GRAVEYARD BIO 2023

As enduring and authentic as an old school leather jacket, Graveyard have long since mastered the art of rock’n’roll. Formed in 2006 in Gothenburg, Sweden, their shared passion for hard rock, psychedelia and the eternal bedrock of blues marked them out from the start. Led by vocalist/guitarist Joakim Nilsson, they opened their account with their now seminal self-titled Tee Pee Recordings debut in 2007, showcasing fiery chemistry and some wildly imaginative songwriting. Subsequently snapped up by the mighty Nuclear Blast Records, the band’s rise to prominence was swift and irresistible.

In 2008, guitarist Jonatan Ramm expanded the ranks, joining Nilsson, bassist Rikard Edlund and drummer Axel Sjöberg for the recording of second album *Hisingen Blues*. A critical smash that more than lived up to the hype, it established Graveyard as rock’n’roll heavyweights. A thunderous, soul-stirring live band, with subtlety and swagger in equal amounts, they spent the next decade keeping fans of loose-limbed and earthy rock music in a near-constant state of rapture. From the rootsy clatter of 2012’s *Lights Out* to the magical, muscular grooves of 2018’s Peace (taking in the sepia-tinted folk doom of 2015’s *Innocence & Decadence* along the way), Graveyard have made some of the most vital and vivid heavy rock of the 21st century. All eyes and ears are on their next move.

“I mean, it’s an obvious story!” laughs Joakim Nilsson. “We had plans to start recording or writing an album before the pandemic started, but then everything shut down. Maybe we shut down too, you know? We couldn’t make any money from playing anymore, so everybody started getting jobs and stuff like that, and everything took a lot longer than was expected. During the recording we had a Covid scare and we had to cancel things for a while, so it all took a long while, but mostly because we didn’t have time. We were working and taking care of family, whatever was needed most.”

Fast forward to 2023. Graveyard have completed their latest full-length recording and memories of gloomy lockdown are fast fading. This band has evolved yet again, both in terms of personnel and on a profound musical level. Simply titled *6,* the band’s sixth studio record may be instantly recognisable as the work of Nilsson and his comrades, but this is a very different kind of Graveyard album. The second record to feature a line-up of Nilsson, Ramm, bassist Truls Mörck and drummer Oskar Bergenheim, it is slower, more soulful, more introspective and a little darker than its predecessors. The new songs reflect the fragile aftermath of a ruinous global sickness, drawing more inspiration than ever from the blues in the process. But despite its melancholy overtones, *6* still sparks and flashes with many moments of riff-driven euphoria. Ultimately, Graveyard are operating on instinct alone.

”We only make the music that feels right at the time, when we’re making it,” says Nilsson. “I mean, the main thing was we wanted to make a more guitar-driven album. *Peace* was maybe more bass and rhythm-driven, but now we’ve got more of the guitar stuff, so you can hear that there are two of us! [Laughs]. We try to make the albums as different as possible, but we *always* do that and people often don’t hear it! Maybe for once people will hear we’ve made something different from what we normally do.”

“Since *Peace* was a little harder and rowdier, it felt like a good time to have some breathing space,” says Jonatan Ramm. “You can’t always choose what to write. You just work it out and see what feels the best. As always we didn’t know what it would sound like, but we trust Don, as we always do when we record with him. He was also producing, so if he had anything that he wanted to change, we gave it a try and we worked from there. I think the songs are built up really nicely on this one.”

From the shimmering slow-flow of opener *Godnatt* onwards, *6* is easily identifiable as the most striking, original album of Graveyard’s story so far. A gently lysergic blend of desolate guitars, simmering Hammond and lithe, nimble bass and drums, the Swedes demonstrate a lightness of touch that they have only hinted at in the past. Whether it’s the rootsy strut of Twice, the garage rock *sturm ‘n’ twang* of *I Follow You*, or *Sad Song*’s bleary, barroom blues, *6* is a restless but riveting affair. Meanwhile, while Graveyard may have stepped outside of their comfort zone this time around, a renewed collaboration with a dear old friend has also had a huge impact on the new songs’ freshness and verve. Master of knobs and faders on the band’s early works, Swedish producer Don Ahlsterberg returned to capture *6* in all its gritty, groovy glory.

“We worked with Don on your first three albums, and he’s back now on the sixth,” Nilsson explains. “We had other producers on the fourth and fifth records, but I’m happy he’s back for this one. We started recording *6* in an old studio in Sweden called Silence. It’s a rural, *foresty* sort of studio in one of the darkest parts of a county in Sweden called Värmland. It’s a really nice place, but we didn’t have everything written yet, so we were only there for a week. We started recording guitars and drums for three or four songs. Then we decided to use Don’s own personal studio here in Gothenburg. It was the most convenient choice!”

After dabbling momentarily with digital technology on their last album, Peace, Graveyard have reverted to their original ethos on *6*. Captured using analogue equipment only, the new songs have the kind of raw and sometimes primitive edge that simply can’t be faked. From the drifting swamp gospel of *Breathe In, Breathe Out*, to … *6* sounds as old as the hills, but as fresh as the daisies that grow on them.

“I just like the feeling that you need a really good *take*,” says Nilsson. “It all felt too easy on ^. I just sang a song three times and the engineer cut the best parts from all the takes together. With tape, it feels more substantial and real. It’s important that you hear that it’s hard to play this stuff sometimes! Especially with singing, you need to hear the effort it takes. If you want a perfect album with everything recorded perfectly, Graveyard is not the band for you! [Laughs] We love the mistakes. If the feeling is right, then the music’s good.”

While the music on *6* veers from languorous blues to kaleidoscopic psych, Jonatan Ramm’s lyrics paint a more monochrome, melancholy picture. Although shrouded in metaphor and poetic misdirection, songs like Sad Song and Bright Lights bring a more intimate and emotionally supercharged feel to Graveyard’s sound, whether at full blast or smothered in restraint. These are elegant, organic anti-hymns; tinged with sadness and troubled by loss, but bathed in the sonorous, soothing tones of hope.

“I think the lyrics have a lot to do with the whole pandemic period and all the change that happened for everyone,” Ramm explains. “We worked hard and often on this album, but there were a lot of bumps in the road. Everybody got sick. We have kids and other jobs, so we all needed to put food on the table. It was a strange time and I guess a lot of the songs ended up in a certain mood. *Twice* is about a few aspects of human interaction, like when you realise that people can change a lot and not always for the better. *Breathe In, Breathe Out* is a song about hanging in there, when life is a struggle. *Rampant Fields* is about making mistakes and realising that this is a rollercoaster ride and we’re just passing through. It’s always hard to explain lyrics, but this album is more about the *feeling* of the time.”

Armed with their darkest but most accessible album yet, Graveyard have weathered a few years of isolation and frustration and come back braver, bolder and more bluesy than ever.

Reinvigorated and surfing on waves of inspiration, they are ready to take their new songs out on the road, where the *real* magic happens and the rock really rolls. For fans of the truly authentic, *6* is mandatory, medicinal listening. Now watch this thing grow.

“All, we can do is hope that people enjoy what we do and we’ll take it from there!” Ramm laughs. “You can never be certain of anything, but maybe this record will be more appreciated by people that haven’t heard us before or people who think we’re harder than we are. Maybe they’ve heard the name and they think we play some other kind of music! Hopefully we’ll reach out to even more people and we’ll grow as a band. I think there’s a bright future, if we continue to travel and play live. It feels good to be done with this record. Now we see what happens next!”

“Before everything stopped for the pandemic, we were kind of fed up with everything, so we needed this break!” concludes Nilsson. “But we’ve been out a little bit already and it feels good! Now we love doing it again and playing music together is fun now. It’s good to be out touring, so I’m looking forward to it. The ambition is high and we want to tour as much as we can. Everywhere!”