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**MURPHY'S LAW AT HARD ROCK CASINO
AMERICAN IDOL FOR BANDS**



BEN HARPER - BILLY JOEL - AARON LEWIS - VELVET REVOLVER - AEROSMITH

In a landmark ruling on pornography, United States Supreme Court justice Potter Stewart famously declared that while he couldn't necessarily define it, "I know it when I see it." Likewise, that which constitutes true rock and roll is not easily explained; you simply know it when you hear it.

True rock and roll gets you wasted. It lets your adrenaline run wild. It makes you do terribly foolish things, like purchase an embarrassingly tight pair of \$200 black trousers made from the skin of some exotic mammal in the desperate hopes that the spirit of Jon Bon Jovi might just squeeze its way in there and make you look cool.

These days, unfortunately, true rock and roll is also just about as rare as the poor critter that was killed to make your pants. The scene is cluttered with imposters, quick to learn a few chords, skip a few haircuts, buy a Stones shirt, and capitalize on the current trend of "retro is better." They may look the part, but they don't live it.

Oxford, England trio, The Thieves, on the other hand, are genuine rock and roll through and through. Not only do they look the part (chiseled cheek bones, tight pants, long hair), and live the part (getting drunk with the Darkness, living with the drummer of AC/DC, getting accused of, ahem, theft), they also sound exactly the way good ol' swaggering rock should.

Think a poppier AC/DC minus the laryngitis. Think Jet with slicker production, better choruses, and more balls. Think *Tales From The White Line*, produced by Chris

Brown (Radiohead, Muse), and one of 2005's best records that you didn't hear.

Now, stop thinking and get ready to rawk! RAG Magazine spoke with bassist Sam Stokes about working with the man who made Radiohead's *The Bends* sound good, dressing up as Spinal Tap, and conquering America, one town at a time.

RAG Magazine: Tell me a bit about how you guys got started.

Sam Stokes: Well, Hal's my brother, he's the singer, and we were in bands as we were growing up. And my dad's pretty musical, so we had all the Led Zeppelin records, Pink Floyd, Pretty Things, and all that stuff, sort of brought up in a musical family. And then when I was about 17, I got a band together with Hal, and I've been doing it ever since.

RAG: And you guys kind of developed a following around Oxford, right?

SS: Yeah, we did like three years in Oxford, actually four years, and by the time we left, we were selling out every show. We played then to about 400 to 500 kids. And, I don't know, maybe it was a stupid reason, or a stupid thing to do, move away off to America. But, actually, the



the thieves

Story: Craig Mandell

reason why we moved to America was because we got a management deal with this guy called Steven Smith who used to manage Lenny Kravitz on his first two albums. So, that's why we decided to move to L.A., and I guess it's working out well.

RAG: And what is this Spinal Tap connection I hear about?

SS: Oh, right. Well, Jamie is our long-time drummer now, and the first show we ever did with Jamie was a Spinal Tap night. Basically, he was in another band and we were in another band, and we were just really good friends and jammed all the time. And kind of this infamous club called The Point in Oxford got closed down, so we were offered to do the headliners slot on the last night of it being open. So, all the local bands did cover bands, like one did a Ratt band, and when we went on we did Spinal Tap. And, you know, when we went on we dressed up in spandex and mullets and the whole lot. It was pretty good fun, yeah.

RAG: You didn't have any "drummer accidents" in the name of Tap, did you?

SS: We've been through probably more drummers than Spinal Tap, literally, through like seven or eight drummers. But now Jamie's been in the band for like two and a half years, so, it's working out well.

RAG: Speaking of drummers, is it true that you live with the drummer of AC/DC?

SS: Well, yeah. The hookup is kind of weird. We were at the NAMM show, it's like an expo for guitar amps and guitars and stuff. Hal's endorsed by this British amp company called Cornford. And Paul Cornford is friends with Chris Slade. So we were on the stand and Chris came up and was introduced to us. Hal actually went to college with his son, so there was like an instant hookup there - you know, chat for hours and have some beers. Chris was just coming through L.A., he wasn't living there at the time, and he told us he was coming back in a few months to live, but he didn't have a place to stay. So we offered to let him stay with us. And initially it was just going to be for like a month until he found a place to stay, and then, you know, he just ended up staying for a lot longer, and now we're like really good friends and he's kind of like our flat-mate.

RAG: It must be crazy for you to be living with the drummer of one of your major influences.

SS: Totally, yeah, and we've jammed with him, like done "Back in Black," and "Thunderstruck," and all those kind of things. And it's amazing to play with him. He's quite old, he's like, I don't know, 59 or something, but he still bangs the shit out of the drums. He's the hardest hitting drummer I've ever seen, he's just unbelievable.

RAG: Can he hang with you guys in the partying too?

SS: Yeah, totally. He likes to drink. He can keep up on the booze definitely.

RAG: Well speaking of "Thunderstruck," you kind of play the riff in "Don't You Lose Me," right? Was that kind of a nod to Chris?

SS: I guess maybe living with Chris and jamming and stuff, it just subliminally came out, you know? But I don't know, it wasn't intentionally to go, "Oh, this is 'Thunderstruck.'" We were just looking for a cool lead and it just seemed to work, you know? It sounded cool.

RAG: So tell me how you hooked up with Chris Brown?

SS: That's actually.... Ages ago on our first album, we were set have our album produced by Gordon Raphael, who produced the Strokes. So, he flew out to England. We live in the countryside back in England, so he hung with us for about a week and a half. And it started off really well, but he's from New York, and I think the countryside just drove him mad, and the whole thing fell apart. Chris was just going to engineer the album, but Gordon Raphael flew back to New York and we were without a producer, so Chris just kind of took over the producer role. And we've been friends ever since, and we asked him to come out to L.A. and check out what we were doing. So he flew out and wanted to produce it, so we did it.

RAG: Was it big for you to work with him?

SS: I guess it kind of just gives you confidence, you know? You need someone that you can rely on and hit your ideas off and not worry that they don't know what they're talking about. So, it's more of a confidence thing. You know, it boosts your confidence knowing that if something's shit, he'll tell you it's shit, and if something's really good then it's probably...pretty good, you know? So I guess it wasn't really daunting, it was more of a release to have someone that knows what they're doing, that's got a track record, and has worked on so many great records.

RAG: How did you come up with the name The Thieves?

SS: Well, me and my brother, it must've been about six or seven years ago, we were really pissed up and we walked past our old school. And, we broke into our school, and about half an hour later, cops were lined up around the outside. We spent the night in jail, and we got away with...we were given like a burglary charge or something? I think we were charged with burglary, even though all we took were like some pens, and it was just us being pissed up, you know, we weren't like being assholes really, we were just drunk. But we got a really bad rep for it, like, we got a proper caution for burglary, so...The Thieves is just kind of like a bit of a social commentary, kind of like saying "fuck it" to the man.

RAG: And as far as "Tales From The White Line" goes, is that just "tales from the road?"

SS: Um, I think it's from the road, but you can read it however you like, you know? It's gonna be, you know, read it how you like, open to suggestion, but read it how you like.

RAG: So, basically you guys kind of encompass the whole sex, drugs, and rock and roll thing in one.

SS: Yeah, totally. I guess, just, see it how you see it.

RAG: So tell me a crazy "tale from the white line" that you guys have experienced.

SS: Well, let's see. We went back to this party in Boise, Idaho, one night and we got really hammered and had a good party. Then in the morning, we were staying in our R.V. and we got a knock on the door from some cops. And they were like, "The people you were just staying with having that party last night have said that you've stolen some of their prescription drugs." And Hal had broken his foot, so he had loads of prescription drugs. And we were like, "Well, I don't think we do but you can search our van." And we didn't know it, but we had, like, weed, and loads of other stuff in the van, and they searched the whole van and didn't find it. Then, afterwards, the person who was with us was like, "Fuck, I had loads of weed," so, we got away with that.

RAG: Close call.

SS: Yeah, and when the cops were saying, "So why are you in town?" We were like, "Oh, we're in a band." And they were like, "What's the name of the band?" And we were like, "Shit, we're called The Thieves!" So it didn't go down too well. After a while, though, they found it quite funny.

