

DOCTOR VICTOR

Rock 'n' roll is more than any drug

TEXT BY PETR KORÁL

It's no secret that as far as any kind of progressivity goes, I suffer from a growing skepticism towards the contemporary music scene (not just domestic, and not just rock). The "old and established" names use their new recordings to just repeat, recycle, reprocess, or make unconvincing attempts at modernizing their old well-known approaches – and "young and promising" groups, despite their logical effort to sound different, usually come across sounding like a version of something that already existed years and years ago, only with a better sound. But is it really so bad?

I've long since reconciled with the notion that it probably isn't. Music has evolved to an absolutely logical stage. And when you stop fighting windmills, meaning looking in vain for some modern golden musical grail, you come to the conclusion that luckily, rock is still being created through its tastier and even gourmet executions, albeit still not too obvious and therefore a bit archaic. Thank God for such upcoming bands like the domestic trio Doctor Victor – I'm really excited about their concerts and their debut album *Ist Prescription*. On top of that, the leading man, singer, guitarist, and author Vojta Bureš, is a highly thoughtful and goal-oriented person. But judge for yourself.

How long have you been active in music? How old were you when you started playing guitar, and what did you manage to accomplish before the formation of Doctor Victor?

My first children's band, Trvalka, played regular gigs in a retirement home in Choceň. We were a group of little kids, four to nine of us, depending on how well we were doing at school. We were led by a great teacher, Mr. Kalousek, who also taught me classical guitar. He showed us what it meant to play in a band, and he also stood in on the bass sometimes. I was eight years old and played drums. It was my job to get the attention of the grandmothers and grandfathers, so I tried to play loud (laughs). We would take the money we earned and go to the café for sweets.

I started to compose later, when I was about fourteen, in the band Fish Fingers. I started to take music really seriously after I was accepted into the Jaroslav Ježek Conservatory. I spent all my free time just practicing. I took my guitar everywhere, practicing in the metro, tram, and bus, just anywhere, even on my way to part-time job. My great dream was to start my own band, which was one of the reasons why I signed up for the Ježek Conservatory. I was really happy when I got in. Mostly I like to recall the debates about music that my classmates and I held in the dorms until the morning. That was something else!

After a while, I set up a school band called Dr. Viktor. Its members were anybody who had the

member rhythm section. The school gave us a lot of encouragement.

How an AC/DC concert changed one child's life

What makes a young musician play music that has its roots deep in the seventies and partly in the sixties? Was this your parents work?

I've got a thing for the blues. If some music has some blues in it, it can hold my attention. My parents always supported me with music from the beginning, except for those times when it was after eleven at night and our neighbors would bang on the walls and ring the door for me to stop playing. Even my dad, who was otherwise cool, would get nervous (laughs). Otherwise, I have to thank him, because he took me to different concerts since I was young, from Katapult to AC/DC, when I was eleven. This concert in 2001 was a serious breaking point for me, and my greatest passion became music, even more than hockey.

I've often thought which bands or artists had the greatest influence on the creative work of Doctor Victor, without even admitting it yourself. I would personally think Jimi Hendrix, Led Zeppelin, AC/DC and Lenny Kravitz. What do you think?

Some people also say that they hear the Stones, Queen, and the Beatles in our music... This is a huge complement, since these rock legends have positively influenced the lives of millions of people.

What do you think it was in that "old", or classic rock, that was, and still is, so extraordinary and inspiring, even in the 21st century?

Its authenticity and its attitude. You can feel heart, unlimited devotion, a message, a commitment and a lifestyle in it.

This fairly strong "retro boom" that's been going on in the foreign music scene for some years now, has it had an effect on what Doctor Victor does?

No way! I've played rock 'n' roll and blues since I was a kid. Before we started playing our own stuff, our band focused on soul as well as rock and roll. We played songs from different artists and had a female singer. About five years ago I started singing publicly and wrote my first compositions. From that point, everything revolved more around rock.

How important is it to you not only to pay homage to music forty years old or more, but also to shift its legacy in some way?

I don't think about it at all. I try to play and do what I enjoy most, and if someone likes it, then that's just fine by me. That's the main reason why I do it.

Riffs above all – the trio is an ideal situation

How do you see bands that also draw from the classic rock basis but combine it with modern electronics, fuse its motives, with other genres, etc.?

Each period has its own specific characteristics. People look for “new elements” and so on. For me, though, the simplest guitar riff played with a simple drum beat is equally important. A direct shot to the heart. I try to stick to the principle that less is better.

It seems to me that the core of your songs is the guitar riff. Do you feel this too? Is it really the basis of everything?

Yes. But still, I try to take other instruments into consideration, like the vocals, bass, and drums. It depends on the song.

From the beginning you've played as a power trio, with only the guitar-bass-drums as the basic line-up. Is this a clear intention? You never thought about adding a second guitar or keyboard?

As I mentioned before, I tried out a larger band line-up in school. For the rock style that we play, the trio is an ideal situation. It works for us, so we don't think about another guitar or keyboard.

Do you have any "kindred spirits" on the local scene, maybe some related bands or musicians, who have a similar philosophy like you?

Well, definitely Olda Říha, he's the rock 'n' roll master for me, because I feel that he plays from the heart. There's also Honza Mootz with Černá Rokle, Jindra Vobořil, Míla Benýšek... and Honza Nováček and Radek Bláha from the Czech AC/DC Revival band. (Note: Jan "Nováček" Vanický is mainly known as the bassist of the recently renewed Walk Choc Ice.)

It doesn't work without the show (but it does without the booze and cigarettes)

Besides the music itself, how important are the image and stage show? In your case, both are very striking... To what extent is the show prepared in advance? Has any particular rock legend inspired you in this sense?

For every band, just like for an actor or general artist, costumes and props are an integral part of the performance. They shape and characterize the creation and help to express the main idea. Without the show, it just can't be done these days! And I like it when it's partially improvisation... With us, it's about fifty-fifty.

Otherwise, Kiss, Michael Jackson, James Brown and others based their performances not only on music, but also on the show. Thank God for the inspiration!

You sing only in English. Have you ever thought of trying some Czech lyrics?

I chose English for the way it's sung and for its assonance. It's no secret that we'd love to go play abroad. If the world sang in Czech, we'd definitely be singing in Czech (laughs).

Can the basic thematic area of your songs be defined somehow? Which song or songs are the closest to you in their thought content?

For me, it's mostly about people having a good time at the concerts. Definitely no deep meditation here. All the lyrics relate to different incidents, life experiences, our desires and views of certain things. Just something that concerns me directly, to my good friends or to random "passers-by". For example, the subject of the song "Big Joint" was my friend's story. He ended up at the bottom because of a drug addiction, and music was what finally pulled him out of the habit. His true story was such an inspiration to me that I decided to use music to tell this story to others.

As far as I know, you're a staunch opponent of any illegal drugs and even alcohol and cigarettes. Some could say that this attitude is a bit different from the very essence of rock 'n' roll...

If I can exaggerate a little, we only live a few autumns, literally just "a few apples", so why destroy it with such crap? Drugs deeply repulse me. As for alcohol and cigarettes, I don't mind too much, but I just don't smoke or drink. For me, music is a drug and I hope it'll stay that way for the rest of my life.

I guess that has something to do with the name of your tour, Music Is My Drug.

Yes. It's our first official tour, and I believe that most of our fans feel the same way.

From Thailand to opening for Lucie

What did it mean for you to win the first year of the Czech version of the GBOB international competition and moving on to the world finals?

Contests, just like "normal" concerts, are a great motivation in general. The pleasure was overwhelming. In Thailand we learned about a different culture and customs, and it was another great inspiration for me.

What were the most interesting experiences you brought from playing in Thailand?

As musicians from Europe, we were probably pretty exotic for the Thais. They pampered us. The locals were really great. They took us through the most interesting places, took care of us, and we spent a lot of free time with them. I'm still in contact with some of them today.

But shortly afterwards, the band broke up. Why?

Every success is offset by a failure. We had different views on the band's direction and we had also spent a lot of time together. We were beset by massive cabin fever, which none of us was ready for. I don't like to recall this period. It affected me so much that I started to stumble and have speech problems. If it hadn't been for my beloved music, which I completely immersed myself into, who knows how I would have ended up.

The line-up changed once more after that. Do you think that the band's present line-up is finally perfect, or do you rather say, "never say never"?

I've known Honza Karpíšek, alias Karpa, known elementary school, and Honza Heřman, or Johnny, was recommended by one of my friends. The guys have a great musical memory and are excellent musicians. They managed to learn the repertoire in a very short time, which just confirmed my belief that we should keep playing together.

In 2014, you played at Lucie's comeback concerts at the O2 arena in Prague, but you performed "only" on a small outdoor stage in front of the hall. Did this make sense to you?

Of course! Because Lucie later invited us to Plzeň where we had the luck to play in Lochotín in front of 20,000 fans of this great Czech band. It was a great experience and it definitely made sense!

By the way, Robert Kodým still has good things to say about you and is obviously excited about your work. Did he choose you for "warm-up" position?

I think that it was David Koller who contacted me. Of course I'm grateful for the opportunity to play in front of such a crowd, for us it was a great honor.

Last year you opened for the Czech concert of AC/DC. As a big fan of theirs, was this something like fulfilling the impossible dream?

"Was it a dream?" This is what I was thinking, like an eleven-year-old kid, the morning I woke up after the AC/DC Strahov concert in June 2001. But the two ticket stubs on the table stated it clearly... This was such a strong experience for me! I still remember it today like it was yesterday. If someone had told me back then that in fifteen years I'd be opening for AC/DC in Prague, I'd think they were crazy (laughs). There aren't words to describe what this opportunity to stand on the stage of such a rock legend meant for me.

The album the world never saw

In 2016, you finally made your first album. The recording of *1st Prescription* came out only in digital form – isn't it a pity? No LP or CD versions to come?

Digital promotion is mainly aimed at our most faithful fans. When they buy a t-shirt, backpack, or poster at a concert, they're financially supporting us so that we can go on tour in the future and release more songs. It also gives them access to our album. We'll think more seriously about making a CD or LP if we manage to arrange a European tour.

What's your relationship to vinyl records anyway? It seems to me that your music is made for this kind media...

You have to take care of records, treat them completely differently, and for me that's what's magic about vinyl. I've got a soft spot for them. It's a style, huge retro, and nostalgia. I like how the needle rides along in the groove and sometimes you can hear the crackle from the speakers...

Did you try to promote the album somewhere abroad? What contacts do you have today? Did your success at GBOB help you in this respect?

Our album is currently being promoted only in the Czech Republic through the tour that we're about to set off on, as I mentioned earlier. I was recently in London where I had a meeting with two music managers, but so far everything is still in the preparation process and I'd hate to jinx it. This has nothing to do with the competition.

Are you planning to devote your full attention to Doctor Victor, or do you have the urge to try some side project? Which Czech musicians would you like to work with?

Doctor Victor and nothing else! I rejected a lot of other offers for this band, but I don't regret it. On the other hand, I enjoy jamming with anyone whenever I have the time.

It's starting to look like this new electronic sales records system (EET) may have a sharp impact on how bands function. Has EET already hit you? Do you agree with how it's been introduced?

I think that EET is a dangerous system that's easily abused against people. We have EET because it's the law, and we use it. But it's a bit weird to force people who don't have a relationship with the Internet and computer technology to use it for their work and it's immoral to announce a competition in "tattling". I can imagine how some old tradesman who doesn't even have a cell phone would face a fine or even lose his business. It puts off a lot of skilled older people. What's more, some hacker breaks into the system, changes some data in the database, and you've got instant trouble... I would consider the fiscal cash register a lesser evil.

The path ahead is clear

What does the present and the future of the group look like – what's in store for you and what shouldn't you miss in the foreseeable future?

Right now we're mostly focused on the ongoing tour, which also includes performing at eight festivals. In the near future we're planning some recording in my studio and relaxing in our cottage in Proseč.

Can you guess already whether you'll continue in a relatively clearly set direction, or will your repertoire break off from it in a more fundamental way?

I look forward to playing new things with the guys. They're moving forward in a similar spirit and there's no talk of diversions. The essence of rock 'n' roll still remains!

What would you like to achieve with Doctor Victor? What's the ultimate goal?

We would definitely like to go abroad. That's my goal number one. I'd also love it if our Doctor Victor Music Academy, which I recently founded, would flourish. We already have about 25 students and 5 teachers. The parents and the kids who we teach seem satisfied, and I'm glad that people who've chosen this music themselves are coming to us. I really wouldn't be able to teach someone who goes to music school because they're forced to!

box 1

Who is Doctor Victor?

The band Doctor Victor was established in Prague in 2012. Its vigorous “power” music is based primarily on the legacy of traditional rock from the late 1960s and early 1970s, but it’s also been infiltrated with a considerable amount of blues. In 2013, the band took the first place in the final Czech round of the international competition Global Battle of the Bands (GBOB) and in the Hard Rock Rising competition. In the 2014 GBOB Worldwide Final in Thailand, the band just barely missed a win and took home the imaginary silver medal. During its career, it’s already managed to open for such bands like Lucie, Chinaski, and even AC/DC. They released their first album ***Ist Prescription*** last year. The band’s present line-up includes guitarist and singer Vojtěch Bureš (formerly of the AC/DC Czech Revival), bass guitarist Jan Heřman, and drummer Jan Karpíšek.

box 2

Doctor Victor Music Academy

This is the first music school in the Czech Republic with a unique interactive instructional system. The academy isn’t limited by age and is open to all music lovers, regardless of their level or instrument. It’s actually designed as a music lab. Each month is devoted to one band (for example, The Beatles and others) and covers its history, influence, etc., ending with a concert of the band’s music. Students form their own bands and play tributes to their musical legends at regular thematic concerts at the Prague club Vzorkovna. The Academy is headed by Vojtěch Bureš, front man of the Doctor Victor band, graduate of the Jaroslav Ježek Conservatory in Prague, and holder of a scholarship at the prestigious Berklee College of Music in Boston.