

Written by John Humphrey
Wednesday, 02 May 2012 16:23



John 5, the multifaceted guitar player who always manages to strike the delicate balance between extreme technical prowess and expressive musical personality across a broad range of musical styles, is a very busy man these days. If you listen to heavier music, chances are you'll have heard his work at some point, whether it be with Rob Halford, David Lee Roth, Marilyn Manson, Rob Zombie, his own solo work, or the countless other projects he's guest on. Fango caught up with John recently to discuss his new solo album (out May 8th), the next Rob Zombie record, and his score for LORDS OF SALEM.

FANGORIA: Why don't we start by talking about the new album you have coming out. What was your approach going into your sixth solo endeavor? What sort of things inspired and influenced you during the process of making GOD TOLD ME TO?

JOHN 5: I wanted to do this DVD/CD a little different from the others I've done in the past. I try to always keep my fans on their toes, so I did something I've never done before: a half electric/half acoustic CD. I used styles of music that were new to me, such as Spanish guitar. I wanted to document the making of with a documentary. It shows me in the studio, and it shows a day in the life on the road with Rob Zombie.

FANG: Compared to your previous albums, there seems to be a much heavier acoustic presence on this one (both steel and nylon string). What made you want to explore the acoustic side more this time around? Was any of your new material picking up where you left off on some of your acoustic experiments from the EDUCATED HORSES era?

JOHN 5: I didn't pick up from anything. It's something that I didn't explore before and I wanted to do something different, and venture into the world of acoustic guitar music, which I'm a big fan of. I did a lot of studying and research on amazing guitar music and I believe I came out with a pretty good batch of songs for people to enjoy.

FANG: GOD TOLD ME TO is an interesting title. What's the significance behind the name? Is there a specific theme that runs through this album?

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JOHN 5: When I was a kid all I dreamt about and hoped for was being a professional guitar player. The very few times I'd go to church, like at Christmas time, I'd pray to be a successful, working guitar player. That's why I wanted to name it GOD TOLD ME TO. On the other hand, murderers or people who do something bad say "God told me to". It's a double entendre.



FANG: How did it come to be that Rob would paint the cover art?

JOHN 5: I asked him to do the artwork for the album and he said "What's the name of the album?" I said "God Told Me To," and he said "Okay, let me see what I can do." That was all the input I gave him and he came back with something I think is an incredible work of art.

FANG: So far, you've released a killer cover of Michael Jackson's "Beat It," the brutally heavy "Welcome to Violence," the haunting flamenco "Noche Acosador" and the atmospheric, bow and harmonic-laced "The Castle". It's a very diverse collection of songs that employ a lot of different sounds and techniques. What other sounds and styles do you play with on this album and what sort of things did you have to learn along the way?

JOHN 5: I had to learn more of a Spanish style guitar, and the rhythms that were created on the body of the acoustic guitar, plus different voicing on the guitar. I love a challenge and I love to learn, it's one of my favorite things to do in the world. Learning something new, and trying my best to master it, that's what life is all about.

FANG: What's the songwriting process like for you as a solo artist? Is it very different from working with a full band, or is your general approach pretty much the same from project to project?

JOHN 5: It is very different because I take a lot of time with writing the song. There are so many different melodies and licks to try, even so many different keys that the song is in. It usually takes time to come up with the song, play the guitar and master the song so I can go

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into the studio and lay it down in two or three takes. The songwriting process takes a long time for me because I need to have it perfect. It's like writing a three-minute symphony.

FANG: I know it's sort of like being asked to pick your favorite kid, but are there any songs that you're particularly jazzed about on this album?

JOHN 5: I love "Welcome to Violence" because of how frantic it is, and how it sounds like any minute it's going to fall apart. I also love "Noche Acosador" because I spent a lot of time with it and practiced, so I'm proud of it. I'm very proud of the whole CD.

FANG: Aside from your signature Tele's, what sort of guitars and other equipment did you use to make this record?

JOHN 5: With the acoustics, I mainly used a Martin D 45 and a Martin Nylon string guitar. For the heavy sounds, I used my signature Telecaster and Marshall amplifiers. I did use a violin bow over the acoustic guitar, which sounded really cool. I also used an old dobro.

FANG: Do you have any plans to do more of your guitar clinics in support of GOD TOLD ME TO, or perhaps some kind of solo-tour?

JOHN 5: I love doing guitar clinics because it's so much fun. With the guitar clinics, they usually want you to play for an hour, and then sign autographs. This time I'd love to come out, do a 45-minute guitar solo, play a couple songs, then meet the fans and answer questions. I really enjoy doing them. It brings me closer to the fans.

FANG: Now you also recently released a book with Hal Leonard titled THE BOOK OF JOHN: WICKED GUITAR LICKS & TECHNIQUES FOR THE MODERN SHREDDER. How did that come about and what was the process of making an instructional book like?

JOHN 5: I love to learn, myself. Hopefully, some of this will rub off on some inspired guitar

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players.

FANG: What sort of things does the book cover?

JOHN 5: I put out a book of some of my cool lick tricks, arpeggios—things like that—to inspire people on the way. When I was a kid, I really enjoyed things like that. I believe that knowledge is power.



FANG: Shifting gears, you've also been hard at work composing the score for Rob's new movie, THE LORDS OF SALEM. How's it coming along?

JOHN 5: I just completed the score, and it came out great. I'm very proud of it. It's my first time scoring a movie. I've worked on movies in the past, but on pieces and scenes, never the whole score. I'm very excited for the movie to come out and people to enjoy the music.

FANG: You providing the score for one of Rob's movies seems like a match. What's the process been like, and how did it initially come about that you would be scoring this one? Did working with Tyler Bates on THE MAN WHO LAUGHS have anything to do with it?

JOHN 5: I think working with Rob had most to do with it. Rob knows that I love all styles of music. It was a challenge because sometimes there was no time signature, no specific key, and sometimes it was just drone. I made it really interesting with violin bows on the guitar and using organic instruments to make these sounds.

FANG: Are you able to tell us anything about the sound of the score? What sort of tone or instruments you've been working with, etc.?

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JOHN 5: I've been working with every kind of instrument known to man. There are cellos, violins clarinets, French horns, upright bass... You name it, it's in there. There are many styles of music in the score. I think everybody will be very surprised and pleased.

FANG: There's talk you, Rob, Piggy D, and Ginger Fish are planning to head off the grid, come June, to sequester yourselves in the studio to work on the follow up to HELLBILLY DELUXE 2. What's the vibe going in, this time? Do you guys already have some ideas in mind?

JOHN 5: We do have many ideas in mind. We go into the studio after the tour with Megadeath. I'm looking forward to get into the studio to make another Zombie album. So far how it's shaping up, to me, this is the heaviest sounding record we've done. I rarely say that unless it's completely the truth.

FANG: What's been inspiring your makeup and costumes lately for the shows? What are some of your favorite tunes to play live?

JOHN 5: I want the makeup to look sinister, but not in a monster way. I want it to be easy to read from the crowd, large enough on my face. My favorite songs to play live are "Jesus Frankenstein" and the White Zombie classic "Creature of the Wheel." It was always one of my favorite White Zombie songs.

FANG: Finally, what do you think draws you so much to horror and the macabre and what are some of your favorite horror movies, directors, books, etc.?

JOHN 5: What I do every single night before I go to bed is watch the classic Universal horror movies such as FRANKENSTEIN, DRACULA, THE WOLF MAN, THE CREATURE FROM THE BLACK LAGOON, INVISIBLE MAN, and THE MUMMY. I love those movies so much, I've watched them my whole life. It is a ritual before I go to bed at night. I watch 20 minutes or so of the movie to relax. I would have to say my favorite is probably THE CREATURE FROM THE BLACK LAGOON. What draws me so much to horror movies, I think, is from when I was a kid growing up. I was so drawn at an early age to the classic Universal monsters. There are things that start with your childhood that will stay with you for the rest of your life.