

BRIAN HOWES

Biography

Renaissance man: It's an overworked label easy to dispense and all but impossible to live up to. In the case of Brian Howes, though, it just might fit. Songwriter, singer, producer, multi-instrumentalist, label executive, A&R professional and studio owner – the Vancouver-based all-rounder has evolved over the last decade into one of contemporary music's best-kept secrets even as his name crops up repeatedly as a writer and producer on massive hit recordings by Hinder, Daughtry, Puddle of Mudd and Hedley, among others.

"I'm comfortable wearing a ton of different hats," explains Howes, who was born in Los Angeles in the mid-1970s and relocated to Canada's west coast as a youngster. "I've had record deals with two of my own bands, tasted a little success and made all the mistakes. But I learned awhile back that I love working with other bands and helping steer them clear of the potholes. Rather than being out in the trenches locked in one situation and one genre, it's incredibly satisfying to be involved in the big picture as a writer, producer and collaborator." Acing his long-time role models Bob Rock and David Foster for Producer of the Year honours at Canada's 2007 Juno Awards and then helming Skillet's Grammy nominated *Comatose* album is evidence he's on the right track.

These days Howes is focused on three main fronts: Van Howes Records, a joint-venture deal with Interscope/Universal that finds him signing, developing and recording bands under the auspices of Interscope Geffen A&M chairman Jimmy Iovine; Van Howes Studios, a top-tier recording studio in downtown Vancouver that he opened in 2007 with his creative wingman, recording engineer JVP (aka Jay Van Poederoyen); and Nobody Home Publishing, which is represented worldwide in a joint-venture agreement with EMI Music Publishing through its executive vice-president Dan McCarroll.

Howes is faced with what shapes up as another huge year in 2008. In the spring he holed up in Van Howes Studios with Hinder to write and record the hotly anticipated follow-up to the Oklahoma band's four million-selling *Extreme Behavior* debut. And Van Howes Records launches in June with *Light It Up*, the sophomore album by fast-rising New York alt.rock band Rev Theory that Howes co-wrote and produced at his studio. Previewed during the closing credits of this year's Super Bowl, the disc is already being hailed as a "brave, loud, crunchy, hook-sick, bombastic, *Appetite*-inspired long play" by veteran U.S. rock jock Lonn Friend.

Music runs deep in Howes' blood. His grandfather, Payton Legare, was an alto saxophone player with the Benny Goodman and Louis Prima orchestras during the big-band era. Legare's father, in turn, was an opera singer. Howes himself learned guitar as a kid, began writing songs early on and played in the requisite high-school garage bands. "I was the kind of guy who was equally into Fugazi and Def Leppard," he says, laughing. "It was all about the latest Operation Ivy album with one set of friends, then I'd go listen to Judas Priest and Iron Maiden while drinking Bud and getting into fights with another bunch of hosers. I've always been a classic Gemini."

After working the bar circuit as a guitarist and back-up singer, Howes realized he had the necessary hunger and stage presence to cut it as a frontman with his own band DDT. Delivering a fierce blend of ska, punk and rap, the critically acclaimed quartet was signed to TMC/Elektra (launched by Metallica's Lars Ulrich), wracked up an instant rock radio hit ("Walkabout"), toured arenas (opening for Kid Rock, Public Enemy and the Scorpions) and were then promptly chewed up in the starmaking machine. "It's a familiar story – we were a pretty cool band that imploded under the pressure. 'Nuff said."

Circulating a demo in search of a publishing contract in 2003, Howes instead sparked a bidding war that resulted in a record deal with TVT/Universal and more frontline action with the melodic, arena-rock act Closure. The band scored significant airplay in North America and toured with the likes of Sevendust, Trapt and Buckcherry. Growing weary of the road, however, Howes decided to root himself in a studio

context as a producer and on-call collaborator specializing in artist development. Rather than studying with a mentor in a city renowned for its world-class studios and such legends as the late Bruce Fairbairn, he learned the ropes himself while honing DDT's explosive sound and working with both JVP and his Closure co-producer Joey Moi (Nickelback, Theory of a Deadman).

His first bid to develop a band from the get-go proved he had the knack. The members of Hinder were fans of Closure and arrived on Howes' doorstep seeking guidance, a strong co-writer and production expertise. "They were exactly the kind of band I believe in: Great songs and great live performers with a star singer, an incredible work ethic and real belief in themselves," he says. "We totally connected to the point where I'm almost a sixth member." *Extreme Behavior* racked up heavy worldwide sales for Universal Republic and spun off the major hits "Get Stoned" and the international #1 "Lips of an Angel" – both Howes co-writes.

The success of Hinder and another upstart development act, the Mission, B.C. band Faber Drive, spawned a series of top-flight production/co-write gigs. His collaboration with *American Idol* finalist Chris Daughtry generated the heavy-rotation singles "Over You" and "What I Want." The Howes-produced and co-written Universal debut for the band Hedley spun off three #1 hits in Canada. He scored major rock radio airplay with Puddle of Mudd (the U.S. #1 mainstream rock radio hit "Famous"). Other notable credits in 2006/07: Chris Cornell, Avril Lavigne, Graham Colton, Lifehouse, Takota, Lesley Roy, Serena Ryder and Rachel Page.

Easygoing but armed with an intense work ethic, Howes doesn't intend to rest on his laurels. "Maybe it's a Canadian thing," he says with a laugh, "but I never take myself too seriously. Being young and hearing Lars Ulrich say you'd be huge, then having it all vanish and build again only to go away a second time – well, it's taught me to live one day at a time and just enjoy it all. I'd honestly do this for free, which I basically did for much of my life. At least now my wife is happy that I can help pay the mortgage."

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