QOTSA Gamma Ray recordings. Homme has continuously hosed down reunion speculation throughout his tenure as the main man of the QOTSA collective and even Garcia, who famously got hopes up when he guested with QOTSA on Kyuss tunes *Thumb*, *Hurricane* and *Supa Scoopa And Mighty Scoop* at a California gig in December 2005, was keen to distance himself from the band in the years immediately following their 1995 split.

“There was a time in my life where I used to say ‘fuck Kyuss,’” frontman Garcia admits as he takes a break from “Mr Mom” duties caring for a sick wife and son. “I didn’t want that association with Kyuss when I wanted to go off and do my own thing, but it’s difficult if you’re the singer for Kyuss and you go off and try to do a different rock band – I’ll always be known as the singer for Kyuss. It’s something I don’t shine anymore, it’s something I embrace and it’s something that I’m very proud of, I’ve come to terms with and I’ve got a newfound love for the past.”

That newfound love has crystallised in the form of Kyuss Lives!. With its genesis in the Garcia Plays Kyuss tour, on which Garcia traipsed across Europe in 2010 delivering the band’s songs to rabid crowds, the project really gathered steam when founding bassist Oliveri and drummer Bjork joined him and guitarist Bruno Fevery on stage at France’s Hellfest. Kyuss Lives! was born, with the dual purpose of taking their classic material to a new generation of fans (as well as older ones still living the dream) and helping Garcia raise awareness for his forthcoming Garcia Vs Garcia solo project.

“I never really expected this Kyuss Lives! piece to go any further than this past trip to Europe. But the response and the amount of attention that was generated was almost impossible to refuse. Once I heard that Australia was in the mix, there was no possible way that I was going to turn that down because I’ve been waiting to get

down there [since 1993]. I’ve been trying to get down there and I’ve been trying to get [still active post-Kyuss band] Hermano down there, but it has to make sense to do stuff and this time it kind of makes sense.”

The sell-out Australian tour indicates fans have embraced the concept despite the notable absence of Homme (not to mention Messrs Reeder and Hernandez), with Garcia adamant that Bruno Fevery has stepped confidently into what is surely one of the most revered guitar slinging positions in rock music.

“Sometimes he gets some flack, but I think the majority of the time – like 99.99 percent of the time – he gets praised, because he shows an incredible amount of respect to Josh. He wants to play what Josh played. He’s a fan of Josh’s. Of course he doesn’t want to butcher the songs and I think he shows the songs an incredible amount of respect, but I also think he puts his own flair, his own personality... it’s almost impossible for Bruno not to put his own personality onto some of these songs and you can hear it in some of the solos he plays and some of the little nuances that he does. That’s something that Josh did as well. I don’t think I’ve ever heard Josh play the same – he didn’t play solos very often, but when he did there was always those subtle nuances.”

Homme is a recurring theme (for the most part

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unprompted) in Garcia’s conversation – understandable given Garcia and Homme were the constants through the group’s union as Katzenjammer while still in high school in the late 1980s, then transformation into preachers of the stoner rock old testament on instant classic albums *Blues For The Red Sun* (1992) and *Welcome To Sky Valley* (1994). And Garcia is determined to quash any rumours of beef between the pair.

“Josh Homme – everybody wants there to be this bad blood between me and Josh, when I have nothing but the utmost respect for Josh. I love him to death, I think he’s a brother of mine, I think he’s an unbelievable singer, I think he’s an unbelievable guitar player, but I think most of all where he really shines is his songwriting. There’s a certain class and a certain feeling that I get when I listen to his songs, whether it be Them Crooked Vultures or Queens Of The Stone Age – and I’m more of a fan of Queens Of The Stone Age than Them Crooked Vultures, but I think Josh knows that.”

While Garcia won’t confirm whether burnout or creative differences were an issue (for the record, Garcia credits 1995’s slightly unfocused... *And The Circus Leaves Town* as his favourite Kyuss record even though it did signal “the beginning of the end for me”), he does say even the story behind the untimely demise of Kyuss has been embellished with the passing of time.

“It’s funny,” he chuckles, “because whatever went down in the day didn’t even really go down. What went down was a ‘big blowout’ – the supposedly ‘big blowout’ was

me and Josh sitting down at a bar in the afternoon having a couple of cocktails and within five minutes of the conversation we’d decided to break up the band. We were already toasting about that time in Berlin or that time in Milan or that time in London and it was like that – and it’s been par for the course for the entire relationship between me and Josh.”

Like the “big blowout” that never was, the so-called generator parties, which saw the band drag their gear and a generator into the desert surrounding Palm Springs and jam for anyone lucky enough to know where to find them, have become part of the Kyuss mythology. While it would be all too easy to suggest the group and the desert had a synergistic relationship, Garcia believes the influence of environment on their sound was secondary to the interpersonal chemistry of the band members themselves.

“I think we were just four young punks who had a huge void in our guts and it needed to be filled. We played the music that was missing in our lives. While I was listening to Earth, Wind & Fire, ZZ Top and The Smiths and whatnot, Nick and Brant and Josh were listening to Black Flag and The Misfits and Bad Brains and The Ramones. We were on our own trips, yet we wanted to fill that void. I don’t necessarily think it came from the desert – yes, is the desert beautiful? Is it awe-inspiring?

Yes. But it’s like that old saying – necessity is the mother of invention. It was a necessity for us to go out there and fill that void. It was a necessity for us to fill that boredom. And sometimes it was sheer out of boredom that we’d get together and play tunes. There was not a whole lot to do out here in the desert back in those days. Now it’s a great place to raise a family, there’s plenty to do and the desert’s changed.

“Whether we were in the south of London playing house parties, or in the middle of Lawrence, Kansas playing in some corn fields, just us four getting together and how hungry we were was the main mix, that was the recipe for Kyuss. And we didn’t want to suck, we wanted to sound good and we wanted to make a mark with our music, which I think we did.”

And the good news is that an addition to the vaunted Kyuss discography may be just around the corner. “All four of us want to do another record and it looks like we are going to do another record. I’m very pleased in announcing that and I feel confident that we’re going to do it. We’re looking at some producers and that’s still up in the air and it’s all a bit premature, but yeah man – it’s gonna happen.”

WHO Kyuss Lives!

WHEN & WHERE Saturday 7 May, Big Top Luna Park



HERMANO

SECOND TIME LUCKY

Though Queens Of The Stone Age has been the most visible post-Kyuss vehicle, the honour roll is a decorated one: Brant Bjork’s solo career followed a stint on Fu Manchu’s drum stool, Nick Oliveri has continued to pursue Mondo Generator after his messy departure from QOTSA, eagle-eyed fans would have Scott Reeder pop up auditioning for Metallica in *Some Kind Of Monster* (he also guests on Garcia Vs Garcia) while Garcia himself moved through Slo Burn, Unida and Hermano via a guest vocal slot for Las Vegas breakbeat act The Crystal Method on their 2003 anthem *Born Too Slow* and many more besides.

For Garcia, music has until now taken a back seat since Unida’s record deal with American Recordings took a turn for the worse and he focused on family life and his other love – veterinary medicine. “I’ve been in veterinary medicine for the past eight years and I’ve always been into veterinary medicine, even when I was in Kyuss – interested and always educating myself. I’m very lucky to have two things I love to do. I would get my fix every now and again with Hermano or Arsenal or Mad City Rockers, some of these one-off projects that I go and do a jaunt with like The Crystal Method, that was done on my family vacation time from work.

“So [returning to music full-time has] been an interesting move but I’m digging it so far. I’m looking forward to coming down to Australia and celebrating the past and letting people know that Garcia Vs Garcia is coming out. Don’t sweep me under the carpet just yet. Don’t kick me to the kerb just yet. I’m not done.”

Better still, Garcia is launching his fresh assault from just up the road from where it all began rather than his (thankfully brief) home town of Los Angeles. “No, no – I’m in the desert,” Garcia assures, as if the alternative is an outer suburb of Hell itself. “I tried moving to Los Angeles for a job, for this other career that I had working for the largest animal diagnostic company in the country. I was working for them for a while and I decided that Los Angeles wasn’t for me. As soon as I moved there, the day that I started unpacking, I knew that I was coming back and it took me about a year and a half to come back. Luckily we kept our house, which is near Palm Springs – about 15-20 minutes north of Palm Springs. But yeah, I’m still here and I’m doing very well.”