

PRETTY MAIDS

The Danish maids have become ladies

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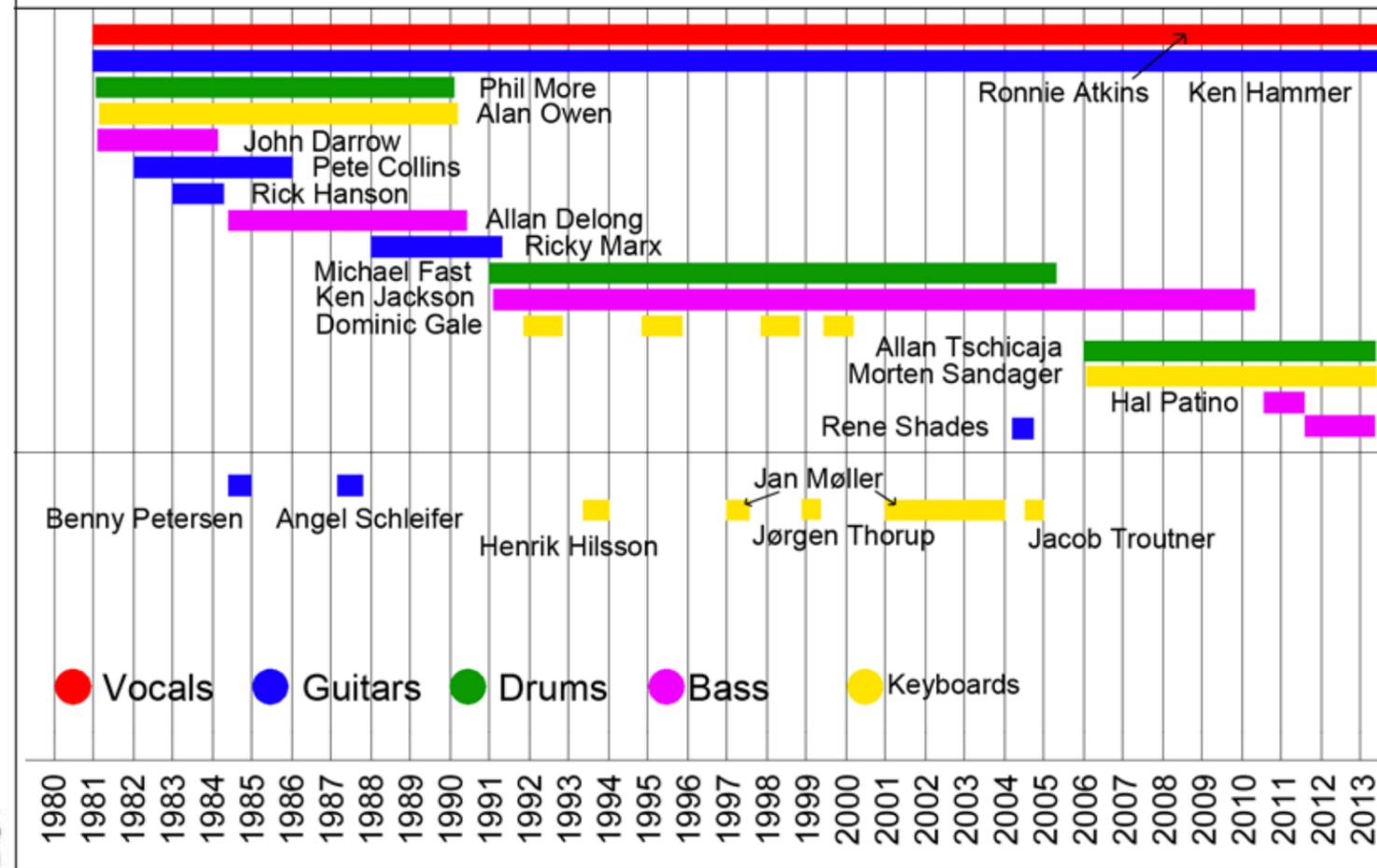
'Pandemonium' set some high expectations on **Pretty Maids** and some 30 years in to their career a lot of people thinks this band sounds the best they've ever have. With their most recent album, 'Motherland, fresh out in the stores I had a little chat with vocalist Ronnie Atkins about the present, past and the future...





Pretty Maids medlemmar 1980-2013

Source: Wikipedia
Graphic: Caj Källmalm



Rock stars, always late - everyone knows that. But on this occasion it was actually me who was late. Some 20 minutes after our set interview time I call Ronnie, luckily he's in good spirits and isn't the least upset about my lateness. Some big apologies later we are talking the new album but we'll get to that later.

The history

Pretty Maids started to play together in 1981, started by Ronnie Atkins and Ken Hammer. The band has gone through plenty of members but the core with Ken and Ronnie has remained intact through all these years.

In 1984, the band released their debut 'Red Hot And Heavy', fol-

lowed by 'Future World' in 1987. Around these years they also released the EPs 'Pretty Maids' (1983) and 'Red Hot And Heavy' (1985). By this time three members had already left Pretty Maids and they continued to do so.

Five more members left the band in the 90's and another three has left in the last ten years. The current line up consist, besides Atkins and Hammer, of Rene Shades (bass), Allan Tschicaja (drums) and Morten Sandager (keyboards) which all has come in to the band since 2006.

The discography has seen 13 full-length releases to date, three live albums, some EPs and a couple of compilations (see the full discography to the right).

After 'Future World' the band released 'Jump The Gun' in 1990, 'Sin-Decade' in 1992, 'Stripped' in 1993 - an acoustic album - and 'Scream' in 1994.

In 1997 the band returned after a few years off (during which we got the first live album from the band) with 'Spooked' and continued by released two compilations - one best of in 1998 and a compilation of early and rare material in 1999, along with another studio album, called 'Anything Worth Doing Is Worth Overdoing'. 2000 saw the band release 'Carpe Diem' and then they released 'Planet Panic' in 2002 and the second live album in 2003. 'Wake Up In The Real World' from 2006 was the first

album with almost the complete line-up that the band have today and after this they've only had one member change, which came after 'Pandemonium' in 2010.

About the band

The current line-up is working really well at the moment and Ronnie thinks they have the best line-up they've ever had, or at least one of them and he hasn't felt this comfortable with a line up for a very long time.

- It really feels great at the moment and has ever since 'Pandemonium'. I haven't felt like this since the 80's and I think this could very well be the best line-up we've ever had. All the guys have the same sense of humour

and we can talk about everything. We just have a good chemistry, and that affects the music because even on bad days it still feels good and when we play live then it doesn't matter as much if I have a bad night because the rest will cover for me.

The difference between this and earlier line-ups isn't that big but earlier things just haven't worked out in the long runs.

- It's always started pretty good and fun but after a while it's become worse. And it just hasn't felt as fun before as it does right now.

You say that this might be the best line-up you've had but since there's been so many different versions of

Pretty Maids diskografi

- Pretty Maids (EP 1983)
- Red Hot and Heavy (1984)
- Future World (1987)
- In Santa's Claws (EP 1990)
- Jump The Gun (1990)
- Sin-Decade (1992)
- Offside (EP 1992)
- Stripped (1993, acoustic album)
- Scream (1994, released in Europe 1995)
- Spooked (1997)
- Massacre Classix Shape Edition (1999)
- Anything Worth Doing Is Worth Overdoing (1999)
- Carpe Diem (2000)
- Planet Panic (2002)
- Wake Up to the Real World (2006)
- Pandemonium (2010)
- Motherland (2013)
- Live & Best of: Screamin' Live (1995, live compilation)
- The Best Of: Back To Back (1998)
- First Cuts and Then Some (1999)
- Alive At Least (2003, live compilation)
- It Comes Alive (2012, live CD/DVD)



Pretty Maids, is there any line-up you would consider more "classic" or "real" than the others?

- I think back in the 'Red Hot And Heavy' days when we kind of invented ourselves and found our style and sound - that's probably a bit more than the others but we were younger then and things felt more important in a way then - you took everything so much more serious than today. I mean, it's easy for me to say that this current line-up is the best at the moment, but back then it was also

great and then things got worse. But I think we've gone a bit back to the roots with our recent sound and albums and I think this is the best I've felt since '87.

Could it be a Pretty Maids without you and Ken? Could the members that are in the band continue if you didn't want to do this anymore?

- I think it would be very strange if they did because if we didn't want to continue the band would probably die off, but I've never thought about that so it's a

difficult thing to answer. I think if me or Hammer didn't want to play and the other one did it could probably work, but I don't think I would want to continue without him - it wouldn't feel right. But if he wanted to and found a new vocalist, I guess it would be fine... I don't know.

A new album

With 'Motherland' just out in the stores the band is in good spirits and everyone is really happy.

- Yeah, it feels great! Everyone

is happy, we've had good reactions so far, good reviews and it just feels fine. It's a bit like a new baby, so everyone is happy that we've had such good reactions so far.

Ronnie means the band has felt bigger pressure for this album with 'Pandemonium' being something of a success.

- We have felt a bit anxious of what people would say since we've felt more expectations after 'Pandemonium' but it's really been good reviews. I've seen

many and it's been some average reviews but mostly good, mostly great! I can't remember when we last got this good reactions for an album. It's not too different from 'Pandemonium' as we've had almost the same band and the same team around the album but it's a bit different.

The cover art suggest it's more of a reflecting, dark album and Ronnie agrees.

- I think the music is fresh and I think we've gone a long way, it almost marks a new era for

us. It begun already on 'Pandemonium' and when we started to work with this album I remember thinking "what the hell are we doing?" because we just wrote and worked with what we came up with and there was a lot going on and once we'd recorded everything I just put everything away for a while and then took it up after I'd had some time off. I think it's very different from when we invented ourself with 'Red Hot And Heavy' and 'Future World' but it's just the way

we wrote it, it's what came at the time and maybe it's a bit deeper and moodier album but it's still what we wanted to do and we're very happy with the result.

In Controll

I think the whole concept around 'Motherland' is profiled in a tone in both sound, style and look, which is a concept Ronnie means that the band themselves are completely in control of.

- We control everything, to 100%. We decide what goes on the album and what's not - even though we don't do all of it, we still have the final call. However, 'Motherland' is not a concept album and the artwork is not really connected to the music, the artist did the artwork and we liked it and the songs are just 12 songs.

Ronnie also means the band, although a live band that likes it best on tour they still don't have any problems focusing on their task once they are in the studio.

- When we're touring we're a live band and when we're in the studio we're a studio band, then when we go back on tour we're a live band again. Once in the studio we need to focus on that

and we don't have any problems doing so but mostly I would consider us a live band. It's just something standing face to face with the fans in the audience. I like to do both things.

So talking about live, when will we see the band on tour the next time?

- We're starting the tour in May, doing a lot of summer festivals and a few different projects as well and then in September we're heading out on the big tour. I hope we're going to South America as well, but I don't know that yet, but I hope we're staying out as long as possible and then do things in between if we have time.

Jacob Hansen

'Pandemonium' had a new face on the production side in Jacob Hansen, who is a renowned producer when it comes to this music. Ronnie means they got a tip of Hansen after a few friends in other bands recommended him.

- Yes, he's a really great guy and he has some good ears. We'd heard some of the things he'd done in the past to friends of us and they recommended him to us,

which has turned out really well. We have really good chemistry and works really well together, he's very diplomatic and he's not saying "do this" and "do that", it's more like talking to a friend. We really have great connection and he's a guitarist as well so we speak the same language.

I especially mention the clean and punchy sound to Ronnie and he agrees.

- Yes, that and the sense of melodies is really something extra. I think he really upgraded us as a band.

But Hansen did not help with the live album 'It Comes Alive' that was released in between 'Motherland' and 'Pandemonium', and was something the band released as a celebration over their 30 years as a band.

- It was something the fans requested - not as much the album part as the DVD as we've released two live albums before this one already but never a live film. I don't know why we never did it, but we didn't like to see ourselves on film, not even on photos - probably because we've never looked very good. But people wanted it so we decided to do it for our 30th anniversary.

It Comes Alive

'It Comes Alive' was recorded in Basel, Switzerland in October 2011 and later released as a both a double CD and a DVD. Ronnie means Basel is a great place to play in and they've played there plenty of times but it wasn't where they'd planned to do the recording in the first place.

- We had planned to do it already in September in Copenhagen in front of a huge Danish crowd but then Hal started to argue and everything and when we got Rene to be our new bass player, we didn't want to





record the Copenhagen show as it was the first show we did with him so we switched it to Basel instead and that's what's on the DVD. I think it was a good DVD.

I think so too, I was pleasantly surprised by it but I can't help wondering why Pretty Maids made this as an anniversary and not some kind of collectors box or something in that fashion.

- Well, it was because the fans wanted it, so we thought it would be a good thing as we'd never done it before.

The future

So the present and past looks all set, but what about the future? Can we expect a Pretty Maids as

strong as the one we've seen lately? Inspiration-wise it doesn't seem to be any danger as the band seem to lack all such things.

- I don't really know where we get the inspiration from but in the very beginning I remember my older sister was playing heavy metal, which inspired me to be a rock musician. And I see it as a privilege to do that because it is what I always wanted. I can't see myself doing anything else.

When it comes to specific albums and songs, though, it's more random than anything.

- Ideas just pop up and sometimes we use them, sometimes we let them lay around and use them later. The only constant in



the process is that we start by writing the music and then go for lyrics. We might have a title or something before we do the music but that's more a guiding

for the music. It's often easier to write things when you're supposed to write, so most songs get written in the times when we start to work with a new album.

Today we're not really gathered in one place as we were before, today we're spread all over Copenhagen and two of us doesn't even live in Denmark. Much material gets sent back and forth as it's written but we try to meet at least once every time we write an album and work intensely with the music, but most is sent by i-Phone or mails these days.

A new era

The music may have entered a new era in terms of sound and style and everything but that's not the only thing that's changed today. In the very end of our conversation me and Ronnie gets in to the subject of sales. It's so-

omething that has changed a lot in just a few years time and Pretty Maids is a band that's been there through the entire transformation to see the changes.

- The music industry has changed a lot! First people started to burn CDs and then the downloading started. Nowadays it feels like you only do albums to get some gigs, which is very different to how it was before. I think it affects all of us working with music because there just isn't any money to earn in releasing albums anymore.

People often talks about how the music industry is a lot better today than it used to be but it's very seldom musicians that



say those things (even though it does happens that a few musicians does). Plenty of record labels has gone bust or needed to slice their budget and cut down personnel. This affects how albums are sold today as fewer people need to do the same job to get the albums noticed and sold but for a lower income, and it's far from a guarantee that the labels pay for the recordings and all that things

anymore, even though Ronnie means that Pretty Maids still have that benefit.

- I mean, there is money - but not like before. Record companies are very different today and it's getting harder and harder for musicians. The sales are probably around 10% of what they used to be and anyone can understand that that's not enough.

So would you say the change

is for the better or the worse?

- I would definitely say it's for the worse, but maybe I'm a bit old fashion. I just think it's so hard to make it as a musician these days and that affects the music, I think.

But Ronnie himself lives as a full time musician at the moment, all though it hasn't always been that way.

- At the moment I'm not doing

anything but the music but I have done a bit work at the side at times, like music training and coaching for other musicians.

So what's next?

I ask Ronnie about his vision for the future, like for example: will there be another 30 years for Pretty Maids?

- Well by then we would be in wheel chairs so I wouldn't think

so. But had you asked me 20 year's ago if we'd still be playing by now I wouldn't believe it so one could never know. I can say that I don't see any stop signs at the moment and we'll play for as long as it's fun and people want to hear us.

In the coming months we'll be able to see Pretty Maids on their tour, or if we don't get the opportunity we can always pick up

'It Comes Alive' from last year. Ronnie, though, hopes to see you fans on their shows first of all.

- I hope to play as many gigs as possible and to see as many fans we can. Hopefully we can go to as many places we've been to as possible to see our old fans but also visit places we've never been and see some new faces. And most of all, kick some ass!

Amen to that!