

ROUNDER RECORDS ARTIST BIO

Big Wreck

Albatross

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The first question after a long absence necessarily has to be ‘why did you go away?’—which belies how happy fans are to see Big Wreck return. The truth is the details have grown hazy over the last decade and neither Ian Thornley nor Brian Doherty recalls precisely what brought about the shelving of their band. Sure, there were outside pressures and there was a machine whose component parts were no longer in sync. The simple answer on why Big Wreck is back owes to a rekindling of the friendship of these two musicians, who didn’t speak for years and, once they did, the guitars came out. “I just missed him,” says Ian frankly. “I called him just to hang out but of course knew the chemistry would be there.” Brian echoes the sentiment: “We got together and started doing the same things as when we first met, on personal and musical level. It seemed to make complete sense.”



Returning to that place where like-minded musicians communicate is to return to the wellspring of inspiration and creativity. With Big Wreck, that translates into an outpouring of rock music that is direct from the subconscious heart, and lives in the interplay of controlled horsepower and unbridled virtuosity. Big Wreck remains faithful to the Big Rock playbook but isn’t necessarily interested in the “so big it will eat your children” flavors of today. “I went for all the good stuff that’s missing on rock records these days,” says Ian in describing the recording process. “I wanted to avoid falling into the formulaic cookie-cutter trap. That’s not going to interest me so how can it interest the listener? I have to go with my gut, which means longer songs, intros and bridges which explore strange territories, more room for breathing and a different dynamic range or sonic palette altogether.” While contemplating the next studio sessions, Ian was listening to Dire Straits, Fleetwood Mac and Thin Lizzy, finding a love of the textures in clean guitars against dry drums for creating a sonic backdrop that’s rarer today.

As important as finding a more natural approach to the aural landscape, Ian was also committed (and unencumbered!) to approach the recording technique in a way that would offer least obstruction. “The first Big Wreck was recorded really quickly, almost like high-performance demos. When we got signed, that’s what they put out and it worked,” he recalls. *Albatross* would be best served by following this same template: written free from outside influence, recorded fast in the studio to match the vibe that Ian wanted to capture. “There’s no other word for it other than ‘vibe’ – it may be a cliché but you know when it’s there and you definitely feel its absence when it’s not.”

Albatross was recorded over a period of four weeks in mid-2011 at Vespa studios in Toronto with producer Eric Ratz (Billy Talent, Cancer Bats). “Working with Eric is really easy and really fast. I worked with him on *Come Again* and it was a great experience in the studio—we’re like-minded, we get along, we appreciate the same sorts of sound. I don’t want too many opinions in the studio and his I trust.” For a trusted ally outside the studio, Big Wreck relied on Nick Raskulinecz (Foo Fighters, Rush), producer of Thornley’s *Tiny Pictures*, who extended his services as an ‘executive producer’ to *Albatross*. The band would send him songs in progress and he would return suggestions for possible avenues down which to proceed. “Nick’s a great song doctor. ‘With Time,’ that was a song made of three songs which had to be sewn together like Frankenstein’s monster, only much prettier.”

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Looking back at the recording studio, says Brian, is something of a blur. “It was lightning fast. Ian had so much already written that I just had to come in, pick out some guitar parts and, before you knew it, I was done! It was crazy fast but not stressful at all. It was great to be back in that scenario and to see Ian work in the way that he likes best. So reminiscent of those first Big Wreck days.”

So what about the songs themselves? It can safely be said that Big Wreck of 2012 follows naturally from where their songbook left off a decade earlier. “Some of these songs [on *Albatross*] have been kicking around since then. A riff here and there, a melody that was just looking for its home – especially true of ‘Albatross’ [the song]. That main lick has been with me a long time, working some sort of Rod Stewart ‘Maggie May’ vibe. ‘Do What You Will’ has had different lyrics in its various incarnations but it has remained with me as I won’t deny I have a soft spot for beer-chugging rock anthems.” Ian has an admitted soft spot for Led Zeppelin and ‘All Is Fair’ treads a not-dissimilar path. “I’ve always been honest and open about my feelings for Mr. Page,” grins Ian.

“Head Together” was created by layering, over and over, vocals that almost – but not quite – line up. “I wanted to hear what it would be like to do 20 vocal lines on top of one another and then begin picking notes over top, in-between and around.” Putting new spins on old forms is a never-ending process of discovery. “You Caught My Eye” has to be the most straight-up blues song I’ve ever done, which actually gave me lots of opportunity to play within that structure for soloing, different lyrical approaches and more. The guitar sound came first and everything else followed.”

Beyond the impact of their recordings, Big Wreck retains a legacy of an exceptional touring band who deliver on stage true to all the great rock legend and lore. “We’re getting incredibly impatient,” admits Brian. “Take a group of guys like us and put them on the road for weeks, playing 5-6 nights a week, and it’s a matter of what that can become. You can come see Big Wreck in a club and appreciate the Rock ‘n’ Roll party side and have a ball AND I think there’s a lot to listen to in terms of musicianship and songwriting. There’s a lot to offer and if an audience can work with that, this will be great.”

So *Albatross* is the same Big Wreck, only different. Fresh yet familiar, there’s no mistaken the voice, the virtuosity of playing, the pen from which it pours forth. Ask Ian Thornley if Big Wreck of 2012 is the Big Wreck that called it a day back in 2002 and he sees this as the natural extension of what he’s been doing for decades now. “It’s still the same thing. I’m still looking to get off and get that feeling. I’m still searching for the perfect thing. I hope I never find it.”

Big Wreck fans may argue that they’ve found what they’ve been looking for these last ten years.