



As sardonic songwriters par excellence Barenaked Ladies return with their new album, *Everything to Everyone*, *TotalMusic* talks Höfner basses, the joy of throwing out the rule book and the trauma of life on the road with the band's Jim Creeggan...

As a band with a formidable reputation for live shows – where their well-honed inter-band schtick and fondness for all manner of onstage hi-jinks provide a perfect counterpoint to songs that range from witty, post-slacker singalongs to surprisingly heartfelt ballads – you might expect that the Barenaked Ladies' bassist/arranger Jim Creeggan would be chomping at the bit to get back out there after a three-year lay-off.

This would, however, be rather wide of the mark. "I have been terrible at touring in the past – I always fight it like the plague," he admits shortly before crossing the Atlantic for a series of British shows. "When it's coming up, I approach it like a looming cloud of doom. But once I'm out there, I usually have my tricks to enjoy it – some kind of little project, be it knitting or tap-dancing."

In facing the testing demands of the road once again, it can't hurt that the band is touting one of its most diverse albums yet, *Everything to Everyone*. Conceived in a more informal fashion to 2000's *Maroon*, singer/guitarists and principal songwriters Steve Page and Ed Robertson opted to bring the whole band – including Creeggan, multi-instrumentalist Kevin Hearn and drummer Tyler Stewart – into the creative process from day one.

The result, while recognisably the work of the band that produced sharp, finely-crafted singles like 'One Week' and 'Brian Wilson' – the former their true breakthrough hit in 1998, the latter a song so beloved of the band's devotees that the Beach Boys' founder himself has taken to covering it in his live shows – finds the group stretching itself, employing more ambitious arrangements and evidently much less concerned with the eternal and often self-defeating quest for the 'radio hit' (although large-of-chorus opener 'Celebrity' certainly sounds like one to *TotalMusic*).

"In the past, we usually had just a month to put all the songs together, the main songwriting team being Steve and Ed," says Creeggan. "But I write songs, too, and so does Kevin – in fact, he's very prolific. We had a little more time for this album, and everyone brought a grain of an idea into the studio for each track. So you had the kind of situation where one guy was writing a bridge for another guy's song. It was a much more inclusive process, so I think everyone feels more attached to this record than some of the previous ones we've made."

Creeggan cites 'War On Drugs' – an oblique

take on addiction – as possessing the real heart of this new record: "It's a true step forward for us. It started as a really simple four-chord song, but I think it goes straight to the heart. It was little more than a folk song, but we crafted it very carefully, adding strings and so on. I think it's a very special thing."

'Aluminium' – all pristine funk and striking lyrical metaphor about labouring under misapprehensions – is another strong point: "I like the idea of that song, calling the bluff of something saying that it's silver – unearthing a falsehood. It's almost like a strange kind of anthem, that song. But again,

because of the way we were working, it went through a few different stages. It had a really dry feel to it initially."

Given that, no matter how much they have developed their music on this latest album, Barenaked Ladies' default sound veers towards what was once termed 'FM radio

rock', Creeggan's own list of influences is a little unexpected. There are unlikely to be any objections to the presence of legendary (and legendarily troubled) jazz bassist Jaco Pastorius ("he was totally influential and made everyone reconsider the instrument"). But what about 'challenging' – in every possible sense for this particular writer – dusty old prog-rock trio Rush? It can't simply be because

they share Canadian heritage with Barenaked Ladies: "I don't go back to it that often, but whenever I do, I get a little teary-eyed. Of course, the prog-rock is an acquired taste."

More recently, it's been a mix CD from drummer Tyler that has provided an infusion of fresh sounds. "He's the alternative rock expert in the band, and he compiled this CD called *This Shit Rocks*, with bands like The Hives and The Strokes," says Creeggan. "That's been the main influence on me for this record, combined with the fact that I just bought a Höfner bass and am in love with the thing."

So, as Creeggan steels himself for life couped up on a tourbus once again and contemplates what hobby he should pursue this time – *TotalMusic* reckons that the eminently respectable card game of patience might be suited to a band that doesn't seem inclined to indulge in more clichéd pursuits like driving Cadillacs into swimming pools – who would he like to work with should Barenaked Ladies ever decide to hang up their rock'n'roll shoes?

"Jane Siberry – I love her stuff, she is always testing the boundaries. I actually got to work with Sarah McLachlan, and she's a great artist." Creeggan pauses, laughing: "You'll notice I'm saying all women – I have enough of working with men!"

# The Naked Truth



Left to right the ladies are: Steven Page, Kevin Hearn, Jim Creeggan, Tyler Stewart, Ed Robertson

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## Pencil sharpeners

Like Barenaked Ladies' frequently barbed way with a word? Then check out these three fine examples of literate songwriting...

Steely Dan – *Countdown to Ecstasy* (1973): Possibly Walter Becker and Donald Fagen's most incisive collection, as illustrated by the savage wannabe put-down of 'Show Biz Kids' ("Showbusiness kids making movies of themselves/You know they don't give a fuck about anybody else"), and all wrapped up in surprisingly fierce, guitar-heavy arrangements.

Richard Thompson – *you? me? us?* (1996): English folk-rock guitarist's most diverse collection. Just feel the bile pouring out of 'Put It There Pal' ("some say, you're a rattlesnake in the grass/But I say, the sun shines out of your arse").

Warren Zevon – *Life'll Kill Ya* (2000): The most perceptive (and, given his death from lung cancer in 2003, eerily prophetic) collection of songs Zevon ever wrote. Intimations of mortality abound, even in the barbed Elvis tribute, 'Porcelain Monkey', that includes this fantastic couplet: "Hip-shakin' shoutin' in gold lamé/That's how he earned his regal soubriquet."

