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RIFFS**

## NEVERWONDER Rocking and Rolling Into 2020

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"2020 is going to be a great year for NEVERWONDER. We have a new record coming out, we have some great shows coming up and we will be at SXSW (in Austin, Texas). We have had radio play and we have some more coming up," says Fabienne Grisel, the Swiss born lead singer of the melodic Rock band NEVERWONDER (yes the name is all in capitals), while in conversation with Riveting Riffs Magazine.

About the new album she says, "We are experimenting a little bit more with effects. We work together as a unit even though we all have our own instruments. We collaborate, for instance if I hear something that the drums are or are not doing we can talk about it. If the guys hear something that I am doing vocally they will say something. We might say (to one another) why don't you try this or that? I can't wait to see what comes out of these songs in the studio, because they are already great, but I think we can take them to the next level for sure.



(The album) will first be recorded in analog and then it will be put through the digital (process). I like analog, because as a singer you can hear every crack and every crisp in the voice. I like to hear things that are not so perfect. I am not talking about notes or anything, but the things that make music interesting or the moment interesting; the crack in the voice or that little screech in the guitar. It is those things that you might not be able to hear as much in a digital recording. I am not trying to disregard people who are digital. I think for certain genres of music that is totally appropriate for Rap and things like that, but for what we do I think it just fits us. We are primarily an organic band. I just like the sound of analog (recordings). We like to play around too. We play around with effects and we merge some digital aspects into what we do, but we like to keep part of the sound as organic as we can."

The longest serving and founding members of the band are Vincent Ramos (electric bass) and Andres Ramos (drummer) and the two new members are Jay Wise (guitar) and of course Fabienne Grisel on vocals.

Fabienne Grisel describes NEVERWONDER as a melodic hard Rock band with a funky edge, which prompts the question, how does someone who grew up studying Classical music in Switzerland and who has been part of a Jazz duo end up as the lead singer of a hard Rock band in California?

It was and it wasn't (a big transition). I grew up listening to a lot of Rock. I was always into Rock and Roll from a very early age and a lot of my early favorite music was Rock. I guess I am lucky enough that I can transition from this to that and I can adapt to the music. Rock is something that speaks to me and it was something that affected me on a deeper level. Until recently I never pursued it really strongly, because I got involved with other projects. It wasn't because I didn't want to pursue it, it was just the right project never came along. I think it takes certain types of musicians as well who are around you to allow you to do as a singer to do what you do. I can sing Rock, but I still have a melodic undertone to it. I don't have a raspy voice. I needed to find the right vehicle if that makes sense, Rockwise to bring that edge forward. Vocally, it was always there I just had not been in the right setup for it to come out. The guys are very open to me trying different things. It doesn't have to be this really hard, edgy vocal. They just want something that works and that (allows) us to mesh well."

Having fun with our guest, we could not help but tease her a bit and ask if this was Fabienne's way of rebelling after all those years of studying Classical music.

She laughs and then enlightens us, "I have always been rebellious and I think I am always going to be in a rebellious stage. As a musician there is a constant state of being rebellious to some degree. I would say I am a pretty rebellious person. I am also someone who likes to try different things. If it feels right I will always give it a shot. I don't like to be put into boxes and be labeled. I think music is music and if it speaks to you and it feels right and the chemistry is right then I think you owe it yourself to try.

I come from Europe, so my background is a little different than the guys. I was probably exposed to different types of music that they might not have heard, such as international world

music. I am also Classically trained, even though I have done other things.

Dre (Andreas) and Vince are brothers and they have been playing together for a long time. They've had bands all of their lives. There is a pretty tight rhythm section in the

band. Their backgrounds are interesting. Some of it is Rock; some of it is Disco and R & B. They are open to a lot of different types of music and I think it shows in how they play. They also grew up in LA. Jay, the guitar player is from Orange County and he also has a very interesting background. He likes Jazz, he likes Rock and he is kind of an eighties cat. He is also somebody who likes intricate music and he is open to listening to other things. It is like we all have our own little niche within the band and when we all come together it is funny how we find common threads. It works, it fits and it is what makes the band what it is. We are different where it matters and we are similar where it counts."

She says, "Whether you realize it or not your musical background (continues) to influence you. Then you incorporate that into your playing, singing and your writing and it becomes something else. It evolves that way.

In my case my father played the trumpet and I grew up with a lot of Jazz and Blues in the house. My mom was into black music with R & B, like Stevie Wonder and Tina Turner. She was also into Elvis Presley. I had my training in Classical. Growing up I listened to The Police, Pat Benatar, Led Zeppelin and The Cure. I liked all kinds of music. All of that affected me in some way and I think that is why my musical palette is pretty eclectic. I love all kinds of music and many genres of music. It comes through here and there with what I do, how I write and how I sing, even if I am not aware of it. It just happens on its own."

As for how Fabienne Grisel became the lead singer of NEVERWONDER in late 2017, she says, "I was on a website for professional musicians and out of the blue Vince the bass player of the band reached out to me and he said I saw your profile, I listened to your music and I really like your voice. We are looking for a lead singer, would you be interested in auditioning for us? We would love to have you come down and try some stuff. That is pretty much how I started. Vince and I had a wonderful conversation over the phone and we really hit it off. I thought sure I am open to trying something different. They sent me the music that they wanted me to sing and I went there and we clicked. I wasn't really in the market for a band, but I ended up with a band (she laughs lightly)."

In 2018 NEVERWONDER released a two songs disc with songs the band had previously recorded. The songs were "**Movin' On,**" and "**Give It All.**"

"The reason we recorded those songs again was, because we had started working on some new material, but it wasn't one hundred percent ready. We made a conscious decision to pick two songs that we all really liked and that we thought we could put our own spin on with Jay Wise and I being the new members of the band. It was an introduction to the new lineup of the band, so people didn't have to wait another six months or eight months or whatever, until we went into the studio. When you do new songs from scratch it takes a while to lay everything down. We thought should we wait or should we put out two songs that we like? Then we would go into the studio and make a new record with brand new songs. We decided to do that instead of waiting. We re-arranged the two songs, they are played differently and if you listen to the original songs, these are quite different. This month we are recording the new album. We have a bunch of new songs that we can't wait for everybody to hear. This record is one hundred percent songs that we wrote. We also have a new video that will be coming out. We are very excited about this year," says Fabienne Grisel.

It may surprise some fans of NEVERWONDER to learn that Fabienne Grisel describes herself as being introverted.

"A lot of people don't know that, because I hide it well. When I am on stage it is a whole different persona that comes out. I am actually very introverted. I used to spend a lot of time (when she was growing up) in my room listening to music, writing poetry and I was an avid reader as a kid.

I have learned to turn it on when I have to, as a singer and a musician you have to turn it on, but it is not natural to me. I used to get physically sick, before a show," she says.

We wondered what helped Fabienne Grisel to cope with being introverted and performing live.

"I think it is a combination of things. First of all after doing it for so long you are able to tap into that a bit easier. It is like everything else, the more you do it the better you get at it. I am also older, so I feel like I know who I am and I have more self-confidence. When I go on stage now I know why I am there and not to be so frightened. I did some acting when I was younger. I did some commercials and things like that. Originally, I took some classes, because I wanted to feel more comfortable on stage.

I am Buddhist so I chant. If before a show I am feeling stressed I give myself a few minutes and I just go and chant and focus on what I need to do. Before I go on stage I have that five minutes (alone) and I tap into that part of me that (makes it possible) for me to do what I do up there. Once the music starts, I think something magical happens. Music is such an amazing outlet for me. When it starts it is just like everything else goes away. Sometimes I am totally transported elsewhere and it is hard to explain. It is almost like I am channeling something else or someone else.

As a performer and as a singer you are just in the moment, which is another form of meditation. Anything can happen in a live show and eight out of ten times it does. You just come with the state of mind that you are very well prepared for every show, but there is always room for unpredictability and something always happens. You have to roll with it. That is why I like live performances too. It is not calculated to the tenth degree," explains Fabienne Grisel.



It is obvious that she is comfortable on stage and that the new lineup for NEVERWONDER is working just fine, because in 2019 the band received seven nominations for the LA Music Critic Awards and was named Alt Rock Band of the Year. NEVERWONDER also placed fourth out of 150 bands that competed in a battle of the bands and they have received high marks from a number of music critics and publications.

Our conversation changes direction, as we talk about growing up in Switzerland, "I am from Geneva, the French speaking part of the country. I have a relatively small family. There was my mother, my brother and my father. We had my grandparents on my mom's side. My father was an orphan, so there isn't much family on his side. I was very privileged and very lucky to be born in such a place. It is very safe and we had a great education. Geneva is a very interesting spot, because it is very international. We have all of the humanitarian organizations there. It is kind of like a little island in the middle of Europe. It is a very independent country. It is very pretty and I am not just saying that because I am from there. I sometimes forget (how pretty it is).

I was exposed to a lot of different cultures and languages. There are four different languages and cultures melting together. I grew up with a whole lot of people of different colors and from different backgrounds. I was really lucky that way and I think it influenced me greatly as a person and musically as well.

The only thing is there aren't a whole lot of outlets for musicians (in Switzerland) if you want to pursue it as a career. The Swiss are a little conservative in their ways and it is an old culture that has been around for a long time. They do not like to move too quickly and they do not like to change too quickly. The Swiss are also more traditional, so I think that is part of the reason why there aren't as many (venues). I have lived half of my life in the United States and half of my life in Switzerland, so I can tell you the differences between those two cultures are dramatic. Here (United States) people are more entrepreneurial and they are open to change. (Americans) embrace the change. There is innovation and everybody is really excited and into it. They support it. Where I am from it is the opposite. There is well we have been doing this stuff for thousands of years, why should we change now? It is that kind of mentality and I think with that comes sometimes the lack of vision for art or for other things that are not traditional or conventional careers. We have a lot of exports, imports, pharmaceuticals and there are specific types of businesses. Even though there are a lot of musicians there just are

not a whole lot of places where you can go and play live music, unless you are at another level. There are stadiums and such, but to get to that level is really difficult. Usually, you have to leave the country to get to that level and you should probably go to Paris or London or now Berlin, as well.

I have always found it strange, because we (Switzerland) have a lot of music festivals We do have a lot of things like that, but for local artists there aren't a lot of outlets. I think now it is even worse than when I was growing up. Now it is mostly DJs and electronic music and organic live music is dying out there, which is too bad."



Fabienne Grisel's introduction to music came early, "My very first memory is a musical memory. I think I was just drawn to music at a very, very young age. I am talking like four or five years old. Music has always been my outlet and I think if my father hadn't been playing music I would have still been in music in some way. I don't think the fact that my father played an instrument was the (catalyst) for me becoming a musician. Honestly, I think I was just born like that. I think some of us just have that streak and music is your religion (she laughs). It is who you are. I had a deep, deep connection with music from very early on. I don't have an explanation for it; I just feel music very deeply.

My mom was Catholic and she wanted to take us to church on Sundays, but I was never big on that as a child. My mom got tired of me fighting her about going to church, but she noticed that her kid liked music and liked singing. I sang in the house everywhere. She enrolled me in the kid's choir at church on Sundays and she noticed after that I never argued with her about going to church (she laughs). That's how I started singing. It was with the kids' choir at church.

Where I am from a lot of the church pieces that we did were Classical pieces and things like that. It wasn't like churches in the United States. It was a little more traditional. "I started with things like "Ave Maria," and some of the Latin pieces When I was seven years old I started taking lessons.

As time progressed I started taking lessons outside of the school. I started really taking it seriously when I was around fourteen and fifteen years old. That is when I focused on it primarily, as opposed to all of the other hobbies that I had such as horseback riding. When you are a kid you do a lot of other activities. I focused on my music through my pre-teen and teen years, but I had already started voice lessons early on. I have always wanted to play music since I was little."

Before embarking on a career in music Fabienne Grisel's education and life too a little detour.

"I ended up going to school for banking, because I am not that original and once I finished it I told my parents I am

out of here. I am going to play music. I came to the (United) States.

The reason I ended up in banking is because I made a deal with my mother and she said I get it that you want to have a career in music, but she was concerned if I would be able to feed myself when I was forty years old. She said why don't you do a degree, I don't care what you do, pick whatever you like and once you are done with that I will let you go wherever you want to go to study music. It was not, because I really wanted to be a banker or anything like that. My intention was always to play music, but I made that deal with my mom. My mom said it is great and you can do that, but first why don't you have some kind of education and then you can go and do what you want to do. I was really good in school, so I think my parents really wanted me to have something to show for it just in case. You never know in life. It was always a means to an end for me. For me it was always once I get that then I can go to music school and do music fulltime.

(In Switzerland) we go to high school from twelve (years of age) to fifteen and then from fifteen to nineteen we go to college. I was done with my degree, before my twentieth birthday.

I also went to ETM Geneva School of Music when I was seventeen years old. I did that after school (while attending college for banking). Once I was done with that I was also done with my college degree and I finished a little bit short of my twentieth birthday. We finish school a little sooner. That is when I moved to LA to go to the Musicians Institute and to study there. I did the vocal program there. I was three months short of my twentieth birthday when I moved to (America)," she says.

Fabienne Grisel studied vocal technique and vocal pedagogy with Dr. Joel Ewing for almost twenty years. The latter prepared her for teaching her own students about treating the voice as an instrument and how it functions. She studied with one of the best as Dr. Ewing has been the vocal coach for artists such as, Seal, The Eagles and Steve Perry. She describes Dr. Ewing as, "an amazing source of knowledge."

"I am still taking students if people want to call me up. They can reach me through social media and [my website](#). I am on the west side of LA. I am trying to spread what I know, because it has been great for me. I want to help everybody to get what they need.

Please visit [the website](#) for NEVERWONDER and the official [Facebook page](#) for the band. [Return to Our Front Page](#)

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