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Jim Kerr at Zermatt Unplugged Kaufleuten: Simple Minds is like a football team

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On 11th November Simple Minds will release SIMPLE MINDS ACOUSTIC. This follows several years in which the band has gone from strength-to-strength, becoming more relevant than ever. Their 2014 album BIG MUSIC received across the board praise, with MOJO Magazine declaring it “ Their best album in 30 years”.

SIMPLE MINDS ACOUSTIC continues the band’s artistic quest with a one-off album release of stripped down and re-imagined songs spanning their eclectic and illustrious career.

The fact that the album sessions entailed a sentimental return to their Glasgow roots for Jim and Charlie Burchill helped, with some songs recorded in Gorbals Studio, a former railway workers social club located a stone’s throw from the high-rise estates of the city’s South Side where the pair took their first musical steps.

The band began in 2016 by putting together an acoustic set for the Zermatt Unplugged Festival(April) in the Swiss Alps. They spent weeks working on meticulously layered acoustic arrangements of their best-loved songs. After the succesfull gig, Simple Minds returned on the 29th October to Zermatt Unplugged Kaufleuten in Zürich. Nine hours before the gig, Frontview Magazine meets Jim Kerr for a chat.

I suppose Mel Gaynor & Andy Gillespie will not be on stage tonight?

Of course there is no keyboard and no drums,of course they would be there, but you can’t do something different and not do ‘it’different.

The last time I saw Mel, he was doing his solo project . I spoke to Andy yesterday, we’ll play in Australia with the full band in January and we were talking about rehearsals for that. I’m sure they would love to be playing, it’s a bit like a football team, certainly they are on the bench. Simple Minds are different line-ups. Maybe one day, I get left on the bench! They will do an instrument or two to leave me out!(*laughing*)

Who are the additional band members for the acoustic set?

In this line up, in this acoustic band, first of all they are all guitar players because it had to be acoustic. Gordy Goudie, who has been a surrogate member of Simple Minds for many years. He has written songs with us, he did some production. He’s like a Glasgow fix-it guy. Gordy is playing guitar with Charlie Burchil & Ged Grimes. The real novelty ,the real newness is the percussion player, Cherisse Osei, she’s absolutely amazing. She will bring energy and movement.

There’s a thing about acoustic, everyone does acoustic differently and when you say acoustic, you imagine two guys sitting in a stool and some candles,it had been a bit rigidous. We didn’t want to do that, we wanted to blow it up and still have a kind of Simple Minds dimension.

Simple Minds played in Zermatt in earlier this year. How did you experience the environment?

Zermatt is an amazing place. The festival is in a tent, but a lovely theatre. They’ve established it for many years, so they know what they are doing. But it was also for us unique,it was a bit of a test, a worthwhile experiment. The first time that we did something like that. If that hadn’t gone well, we would not have done the album, we would not be setting here.

Winter is coming in December, never dreamt of a Simple Minds Christmas song? You made already one by singing in Don’t you forget about me “snow keep falling, snow keep falling” in Zermatt Unplugged.

There’s a song on the new album “Long back train”, which lyrically, it isn’t Christmas, but there’s something about it. We feel like it’s Christmas, it’s Winter when we play that song.

Where did the idea start to play acoustic and to release an acoustic album? Simple Minds played already acoustic sessions at Absolute Radio and at the Dingwall’s.

To be honest, the first time it came up, it was back in the real MTV Unplugged Days. We’ve been asked, but we didn’t do it for lots of reasons. In 1985 we did an acoustic version of “She’s a river”, not really acoustic, but we took everything out,just a guitar and a voice. We thought, that’s sounds great. But doing an whole album or gig, that sounds great, is a different test. We also did promo for the album Big Music with a few acoustic songs, and we could feel everytime like “is this do-able?”. But I suppose, going to Zermatt again, and the next day we knew we are gonna do it.

It has also to be said, as well continuing recording the follow up to Big Music, we didn’t really stop that to work on this, we were working both at the same time.

How would you describe Charlie’s unique guitar sound?

I think that this is Charlie’s best ever work. You can hear the space around it. It speaks to you even more. It’s not for no reason that we put the guitar on the front of the album, what we never have done before. It reflects Charlie’s work on the record.

On a beatiful autumn day like this, are you an early bird, wants to see the city awakening?

Yes, I wake up about 6.

How was it to make a few radio-sessions this year?

I enjoyed it very much. It was a bit of a favour to a friend who works there. I did one show, and he said, “this is great,could you do more?”and I did some in London as well. I still love radio as a medium.

We met the other day, Steven Van Zandt, with who obviously we did things with in the past and he’s got a great radioshow as well as playing and touring. With the technology now, you can do the stuff and send it to them and they put it together. I think it’s good to see people’s taste, as long as you’re allowed to choose. I wouldn’t do it, if they were saying, “you have to play that song”.

Is it right when I say the Simple Minds is Bigger than music, it’s also art because of the lyrics, the albumcovers,...

Certainly, I hope so. It all has to say something. We put a lot of time in trying to make the whole vision complete. (symbols,titles) It’s a whole production, rather than just say “here’s the music”. And when you go on tour as well, people often say it’s a Simple Minds lighting, or it’s a Simple Minds approach, that’s always a compliment. The great bands, artists had always a kind of a solid vision that they put it across, that’s because of the artwork.

Simple Minds music is not based on the art? Bryan Ferry’s music is based on the art that he created.

Oh really? Bryan makes his music, Charlie makes our music. So you would have to say to him,” what inspired this music”? And he knows. Bryan Ferry went to the art school.

The Night of the Proms is also coming end November. When do the rehearsals start?

We did a couple Night of the Proms earlier in the year. Of course we remember our friends ,’the Belgian guys’ of the Proms and the German guy who did the promo for Life in a day. He asked always, when will you come back? And in november we had one month free and we said “let’s do it now”.

Can you lift a corner of the veil about the new album after Simple Minds acoustic?

We don’t know a date. 2017 or wait till 2018? No one really knows when the Simple Minds anniversary is. We got together first time in November 77,but our first gig was January 78. First album & first single was March 79. So.....which one? I say 77! Because it looks better on a t-shirt. (laughing!) But in 78 we first went out & played music.

Does it feel still exciting , the first show tonight of the new acoustic set?

Although we did the acoustic set in Zermatt, things did even changed a lot since then, the format is very new to us. There are songs tonight that we didn’t play in Zermatt. Arrangements have changed, there are new band members. It’s new, and when you are new , it’s great. There are not very many things that Simple Minds do, that you say” that is new”, we’ve never done this before. There is obviously a newness about this, so it will be much better after 30 gigs. But sometimes the spark about the freshness can be good as well.

SIMPLE MINDS ACOUSTIC – CD TRACKLISTING

1. The American
2. Promised You A Miracle (featuring KT Tunstall)
3. Glittering Prize
4. See the Lights
5. New Gold Dream (81-82-83-84)
6. Someone Somewhere in Summertime
7. Waterfront
8. Sanctify Yourself
9. Chelsea Girl
10. Alive And Kicking
11. Don’t You (Forget About Me)
12. Long Back Train

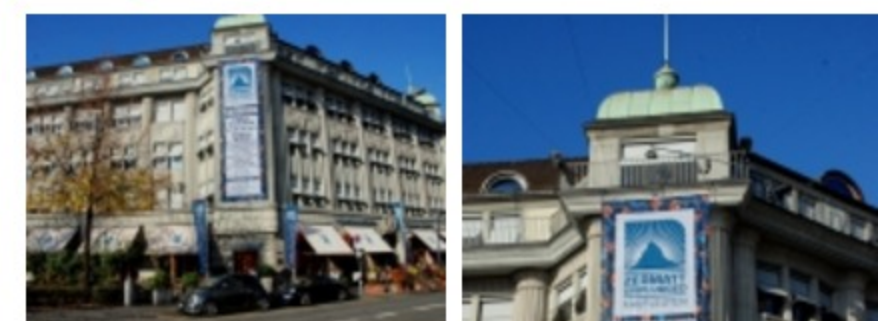
VINYL EXCLUSIVE BONUS TRACKS

1. Stand By Love
2. Speed Your Love To Me
3. Light Travels

SIMPLE MINDS ACOUSTIC will be available on CD, Digital Download and the stream from November 11 th. The heavyweight vinyl LP will be released on November 25th.

Photobook:

Zermatt Unplugged Kaufleuten 2016



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