

IKON



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IKON *has something in common with David Hasselhoff: they've both found success in Germany. Though the Hoff's musical star faded not long after his performance, attired in a piano-key tie, at the dismantling of the Berlin Wall, after almost twenty years together, IKON's European fanbase continues to be largely located in the land of beer and wurst. A quick glance at fan comments online shows that Australia's most successful goth rock band has also infiltrated as far afield as the United States, Mexico, Japan, Argentina and Peru. No wonder, then, that they've been invited back to the Wave Gotik Treffen festival in Leipzig, Germany in 2011, to celebrate twenty years of music and the re-release of their seminal album In the Shadow of the Angel.*

IKON initially found a musical niche with a Joy Division-inspired style of post-punk. As singer and songwriter Chris McCarter recalls, 'IKON fitted into the goth scene because our sound was relatively dark when we were first signed to Apollyon in 1994 and our different influences gave us an edge on other bands who were more like clones of Sisters of Mercy'. The band's first album *In the Shadow of the Angel* brought Australian music to European fans of dark alternative music, and songs such as 'Condemnation', 'Black Roses' and the band's popular interpretation of Death in June's 'Fall Apart' are still demanded on tour. 'The IKON back catalogue has been deleted for some time and we have recently acquired the rights back for the material, so we would like to remaster them and reissue them to get them out to a new audience coming up to the twentieth anniversary of IKON', McCarter says of plans to release IKON's debut album, and the band's second album *Flowers for the Gathering*, in deluxe three-CD and DVD packs.

In a time in which physical album sales are inhaling their dying breath and music stores are closing their doors, placing emphasis on music as a tangible object remains important to the band. 'I have to stay true to my reasons

for wanting to create music in the first place', McCarter says. 'As a music collector, it was very important for me to have the ultimate goal of having a vinyl or CD in my hands and that showed that I had achieved something regardless of what people ever thought of it.' This focus on the physical form, as shown in IKON's frequent use of digipacks and bonus discs, does not mean that they are luddites when it comes to distributing their music. In the past few years, IKON has made collections of rare and unreleased material available through free download compilations via their website. 'IKON has an amazing collection of literally everything we have ever done since 1988 as *Death in the Dark*', McCarter says of his archive of rehearsals, demos and live shows. 'The stuff is now wasting away, and we have already lost a lot of material due to tape degradation, so I started to go through it and find things that may be of interest to people.'

After witnessing the popularity of these downloads, IKON began to reassess how the band's music was promoted. While three previous video clips sat half-finished or lost, the single 'A Line on a Dark Day' became the first video to be released in the band's career, and it won't be the last, as McCarter notes: 'We have just recently shot a video for the

single 'Torn Apart' using the creative genius of Jason Chave, which has Dino [Molinaro, bass player] and I set in a post-apocalyptic Western bar.'

'Torn Apart' will be the final single from the band's most recent album, *Love, Hate and Sorrow*. After nearly two decades and five albums, McCarter made the decision to abandon any worries about deviating from what people expected of IKON on this album. 'I was concerned about fans' reactions but I had felt that, for my own personal sake, I needed to explore using melody and perhaps not overlook songs I would not have put forward as IKON songs in the past. For instance, I would have used 'A Line on a Dark Day' as a b-side due to thinking it too melodic. 'Torn Apart' we tried to make "darker", but it worked best the way it originally came out.' Any anxiety about IKON's minor metamorphosis was allayed when the album was released: 'The response to *Love, Hate and Sorrow* has been overwhelming and both reviews and fans alike have rated it as the best IKON album to date', McCarter says. 'I personally feel that I've pushed all my influences and abilities beyond the boundaries of what IKON had been.'

IKON's renaissance has also come about through a thorough re-embrace of their status as a rock band, with the return of former members David Burns on drums and Clifford Ennis on guitar. 'Due to the decay in rock music within the goth genre and the overemphasis on electronic music, we wanted to re-establish IKON primarily as a rock band, and we wanted the elements of live drums', McCarter says of process of mothballing the drum machine. 'Having live drums adds so much more atmosphere and energy to our performance. We were becoming somewhat complacent ourselves with our reliance on technology and wanted to thoroughly distance ourselves from the majority of the regurgitated electronic Eurodisco that is being pushed on us by the dark music industry.'

IKON's return to Europe in 2011 will therefore see the band perform with its strongest live line-up ever. Last year's *Love, Hate and Sorrow* tour took the band to the familiar haunts of Germany, Belgium and Italy, but also saw the band play to new audiences in countries such as Poland and Hungary that are starved of live alternative music. The tour also included a large co-headlining gig with dark folk band Faun in Switzerland. 'This made me realise how many different genres IKON has covered within our

career," McCarter says. "We have the folk and the electronic, as well as rock. We were able to create a set on the spot that fit in with the crowd, who all seemed to have long hair and bells around their ankles."

If there's one thing, apart from the music, that makes IKON distinctive amidst other artists in the goth genre, it's the band's failure to stand out in image terms. McCarter explains that he has only ever wanted to be a musician: 'AC/DC were criticised in the early-'80s when image became an important part of heavy metal, however stuck to the original ideology that the music speaks for itself.' Fittingly enough, IKON has been called the 'AC/DC of goth' for their shared Australian origins, but also in recognition of the mark each band has made on their respective genres. While goth has always encompassed the theatrical, McCarter laments that substance has been subordinated to style. 'We established our fanbase when music was the key focus not hairstyles and dancing girls and bands getting on stage playing with CD-Rs and laptops.' While we could not imagine the world of goth without the superficial, there'll always be a much needed gap left for substance, and IKON's music continues to fill that void, even after twenty years. Ω