

buzz

TOM KEIFER

NOTHIN'S FOR NOTHIN'



PHOTO BY THOMAS PETILLO

by Andrea Seastrand

No stranger to success and the dedication and effort it demands, Tom Keifer's first solo album showcases his versatility as a songwriter, vocalist, and guitarist from start to finish. As Cinderella's crooner, Keifer has weathered physical, emotional, and industry setbacks, and chronicles his experiences on his appropriately titled release, *The Way Life Goes* (Merovee Records). With both hard rock heavies and love songs of loyalty and devotion, Keifer's album is at once familiar and new, sung with a worn tenderness that only comes with experiencing life's lows with the highs.

Before he takes the album on the road, Tom talked to me about his approach to singing, remaining objective, and one of the best albums of all time. The transcription follows:

Before we start, I want to say I'm a huge Cinderella fan, always have been. It's a pleasure to speak with you.

Oh thank you, thank you very much. Nice to speak with you as well.

I read the article in *Vintage Guitar's* January issue and wanted to ask a little about your influences as a guitarist and, also, about the impact Fleetwood Mac's *Rumours* had on you.

When you hear it, *Rumours* just has such an atmosphere to it and a vibe. The guitar work on it and vocal harmonies made it one of my favorite albums growing up. Lindsey Buckingham, just an absolutely amazing guitarist. Stevie Nicks. They were one of those bands where everybody in the band was just very unique, much in the way that Led Zeppelin was. Everybody brought such a real flavor to the band and I really liked bands like that back then.

The Eagles were like that for me, too. Fleetwood Mac, and particularly that record, just really blew me away.

You've said Lindsey Buckingham and Jimmy Page were inspirations for you as a guitarist, but as Cinderella's frontman, you also had to be a vocalist and entertainer. Who were your influences in those terms?

I'm a huge Rod Stewart fan. I love his voice. Robert Plant is probably the first singer, growing up, that I tried to imitate. That high, screaming voice, a lot of that was probably influenced by him. Bad Company, Paul Rodgers. Mick Jagger. I loved Janis Joplin of course. That's to name a few from when I was first getting into rock, but also I got into blues in my later teens and was very much influenced as the years went on with artists like Muddy Waters and Robert Johnson and all that old blues stuff.

Of course, Cinderella are known for being bluesy and different from other hard rock bands. What advice would you give to encourage an artist to be unique when much of today's music sounds the same?

A lot of times younger, up-and-coming musicians will ask me for the best advice I can give them and I always say the same thing, which is to be true to who you are. Because, if you're true to who you are, you're not going to be shoved into a cookie cutter. I think what it takes is to find that side of you that feels like you, musically, and express that. Don't let someone change that on you.

Over the past 15 years, you've had some problems with your voice. Did coaching and therapy mainly help you overcome that obstacle?

Yeah, it's coaching. I was diagnosed with a neurological condition called paresis back in 1991 and it just wreaks havoc on a singing voice. It's like a partial paralysis of a vocal cord and there's no cure for it. So, even though I'm still able to sing, I was told then that I'd never sing again and that's usually the result for singers. The doctor told me, if there was any chance, the only thing to do would be to train it and that starts at the speech level of developing your habits with a speech pathologist and where to place things, and that eventually goes into pitches and working with vocal coaches and singing.

I've worked with everyone in the country. That's how I did it. It'll never be fixed or be 100 percent, at least it doesn't feel that way. It's something I live with every day and is a weakness I have and I have to stay on top of, but I'm just glad that I'm still able to sing and do what I love to do. **I saw Cinderella a couple years ago and thought it was a great performance. Your voice is still similar to the Cinderella sound, but there is a difference to it that's apparent on *The Way Life Goes*.**

It's something that I try to walk the line on because a lot of the songs are in a slightly lower register. I'm not singing quite as high as in Cinderella but I also didn't want my voice to be unrecognizable, so I try to walk the line between the two.

***The Way Life Goes* was quite a while in the making. What made now the time to release it?**

It just felt finished one day. I don't know how to describe that. But whenever you write a song or you start a record as a whole, there's a vision that you have, that

you want it to sound like, that you can hear in your head. All the time in the studio that you spend is just time spent chasing that vision and trying to make it sound that way. This one took a little longer than normal (laughs).

Then one day you just hit play and you say, "You know, I'm okay with this." Every record's like that but there's some difference with this record. We weren't on a record company's clock because it was produced independently, so that can be a blessing and a curse. Spending 10 years on a record can go two different ways. It could've ended up as a disaster too, I think (laughs). And I think there were a couple of curves that we made there that we had to back out of over the years, where we were like, "Wow. What were we thinking?" But it was the first record I ever did in Pro Tools and that format allows you to be able to step away from it for months at a time.

During the 10-year period, I did a lot of tours with Cinderella that would take me away from the record for long periods of time. Then I'd come back and pull a session up and say, "I like that. I don't like that. Let's get the chorus quicker here. Let's change the bass part here." That provides objectivity. I don't think I'd really wish to make a record over 10 years again (laughs), but it worked for this record. Every record's different.

And like you said, you've still been touring with Cinderella, so it wasn't an unproductive 10 years by any means.

Yeah, I don't want anyone to get the impression that I was just locked in a studio at a mixing board for 10 years straight. Believe me, the record would *not*

be very good if that was the case! (Laughs) That would have provided no objectivity. No, there was a lot of time away from it. I mean, obviously when we first started cutting the tracks in 2003 we took a pretty long break almost immediately because Savannah and I, our son Jaidan was born. So we just got into the whole parent thing for a while after we'd cut maybe about a handful of the tracks at that point.

Right away, life sort of put an objectivity break in it for us (laughs). The greatest one of all though. Then there were probably four or five tours with Cinderella that took me away from it and that's a good thing. You don't want to stay on something creative constantly. Being objective and being able to walk away from it really is the beauty of the Pro Tools format. You come back and turn it on and it's exactly the way you left it. You know, in the old days, you'd have to do this recall where they'd write things down and look at the knobs on everything. Take pictures. It would take half the day to get things back to the way they were. Those days are gone so that's a nice benefit.

Your wife is also a singer-songwriter and was involved in *The Way Life Goes*.

Yeah, it was produced with Savannah and a great friend of ours here named Chuck Turner. We had a ball with the recording and producing process. When it got into mixing, it got a little bit challenging. We went through probably 17 or 18 different engineers, who were all very talented, but they just didn't have the same vision or I couldn't find that person who could make it sound exactly like what I was hearing in my head. That was the hardest part, the part that made it seem like a little more of a task.

TOM KEIFER'S NEW SOLO ALBUM, *THE WAY LIFE GOES*, WILL BE RELEASED APRIL 30. SEE HIM AT NYC'S HIGHLINE BALLROOM ON FEB. 11 AND THE LEGENDARY DOBBS, IN PHILLY, ON FEB. 13. FOR MORE INFORMATION, GO TO FACEBOOK.COM/TOMKEIFEROFFICIAL.