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'When Legends Rise': Sully Erna and Tony Rombola Discuss Godsmack's New Album

By James Wood April 11, 2018

20 years after the release of their debut album—and more than 20 million in album sales later—Godsmack are back with their seventh studio album, *When Legends Rise*. It's the band's first album of new material in four years, following the monster success of 2014's *1000hp*.

Produced by frontman Sully Erna and Erik Ron, the sonically intense, layered record contains the signature Godsmack sound, while pushing the band to new limits of musical creativity at the same time.

From the tribal percussion and lethal riffs at the opening of the title track to the groove-fueled power of songs like "Bulletproof," "Every Part of Me," and "Someday," a theme of rebirth runs through the entire album. *When Legends Rise* also contains the infectious sleeper track, "Under Your Scars," the first ballad to ever make its way onto a Godsmack album.

Guitar World recently sat down with Erna and Godsmack's lead guitarist, Tony Rombola, to talk about *When Legends Rise*, gear and more in this new interview.

How does *When Legends Rise* compare to some of Godsmack's previous work?

Sully Erna: This record is a complete rebirth and a conscious decision to experiment and explore new sounds and more modern melodies, and to invent the next chapter in the band's career. From zero to 20 [years] has certainly been one journey, and we were beginning to feel like the same thing was happening over and over. So, we took the time to dig in and get to work on taking it to a new level. There's a whole new generation of fans coming up, and we want to evolve with them. There's been a lot of changes in our own lives as well and I think this music reflects that.

What's your songwriting process like?

Erna: It happens in all different ways. Most of the time, it starts with music. But there have been songs that began acapella and then the music was added later. There's even been times where I'll play drums and write to grooves I enjoy playing. For the most part, we write what we feel is the best music at the time and hope other people will enjoy it as well. This album also gave me opportunity to explore writing with outside writers who normally wouldn't be a part of what we do. It opened a different side and allowed me to think outside the box.

Let's discuss a few tracks from the new album, beginning with "When Legends Rise."

Erna: The title is a metaphorical statement for rebirth. It's really about this band coming to a place, both individually and musically, where we wanted to burn this thing down and rebuild it in a different way. For me, I'd gone through a transition over the last few years where I eliminated all the negative things from my life. The other guys in the band were also going through their own transformations, so there were a lot of things that seemed like a rebirth. "Legends" is a metaphor for the phoenix rising from the ashes. It's a theme that runs throughout the whole record.

What about "Bulletproof"?

Rombola: That was a song Sully wrote with [producer] Erik Ron. It's a commercial-sounding track with a slick chorus and a lot of guitar harmonies. But it's still polished and heavy.

Erna: That was the exact song that opened the whole can of worms. I wrote it after I'd gone through a shocking relationship breakup. It opened my eyes to a lot of other people and things around me that we there for the wrong reasons. I decided to flush it out and change.



“Under Your Scars”?

Rombola: Sully had the idea and vision for that song. He's been playing piano a lot on his solo work, so it wasn't a big surprise for us. It's a cool tune and solo, and a lot of fun to play.

Erna: That song is a sleeper. It's an epic song and the biggest risk on the record because it's the first time we're introducing a real ballad into the band. Lyrically, it touches upon a sensitive subject we all go through. We've all been [in] hurt relationships and carry baggage and scars. A lot of time, you'll meet someone who's great for you, but it doesn't work out because you allow the damage to get in the way. This song is about letting the other person know that it's ok to have scars, and I'm willing to live with yours as long as you understand that I have my own and you're willing to live with mine.

“Every Part of Me”?

Rombola: That's another example of song that we learned and got under our belts in the studio. A lot of it came really quickly. I love the big, vocal choruses of that song.

“Someday”?

Erna: That song happened as a band effort. I had the basic ideas and then we sat down in the rehearsal room and carved it out. It's one of my favorites on the record that I think will translate well live.

What was it like working with Erik Ron on this album?

Rombola: It was a great. Erik's a really talented guy who writes, plays guitar and sings. He brought a lot to the table, even with amps. We usually go into sessions with six to eight high-gain tube amps. This time, we let Erik drive the sound and he came in with a Kemper with all his amps in it and that's what we tracked with.

Erna: I originally worked with Erik just for a few writing sessions, and during those sessions, we stumbled upon “Bulletproof” and the song, “Take It To The Edge.” Beyond the chemistry, the demos Erik had given me had a strong production. I knew sonically, he could help make this record sound amazing. I wanted it to sound tight, crisp and strong, and he really nailed it.

What's your setup going to be like for Godsmack's upcoming tour with Shinedown?

Erna: For this run, we'll be experimenting more with the Kemper systems. It not only allows us to have a cleaner deck, but I couldn't believe how spot on the profiles are. Guitar wise, I play Gibsons for electrics. For acoustics, I use a Zager. They're custom made from scratch by the man himself and are the best sounding acoustics I've ever heard.

Rombola: I've been using PRS for that past few years. The ones I use live are the Doublecut Custom 22's.

What are you most looking forward to about this next phase of the band's career?

Rombola: I'm excited to see where it takes us. Sully had a vision before we even started this recording and we all backed him. So, I'm looking forward to seeing where it goes.

Erna: I'm hyper-focused on this cycle. My goal is to get this band consistently on top in arenas. That's where I think we're at our best. I love playing outdoor stages and amphitheatres but don't like being at the mercy of mother nature. When you can get inside an arena and put on the exact production you want, that to me is money!



James Wood is a writer, musician and self-proclaimed metalhead who maintains his own website, GoJimmyGo.net. His articles and interviews are written on a variety of topics with passion and humor. You can follow him on [Twitter @JimEWood](https://twitter.com/JimEWood).