

“AMERICAN THUNDER” BY RON KEEL & RFK ALL STARS: BEHIND THE MUSIC

By Ron Keel

***THE SONG:**

Twenty years ago, we were playing at a bike rally in Ohio called American Thunder, and I thought of course that's a cool name for a song. I wrote it shortly afterward, so it's had time to prove itself. When you can dust off a tune after two decades and it still sounds fresh, that's a great indication it's a good song.

Like much of my lyrical work, this one celebrates diversity while recognizing that music really is the binding force that brings us all together. In the tradition of “The Right To Rock,” “When This Is Over,” and many more pieces of my history, these lyrics embrace that spirit of unity.

I felt it was important for the lyrics to pay tribute to various forms of American music. Rock is a global sport, but it was created on American soil by the great Chuck Berry; I also reference the delta blues, country, Native American music, and more. I am not a hip-hop fan, it's just not my thing, but I had to acknowledge its cultural importance by including Cool Herc, the cat who is credited with creating that style by rapping poetry on the New York streets.

The music is straight-ahead guitar rock, loud and fast. I've enjoyed playing a lot of different styles of music in my life – from being classically trained as a kid, to winning awards playing jazz and blues, of course my connection with country music is well documented. But my roots have always been firmly planted in rock n roll, and a song like “American Thunder” HAD to be a loud reckless rocker.

***THE MUSICIANS:**

Ron Keel & Roy Cathey (THE FIFTH) – Lead Vocals

I had some recent concert appearances scheduled with THE FIFTH, a killer hard rock band signed to my label RFK Media fronted by singer Roy Cathey. Since we were on the bill together, I was looking for song that we could sing together and other than “Rock N Roll All Nite” there aren't a lot of great hard rock male duets out there! My partner Aaron Fischer suggested “American Thunder,” he's always loved that tune, and it made perfect sense. So, Roy and I went into the studio and started yelling back and forth into the microphone! I was surprised when I heard the final mix, how much we sound alike – I was expecting more contrast, but it seems we really are cut from the same cloth.

Mike Vanderhule (Y&T) – Drums

Mike and I really got tight when I toured England, Scotland and Wales with Y&T in 2009, and he played all the drums on my solo album “Metal Cowboy” (released in 2014). He's one of the best in the business at cutting remote drum tracks in his own studio and sending you exactly what the song needs, and this new version of “American Thunder” required his special kind of power and groove.

Rik Fox (Steeler) – Bass

“American Thunder” marks the first time Rik and I have recorded together since that iconic Steeler album in 1983. We’ve been friends the entire time, and he’s joined me onstage from Ohio to Hollywood, and we’re on stage together again for KEELFEST this year, and to get him on this track is a really cool treat for me and the Steeler fans.

ABOUT THE LEAD GUITAR SOLO:

I have always been surrounded by amazing guitarists, very fortunate....and there are only so many solos you can squeeze into a song like this. So, I invited four of my dear friends to the party – Stacey David Blades from Crashing Wayward, Justin Womble from THE FIFTH, Jay Rusnak from IronHorse; and Dave Cothorn from Ron Keel Band (Dave gets invited to ALL my parties).

Well, everyone is always super busy, some guys record at home, some go to a studio, and I assigned different sections to each guitarist (“you take the first and third pieces of the first section,” and so on). So I had no idea what I was going to end up with, just hoping the players I wanted could meet my deadline. Of course, they all met the deadline, and they ALL played the ENTIRE solo and sent me their audio files – so my producer/engineer Mike Dresch had the fun task of assembling all their pieces into a blistering solo that fits the spirit of the song perfectly. That guitar solo comp is based entirely on what worked best for the piece, not who’s more famous or who’s my best friend – the song comes first. I’m just glad that Dresch was there to make those decisions for me!

Jay Rusnak (IronHorse) – Lead Guitar (intro solo, main solo 1 sections #2 & 4)

Jay “Snakdaddy” Rusnak was in my band IronHorse when we first cut “American Thunder,” and it’s fantastic to reunite with him and feature his talents on this new recording. He’s at the top of his game on this session, and to me the song really comes alive with his lead licks in the intro.

Justin Womble (THE FIFTH) – Lead Guitar (intro solo, main solo 1 sections #1 & 3)

Justin Womble worked up the song for our tour dates together, and I was so impressed with his playing that I had to include him on the session. This guy is a next generation guitar hero, and you’ll be hearing a lot more from Justin on the upcoming album THE FIFTH from RFK Media.

Dave Cothorn (Ron Keel Band) – Lead Guitar (finale section of the solo)

There’s not much I’ve done the past 8 years without Dave on lead guitar. He’s been the Randy to my Ozzy, the Robin to my Batman, you get the idea...so of course he had to play on this. He’s great at that “tapping on the fretboard” thing, like the end resolve of this solo. His take on the whole solo could have easily been “the one” – maybe we’ll release that as a bonus version!

Stacey David Blades (Crashing Wayward) – Lead Guitar (first ½ of solo section two – b section)

Every time I work with Stacey, I’m reminded what a true virtuoso he really is. Dude spent ten years in L.A. Guns but that’s just the tip of the iceberg with this guy. He’s a master of the instrument and knocked it out of the park on this session. His solo section is what I call “the weird part” – where he plays something

totally off the wall and it fits this old school rock riff like a glove. I'm excited for everyone to hear Stacey's new album with Crashing Wayward, coming soon from RFK Media.

RHYTHM GUITARS: Ron Keel & Mike Dresch

When it comes to the wild guitar solos, I leave that to those other guys – but playing good solid rhythm guitar is one of my favorite things to do, especially on songs that I write. I laid down all the rhythm guitars on “American Thunder” (4 tracks, two parts, each one doubled) and sent them to my co-producer/engineer Mike Dresch.

Mike felt the rhythm guitars in the choruses needed to be beefed up, and being a world-class guitarist himself, he grabbed an axe and laid down a track of his own, which is always fine with me. Mike has co-produced, recorded, and mixed everything I've done the past eight years and has really kept my recording career alive at a high level during that time. Our previous work together includes the “KEELED” EP, the albums “Fight Like A Band” and “South X South Dakota” from RKB, the remix of “Metal Cowboy: Reloaded,” the Black Sabbath tribute album, our recent hit single “When This Is Over,” and now “American Thunder.”

“American Thunder” is the lead track on the new compilation album from RFK, “LIVE THE ROCK Volume One,” hitting the streets March 17 and featuring 15 tracks from new & established artists from around the world. Radio promotion and interview requests are being handled by Jody Best at Best Bet Promo – contact bestbetpromo@yahoo.com.

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AMERICAN THUNDER

ROY CATHEY – RON KEEL – MIKE VANDERHULE – RIK FOX
JUSTIN WOMBLE – STACEY DAVID BLADES – DAVE COTHERN – JAY RUSNAK – MIKE DRESCH