

CHEMIA

There are outrageous, improbable band stories. And then there is the story of Chemia, unquestionably the very best modern rock combo produced in Vancouver by way of Warsaw you will ever hear and a group so primed for global stardom that it's almost eerie. Except that it's actually kind of cool.

Our story begins in early 2011 when Chemia founder, guitarist/songwriter Wojtek Balczun finds himself on a business trip to B.C. There he meets Marc LaFrance, a musician and producer with a sterling and very extensive CV (see Bachman & Turner, Alice Cooper, Bon Jovi, Mötley Crüe, Loverboy, the Scorpions, the Cult et al).

Long story short, the pair get to talking – about the industry, about Chemia's thoroughly righteous, totally heavy yet stalwartly melodic rock – and before you know it, plans are hatched. Big plans... of the "Yeah, we Chemia members live in Poland but let's decamp to Canada to record an album in English" variety. An EP, 2012's *In the Eye* is soon forthcoming.

By November 2012, Chemia – just two years old - is ensconced in Vancouver's Warehouse Studio, LaFrance behind the console, where the gargantuan, scorching *The One Inside* album is confidently nailed. Final mixes happen in January 2013, and by February, Grammy-winning engineer Ted Jensen (Alice in Chains, Green Day, Sigur Rós, Dave Matthews Band, Muse) has completed mastering.

So blistering yet accessible is Chemia's sound that a Who's Who of Canadian business talent - marketing wiz Larry Wanagas (the Trews, k.d. lang) and booking agent Ralph James (Nickelback, Billy Talent) – immediately line up behind producer/manager LaFrance, thus helping to ensure the disc wallops as many heads as possible.

This would all be something of a Cinderella story if the members of Chemia – Balczun plus vocalist Lukasz Drapała, guitarist Maciek Mąka, keyboardist Rafal Stępień, bassist Krzysiek Jaworski and drummer Adam Kram - hadn't busted their humps to unleash *The One Inside*. Also, if Cinderella stories weren't so lame.

As Balczun notes, although *The One Inside* is actually Chemia's second full-length record (*O2* dropped in 2011) it is, for all practical purposes, their debut. It is also a snapshot of a completely unique, ridiculously gifted rock band with all the pieces in place just as the planets are about to align.

"This new record represents us 100 percent. The first album had a slightly different lineup – a different singer and guitarist – plus a different style. So for us *The One Inside* is our first album," he says.

The first single and video from this first-of-its-kind album - the pounding, propulsive, guitar-goosed corker 'Bondage of Love' - is pretty much guaranteed to blow Chemia wide open at radio and beyond.

"We are absolutely determined to do anything necessary to make this work. Sometimes you have to do risky things – I've done that all my life," Balczun says, confirming that Chemia has played multiple major European festivals, sharing stages (and kicking ass) with Guns N' Roses, Paul Rodgers, Motörhead, 3 Doors Down and the Red Hot Chili Peppers.

He continues: "Chemia is unusual. We worked very hard on this album and we're almost finished writing the next one. I am composing music every day, trying to create new ideas and new songs. This band has

such strong potential. I know the competition in North America is huge but I do believe we will achieve success.”

Though Chemia is as cohesive a unit as any six individuals can be – their name isn’t “Chemistry” for nothing - Balczun allows that he and singer Drapała handle the lion’s share of writing.

“Our formula usually works like this: I am responsible for the first, main music idea which I will usually work out on the guitar. Then I take that idea to Lukasz and he’ll generally develop the melody, then we take the idea to the band and it grows from there through rehearsals.”

And while he admits the group took some flak for singing in English, it is, he says, the way of the world. “It’s essential to open ourselves up to a wider audience,” Balczun offers. “Lots of people in Poland speak English. Plus lots of famous bands from Scandinavia, Germany, France and Spain sing in English.”

Indeed they do, which is not to say there isn’t a thriving and highly diverse music scene back in the old country. Balczun name-checks a couple of notables, namely Gdańsk death metal brawlers Behemoth and Warsaw prog-rockers Riverside. Yet those examples only serve to underscore just how matchless – borderless, really - the music of Chemia is.

Take the smouldering, epic song ‘Ego’ from the new album, which manages to slyly conjure post-grunge Soundgarden but about 50 times heavier. Lest anyone try and pigeonhole our guys, check out the creeping ‘Sweet’ which spins on the thick, almost militarist thud of Kram’s powerhouse drumming. Elsewhere, particularly the almost-ballad ‘Stalker,’ guitarists Mąka and Balczun summon shimmering Zeppelin-stained classic rock riffage behind Drapała’s soaring voice.

“The response we’ve been getting to our music all over the world has been absolutely fantastic,” Balczun enthuses. “People just seem to get it. And it feels as though we are on the right track. We are hopeful that we can take our music to the world.”

Only a fool would bet against them.