

**INTERVIEW WITH CHARLES MICHEAL PARKS JR. FROM ALL THEM WITCHES
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With every new record, ALL THEM WITCHES is growing both as a band and becoming a household name. They just released their latest album „Nothing as the Ideal” which gave me the perfect excuse to reach out to Charles Michael Parks Jr. and talk about it. Here’s what he had to say about the new album, music, and other ATW related stuff.

So, Parks, „Nothing as the Ideal” is ALL THEM WITCHES’ sixth full-length release in like eight years. It’s quite impressive. Someone could say you are a workhorse. Pun intended

[Laughs] Yeah, we put out a lot of music you know, and I think that’s just because we don’t like to practice. So, we keep creating new music.

That makes you a very productive artist.

I’m sure we could produce more. The problem is that we barely see each other. We wrote those records in a week. And then it took a week or so to record them. I imagine that if we had a sort of work ethic, we could sit down and create even more music.

For your last record, you decided to go to the legendary Abbey Road Studios and to work with Mikey Allred. You already worked with him on the album "Dying Surfer Meets His Maker". Am I right?

Yeah, that’s all right. This time we went to Abbey Road Studios and we brought Mikey along. We love him. He’s like family for us and we wanted him instead of having some big-shot producer.

Last time you worked with Mikey in the States, as I recall?

Yeah, for "Dying Surfer..." we did it all with Mikey in a remote cabin in East Tennessee.

Please tell us something about recording at Abbey Road Studios? The studio is considered legendary and surrounded by mysticism. The Beatles, Pink Floyd, and many other great bands recorded there. Were you intimidated by that, or it gave you more strength?

Honestly, I was worried that I was gonna be disappointed by all the hype you know. It’s the most famous recording studio out there and we just thought it was gonna be played up or cheesy or something. And it wasn’t. It’s a badass studio. It’s full of mysticism and weirdness that you’re talking about. There are a million cool things there, the gear, the stories, the pictures on the wall. I mean

yeah, you can see and feel all this just by walking in the door. One of the studio rooms, I think it's A or Studio One (actually it's Studio One - FF) used to be a garage. Pink Floyd would drive their Rolls-Royce down there and work on their car as they were recording. I think that's hilarious that you've been able to drive to Abbey Road and then go across the whole recording album working on your car in the next room.

How did you come up with the idea to record in Europe this time?

Actually, we tried to self-record and self-release the record again just like we did it last time. But I think I came with the idea record the new album in a studio. While Dan was looking for studios, he saw Abbey Road was free at the time, so we booked it. I didn't know that it was that easy to be somebody special or famous or something.

What was the experience like? I mean the recording process and so on. Was it easy to work there?

So far, it has been my favourite studio experience. I loved going to Abbey Road daily because it felt like it was mine. It all felt like it was ours as soon as we got there. And for the whole eight days, we enjoyed it. Which for me is an unusual case. Normally I hate going to a studio. I don't like the recording process.

But you do it so often [Laughs]

[Laughs] Yeah, I know. But fuck recording. It's so boring. I'd rather be on stage and have like a show where I'm messed up than sitting in a room and doing one song a hundred times and try to get it right. But Abbey Road was great.

My all-time favourite songs from ALL THEM WITCHES are "Diamond" and "1x1". I also like "Fishbelly 86 Onions" and, of course, "Workhorse". When I compare those songs to the new one from "Nothing as the Ideal" I get a feeling that the new record is even more straightforward and angrier. Am I right, or am I just making stuff up right now? [Laughs]

I think you're making stuff up [Laughs]. I think you actually got it backward. Our previous record was rawer. But I'm talking that from my experience, you know. 'Cause "Diamond" is not a very complicated song and neither is "Workhorse". When I think about new albums technicality and writing, I would say the new stuff is more complicated, I think.

Perhaps. I can agree that the new songs are more elaborate but they don't lack the strength that I hear in ALL THEM WITCHES music. Maybe my misconception of the new album is that it needs

more time. It's a grower. You must take it, enjoy it, play it at least a few times, and only then you can enjoy it in full.

People say that to me all the time. They're like "I didn't like it first, and now that I listened to it again and again, I like it now". I think it happens all the time because I don't like choruses. So, for me, our songs are not normal. It's not like we have two or three songs squished together, catchy choruses, and so on. We're not the next big thing, Radiohead or AC/DC type of band. I'm glad that the new album grows up on people and they actually want to listen to it again. For us, it also takes a while to get in a mood to even play our songs outside of the studio. But I'm glad that the album has grown on you.

Perhaps what would help if you would play those songs live. It could be a faster way for the fans to get familiar with the energy of the new album? You haven't played it live, I guess?

We never played it live, so far. Honestly, I don't even remember how to play it because we never played those songs outside of the studio. I'll have to relearn it before we hit the road again.

Listen perhaps it's a dumb question but stay with me [Laughs]. The band is from Nashville, Tennessee. Where I come from, we tend to associate Nashville with country music and pop stars like Taylor Swift. I know that Stephen Tyler and Jack White are both from Nashville but it's hard to imagine that there's a psychedelic rock scene with such bands like ALL THEM WITCHES...

[Laughs] Yeah, I think that a lot of people have that idea of Nashville.

Do you think it's a misconception?

No, you're not wrong. But what people outside of States don't know that you can find a lot of the best musicians that I can think of in Nashville. The only thing that I haven't found in Nashville is good reggae. I mean everything hip hop, rock, pop music, and country you can find just about anything western I should say, in Nashville. Like Jack White. I think that what's drove him here because he's originally from Detroit and I'm from Louisiana. None of my guys are Nashville, originally. They are from Florida and Ohio. Come to think of it maybe 10 people that I know are actually from Nashville. And almost none of them play country music.

What drove you to that kind of music that you perform?

I don't know. Just because it came out of me, I guess, that's why I keep writing. I didn't listen to stoner rock or psychedelic rock or whatever that people try to claim we are. I've never heard HIGH ON FIRE until I was like twenty-five or something. And I didn't listen to CLUTCH or knew anything

about these bands either. The music that we are making has been brought up to the room by us. I don't know where it comes from or why it comes from.

Perhaps some bands inspired ALL THEM WITCHES. That influenced you. I hear some grunge music, psychedelia, sometimes your vocal sounds like the second coming of Jim Morrison. Could you elaborate on that? or me

What do you want 5, 10, 50 bands? [Laughs]

No, just a few influences would be ok [Laughs].

Now I obviously love some bands and musicians. But I can't consider them as heroes. But there are some bands that hit hard every time I listen to them. Everybody wants to hear The Allman Brothers Band, Pink Floyd, Black Sabbath, Led Zeppelin. That these are our influences. What people don't wanna hear is I listen to a lot of religious music from all around the world. I also listen to some old violin music from Louisiana. I mean Robby listens to a lot of hip-hop, we both listen to a lot of new age music. Ben listens to black metal. I don't fucking like black metal. The influences are everywhere and everything can be an influence. Also, grunge that you hear there is possibly from me. I like Pixies and all of the post-hardcore stuff as well. I like bands with good lyrics, like Every Time I Die. I don't normally listen to stuff like that but their lyrics are so good. Anyone that has something more to say than "I'm going out getting drunk and trying to pick up women" that resonates with me. I mean when the band has actually something to say.

I get it. So, there is a little bit of Americana, in ALL THEM WITCHES or not?

Yeah, you should see where I grew up. It's Americana to the teeth. Only fields and soybeans.

I tell you that because for some time I'm a fan of Rhiannon Giddens. I love how she translates the old sounds to the modern musical language.

Rhiannon Giddens? I don't know.

Really?

Nah, gotcha! [Laughs] I know her I heard her a couple of times.

Your lyrics don't sound like lyrics at all. They're more like poetry. Where this comes from? Were you surrounded by poets and poetry at one point in your life?

You know, I love poetry. I didn't grow up around poets. Nobody introduced me to poetry. I think I think I've read a lot of Sandburg and Shakespeare when I was younger. I never had a big social life. I

didn't have a lot of friends. I never went to parties to drink, smoke, or even hang out with people. But I've read a lot of books from the library. Poetry books, old Greek myths, Roman history, and stuff like that. I like sci-fi too. There was a time that I couldn't stop reading. When I was younger I read 5-6 books at a time. Now it changed. I wish I'd still did that but now I'm a little lazier.

Perhaps now, you're more occupied with making records, yes?

Maybe. Now I don't wanna hear anybody's poetry except my own [Laughs].

How do you tie this all up together? I mean the lyrics and the music. You don't overdo the heavy or the psychedelia. The songs are varied and there is meaning to them as well.

[Laughs] I don't want the song to stay the same for like twenty minutes. Like in metal when you have 20 minutes of noodling. We noodle but it always changes. I don't know how we do it but we want to give something different rather than 70's worship or anything like that. Those guys back then were experimenting with acid but you can do it also without. I never wanted to drive a pick-up, wear a patchy vest or something.

With your music, you are crossing some bridges and transcending genres. Like that moment in "1x1" when you're walking straight and I get a fucking Henry Rollins experience, you know?

[Laughs] Yeah, I know what you mean. I like him.

In the late 90's when I saw Henry Rollins singing "Liar" that my buddy recorded on a VHS tape straight from MTV I was blown away. I'm talking about this kind of look and feel. And also, the cross-genre type of thing when thinking about music.

Yeah. I didn't grow up listening to Black Flag or anything. But I like the Rollins Band. You know what I thought what he was doing is like jazz music but also, he was like yelling at people about their morals, and I fucking love that. I like Henry cause he's doesn't afraid to stick up for his morals. He says flat out what he thinks. Just like what he says about why he's not married: "Every time I meet a woman, she drinks I'm bored, she smokes I'm bored, she doesn't work out, and I do that". It's like he knows what he wants and he doesn't take anything less, I kind of try to model myself on that. I see people try and put ideas into my hand all the time, but that doesn't make any sense to me. I want to do my thing.

And you really do your own thing.

Yeah, I said some time ago that if you want to make art don't let anybody tell you what to do. It doesn't make sense to blindly worship the old masters and revere Dutch paintings. Go through all this schooling. That's a level of celebrity I'm not aspiring to. Like Jay-Z. He's now an amazing brand, and he's one of the biggest pop stars in the world. But whatever he does must fit the culture that he's a part of. I'm not trying to do that. I'm trying to make myself happy.

Is the visual aspect of ALL THEM WITCHES important for you? It can give a new perspective on a song.

It always gives me a little new perspective. What Robby has in mind and how he translates it to the screen. I think that a lot of musicians don't have the visual aspect well worked out. It's not like a commodity of musicians to have a video or a photo or background really. It usually is something that they hire out and the director has an idea and you do that idea and make a big video or whatever. But I don't like producers to tell me what to do. I don't always follow what Robby is doing but I can't fight with it. And I appreciate it. He's my brother he's popping new ideas to this band just like I'm am and just like Dan is.

Listen, you played last year here in Poland. Because of this whole COVID situation, there are no gigs right now. Perhaps you have some plans for the next year?

Yeah, we do and we're currently working on it. How it will turn out I honestly don't know. So, I'll hold my breath.

Is it hard for you to relive the emotions you recorded earlier in the studio? I mean there's a certain vulnerability to that. When you're writing from your perspective about your feelings it may be like cutting your soul open in front of other people when you perform live.

Yes, and I have to do it. There's not a lot of chances that males get to be vulnerable. For me, like it's like that: when I go out on the stage and cry, I don't care anybody sees me cry. Sometimes it happens. You don't drive for eight hours to play your show not to put yourself there. Really. It would be wasting your time. I don't get nervous by crowd size. Ten thousand people crowd doesn't bother me. But the chance to get out there and scream about what I know and what I think and how I feel is really important for me. That's why I appreciate the live experience, as opposed to recording in the studio. The latter doesn't have the same impact, you know?

You told me earlier that you're not together with the guys. What are you up to lately?

Nothing. We kind of moved down of Nashville. Robby spends his time on the West Coast mostly and yeah, we're just waiting for a chance to come back and play together. Right now, we are all

separated. It's not the first time this is happening we done these three or four times our band experience we lived in the different places and we come back to Nashville.

Do you have anything else to say to our readers and fans in Poland?

Yeah, I think that the Polish people are some of the nicest people in Europe, honestly. They're outright friendly and accommodating. I really appreciate how everybody treated me last time I was there, so I look forward to seeing everybody again. And I hope that we still have a fanbase there next time we come.