

POWER QUEST

MARCH 2008

POWER AND
THE GLORY

Master Of Illusion Steve Williams talks about Power Quest's new album

Seven years after coming together, Power Quest have their fourth album in the shops. But before talking tracks, it seemed like a good idea to do a bit of Time Team digging, delving into the mists of time and firstly discussing a London-based outfit called DragonHeart. Power Quest's keyboard player and founder member Steve Williams nods. "Yeah, I can remember the first time I met them - Steve Scott, Herman Li, Sam Totman, ZP Theart and Matej Setinc the drummer - for the first full rehearsal in Old Street, London, in September 1999. It used to be a real mission finishing work and then catching the train up from Southampton to London for a 6:30 rehearsal, and then rushing to try and catch the 11pm train home. Happy Days!" he laughs. "But then... Steve left about a month before I did in October 2000; I had just bought a house, I was very busy with the day job and I just didn't have the flexibility to get off work for gigs. Given what's happened when DragonHeart became Dragon Force, people often say to me that I must regret that decision, but that's not the case at all. I'm really pleased to see them doing so well, especially Sam who I regard as a great friend."

Power Quest came into being a few months later, in March 2001, and was based on Steve's vision of a band with "more keyboard melodies and variety of pace in the material rather than following

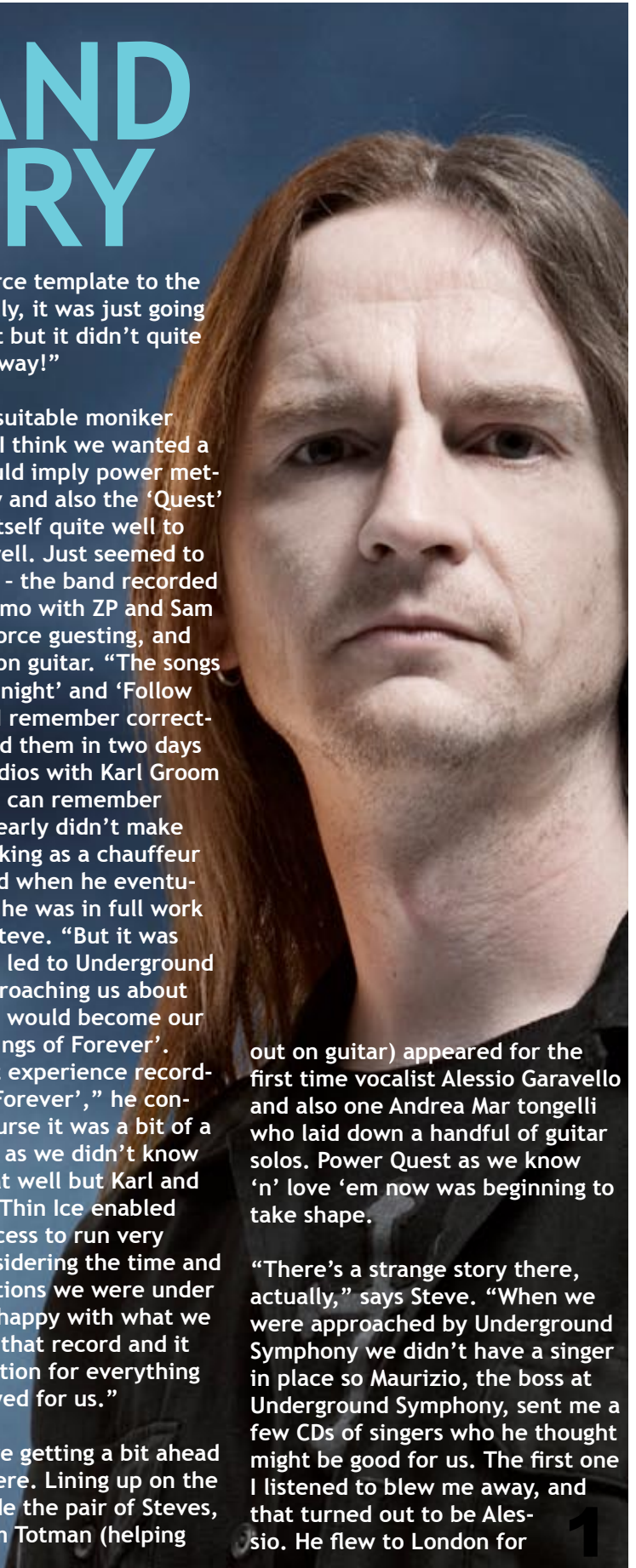
the Dragon Force template to the letter. Originally, it was just going to be a project but it didn't quite work out that way!"

Armed with a suitable moniker - "at the time I think we wanted a name that would imply power metal immediately and also the 'Quest' element lent itself quite well to the genre as well. Just seemed to fit, you know" - the band recorded a two-track demo with ZP and Sam from Dragon Force guesting, and Adam Bickers on guitar. "The songs were 'Glory Tonight' and 'Follow your Heart' if I remember correctly. We recorded them in two days at Thin Ice studios with Karl Groom of Threshold. I can remember that ZP very nearly didn't make it. He was working as a chauffeur at the time and when he eventually turned up he was in full work suit," laughs Steve. "But it was this demo that led to Underground Symphony approaching us about releasing what would become our first album 'Wings of Forever'. "It was a great experience recording 'Wings Of Forever'," he continues. "Of course it was a bit of a learning curve as we didn't know each other that well but Karl and Clive Nolan at Thin Ice enabled the whole process to run very smoothly. Considering the time and budget restrictions we were under I am still very happy with what we achieved with that record and it set the foundation for everything that has followed for us."

However, we're getting a bit ahead of ourselves here. Lining up on the album alongside the pair of Steves, Adam, and Sam Totman (helping

out on guitar) appeared for the first time vocalist Alessio Garavelli and also one Andrea Mar tongelli who laid down a handful of guitar solos. Power Quest as we know 'n' love 'em now was beginning to take shape.

"There's a strange story there, actually," says Steve. "When we were approached by Underground Symphony we didn't have a singer in place so Maurizio, the boss at Underground Symphony, sent me a few CDs of singers who he thought might be good for us. The first one I listened to blew me away, and that turned out to be Alessio. He flew to London for



a weekend to meet us and we got on famously from the word go. When he returned for the recording of the debut album, he brought a friend with him to help with the language issues and that was Andrea. Once we heard Andrea play we asked him to play a couple of solos on the album as we were so impressed, and after the album was done we asked Andrea to join us! Besides, Adam was part of the way through a medical degree back then and he didn't really have the time to dedicate to his studies and to the band."

With a brace of good reviews and a reputation for exciting live shows, it was time to get to work on the notoriously tricky second album. Andre Bargmann had taken over the drum stool in January 2003 and with a full line-up Power Quest spent the summer of 2003 back at Thin Ice studios. The result was 'Neverworld' which came out in March 2004, this time on Now And Then Records. "The songs came together very quickly for the 'Neverworld' record, some of which I had already started writing during the recording of 'Wings Of Forever'. There was no real pressure to deliver but we wanted to keep up the momentum and not be forgotten about, you know? Many people regard this album as the definitive Power Quest album so far, and I'll be very interested to see if that remains the case once 'Master of Illusion' sees the light of day!"

2004 saw the band on the road in support of 'Neverworld', touring in their own right and notching up some high-profile support slots with the likes of Threshold and Dream Evil. But album number three was beckoning, and the end of the year saw them back at Thin Ice once more with a new drummer, Francesco Tresca. "You know, the first time I met Francesco was the day he arrived at Thin Ice to record drums for 'Magic Never Dies'. Alessio and Andrea had convinced me that he was the guy and how right they were. He really added his own style to the Power Quest sound and, like me, he is a huge fan of progressive rock and metal. The actual recording sessions went very smoothly and we

had a lot of fun putting that record together.

"I think you can hear the development both musically and lyrically from 'Wings Of Forever' to 'Magic Never Dies'. Obviously the band has become more comfortable with each other and that makes the whole process a lot easier and more enjoyable. I think 'Master Of Illusion' takes this even further and we have incorporated some different ideas into the mix. Watch out for a lot more guitar riffs and some different keyboard stuff going on too!" he warns, with a smile.

With three albums on three differ-



ent labels ('Magic Never Dies' appeared on the now-defunct Majestic Rock), it was a relief to finally sign with a happening label like Napalm. "We're very happy to be working with the guys at Napalm," Steve confirms. "We spent a long time talking to labels as I was keen to ensure that the problems we've had previously were not going to haunt us again. It soon became clear that Napalm were the label for us and I have nothing but great things to say about the guys." All of which brings us to the aforementioned 'Master Of Illusion', the band's first release for Napalm due

at the end of April. Steve cannot contain his obvious enthusiasm. "It really has turned out incredibly well and I can't wait for the release. As I've already said, there are some different things on this album that we haven't done before so it will be interesting to see the reaction to these developments. And this time around, one major difference is that we recorded the guitars, vocals, drums and bass at Remaster Studio in Italy, under the watchful eyes of Threshold's Richard West and Nick Savio. Keyboards and post-production took place at Western Drive Studios in Shepperton.

"I know everyone always says this, but I really think we have produced our strongest and most consistent work to date. There's four months of hard work in the recording and mixing process there in addition to the writing phase, and we feel that each and every song has a 'magic moment', you know? I wrote five other songs that didn't make the album, so we had a lot of material to choose from, and we really worked through the material in pre-production, thrashing out the arrangements at our rehearsal space in Vicenza; and I really believe it paid huge dividends this time round. I also threw the rule book out when it came to keyboard sounds: I introduced some new, more modern sounds to the mix and was also conscious of making sure the guitars had more room to breathe than in the past."

I point out that it sounds like both he and Andrea seem to be having a good time, soloing away to their hearts' content. "Yes, me and Andrea had fun this time round, there's no doubt about that, but also we have four guest soloists doing their thing: Richard West, Jorn Viggo Lofstad from Pagan's Mind, Bill Hudson, ex Cellador, and Coldera, and Bob Katsionis from Firewind. And I think we were also conscious of making the solos relevant, rather than just having solos for the sake of it, which has perhaps contributed to the average song length being a little shorter this time round."

The heads-down 'Cemetery



Gates' makes a great opener, a point not lost on its writer. "Yeah, I can see that song being the opener in the live set as well. It's short, sharp and to the point and I think it's got a pretty catchy chorus too." And as for a favourite track, "I think it's been harder to choose a favourite on this album than previously but at the moment I would tend to lean towards 'Human Machine'. For me it has some different things going on in terms of the structure, some different vocal ideas and a massive chorus. There's a great solo from Richard West too!"

Another one of the "different things" Steve mentioned earlier is vocal contributions from ex 4-Way Kill singer Chris Neighbour. "It was Jon Hoare of Mercury Rain who actually suggested Chris. I had a couple of ideas about what to do and we recorded Chris's vocals on three songs but we ended up just going for 'Master Of Illusion' and 'The Vigil'. I think the growls work very against Alessio's voice. I had the idea right from the conception of the songs to try this as I thought it would work, and hopefully it

does!"

The Mercury Rain man is also in the frame to help out in other ways. "Steve Scott is currently on extended vacation in New Zealand, where he hails from. In the meantime we have agreed to appoint a stand-in bassist to fulfil live work that Steve cannot come back for, you know, one-off dates and short tours. I offered the role to Jon Hoare and he has gladly accepted."

Talking of touring, the last time Power Quest toured the UK was with Pagan's Mind back in 2006. "Yeah, it's been too long, hasn't it? It's more down to Napalm now in terms of touring plans rather than me organising and planning things, although I'm still fairly vocal with suggestions in that area as well. Nothing set in stone at the moment but hopefully that will change soon."

As we wrap things up, I ask Steve about unrealised ambitions, anything else he still wants to do, achieve or attain. "How long have you got?" he quips. "I suppose at this stage, to be honest, I'm

eager to see how this new record is received by the press, but more importantly by the fans. A proper US release for the first time would also be a huge bonus. That'll do for starters."