DON BROCO BIOG

“With each album we’ve looked at tearing up the rulebook,” says singer Rob Damiani of his band Don Broco’s creative philosophy to date. He’s not wrong; with Priorities (2012), Automatic (2015) and Technology (2018), the Bedford four-piece have forged their own path, marrying hefty riffs to irresistible pop melodies on records brash but buoyant, savage but slick, all while sounding unlike anyone else. It was evidently a recipe for success, too, given that Technology reached number 5 in the UK Album Chart.

Even with a discography characterised by confounding expectations, however, nothing will prepare listeners for Amazing Things - with its abundance of styles, emotions and pop culture references making for the most combustible powder keg of a record this side of Limp Bizkit’s Chocolate Starfish and the Hot Dog Flavored Water. It is one of the year’s best albums, and unquestionably the most eccentric.

“I speak for all of us when I say that being considered eccentric is absolutely a compliment,” reveals guitarist Si Delaney. “It suggests that something sounds different - less obvious and more unusual. We’ve always prized ourselves on making music designed to wrong-foot listeners. We’ve definitely taken that desire to the next level too.”

The roots of Amazing Things date back to the latter part of 2018, when Don Broco, in the midst of the lengthy album cycle for Technology, supported Linkin Park legend Mike Shinoda on his 23-date US tour. Despite their arduous workload at that point, the band set themselves the challenge of writing a new song to play at their show at London’s Wembley Arena in February 2019. As fans now know, that song ultimately turned out to be HALF MAN HALF GOD, though it was very nearly the track, Uber. Now, with its Giorgio Moroder style synths and a moody build recalling Nine Inch Nails’ Something I Can Never Have, Uber provides one of this album’s highlights.

“We knew there was something great about the song Uber but something didn’t quite click into place at the time and we couldn’t force it, so we put it to one side,” Rob says of the song’s faltering development and subsequent second wind. “As soon as we had a break from touring later, though, we came back to it and were able to unlock the undiscovered magic in it. It’s great to have it on this album for that reason and because, musically, it harks back to Technology.”

Funnily enough, technology (with a small ‘t’) played a key role on Amazing Things, with the band writing the majority of the record on lengthy Zoom sessions during lockdown, before decamping to Suffolk’s Decoy Studios at the end of last summer to complete it. “You can only take a song to a certain point,” Rob says of the limitations of working online. “Being on a screen for eight hours a day isn’t healthy, so by the time we got to the studio and were in a room together in the middle of beautiful countryside, it felt like an escape.”

The band were under the watchful eye of Jason Perry, who produced the band’s second album Automatic (2015) and co-produced Technology. “He’s been on a journey with us,” reveals Si. “On Automatic, we’d given him the brief that we’d wanted to make a polished pop-rock record, which we succeeded in creating. This time, however, we’d told him we wanted something wild that threw everything at the listener, bringing lots of our weirder elements to the fore.”

For evidence that the mission was a success, look no further than the first taste of the album. While lead singles traditionally cleave close to what a band has done before, as a way to safely bridge into a new chapter, that’s not the case with MSR (Manchester Super Reds) - its raging, unpredictable structure the result of endless tinkering from a band striving to enter unchartered territory. “We messed about with it for a while, stitching and re-stitching, to deliver these very deliberate, jolting shifts that we’ve never done before.”

And despite drummer Matt Donnelly being a Manchester United devotee, the song isn’t actually about love for the club, but the darker side of fandom. “I wanted to write something about an aspect of social media culture I’d really noticed in the last year,” explains Rob. “Of people tearing other people down, with much of that destructive negativity coming from the supposed fans of bands and teams. In football, you get these ultra fans who go way beyond the point of criticism into cruel, unadulterated bullying.”

So why <<that>> title specifically? “It was very much a placeholder vocal,” the singer says of the gruff lyric ‘<<Manchester Super Reds No.1 Fan>>’. “I figured we’d work something out later, so I’d just shout something in the meantime. The day before it came time to do it, I’d been helping clear out my parents’ house, which was mostly stuff from when I was a kid. In one of the many boxes was this old Manchester United keyring, which my dad had got me when I was deciding what football team to support. I brought it in for Matt, as he’s still a fan, then I saw the words ‘Manchester Super Reds No.1 Fan’, so I decided to shout that on the track. Somehow a better replacement never came up.”

Opening track Gumshield similarly explores the pitfalls of social media, specifically the damned-if-you-do-damned-if-you-don’t nature of taking a position on issues online. “You could put something out there that’s discredited minutes later, or wrong, and get people sending hate. Or you could say nothing, which to others is just as bad. The gumshield of the title is about the idea of trying to protect yourself from those onslaughts.” The song’s refrain finds Rob calmly announcing ‘<<Yes I’m angry and I’m disappointed>>’ before dishing out threats of serious physical violence, which not only articulates the frustrations felt by those on both sides of an argument, but provides a beatdown in the mould of Limp Bizkit’s Break Stuff and Rage Against The Machine’s Killing In The Name.

Bruce Willis, meanwhile, starts as a laid back acoustic number before going somewhere infinitely weirder, and was born from Rob’s surprise that no one had utilised the notorious Die Hard catchphrase “Yippee-Ki-Yay, motherfucker” in song. “It’s so iconic that I couldn’t believe someone hadn’t immortalised it on record before, so we corrected that.”

With tracks about an app-based taxi company, ferocious fans, and Hollywood action stars, it’s fair to say Amazing Things doesn’t have a central theme like its predecessor, Technology. It’s governed by an overarching emotion, though. “It definitely feels angrier than the music we’ve written before,” admits Rob. “That anger was fuelled by the anxiety that came from a year of uncertainty. Not being on tour meant more time spent reading the news, feeling a sense of despair, not knowing our place in the world.”

“As a group of guys, we’re positive people who are always looking for a way to make the best of a shitty situation,” explains Rob. “We’re always wondering: if something is terrible about your life or the world, what can you do to make it better? Even the songs on Amazing Things that don’t find a light at the end of the tunnel, they at least touch on thoughts and feelings that exorcise demons sufficiently enough to have a positive effect.”

Admittedly that desire to find a silver lining was tested to its limits at times, resulting in the more sensitive side of Amazing Things. On How Are You Done With Existing?, Rob shares the frustration he felt when a period of ill health left his father defeated mentally. “From a selfish perspective, I couldn’t believe that, for a time, he thought he had nothing to live for. I couldn’t believe he seemed ready to move on from this world, feeling he’d lost the fight within himself.”

Closing track Easter Sunday is a song that’s heavier for its meaning than its music - dealing, in part, with Matt’s father losing three brothers in the space of a month in the early days of the coronavirus pandemic. “It’s an emotional song for me to listen back to and be reminded of those days,” reflects Matt. “It was such a scary time, and seeing how much damage it had done to my family made me wonder how bad it was going to get for everyone else.”

Given the horrors of the past 12 months, of lives lost or irreversibly changed, Don Broco consider themselves lucky to still be here, with an album they’re immensely proud of. And despite Amazing Things being born during a time of turbulence and setting pain, confusion, aggrievance and disappointment to captivating music, the band has emerged supercharged from the experience. And you will be too listening to it. Amazing Things awaits.