

WAY TOO GOOD!

IN THEIR '70S HEYDAY **UFO** SET THE STANDARD FOR THINKING MAN'S METAL. BASSIST AND BON VIVEUR **PETE WAY** GIVES **ROCK CANDY MAG** THE EXCLUSIVE INSIDE SCOOP ON THE BAND'S CLASSIC ALBUMS FROM 'PHENOMENON' TO 'STRANGERS...' INTERVIEW BY **HOWARD JOHNSON**

SURE, WE CAN ALL agree that it was Michael Schenker's virtuoso guitar performances and Phil Mogg's uniquely emotive singing that created that unforgettable UFO sound. But it was bassist Pete Way who really summed up the UFO attitude. A true rock star in both mind and body, the man from Enfield, north London walked the walk and talked the talk 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Wild Way spanked his Gibson Thunderbird bass with obvious relish whenever UFO played live, which was often. He sniffed and snorted like it was going out of fashion and didn't care who knew it. As the old joke goes, did he take drugs in the '70s? No, he took them in the hundreds! And no matter how wasted he was, Wild Way was always the coolest rock star you ever did see in his polka dot two-piece and matching scarf.

UFO'S LONG and illustrious career as one of British rock's best-loved and enduring acts has lasted over 45 years now, running to an impressive 21 studio albums. Way has been in and out of the band over recent years, sometimes due to serious health issues like cancer and a heart attack, sometimes due (by his own admission) to attitude problems. But very few fans would argue about what is UFO's classic period, when they could genuinely lay claim to being the best hard rock band in the world.

IT STARTED with the arrival of German maestro Michael Schenker in June 1973 and ended with the release of the double live 'Strangers In The Night' in 1979, recorded before the guitarist's departure in October 1978. It wasn't much more than five years.

But during this hugely creative period the band's core line-up - Schenker, Mogg, Way and drummer Andy Parker - recorded six albums. Keyboardist Danny Peyronel played on one of them, 1976's 'No Heavy Petting', before keyboardist and rhythm guitarist Paul Raymond completed what is acknowledged as the band's definitive line-up when he joined for 1977's 'Lights Out'.

I GOT to know Pete, though not very well, just after that astonishing run of rock creativity, around the time of 1980's 'No Place To Run'. I was 16 and starting out as a rock writer. He was 29. I remember being at a party at his flat around 1983, not long after he'd left UFO and formed Waysted. He was out of it, knocking the shelving units over and proclaiming 'Wild Way' to himself in amazement when he realised what he'd done. He wore a vest with 'Cocaine' in the 'Coca Cola' writing and swapped it for a Hanoi Rocks T-shirt with my mate Paul Meredith. He went on about getting the brown powder, which I assumed was heroin, though I never saw any. Pete was a wild one all right, but he was also incredibly loveable.

SO WHEN we at *Rock Candy Mag* decided to pay deserved tribute to UFO, there was only one man we wanted to talk to. And truthfully, only one era we wanted to talk about. Luckily, Wild Way was armed and ready to give us a fascinating insight into each of the band's albums from that killer period, as well as his own personal impressions of the bandmates who made it all happen. So what are we waiting for? Let's, er, rock... ▶

PHENOMENON (1974)



“**‘PHENOMENON’ WAS** our first album for Chrysalis and it was deadly serious, as you can imagine with UFO. Not! Our whole vibe was, ‘We’re not very good, but we’ll have a go.’ I liked working at Morgan Studios, up in Willesden, north London. Sabbath were recording there, but this was before I knew Ozzy. I always saw him sitting in the coffee shop. It was the first album where we worked with Leo Lyons as producer. Leo played bass in Ten Years After. I think Chrysalis found him for us because Chris Wright, who owned the label, managed him. Leo was great. He liked the group and liked our songs, so he pretty much left us to it.

‘PHENOMENON’ IS a very commercial album, actually. At the time Michael was really into Wishbone Ash, who were very melodic for a rock band. So the songs we recorded here were all about melody, and Michael is a melodic guitar player anyway. A lot of the music we were recording was quite soft. The album’s almost acoustic in feel, except for Michael’s fantastic solos, of course. We had a very open mind about making music. For example, ‘Too Young To Know’ could have been Lou Reed. Well it could have been if we’d mentioned heroin somewhere! If you took ‘Doctor Doctor’ and ‘Rock Bottom’ out of it, ‘Phenomenon’ wouldn’t necessarily be classed as a rock album.

I ONLY got writing credits for two tracks, ‘Too Young To Know’ and ‘Oh My’ [*the rest of the album’s 10 songs were credited to Schenker and Mogg, with the exception of a cover of Willie Dixon’s ‘Built For Comfort’*]. But in truth everybody contributed to the songs. In some bands everybody would have got a cut. It didn’t work like that in UFO. Maybe I got stitched up, I don’t know. But you can’t underestimate Michael’s and Phil’s influence on everything. Michael did an awful lot of work on these songs at home on his little four-track tape recorder thing, and then Phil would put his brilliant lyrics on the top.

‘PHENOMENON’ WAS the first album we recorded that we thought was really good quality. But I’m still surprised by the way the songs have stood the test of time.”

FORCE IT (1975)



“I REMEMBER recording ‘Force It’ in two different studios [*Morgan Studios and Wessex Sound*], but I can’t remember why. I’d guess it was for practical and economic reasons, getting cheaper studio time in one or the other, and being able to record in one when the other wasn’t available.

Leo Lyons produced because we were happy with what he’d done on ‘Phenomenon’. Again, he pretty much let us get on with it. He’d tell us if there were a couple of wrong notes here and there. But as long as he liked the arrangements, he didn’t really try to interfere.

I THINK the sound of the band toughened up on ‘Force It’, because we’d done such a lot of touring with ‘Phenomenon’. By this stage we knew we wanted to be a hard rock band. I suppose we were metal, but with a ballad or two between us. But even at this stage I think we had our own style. We never felt there was any point going, ‘Oh, Sabbath are doing well in the American charts. Let’s do a Sabbath-type song.’

We didn’t outright copy anybody, but we certainly had influences. We listened to all sorts of music, and probably stole loads of different stuff, but it all came together in a style that

was uniquely ours. That meant we could take on most types of music, but we liked to add a good punch on the nose. We used to turn it to 11... all the time.

‘FORCE IT’ had songs on it that became ‘must haves’ for the live show. ‘Shoot Shoot’ felt like an automatic choice straight away, as did ‘This Kid’s’ and ‘Out In The Street’. Some of the other songs here, like ‘High Flyer’, always felt more like studio tunes, though I dare say we could still have played them live and they would have sounded good.

I had a sole songwriter credit on the album for ‘Too Much Of Nothing’. I think that was simply because we didn’t have enough songs. I said to Phil, ‘I’ve got this’, but it was really something I’d done in my bedroom. Leo said he liked the idea, and Phil didn’t attempt to rewrite the lyrics, so it went down pretty much the way I’d originally done it. I’m a bit embarrassed about the lyrics, because I wouldn’t write them like that now. I do think the solo Michael does on that song is amazing, the way he harmonises all the way through with feedback. I’ve rarely heard a solo like that.”

Photo: Getty Images/Cus Stewart. Photoshop work by Nicolas Senegas

