

OF ALL THE BANDS who have yet to grace the cover of *Rock Candy Mag*, by the far the biggest number of reader requests has been for Thin Lizzy. We can only apologise that it's taken until now to bestow that honour upon them, but better late than never. It's true that the Irish/American/Sometimes Scottish/English band that won over so many hearts in the '70s and early-'80s never made it to the dizzy heights of US stadium rock gods during their heyday like most of the acts we feature on our front page. But Lizzy's sound – a muscular attack based around those delightful two-guitar harmonies and bassist, vocalist, and frontman Phil Lynott's undeniable charm – merited as much. A storyteller delivering tales in a warm, understated style, Lynott's talents alone really should have taken Lizzy to a seat at the top table worldwide.

"America was a big priority for us," US-born guitarist Scott Gorham tells me as we settle in for what turns out to be a wide-ranging interview. "There's no doubt about it. America's my home country and nothing would have pleased me more than becoming big there. And Phil just loved America. The first time we landed in New York back in 1975, he said, 'Man, we have *arrived*. I love this country!' And we hadn't even played a show there! Phil was sold on the States because he'd seen so much American television, and suddenly he was in the land of all those TV programmes he'd grown up with! He totally fell in love with the place and he really, *really* wanted the band to be successful there. And unfortunately for whatever reasons... There was some bad luck involved. But I have to admit that we also cancelled shows too many times when we couldn't show up because of hepatitis and all that stuff..."

Ah, yes, the debilitating effects of drugs on Thin Lizzy is something we have to get into later. But the Scott Gorham who pops up on my Zoom screen today looks as fit and healthy as any 71-year-old has a right to. He's full of smiles and bonhomie, despite the frustration of not getting the technology to work properly. Fortunately, Gorham has his longstanding wife, Christine, on hand to deal with the issue, which she does with patience while throwing me a 'what can you do?' look.

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HE MIGHT not know much about Zoom, but Gorham has always known his way around a fretboard. Don't listen

to his erstwhile guitar partner in Lizzy, Brian Robertson, who once ungraciously claimed that "we didn't really want Scott in the band, but there were reasons for having him there. He was American and he had long hair. It was nothing to do with the guitar playing." Gorham was an integral part of the band for the way he defined the Lizzy harmony guitar sound. No matter who he was standing next to – Gary Moore, Robertson, John Sykes – Gorham made sure the Lizzy vibe remained intact, the

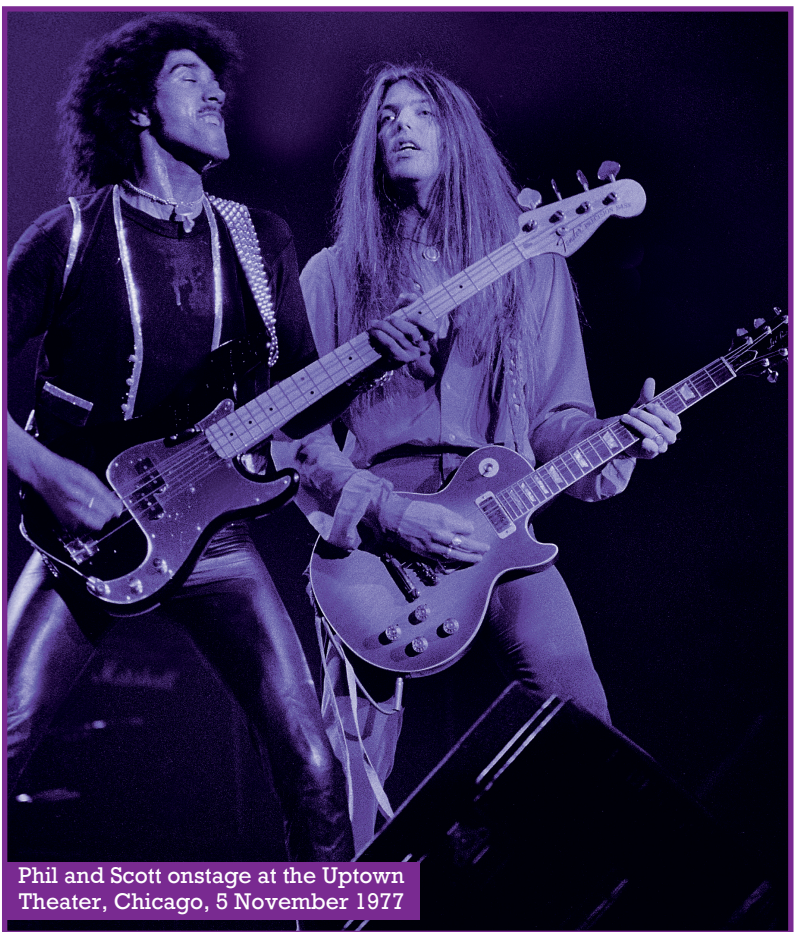
perfect foil to Lynott's unique approach to rock singing.

"Phil had this really great, comforting baritone voice," explains Gorham. "As soon as you heard it you knew *exactly* who was singing. Those vocal gymnastics you used to hear in the '70s from a lot of the hard rock singers? Phil wasn't into that high operatic thing at all. He was much more drawn to a kind of R&B-type way of delivering a song, rather than anything related to that cock rock. And I liked that. A lot of times we'd play to that vibe. We'd start more of a funk groove to play to his strengths as a vocalist, because his singing is really what set Thin Lizzy

aside from everybody else."

Lizzy sure did sound different from many of their peers. At a time when rock was dividing into two camps – the overtly musicianly likes of Deep Purple and Led Zeppelin complete with helium-ingesting vocalists on the one hand, the diluted radio-friendly AOR gang on the other – Lizzy didn't really fit into either bracket.

"One of the things that probably held us back from being massive in America," says Scott, "is the fact that we were always trying to be so original, so unlike anybody else. And that became a little bit of a problem, because when it came time to show your songs to everybody in the band, the last thing you ever wanted to hear from anybody was, 'Hey, you know what? That sounds like such-and-such?' Suddenly you're defending yourself. 'Man, that doesn't sound like *that*. What are you *talking* about?' And unfortunately some of the things we were working on got thrown to the side because just one person said it sounded like something else. I think if we'd kept some of that attitude out, then it might have helped us."



Phil and Scott onstage at the Uptown Theater, Chicago, 5 November 1977



It might well have helped Thin Lizzy commercially, but then again it would almost certainly have made the band more homogenous, less Lizzy-like, just another overdriven group of longhairs in the pack.

"Maybe you're right," muses Scott. "I've said all this to a number of Lizzy fans, and they've said, 'No, no. That's what we *like* about you.' It is true that each album is different. We weren't just traveling the same road each time. We never knew what we were going to get, and you never knew what we were going to give. We'd never walk in with an attitude of, 'OK, this is the style we're going for on this album and this is the sound we're going for.' It changed literally from track to track. It was never, 'This is the way we're going to do this one. This is how this album is going to be.' So that was the way we did it, and I've always wondered whether that was part of the reason we never broke America, the fact that we didn't give the fans a certain familiarity every time. Was that part of the problem?"

SO HERE comes the drug part we mentioned earlier. I put it to Scott that perhaps more crucial to the question was the fact that just when Lizzy were on the cusp of a breakthrough, hardcore heroin use – particularly by Gorham and Lynott – meant they never really had their eye fully on the ball.

"At the start most of it was recreational. But then what I think happened was this. Phil obviously took the drugs, and he wrote a couple of things that came out great.

So then he mistakenly thought, 'Well, it came out great *because* of the drugs. They really helped me out, really helped me to do this. So this is how I get my inspiration and that's how I'll be able to create hit records.' Little did we all know at that point, though, that the more you take the drugs, the *worse off* you're going to be. You're *not* going to become a better person. You're *not* going to be a better musician. You're *not* going to record better songs or albums. You're just not, not, not! And it took Phil finally *dying* in 1986 for a lot of people to realise that drugs are just not the way. And what I can remember when I finally got free of the whole heroin thing was that I suddenly realised that musical pennies were dropping into my hand daily. I suddenly realised that my guitar playing had been hindered, my songwriting had been hindered, *because* of the drugs. Y'know, drugs are fun until they really get a hold of you, but they won't make you *better* at anything."

There's plenty of footage available on YouTube that pays testament to that. In the fading days of Lizzy in 1983, Phil Lynott looked like a dead man walking. The famous roguish glint in his eye completely extinguished, his enthusiasm for being on stage all but gone. Fortunately for us, though probably not for Lynott, films of the 1970s period of the band's existence suggest that Thin Lizzy escaped the worst of the ravages of Scott Gorham's and Phil Lynott's heroin addictions during that period. And if you're after proof positive of that, then look no further than the recently released DVD of