



FireHouse came flying out of the traps and delivered a double-platinum smash debut album *and* a US top five single, 'Love Of A Lifetime', right before grunge put paid to hair metal. *Andrew Daly* talks to guitarist **Bill Leverty** about the album that got in just under the wire...

THE MAKING OF

FIREHOUSE



'FIREHOUSE'

THE YEAR WAS 1990, and LA hair metal standard bearers Warrant were busy dropping the hugely successful 'Cherry Pie' album. A couple of weeks earlier a little-known band from Seattle called Alice In Chains had issued their debut album, 'Facelift'. Few people had worked it out back then, but that album was about to make hair metal redundant. Charlotte, North Carolina band FireHouse definitely hadn't got the memo, though. Despite being miles away from Hollywood geographically, the band's debut album, 'FireHouse', released on the Epic label on 11 September 1990, was unashamedly old-school hard rock, driven by vocalist CJ Snare's MTV voice and guitarist Bill Leverty's blues-tinged shred. The album managed to deliver old-school rock sales figures too, going double platinum in the US with sales of over two million, no doubt driven by the Top Five success of the inevitable ballad 'Love Of A Lifetime'. 'FireHouse' was one of the last of the old-school hair metal bands to deliver

massive commercial success before Kurt Cobain and Eddie Vedder arrived on the scene and quickly stripped bands like FireHouse, Warrant, Cinderella *et al* of their right to rock.

"We didn't see it coming," says Bill Leverty of the grunge invasion. "We spent a *lot* of money shooting a great video for a song called 'Reach For The Sky' [that appeared on the band's sophomore album, 1992's 'Hold Your Fire']. MTV played it *once*. We'd just dropped a hundred grand on a video and MTV's programmers had 'changed direction'. We could see that the writing was on the wall - and then Epic's rock department started prioritising alternative bands."

Despite the kick in the teeth that grunge delivered, nearly 34 years after the success of 'FireHouse' the band is still rocking, though reeling from CJ Snare's sad passing on 5 April this year from colon cancer at the age of 64.

"CJ really left one hell of a mark, not only as a

legendary singer, but also as a songwriter and keyboard player," says Leverty. "He really contributed a lot to the first FireHouse album."

Nate Peck now carries the vocal torch for the band as they keep on keeping the hair-metal genre alive.

BILL, THE GENESIS OF THE SONGS ON 'FIREHOUSE' GOES BACK A LONG WAY, RIGHT?

"That's true. I first bought a Tascam 244 Portastudio when I was fresh out of school in Richmond, Virginia, together with a drum machine and a bass. Being a guitarist, that meant I had everything I needed to record demos in my bedroom. I learnt by trial and error, figuring out how the four-track Portastudio worked, how to bounce tracks. There were lots of limitations, of course, but by the time I started getting my early band White Heat together, I'd already learned a reasonable amount about getting sounds onto tape. Once I'd found

a drummer, Michael Foster, in 1984, we rented a house together and got more serious with the recordings. We eventually got kicked out of that place because the landlord came over one time, saw cables all over the place and freaked out. We eventually added CJ Snare on vocals and Perry Richardson on bass and started writing together as a band, then changed our name to FireHouse. The first song we wrote together was 'Helpless', which eventually made it on the first album. There were a handful from those early days that made the album, actually."

YOU ALL MOVED TO CHARLOTTE, NORTH CAROLINA IN 1987...

"And our recording techniques got steadily more sophisticated. We had a band house with lots of equipment where we could lay down drums, bass, and rhythm guitar all at once, and then bounce the tracks