

# POWER

PLAY

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# GLENN HUGHES

MUSIC THAT RESONATES

TESTAMENT HAMMERFALL IN FLAMES THE ANSWER PRETTY MAIDS

KORN FREEDOM CALL SONIC SYNDICATE GRAHAM BONNET DARK TRANQUILLITY  
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KAYSER/ARMAGEDDON/THEOCRACY/CORNERSTONE/STEFAN BERGGREN/THE WAKES/THOSE DAMN CROWS

# Cornerstone

**This is “unhip, uncool and unsexy” music according to Michael Wachelhofer, keyboard player and songwriter with Austrian AOR band Cornerstone. Duncan Jamieson found out more in an interview rated PG.**

This is the band's third record after *'Head Over Heels'* and *'Somewhere In America'* and sees Alina Peters take over lead vocals from Patricia Hillinger in a split that wasn't amicable.

"Line-up wise it's different," Michael confirms. "Patricia, before, had involved herself full-heartedly for five years. People change though. I change, you change. It was not possible to be in a room together. It was a band issue. It's sad. If there's nothing good to say, better to say nothing."

The new album is very much a band effort, something that the previous line-up was at risk of not being able to achieve. "It had become like Patricia was the singer and we were the backing band. When we did the cover of *'Smalltown Boy'*, we were just the backing band. Neither Steve [Michael's brother and the band's guitarist] or I were happy about it. We wanted to make a pure AOR album this time. It took about five months to make, working with Harry Hess."

Ah yes, recording with Harry Hess, lead singer with Harem Scarem and now also a producer, was a great experience for the band. "I have nothing but

## Michael Wachelhofer speaks to Duncan Jamieson

positive things to say about Harry. He was very patient and absolutely professional. He'd say, 'If you're not happy with something, we can work on that.' It was a good decision to work with Harry. What Harry's done is make it great for a commercial and a hard rock audience. Harry has mixed it quite modern, especially the drum sound. I think it's a great combination to mix the old school and the new, as it wouldn't sound as good if it was just the 80s. You can hear our sound on *'Nothing To Lose'*, *'Heart On Fire'* and *'Believe In Me'*."

Michael and his brother are responsible for the song writing. "Steve and me always work together. Steve wanted to do something heavier in his preferred direction; he likes Metallica, Nightwish, Guns N' Roses, that sort of thing. I wanted it to be like Savage Garden, a heavier Savage Garden! I really like that band." In the end it came out sounding like none of those influences, but uniquely Cornerstone.

Finding a replacement for Patricia wasn't straightforward. "It was hard to do after six years, asking someone to leave. We did audition some interesting singers. We auditioned an R&B singer who

had a fantastic voice, but it didn't fit for a band who like Journey and Toto. It would have the same thing as becoming a backing band with Patricia. Then we auditioned an actor who was on an ABC show. She was great as a person, but didn't click musically."

Alina had sent a tape. "I thought, this is not so bad. I went to a karaoke bar, thinking I might find a singer there. All the singers were really, really bad and I left depressed about one o'clock in the morning. I found her audition again. There were some other songs. 'That's the singer!' I told Steve, 'this is the new singer!' We contacted her and said, 'To cut a long story short, we want you in the band.' Musically and personally we clicked."

Patricia brings something new to the band. "She can play guitar and piano. She wrote the song *'Whatever'* on the record. It's pretty different from the other material on the album. We used it to try and get into Eurovision. We ranked fourth in the national competition. We were very proud. Eclipse had tried in Sweden and Avantasia in Germany, so why not us? On the inside of the contest you can see it is very political who is chosen and who represents Austria."

Being in a band with his brother affords Michael a special working relationship, not always harmonious. "It can happen from time to time that we might say 'Go! Fuck off! We'll do it like this...' We're not diplomatic with each other, but generally it's cool. We have a blind understanding of each other. We don't need many words. We could travel back from a gig two hours away and not speak for an hour. It's not uncomfortable, it's a positive thing working with your brother."

The band are in the middle of a European tour. "We did the UK for two weeks in the summer and we're doing the German speaking countries – Germany, Luxembourg and probably Switzerland. We've been touring with Gary Howard of The Flying Pickets and Alan Parsons Project. He's great, a friend, and we played some of Alan Parson's songs. Then we need to take a break. I've been working like a mad dog, 25 hours a day since January on the music."

The reaction to the band live has been good. "We went down pretty well. The UK was fantastic. The weekend gigs were always great. During the week not so many people get out. The first gig of the German tour was on a Tuesday. How many people did we have? It was pretty full. At the end people were saying, 'Ja! Ja! One more!' We sold a shit load of CDs."

Controversially the band covered Bronski Beat's *'Smalltown Boy'*, a decision Michael now wishes had been different. "We knew this guy who had cystic fibrosis. It's a horrible disease and we saw him in hospital, in Nottingham City Hospital. We thought we could do something to help. The target was to get the song into the UK charts and make money for charity; let's do a cover of something no-one would expect. The UK likes dance music a lot. We thought about Erasure but no-one felt comfortable so we did *'Smalltown Boy'* because it's pretty cool. Ironically, it didn't chart in the UK but it entered the charts in Austria. The whole thing wasn't a great idea. It wasn't Cornerstone music. Patricia and I created it for charity, and a good charity, but I'm not proud of it musically. We're a rock band. I wouldn't do it again."

The band's promotion states that they band are unhip, uncool and unsexy. Michael confesses the idea was his. "I'm afraid it was my idea. We were part of a German rock magazine. The bands all looked identical. You could switch the band on page 3 with page 17 and it wouldn't make a difference. We were in it and we looked different. I liked that. Journey were pretty uncool." If unhip and unsexy are your middle names, then pick up Cornerstone's new album *'Reflections'* for a shot of sophisticated AOR.