

Q&A



ALICE COOPER

America's favorite shock rocker dreams up an all-new nightmare

IT'S ALICE COOPER'S PARTY, AND HE'LL invite whomever he likes. "Anytime someone tells me I shouldn't have a particular artist on an album, I take that as a challenge," declares Alice Cooper. "I think, 'I'll take that person and create a situation where you see a different side of them.'" That attitude led the legendary shock-rocker to recruit such unlikely guests as pop star Ke\$ha, country legend Vince Gill, Drive-By Truckers' Patterson Hood and young guitar phenom Orianthi (now a member of Cooper's touring band) to perform on the new sequel to his spooky 1975 concept classic *Welcome to My Nightmare*.

There are also familiar faces on *Welcome 2 My Nightmare*, most notably the

surviving members of Cooper's original band from the late '60s and early '70s: guitarist Michael Bruce, bass player Dennis Dunaway and drummer Neal Smith. Cooper reunited with the group at the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame induction ceremony in March. "It was like we had never missed a day," says Cooper, who tapped original *Nightmare* producer Bob Ezrin to helm the new project. There's even a '70s-vintage tune from the Cooper vault, "Something to Remember Me By," co-written by former guitarist and writing partner Dick Wagner.

Welcome 2 covers a wide range of styles as it tells the tale of a man journeying through a vision of hell that may or may not be real (complete with Ke\$ha playing the

devil). "It goes in many different directions, just like the original *Nightmare*," says Cooper, 63. We caught up with him during rehearsals in Los Angeles to discuss this unexpected union of his past and present.

What triggered a *Nightmare* sequel?

I knew early on I'd work again with Bob. And we were fortunate to be in a situation where there was no one breathing down our necks, saying this or that type of album has to be done. I told him, "If we're going to work together again, let's do something really special." It occurred to us it was the 35th anniversary of *Welcome to My Nightmare*. We started thinking about the things that would constitute

nightmares for Alice in today's world. Disco was something that sprang to mind right away.

Didn't you once do a disco song?

That was "(No More) Love at Your Convenience," from the *Lace and Whiskey* album [1977]. That song was *too good*—it wound up being a song people actually liked. I hated it. I thought, "No, no, no, you don't want to like that!" That song wasn't defined strongly enough as a satire, but this new song, "Disco Bloodbath Boogie Fever," certainly is. Lyrically it destroys the concept of disco.

How was working with Bob again?

We pushed one another. I would say things like, "Bob, I need you to come up with a keyboard part that's similar to the piano on 'Steven,' from the first *Nightmare* album." I also pushed him to do "The Underture," the track that concludes the album. It's a bit like "Grand Finale," from the *School's Out* album [1972]. He worked really hard on that one. Bob also directed my singing in the studio. He'd say something like, "I don't want the stage voice, I want the clear voice." Or, "I want the 'pop singer' Alice on this one." "I want the garage-rock singer." It's like changing guitars.

Why Ke\$ha as the devil?

My thinking was, if the devil were to show up in an Alice nightmare today, it wouldn't be in the form of Vincent Price or Christopher Lee. It would be a diva, a figure who's the exact opposite of Alice. Ke\$ha loved playing the devil. The most disturbing lyrics in "What Baby Wants" are hers. That stuff about bathing in your blood is all her doing. She understands that people see her as a dance diva, yet she told me she wants to be the female Robert Plant. I told her she needed to put a good band behind her and start writing rock songs.

And the original band is back.

That was decided right after the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame induction. Bob was at the ceremony, and I suggested to him that we invite them to play on the album. He said we should take it a step further and get them to actually write songs. It was a situation where we tried to have each of them play on the songs they wrote with us. They play every instrument on "When Hell Comes Home" on the new album. You can hear that great '70s sound at the conclusion of that song. It's built into their DNA. It tied up some loose ends for me. Getting them on the album was a cool thing, and of course it's great for the fans.

What's your relationship like now?

We were high school classmates before the band was even conceived, so these are my childhood friends. Even when the band broke up there were never any lawsuits or nasty phone calls, anything like that. Everyone was wishing one another well—and at the same time, we all knew there would be moments when we would get back together. I'm sure we'll do more things together in the future.

Why do the Dick Wagner song?

Dick and I wrote "Something to Remember Me By" in 1975 around the time of the original *Nightmare* sessions. With each subsequent album I tried to include that song, but it never fit properly. For this album I rang up Dick and asked if he still had the tape. First thing Bob said after he heard it was, "When was this written?" He felt it was exactly in the

a bit of a prog-rock song. She'll fly right through "Under My Wheels" and all the other riff-rock stuff.

Might you play the *Nightmare* albums back to back?

If I have my druthers we may go into a theater in Chicago or Pittsburgh or somewhere and do that for a couple of weeks. The first act would be *Welcome to My Nightmare*, followed by an intermission, and then the second show would be this album, *Welcome 2 My Nightmare*. Both albums in their entirety, accompanied by the right special effects for each of them. The music is all there. It's written just like a play.

Is it hard to get out of character?

To try to live that lifestyle would have been a lie. I thought it was much more interesting that there were two of us. Alice has a life of



At the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame induction ceremony, New York, March 2011

Lucas Jackson/Routledge/Landow

'Alice has a life of his own, and I let him have the run of the stage.'

vein of "You and Me" and "I Never Cry," and that it fit perfectly the vibe of those mid-'70s ballads. It turned out really well.

What will Orianthi bring to the shows?

I felt it would be interesting and a bit of an oddity to have a girl in the band. But she doesn't play guitar like a girl. She's a premier lead guitarist, and she can really shred. A song like "Halo of Flies," from the *Killer* album [1971], will be an interesting challenge for her, because it's

his own that exists only onstage, and I let him have the run of the stage. But my other life is my own, and it has more aspects: I play golf, I write, I'm a husband and father. I'm many things besides Alice.

—Russell Hall



'If someone says I shouldn't work with a particular artist, I take that as a challenge.'