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**NEW "ROCK TIL YA DIE" ALBUM REVIEW
& INTERVIEW WITH CLIFFORD HOAD**

The King is Dead, Long Live the King(s)!

By Pete Wright (July, 2013)



Rock Til Ya Die album recording lineup (from L to R):
Govinda Doyle, Dave Talon, Clifford Hoad & Quentin Elliott.

If you follow the music career of Hoad brothers, you certainly know that a lot of things have happened in last couple of years. After the demise of *The Rich & Famous* band (=Kings of the Sun under new moniker, which allowed the Hoads to further explore their writing skills beyond confines of hard rock genre) and a couple of years on hiatus, original founder & band's drummer Clifford Hoad decided to resurrect the Kings. This time however, without his younger brother Jeff, former singer and guitarist of the group, who is not interested anymore and definitely left behind his music career.

Now you might ask, how in the hell he could manage to replace the main focal point of the band? Answer is much simpler than you would think. Encouraged by fans, Cliff took lead vocal duties himself and if you look at this from perspective, you will find it as a logical move. Mind you, he has already sung lead vocals on *I Wanna Rock* track and shared them with Jeff on *Shot Me an Arrow*. And don't forget that he also recorded all the backing vocals on all KOTS & R&F albums.

Singer's and drummer's post sorted out, the King needs also some fine axemen at his side. Clifford Hoad chose Q (Quentin Elliott) and Dave Talon. Melbournean Quentin Elliott is not a new boy in KOTS, he played the lead guitar with them in late 90's. Queenslander Dave Talon of *Rollerball* fame and friend of Q joined on rhythm guitar, although he can play a mean solo, too. This trio is the backbone of so-called *Clifford Hoad's Kings of the Sun* band (in order to prevent confusion amongst fans, Cliff decided to alter the band name).

In March of 2013, King's cohort entered the Rock Tank (home studio of ARIA-winning producer Govinda Doyle) to record Clifford Hoad's latest compositions. New album entitled ***Rock Til Ya Die*** was produced and engineered by Govinda Doyle with co-production of Clifford Hoad. Mixing was done by Govinda & Cliff. Mr Doyle also recorded bass tracks for the album.

So, how does the new album sound? And more important, what are the songs like? Are the good-old KOTS back? One at a time, please!

New album features 11 songs. That represents standard Hoad's dose of dozen tracks minus one. But, album's length is – wait for it – 65 min! Most songs clock over 5 minutes, some of them are almost 8 min long. And that's a good thing if you ask me, because these opuses tell some stories. Actually, the whole album is very personal – it's a collection of Cliff's life experiences.

The LP kicks off with **Fire on the Mountain** song and it's an appropriate opener. As the first verse goes: *"Your eyes fixed on the setting sun/Journey has just begun/Searching for a land of gold/Fire burning in your soul"*, fasten your seat belts, folks! Actually, the song starts with Cliff Hoad's secret message to the world. Anyway, the songs' catchy riff and chorus will make your feet start tapping within seconds.

Next number is **Rock Pile** and it is probably the heaviest track on the album. Its rolling rhythm and chant-along chorus makes it a perfect candidate for a live favourite. It features some great lyrics and the bridge part is pure awesomeness. It reminds of legendary *Let There Be Rock* lyrically in a way. Again, it is a personal statement that the King of rock is back in business again (*"Been away for far too long/It seems a thousand years/With all the shit the radio plays/It's a wonder that I'm still here"*) and he offers a piece of advice for aspiring musicians to stay rock steady and never sell out. Otherwise you might end up on the rock pile... Oh, did I mention it features a wicked solo, too?

Switchblade Knife is another corker that grooves. It is followed by **Rock Town**, Cliff Hoad's take on a place every rock fan would like to be in. After sonic assault of first four heavy tracks it's time for something slower. Ballad of **Geronimo** is Hoad's tribute to this last Indian rebel and it features some beautiful singing & clean guitar playing. KOTS have some history with Indian themed songs (*Medicine Man*) and this one fits in nicely.

Second half of the album starts with **Reach for the Bottle (Mescal 109)**, which is ode to alcoholism. This southern boogie track could easily fit into *ZZ Top's* catalogue. Cliff Hoad's singing at times reminds of legendary growl of Dave Tice (*Buffalo*). It also features very nice solos from both guitarists. Next track **Follow You Home** is a mid-tempo groover with sing-along chorus.

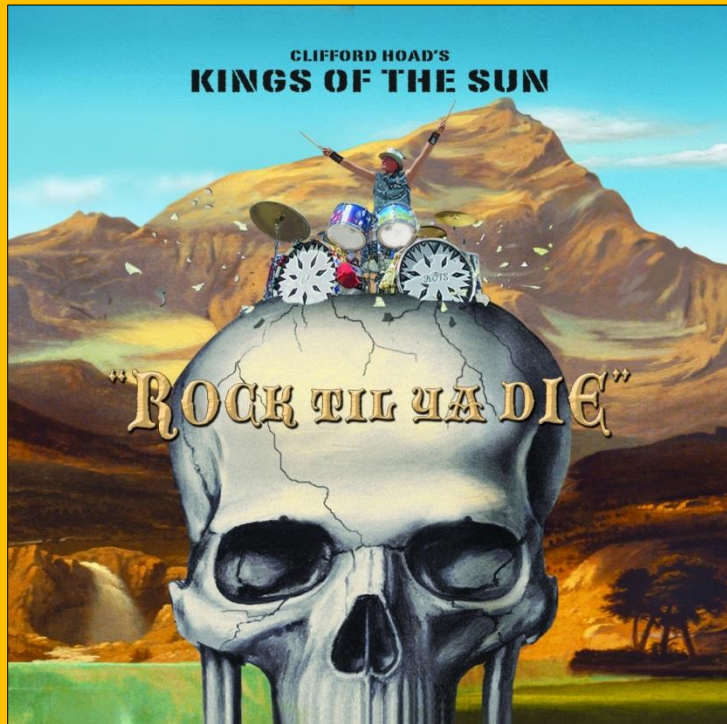
Hearts Ablaze is another highlight. This song celebrates the Vikings and their take-no-prisoners attitude. It starts with a blizzard that sets the right atmosphere. Again some fine singing and especially the mystical part with some beautiful melodic guitars by Quentin Elliott and Dave Talon (you've got to hear it for yourself, it's difficult to describe it by words). And when you think the song is over at 5:00, Cliff yells *"Land ho!"* and the raid begins. You can close your eyes and let your imagination work. No words are needed as Dave and Quentin start their battle axe duelling.

Following one called **Never Too Late (For My Mother Judy)** is the shortest song on the album (it clocks just under 3:30), but once again, very nice crunchy riff and melody. As the title of the song suggest – it's never too late to fall in love again. Clifford's mother must be proud of her son for sure (as every mom should be if her son wrote such song for her).

Album's title song **Rock Til Ya Die** would be obvious choice for single. It radiates happiness & positive attitude towards life. Nice guitar melodies again. And by the way, do you remember those layered triple vocals from *Serpentine*? This album is full of them and they sound great. And it is all Cliff singing.

Last track **Tighten Your Grip** is the only acoustic number on the album, but let me tell you, what a marvellous song. It deals with life & death lyrically and that chorus riff kicks some major ass (yeah, even acoustic can kick ass!) – if played on electric axe through a tube amp turned up to the ten, it might as well split your head. And wait till you hear that Indian drum that adds some bass frequencies to the mix – pleasure for ears! It ends the whole listening journey nicely.

Sonically, the album is well recorded and balanced – kudos to Govinda Doyle. All the instruments are easy to identify and sit in the mix nicely. Guitars got that trademark Australian in-your-face punch. Regarding music performances: Cliff Hoad's drumming is exceptional as always, flamboyant, yet works for the song all the time. His singing will be for some probably the biggest surprise of the album; let's put it this way – it surpassed my (already high) expectations. Quentin Elliott and Dave Talon on guitars complement one another nicely in fine Australian tradition of such players as the Young brothers (AC/DC), the Brewster brothers (The Angels) or Bradford Kelly & Mick Cocks (Heaven). You can hear Dave in the left channel and Q in the right one. Govinda Doyle on bass locks in with Clifford and together they produce an unstoppable rhythm.



Album's fantastic cover. This LP will blow your head off!

So, what is the answer to aforementioned question – are the good-old KOTS back? I'll tell you this: Old KOTS can contentedly rest in peace. This is the beginning of new era. Era of **Clifford Hoad's Kings of the Sun**, which pays homage to original KOTS, yet brings something fresh and unique to the plate. Do yourself a favour brothers and sisters (I sound like Angry Anderson now) and get this masterpiece! For me, it is already THE album of the year. *Krokus* and *Airbourne* could take a lesson or two from Cliff Hoad on how to write a catchy song. Enough of praise, get it and judge for yourselves!

To check the latest news about the *Clifford Hoad's Kings of the Sun* or to purchase new album visit band's official webpage here:

<http://www.kingsofthesunband.com>

If you want to learn more about the KOTS history read this:

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kings_of_the_Sun_\(band\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kings_of_the_Sun_(band))

Interview with the King

Heavy Rock Heaven had recently the privilege to ask Cliff Hoad some questions regarding band's new lineup, the writing process, recording of *Rock Til Ya Die* album and Cliff's future plans. So make yourself comfortable and enjoy!

Questions were asked by Pete Wright.



The Three Kings & panorama of Terranora Valley (from L to R): Dave Talon, Clifford Hoad & Quentin Elliott.

What was the main impulse that finally encouraged you to resurrect the band, even without your brother Jeff at your side?

“My brother had decided to discontinue with me & after I nearly cut my finger off on a car jack, the healing process left me time to think about how much I loved my drums & music with the threat of it being taken away. I felt I still had unfinished business as a musician & lots to prove, not just a drummer as some people have perceived me. Looking back now, at the big picture, he did me a favour by being so reluctant to continue with the band. I couldn't wait any longer & rediscovered my deep inner strength & commitment to my music. Hence the result is our new album, which I'm very proud of.”

What has been the process of selection of new lineup like?

“Very careful & naturally the whole thing fell into place. I always wanted to record Quentin Elliott as he hadn't been heard before, it was time to showcase his brilliant guitar playing & that he did! Dave Talon on rhythm guitar, a man who completely understands the classic Aussie rock style, played a scaffolding of rock chords to die for and of course Govinda on bass guitar, who also plays drums,

understood my feel and where he should sit with it. All these guys played for the songs, understanding the vibe I was after. Brilliant! [There] couldn't have been a better choice of players & contributors to the cause. I'm rapt and very honoured to have them on board!"

Was Govinda Doyle obvious choice as a producer/engineer? He recorded The Rich & Famous' "Stand Back... Prepare to be Amazed!!!" album, right?

"For what I needed to do, Govinda has the best ears in the business and as an engineer he has a sixth sense about mic techniques and an obsession with tones. He also has such a great antenna for hearing things in & out of tune, slowing down & speeding up and the curious ability to hone in on your best performance – quite hard to find in one person. I believe he is a recording genius!"



Studio alchemy. *Clifford Hoad* setting up the drums under the watchful eye of producer & engineer *Govinda Doyle*.

You wrote all the lyrics and composed all the songs for "Rock Til Ya Die" album. Did you have any concept for the album when you were writing songs? Was there any creative input from Dave, Q & Govinda songs shaping wise?

"My concept at first was the sound of it, which needed to be a natural and loose sounding but something you wanted to keep on hearing, just like the classic albums of yesteryear. We don't really know why we love them so much but a lot of it has to do with their sound which doesn't assault the eardrums.

Yes, there was creative input by them all. They all enhanced the album beautifully with their various styles. As far as song structure etc. is concerned, I was firm in my decisions. I'm a hard man to get past & am very definite about what I want! I make decisions quickly & commit to them, not changing but the lads would suggest things at the right time & I would listen & make adjustments."

What was the studio and the whole recording experience like? Any highlights from the recording process? How long did it take to record the album from start to finish?

“A whirlwind of creativity & surprise! When you’re under that kind of time pressure & the record button is on, it’s hard to hear the good from the bad. You have to be your own judge – that’s why I chose the guys. It took about 2 weeks of working through the day from 9 am to 6 pm!”

You did co-produce the album. What was the collaboration with Govinda Doyle like production wise? Did you have a clear vision of how the album should sound? Or was it a joint effort? Were there any creative clashes?

“Thankfully, Govinda Doyle & I have the same ideas about production – try & keep it as honest as you can in performance & sound. Don’t sell your soul trying to create a sound in your voice or playing that you just don’t have – this will make for a bad live band experience for the listening public.

Clear vision of the band, yes! We were very clear on how we wanted to sound, from the classic live vintage Ludwig drum sound to Quentin’s hotted up George Metropoulos amp sound & his custom guitars, he was definitely going for a signature sound. Dave wove his magic through his love of tradition, using Marshall cabs & [Ibanez] Destroyers. Govinda felt the need to plug in his beloved Ampeg amp & he also has a custom built axe made from alder wood! All this created our sound.

Artistic clashes? Constantly! No great project is ever without them. It’s basically people trying to get the best out of each other & it works! How do you up the ante? Stir up the egos! (laugh)”



Axemen at work. Dave Talon (L) & Quentin Elliott (R) with their weapons of choice. Ibanez Destroyer vs. The Taipan made by Ray Carlton Custom Guitars.

Were there any interesting recording techniques used?

“Yes, me holding the studio cat Jinx while I sang. (laugh)”



Working magic. Clifford Hoad recording vocals while holding his talisman – studio cat Jinx.

Are you satisfied with the final product?

“Couldn’t be happier! I’ve never wanted to keep listening to my recordings after I’ve done them, but this one’s different. I just don’t get sick of hearing it. I’m always discovering something new.”

What was it like to record all the vocals? You certainly have a lot of experience with recording of the vocals, but singing the leads is a bit different than backing vocals after all. There are plenty of layered vocals used on record. Did you get inspired by Eddie Kramer and first KOTS album?

“I knew I could sing, I just hadn’t heard myself back in a lead vocal sense. This was daunting whether I would like my voice or not – if you don’t, you’re in trouble. I guess hearing yourself back for the first time is a very strange sensation. Kind of like the first time you walked, like: ‘What was that? Should I do it again?’ Still don’t know quite how to take my voice but I do know I gave it my best shot & I like what I’m hearing. Whether it’s my voice or me trying, I just don’t know.

The layered vocals do come from Eddie Kramer – a trick he showed us to get different emotion from a particular line or word in the song. I wasn’t going to harmonize at first but took the tape home for a weekend & realized I needed to, so glad I did.”

And what about your drumming? It is still flamboyant, yet it works for the song in the first place. How would you compare it through the years? It has developed since the first KOTS album, naturally...

“First and foremost, I’m a drummer & on this recording, I tended to play to my vocals like I’ve never done before, which in listening back I like. It’s different for me. I used to come on like a freight train – that was my strength. My strength now is my feel, but when I need to pull out some flash & excitement, it’s never too far away!”

What do you think about performances of the rest of the band? Did they come up to your expectations?

“Yes, absolutely & more! They helped me create a truly magic album.”



Studio wizard and his rock log. Producer Govinda Doyle laying down some bass tracks with his self-made guitar.

What is that secret message in the beginning of “Fire on the Mountain” song? Maybe you could start a guessing contest for fans.

“What’s a fantasy album without a play backwards message? (smile)”

Whose idea was that guitar duel in “Hearts Ablaze”?

“Mine! I wanted to pit the 2 styles of Dave & Quentin against each other, like a sword fight. Dave is quite a great lead player himself, but chose to allow the young gun Quentin to take the lead. They clash & smash together in a finale that rivals the late Thin Lizzy & I love it. Good work guys, you sound fantastic!”

What are your favourite songs from the album or which ones you are especially proud of?

“I’m proud of them all but the ones closest to my heart are ‘Geronimo’ & ‘Hearts Ablaze’. I have a leaning towards ‘Rock Pile’ for fun & the last track ‘Tighten Your Grip’ that I wrote for myself.”

You are releasing the album independently. Has the release date been set in stone yet?

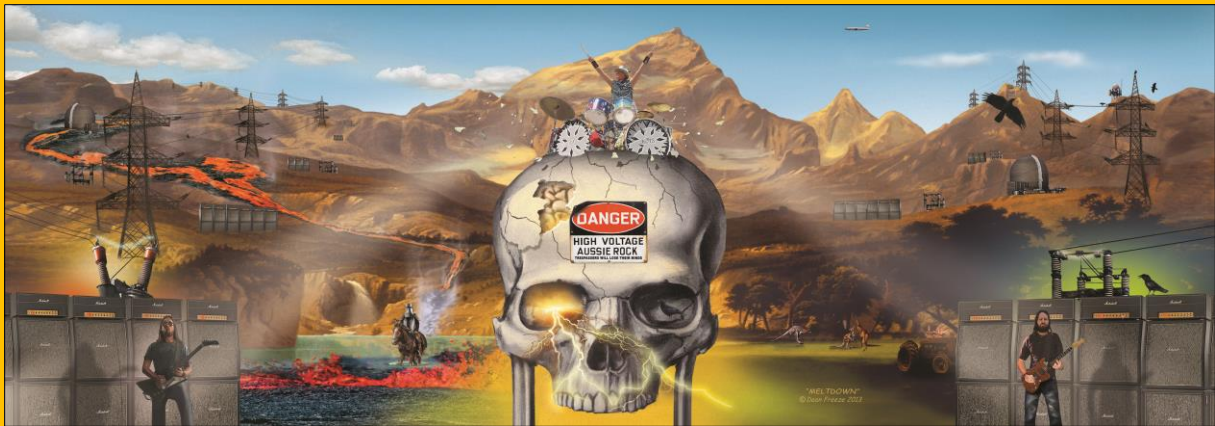
“Yes, I am. We have decided to release the CD with only one hour’s notice! All I can say is it’s not too far away now, can’t wait to get it out there!”

Do you plan to release “Rock Til Ya Die” also on vinyl? In a small volume for diehard fans and collectors, maybe?

“The first thing I will do when I can afford it is to get a gatefold vinyl organized into production. A limit of 250 would suit me at this point, preferably from your Czech Republic’s company, which looked great – thick card, thick vinyl, great colour printing and old-fashioned quality.”

Whose idea was that excellent album cover? It reminds of good old vinyl days.

“It was my idea initially, to do a classic fantasy art cover incorporating the band and an amazing backdrop including the skull, representing the title track ‘Rock Til Ya Die’! I also wanted to incorporate an Australian look & feel! Dean Freeze (artist) brought this to life of our band playing in the wilderness of Australia, piping in extreme electricity supplies to keep up with the bands’ volume needs. The band plugs in & everything comes alive including Dean's title ‘Meltdown’ – in this case the nuclear energy stations. Something to look at while you’re listening to the CD, that’s what I miss!”



Meltdown. Album's rockin' booklet is one piece of an art.

Are we going to see the new band on the road?

“Absolutely! We as a band sound better live than in the studio. With the concept of 2 drummers, I can sing out front & behind the kit. We would love nothing more than to tour anywhere that loves our music. So please, let us know folks if you want us to play in your town!”

Do you intend to play the old songs live, too? KOTS and R&F back catalogue is rich and you could easily fill several setlists.

“We will of course play some of our old favourites, how could we not?! Plus a couple of covers will be included from AC/DC & Rose Tattoo just out of respect! These are the guys we cut our teeth on out here in Australia.”

Do you have any goal or goals that you would like to accomplish with CHKOTS? What are your future plans?

“This new band will be dedicated to holding the torch and keeping the flame of authentic Aussie rock, that unmistakable definitive style from the land down under that has such an influential flavour throughout the world. This icon of music is at the threat of extinction and will be but a memory & museum piece, unless a willing and able band like the one I’ve just formed can re-create some of the old magic in a new sound happening now. So I must keep recording new songs and playing our brand of classic Aussie rock to old & new fans all round the world. Bring it on & bring back the Aussie rock!”