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THE WINERY DOGS

By Christie Gerber

Dream Theater: fantastic. Avenged Sevenfold — love them. What do they have in common? Mike Portnoy, drummer extraordinaire, who has yet another project going on tour very soon with some very familiar and respectable faces. I've been a fan of his for years, so when I found out he was willing to speak to me about the new band and upcoming tour, I was ever so willing to give up my lunch break at work to do just that.

MP: Hello, this is Mike Portnoy here...

SW: Hey, Mike. How are you doing?

MP: Hey, how are you doing?

SW: I'm doing alright. Where are you today?

MP- I'm at home in Pennsylvania, enjoying my last couple of days before we kick off this tour.

It was at this point that I congratulated him on the new band, The Winery Dogs, which consists of Portnoy, Billy Sheehan and Richie Kotzen. I asked him what brought them together, and he told me that he and Billy had been working together for a bit, looking to do a classic rock power trio. He said they were working with someone, but it fell through, and at the suggestion of Eddie Trunk, Richie came along. Portnoy and Billy Sheehan have been in several bands together in the past and have an instrumental project currently, along with Tony Macalpine and Derek Sherinian.

Speaking of bands and projects, it seems Mike and Billy are in way too many to count. I asked him if they were in a contest to see who could be in the most bands before their head explodes. We shared a laugh over it. Mike said he's pretty sure he wins hands down, at about 24 bands. I then asked him how his head DOESN'T explode. He said he simply loves music. "It's not the traditional route for a drummer or musician to do so many things...I'm a music fan, first and foremost. I wanted to take advantage of this lifetime and make the most of it."

Back to The Winery Dogs...earlier in our conversation, Mike said that Richie was a great songwriter, so I asked if Richie wrote most of the songs for TWD on their debut album. He said that they ALL wrote and collaborated together on the songs, from scratch, bouncing ideas off of each other. "A lot of song ideas stemmed from Richie, but we all worked together...that's the beauty of collaborating with people. Seeing the chemistry and creating. For me, the beauty of working with other musicians and mixing it up and seeing what the ideas from different minds from different backgrounds come together and create."



I then asked, "Aside from your sound, how does TWD differ from any of your past bands?"

"It's totally different. The reality is, all the things I've done through the years were either rooted in prog or metal. The Winery Dogs is neither. It's just

a pure rock band. It's not a progressive, nor metal band; just based in true, classic rock, like Zeppelin or Van Halen. It's a very different experience for me. I'm getting to play music that is just straight-up, good songs. Good writing, good playing. It's not overly technical like all the progressive things I've done. To me it's refreshing because, ultimately, my background and my roots come from this style of music before I ever discovered progressive music or before heavy metal ever existed."

I sounded like a kid on their first day of kindergarten at this point. I was about to ask him a question that bands HATE, but ya' know, I felt so comfortable talking to him, I figured what the hell...so I asked him, "If two

bands had a baby, what bands would you say are the parents of TWD?" His answer actually surprised me a bit. He didn't have any problem answering with Led Zeppelin and Lenny Kravitz.



Again, I felt like a kid. I had said the day before that they sounded like Zeppelin and Soundgarden. (I'm hardly a fan of either band but when meshed together, VIOLA!) Portnoy actually liked my answer, too, which put me a little more at ease.

The tour starts in Japan, then to South America, back to the U.S. for a few teaser shows, then to Europe and finally back to the States again for a full American tour. I mentioned Baltimore, and he said he had just driven through Baltimore a few days prior coming home from vacation. Too bad TWD won't be coming through Baltimore anytime soon. I'm really looking forward to seeing them. They're touring solo!



ago, before Dream Theater. One of the most important qualities in this business is perseverance. Give yourself something to fall back on. You will be faced with obstacles. The only way to succeed is to overcome them. It's a business where only the strong survive. Don't back down. Don't give up. Don't ever stop believing in your dreams. That's how I did it. In this day and age, artists and bands are in a position to have more control over how their music gets out there. You could be a garage band and be completely worldwide and international just from the internet. Take advantage of it. Make the most of getting your music out there."

My final question to Mike was for all the 9-5'ers who want to chase and live that dream. I simply asked him for any advice for those people, so if you wanna learn from someone who knows, listen up! He said, "Last time I worked a job was almost 30 years

Solid advice, I'd say. I told him I'd stick to my day job, since I can't sing or play an instrument. He then cracked me up by saying there are plenty of people who can't sing or play their instruments but are still making money.

We ended the conversation on that note, and I thanked him for his time and wished him all the best on the upcoming tour, telling him I'd catch them wherever I can. You should, too!



The Deep End

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