

With their last album, *The Living End* figured near enough was good enough. This time, they set the level they wanted to achieve and wouldn't accept anything less.

COVER
STORY

THE CHILL FACTOR

THE LIVING END story by MARK NEILSEN

"You can always improve, and I thought with the last album the songs were there, but perhaps it wasn't executed as well as it could have been," muses *The Living End*'s vocalist and guitarist Chris Cheney. "So this time it was a case of trying to write much better songs and really get something special. Get a mood for each song and get each song to really carry itself properly, which I think we did. I think we nailed it in a way that we hadn't done before, and it's just because we were relentless about it."

One of the things that jumps out about their new album *State of Emergency* is the strong sense of melody. It's something that's always been present with *The Living End* but it's even more so with the stirring lines on the likes of *Nothing Lasts Forever* and *Order of the Day*. "I always search for that 'chill factor', I call it. When you hear a song and you get that chill from it or that spine tingling moment," Cheney explains.

"Bands like Radiohead are masters of doing it in those special moments in a song, and for me, quite often that comes in a melodic sense over anything else, over a sonic or arrangement sense. To me it comes down to just maybe the way a chord moves up from another chord and the melodies over the top, and it's just putting it in the right order so you get that kind of rush from it. I spent a lot of time on that with this album, just making sure the songs were as hard hitting as they could be. If it's going to hit you in the heart then it really comes and gets you.

"I'm just a fan of really well crafted pop songs, I suppose, whether it's the Beatles or Burt Bacharach or whatever, and I think it's a real art, and I've been trying to improve on that. I think certain people are born with it; very few I reckon. A lot of people probably sit down and do draft after draft of a song and just write thousands of songs until you get to the point where you start to know what's going to work and what isn't. I felt that I got to a point with this album where I could do that a lot easier."

This melody could arise from the fact that the songs are written first on an acoustic guitar. This is something the band has always done, which is surprising considering they're known for mostly being the rock band that they are. "It's kind of weird for us. We're known for being more a live band I suppose than a

band on record, which is what we wanted to turn around with this album, but all our songs are born that way. You can play any of our songs on an acoustic guitar and I think they sound good because they're written from that point of view," Cheney says.

"It's like with all the fast songs and all the fancy guitar playing, it's all irrelevant. People always ask about it, but to me if you don't have a song, if you can't put two chords together and a nice melody and hit someone in a way that brute force doesn't, like the physical thing about a gig, if you can hit them in another way, it's so much more important. That's probably been our weakness, even though we've had melodic songs. I want to write songs that stand up to *The Police* and *U2* and stuff like that, which is kind of weird coming from our background because we started out as a rockabilly band where it's not really about the songwriting prowess, it's about the energy."

This energy was the first thing on display from the album when they released the first single *What's On Your Radio*. But for those touting a return to the old style *Living End* with this new album, one will find an album that's very diverse. There are traditional *Living End* beltters such as the aforementioned *What's On Your Radio* or *We Want More*, to poppier numbers such as *Nothing Lasts Forever*. Whatever they turn their hand to though, it sounds like *The Living End*. It seems with *State of Emergency*, the band has found a style that is all their own.

"We kind of chose that because I think we needed to come out with something that showed the energy of the band and re-establish ourselves as a high energy act," Cheney says of releasing *What's On Your Radio*. "But it was a difficult decision as well because I'm more proud probably of some of the slower songs on this album, and that comes more from a songwriting point of view, and you want to show that to people, but at the same time we didn't really want to confuse the issue at first and I think we're always going to be that high energy kind of band. I can't see us going too mellow in any sense, but at the same time I'm really proud of some of the slower songs on the album. I think they're single worthy and equal contenders, and that's never been the case with us really, other than maybe *All Torn Down*. People think of our signature sound as being this hundred mile an hour punk rock stuff, and I'm really glad we can go in a different direction and, I think, pull it off."

A good case in point of the different direction will be the next single *Wake Up*, an anthemic number that lays off the throttle, but very much has the "chill factor" Cheney was talking about earlier. As mentioned before, the album is full of these melodious tracks such as the likes of *No Way Out* and *Nothing Lasts Forever*.

"I don't know where it comes from," Cheney says of his sense of melody. "It probably goes back to my childhood I suppose, what you listen to and what was on the radio and what your parents played. But for some reason I've always been fascinated by really strong melodies and really strong hooks. I can remember mum and dad playing *Goodbye Yellow Brick Road* and *Hot August Night* as every parent in the '70s did; even like *Meatloaf* and *Little River Band* I loved when I was five or six years old, and I can only assume that it goes back to that. As much as I like seeing a band rocking out on stage and having a certain aggression to them, it bores me after a while if there's no song."

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WHO: The Living End

WHAT: *State of Emergency* out through Capitol/EMI

WHERE: The band is planning a tour in May, so keep an eye on www.thelivingend.com for more details when they arise