

FAMOUS UNDERGROUND - "MIRROR MIRROR, ON THE WALL..."

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By Carl Begai

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feature hard rock famous underground nick walsh



Vocalist / guitarist / songwriter Nick Walsh made a name for himself at the start of the '90s with Toronto-based rockers Slik Toxik, the band enjoying popularity across Canada and some all-important (at the time) touring exposure in the US based on the strength of their 1992 full-length debut, *Doin' The Nasty*. The band took a beating when they released their second record in 1994, however - the ironically titled *Irrelevant* - as their trademark hard rock sound was stifled by the rise of grunge. Slik Toxik eventually faded from the scene but Walsh continued to write and record undeterred, launching *Revolver* in the early 2000's with bassist Laurie-Anne Green, which evolved into their present day passion, Famous Underground. And although nothing was written in stone at the time of the band's self-titled debut release in 2011, nobody imagined it would take 10 years for a follow-up, including the band. *In My Reflection* is the first of a series of planned EPs, picking up exactly where the debut record left off. If you're a fan it's worth the wait. If you're unfamiliar with Walsh's post-Slik Toxik work, don't expect to hear "Big Fuckin' Deal", "Helluvatime" or "White Lies, Black Truth" 2.0.

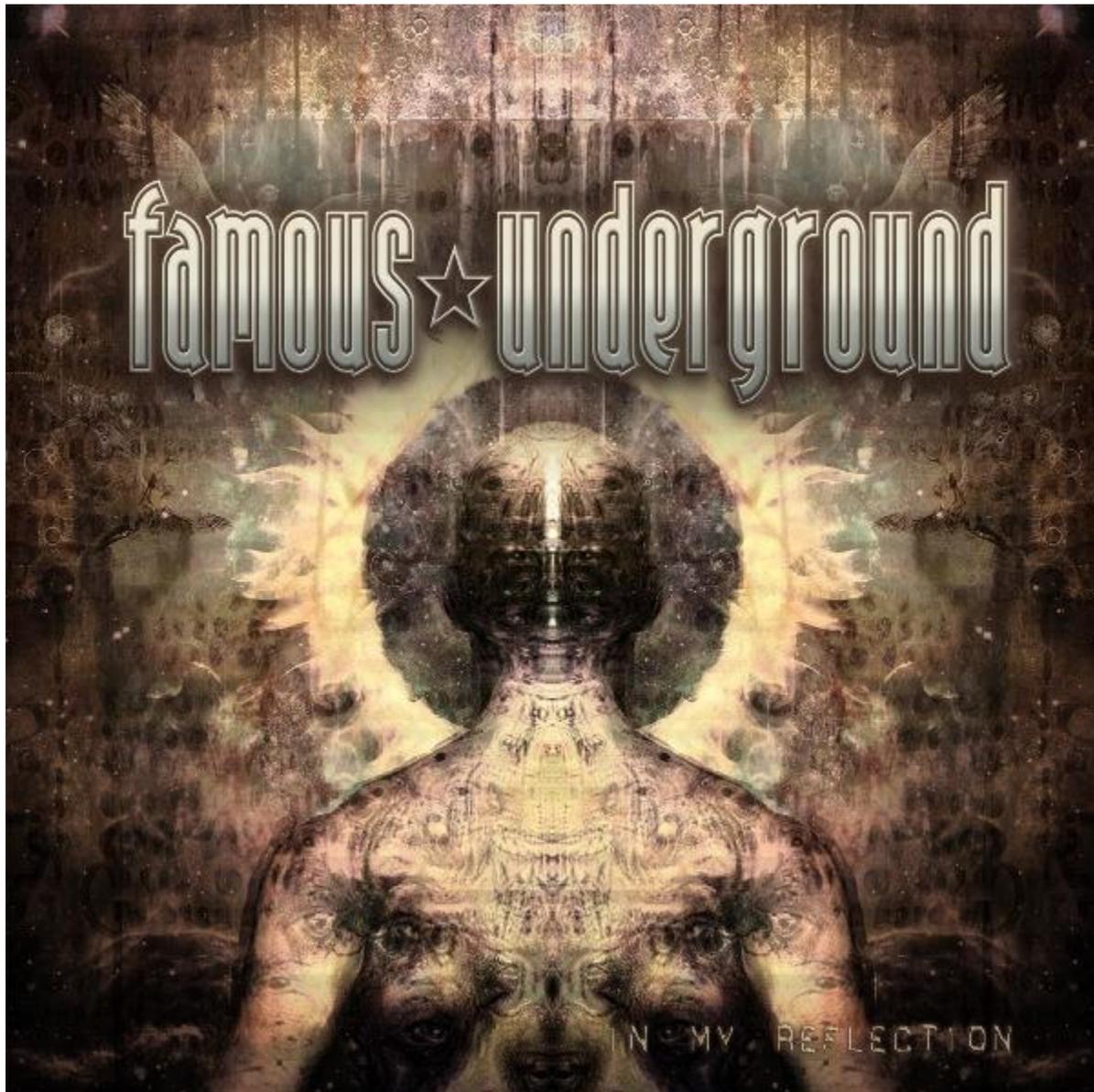


"Let's just call it a five year wait, and originally we were planning on doing more than we did," Walsh says of breathing life back in to the band with *In My Reflection*. "We released the 'Corrupted' digital 45 in 2017, which was sort of like, 'We're gonna try this thing again...!' and then we all just got busy. Two years later Covid hit and there was no better time to release this thing. We were going to release this

last year as an album but we decided that rather than release 13 or 14 tracks at once we'll do it in chunks. The plan, though, was to release new music at this time last year."

Walsh reveals the songs on *In My Reflection* are a mix of older and newly recorded material. The same will hold true for the band's next EP as well; at least that's the plan on paper.

"The bed tracks for these songs are from a few years ago; back when we had the opportunity to actually track drums in a studio. Over the course of the last little while we've been redoing guitars and vocals, adding multi-layered stuff to the songs to make them sound bigger. When you saw us at the Rockpile East in Toronto we debuted the song 'Until The End'. Not all of the songs were written back then; 'Ultra Mega' is new, 'Like An Animal' is kinda new because we had it in various stages, but it wasn't until I really had an opportunity to write again - in November / December 2020 - that we decided to forge ahead."



"It's funny because I'm working on new material again," Walsh laughs. "I'm one of those juggling act guys, where I have this material - the songs that didn't go on this EP that you were privy to hear - that

may end up being on the next EP, but a few brand new songs might be included as well. And they're all ready to go as far as mixing and mastering is concerned. Laurie and I were talking about this the other day, where we plan to push this EP until the fall and then release another one, then spend the winter writing more new material so we'll finally be able to get together and record the stuff properly."

As mentioned, the band potentially could have released a new album even before "Corrupted" surfaced in 2017. The way Walsh tells it, the mix of day job commitments and the offer of other musical projects such as Classic Albums Live - which he has been involved with since 2014 - made it hard to find the time to commit 100% to Famous Underground.

"I know I'm the guy spearheading this whole thing and everybody kind of waits to see what Walsh's word is on this or that, but at the same time two of the guys in the band (Desche Sparboom / drums, Wolfgang Verbeke / guitar) are company owners, so they were busy with their livelihoods. Me and Darren (Boyd / guitar) were the only guys that were really taking time off to work on music. I don't want to get off topic, but I've been fortunate because I've done other little projects over the last year, and that alone has kept me busy. I did a track with the Toronto band Chyld (featuring former Slik Toxik drummer Neal Busby), I wrote and sang a track for Jack Frost (Seven Witches), who is doing an album with multiple singers, so I'm sort of all over the map. I got the chance to focus on Famous Underground and really devote my energy to it from about December 2020. I've been going non-stop."



"What Classic Albums Live has afforded me other than financial stability is the fact that I get to expand my chops," he adds. "It's something I never thought in a million years I would get the chance to do because I'm the hard rock / metal guy. I got to delve into some of the classic rock that I grew up around. I'd never heard the whole Ziggy Stardust (David Bowie) record until I was asked to sing it (laughs). The same for Led Zeppelin; I was the guy in high school laughing at my buddies who listened to Zeppelin, saying 'Dude, that's your Dad's music...'. I was telling them they should be listening to Iron Maiden and Dio and Judas Priest. And there I was singing Zeppelin for Classic Albums Live (laughs). It's been good for me vocally because it's been challenging. I've been able to discover and refine some

new vocal techniques, and I found out that I can be a crooner if I want to (laughs). Singing Robert Plant's stuff, for example, is like a cross between Elvis and Janis Joplin. It's crazy."

Walsh is back in the driver's seat now, and his energy is devoted to putting Famous Underground on the map for good. In *My Reflection* is the all-important first step forward.

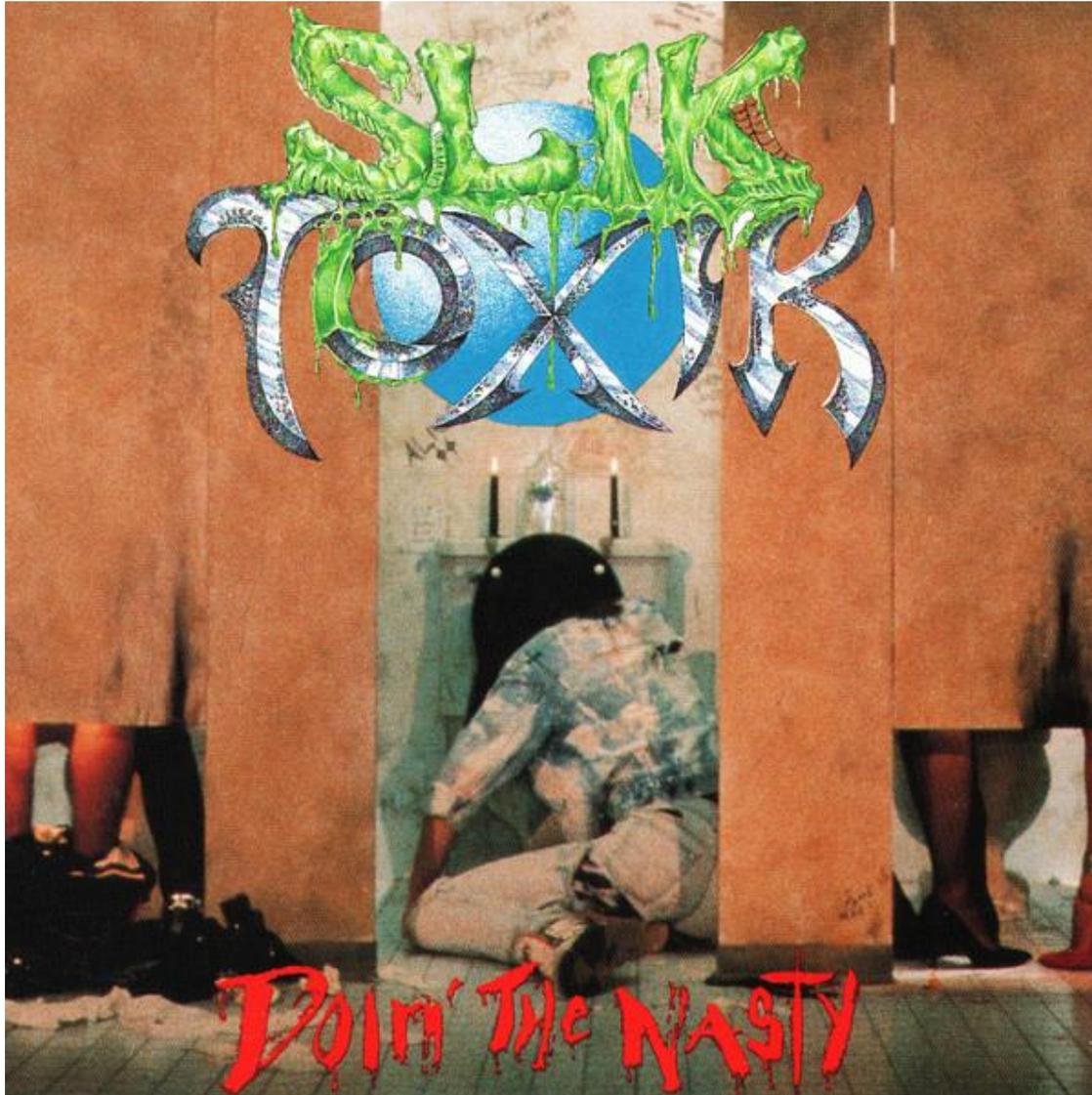
"This is my passion. This is my heart and soul. I hate to quote the bio but these are my words: when I create music, this is the place it comes from and this is the place it goes to. As a vocalist, I'm in my element the most when I'm a little bit more snide and aggressive. You know where I come from and what my influences are. I always say this: without the macabre make-up I wish I could be King Diamond, Alice Cooper and KISS, but I don't want to be one of those acts because they were my influences. They did it first and I don't want to duplicate that, but I think that I can do that stuff with my voice character-wise and look into people's souls from the stage anyway."



No matter how hard or how long Walsh pushes Famous Underground, however, he will always be regarded by some people first and foremost as the frontman for Slik Toxik. Questions about a Slik Toxik reunion persist to this day, and while Walsh hasn't shot down the possibility with an outright "no" he admits that chances of the band getting back together and recording new music are slim to none.

"One of my things is that I don't want to repeat what I did when I was 21 years old because I would look foolish. I can go out and perform those songs for nostalgia's sake but I can't write those songs anymore. I've been asked by numerous different artists to participate in their projects, and when I hear some of the song titles or the lyrics they have I say 'No, this is definitely not me.' No offence to anybody when I say this, but I couldn't imagine at my age writing songs about some girl at a party. Maybe my son could, but I can't (laughs). A song like 'White Lies, Black Truth', there was a social element to that which I can still get behind. Writing a song like 'Helluvatime' or 'Cherry Bomb'... to me that's a little bit

more the 21 year-old bravado chest-pumped-out 'I'm goin' down to Rock N' Roll Heaven and I'm gonna get laid...' party attitude, and obviously that's not my element anymore. I'm a firm believer in staying true to yourself and having conviction, and whether people get it or not, whether people like it or not, at least I know that I feel good about what I'm doing."



That said, for those fans still living in the Slik Toxik bubble, Walsh has some good news...

"Since December 2020 I've been talking with Universal Music - they own the EMI catalogue now - and this year they're releasing Doin' The Nasty and Smooth And Deadly. It is happening, but unfortunately with the lockdown things have been taking a little bit longer than expected. We were hoping it would come out around the time of the Famous Underground EP - there would be a lot more to talk about - but Universal is putting it out in the digital world. "The odd part is that when I first spoke to Universal, they didn't even realize it hadn't been put out digitally. When they took over the catalogue from EMI, Slik Toxik is archive stuff, which is material they didn't have direct involvement with. I want it out there, I want myself and the guys to potentially reap any benefits there are from it."

"So many people send me messages through social media saying 'Dude! How come I can't find 'Helluvatime' on iTunes or Spotify?' Well, it's happening this year. This is our history; it deserves to be out there."

(Photos by Liz Sterner Pinel, Dave Dickson)