

Q&A



Jonas Fairley, D.J. Smith, Jake E. Lee, Ronnie Mancuso

Fred Morledge

JAKE E. LEE

The ace guitarist gets back in the hard rock game with a melodic new set

VETERAN GUITARIST JAKE E. LEE hadn't recorded an album of original music since his acclaimed solo *A Fine Pink Mist* in 1996. Like a proverbial metal Moses, the ex-Ozzy Osbourne axeman wandered in a self-imposed musical exile. "I outlived my shelf life as far as being cool," says Lee, 56. "The only calls I got were from bands that loved Ozzy and wanted his guitar player." Though maintaining he was happy doing nothing, Lee has returned with the hard rock album *Red Dragon Cartel*, which is also the name of his new band. He wrote the music but co-produced with Kevin Churko.

What motivated you?

To make me excited. When we started, I told Kevin, "Look, I don't need to make a comeback. If I'm going to do a record, it's going to be music I feel excited about playing. It's not going to be because this is expected or this will make the most money." You try to make a record to please others and you're going to disappoint everybody.

What's your songwriting process?

The advent of digital recording gave me a whole new way of doing things where

I could sit by myself and write music. I could come up with my own drum parts, play bass, and get a software synthesizer or keyboards. I was happy just being at home, writing music and coming up with ideas, which I did the whole time I was gone.

Did you miss the studio?

I did start to miss interaction with other musicians. But because it was all me, I didn't have to argue with anybody. Everything was great, but after a while I kind of missed bouncing ideas off of other musicians, and guys saying, "Hey, I've got a perfect part to fit in there."

How'd you snag Robin Zander?

"Feeder" was the first song written. The track sounded good and I'm like, "[Cheap Trick's] Robin Zander would kick ass on this song." [Bassist] Ron Mancuso got the song to Robin and he said, "Yeah, I'd love to sing on it." After listening to it I got so excited and felt more alive than I had since Badlands [Lee's band from the '90s]. That's when I said, "I'm pulling my toe out of the pool and I'm diving in. Yes, let's do this."

What was your approach to solos?

All the solos were six takes, and that was it. We did it with no preconceived notions as to what I was going to do in the solo, which is a lot different from how I've done it. There were times I'd do off-the-cuff solos with Ozzy and Badlands, but not many. Ron would give me a glass of Jameson and say, "OK, let's do six takes." I was happy with 'em.

Are you happy with the record?

I'm satisfied with it. I'm never finished and I'm always thinking I can do something better. At some point you just have to go, "That'll work. I quit." I don't try to sound like people. Obviously with Ozzy, I didn't want to sound like [the late] Randy Rhoads. Not that I didn't love his playing, it's just that Randy's Randy.

How's it feel to be back?

Feels better than I imagined. For people to hang on for so long and hope that I would play again, I don't particularly think I deserve it. The last couple of shows we did, I look out and I make eye contact with somebody and they get all excited and it's, "I love you, Jake." It's very heartwarming.

—Steve Rosen

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