

PRESS RELEASE

A-HA TO RETURN WITH NEW ALBUM AND RIO SPECTACULAR FOR SEPTEMBER 2015 AND INTERNATIONAL TOUR DATES FOR 2016

Following on from the announcement that legendary Norwegian band a-ha are to reform to play the 30th anniversary Rock in Rio music festival, the band are delighted to announce the release of a brand new studio album this autumn, with international tour dates to follow in 2016.

The new album, *Cast In Steel*, will be the band's tenth studio album, and the first new music by the group since the critical and commercial success of 2009's *Foot of the Mountain*. *Cast In Steel* will be released on 4th September 2015, three weeks before the band return to play the Rock in Rio music festival in Brazil, and thirty years since their debut single, *Take on Me*, reached number one around the world.

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The Album

When a-ha played the Oslo Spektrum in December 2010 to close the 'Ending on A High Note – Farewell Tour', it felt a definitive full-stop on the band's activities. As Morten Harket says, 'it has been a genuine and real disbanding. There has

been no a-ha in the sense of the word during that time.' For Morten, Paul Waaktaar and Magne Furuholmen, the five-year break has allowed them to explore a rich seam of various creative projects, both musical and artistic.

The return came about in a simple, organic way, as Paul explains: 'it started off very easy and low-key with Morten dropping by my studio at various occasions, and I would show him songs that I was working on. He would sing on the songs he felt a connection with and leave the ones that didn't and it just went like that until we had done 10 or 12 songs.'

The lack of pressure and deadlines was definitely a bonus, and reminded Paul of when the band first started out: 'The beauty of it was that we could do this totally under the radar; there were no deals in place, no contracts, tours planned or deadlines looming ... just our shadow endeavours. It was back to exactly how we started in my parents cabin way back when in the 80s. Some instruments, a song, a voice.'

This nod to the band's early years wasn't the only one during the recording process. Paul also got back in touch with Alan Tarney, the producer who worked on a-ha's first three albums, *Hunting High and Low*, *Scoundrel Days* and *Stay on These Roads*: 'I made contact with Alan to get his input at a stage where I felt an outside opinion would be valuable. I always had tons of respect for his musicality and know-how and thought it would be a cool thing to get him involved now that we're starting up again.'

For Magne, the last five years has seen him focusing on both his visual art passion and a myriad of musical projects. But even so, the band were never far away from his thoughts: 'Writing and recording for a-ha is obviously a big part of my creative DNA, and every once in a while a song would come along that I felt could have been perfect for a-ha. Once I decided to do this, I was surprised to see how much I enjoyed shaping it with a-ha in mind.'

That sense of enjoyment and belief in the new material is clear from all three members: 'The making of our album has

so far been such an uplifting experience,' says Paul; 'It is a really unexpected pleasure to be writing songs for Morten's voice again,' says Magne. 'I knew sitting down with Paul and Magne,' Morten says, 'that this would be a real genuine effort. We have never been ones to look back so you can take for granted all three of us are doing this because we know we can create something new. The songs have to be good: the benchmark is always the same.'

At *Foot on the Mountain* showed, a-ha are a different beast to the vast majority of their contemporaries – still at the peak of their songwriting powers, rather than living off past glories. *Cast in Steel* picks up where their last studio album left off – this is the sound of band relaxed and refreshed, at ease with themselves and ready to take on the world once more.

The Tour

As well as the new album, a-ha are also delighted to announce tour dates for 2016.

There will be an initial fifteen dates in Germany, Austria and Switzerland for April 2016, with further international dates to follow. The dates confirmed so far are:

April 3 Stuttgart Schleyerhalle April 4 Zurich
Hallenstadion April 6 Munich Olympiahalle April 7
Leipzig Arena April 9 Nürnberg Arena Nürnberger
Versicherung April 10 Vienna Stadthalle April 13 Berlin
O2 April 14 Hamburg O2 World April 16 Bremen ÖVB
Arena April 17 Hannover TUI Arena April 19 Halle
Gerry-Weber-Stadium April 20 Oberhausen König-
Pilsener-Arena April 23 Mannheim SAP Arena April 24
Frankfurt Festhalle April 26 Cologne Lanxess Arena

'I'm definitely looking forward to touring,' says Morten. 'I think it will be great. We will pace it so that the conditions are there for us, but it will be a full-on a-ha experience.' As to what the band will play, Morten says, 'we don't need to do the same run through as last time. When people come to

see the band, they'll expect the cornerstone songs, of course, but this time it will be a different pick.'

For Magne, 'both the planning and executing of a good show or a large-scale tour is an exciting challenge, but ultimately, without a good reaction from the audience, it would make no sense. The magic is in the space between them and us somewhere.'

Rock In Rio

The first live date, however, will take place on the other side of world, as part of the 30th anniversary Rock In Rio concerts on 25th September. For a-ha, the festival will always have a special place in the band's history: in 1991, the band played to a world record crowd of 198,000 fans in the legendary Maracanã Stadium.

Morten remember clearly heading out on stage: 'It was an awe-inspiring sight, that hot, humid Rio evening, standing on stage and observing that near 200,000 strong, beautiful, passionate audience. Everything I knew about Brazil and South America was captured in that stadium: the sense of equality and coming together I've always experienced. I felt humbled.'

For Paul, too, the audience was something special: 'Around that time we were releasing more introspective albums like *East of the Sun* and *Memorial Beach*. The energy explosion and the sheer amount of people gathering to hear our songs was a striking contrast.'

The chance for a-ha to play Rio again in 2015, then, was an offer the band couldn't refuse. 'It was just impossible to turn down this request to celebrate the festival's 30 year history,' Magne explains, 'especially as it coincides with the 30 year anniversary of the band itself. This felt like I imagine it must be to hear about the 1000-year wave approaching shore; even as a retired surfer you just want to dust off your board and throw yourself into the water.'

The Future?

Morten makes it clear that 'we are not getting back to stay together. We've agreed to come back for a set period: one album, one tour. It's a great opportunity and allows us to write another chapter.'

Yet whatever these talented individuals do next, either together or alone, the achievements of their extraordinary thirty-year career are difficult to ignore: 'No matter how far or fast we try to run,' Magne admits, 'the a-ha legacy is always there. I think it is a sign of mental health to wrestle with your own legacy, but perhaps also not bad to embrace it sometimes.'

Over the next twelve months, with anniversary concerts, a new album, reissued material and international tour dates, both band and fans will have the opportunity to embrace the remarkable music of a-ha once again.