

RETROSPECTIVE

LOOKING BACK ON CLASSIC ALBUMS WITH THE ONES WHO MADE THEM

During a period of turmoil in the 80s, Black Sabbath needed a shot in the arm. Ozzy Osbourne was a successful solo artist, Ronnie James Dio had his own band, Ian Gillan had returned to Deep Purple and a stint with Glenn Hughes hadn't worked out. Then a short-lived time with Ray Gillen left them in need of yet another new singer. Enter relative unknown Tony Martin – the man who would help rebuild the Sabbath name and be their second longest serving vocalist. Tony chats with James Gaden about how it all fell into place...

When you joined Black Sabbath, you recorded 'The Eternal Idol' which is one of my favourite Black Sabbath records. But what I don't know is how you got the job - I just know you came in as a relative unknown?

Chronologically, if you go back to the Glenn Hughes period, 1986 I think, I got a call then because they were struggling with Glenn. I was put on standby as a possible replacement for Glenn - which scared me to death! (laughs) I was at my mother's house, desperately going through the songs on the 'Seventh Star' album, just thinking "How the fuck do you sing like that?" I didn't have a clue how I could have done that. Then I got a call saying "Don't worry, they've found another singer." That was Ray Gillen. I later get a call saying that Ray Gillen had disappeared, so I was on standby again. My manager called me up, said "Kid, come and meet me, we're going for a drive!" I asked where we were going, he wouldn't tell me. So I got in the car, we drove off, ended up at this reasonably big house, knocked on the door and Tony Iommi answered it! I thought "Fucking hell, you could've warned me!" From there, we played a few tracks, talked about them and I went to London for an audition. All I did was sing 'The Shining' and it was "Cool, you've got the job - you have seven days to finish the album". So I had to sing the whole thing in seven days. I screamed heck out of my voice to get that done, so they could get the album out in time.

How were they aware of you then - had they seen you with a different band?

Oh no, my manager was a school friend of theirs - he was their tour manager during the Ozzy years. Birmingham is quite an incestuous place for rock bands, everybody knows each other in some form or another. They knew my manager and he put my name forward.

Ray had already laid down vocals for the record, so did you have to stick rigidly to what he had already done?

Oh yeah, everything was already written and they were in a rush to get it out. They gave me Ray Gillen's demos to learn the songs, and I wasn't allowed to add any words, take any out and I had to stick to the melody as close as I could. I was able to do that pretty much, there was only one thing I insisted they leave on, because I

couldn't do it as well - it was the laugh Ray Gillen did on 'Nightmare'. So that is Ray - I couldn't do that bit!

In a lot of ways, it was more like a session than being in a new band. That really did lay down the foundations and it's one hell of an audition to put your voice out there on an album with one of the biggest bands on the planet! If you think about it, I was about 29 then, I'd come from a band called The Alliance, who were nothing. We had a deal with Warner Brothers but we weren't doing much - Sabbath took on a complete rookie in me. They might as well have asked me to become Prime Minister to be honest! (laughs) It was quite a leap of faith, but Sabbath as a band weren't really up to much at that point. They'd had so many stories about them and who the next singer would be, they were starting to become a bit of a joke. When they got me in, that was as low as they could get! (laughs) We worked really hard to build it back up, I thought we were doing pretty



well, we went on to pull out 'Headless Cross' and then 'TYR'. It was thundering along and then they dropped Dio back in!

After about eight weeks of Ronnie being back, they called me and said 'This isn't working, you have to come back'. I think I've had about five call ups from Sabbath at various points. I went back and did 'Cross Purposes' and 'Forbidden'. Most people seemed appreciative of things like 'Headless Cross' - apart from the Ozzy faithful, they don't get it.

When you got the job as the singer, were you told you would be the lyricist for future records, or did that get dropped on you too?

I had said to my manager that I wanted to be a writer. The first time the band went into rehearsals, we very quickly settled on a routine. Iommi would provide the riffs. I would then take them away and cut them up into sections, put them back in an order that I could sing over, and then sing something. I'd do three versions, so each song would have three different melodies and three different sets of lyrics. Then I'd take the tape back and play it back. They'd pick which one they preferred - so there's like two other versions of almost every Sabbath song I did!

Being such a prolific lyricist, were you interested in mythology and the occult or did you have to study up on it?

I just studied up on it and found the words that were most appropriate to me.

I've done that my whole writing career, with The Cage, the Giuntini Projects, Rondinelli, all sorts of things.

As Sabbath's vocalist, did you favour either the Dio or Ozzy era with regarding performance?

I made the mistake actually, of telling them that I could sing any Black Sabbath song. I ended up singing everything from 'Changes' to all sorts of other stuff... it became increasingly so, because I could, they thought they should. So my songs got fewer and fewer and their old songs got more and more. The last tour was a bit of a strain, by that point I thought I'd be playing more of my stuff.

When I was sixteen I took my first girlfriend to see Black Sabbath, here in Birmingham! Back then they weren't that massive, nobody knew them that well and I actually joked that if the singer fell off the stage, I'd run up and take over! (laughs) Twat! So I have a connection with the early Ozzy stuff - at the same time, Ronnie did some amazing stuff and it's not difficult to be inspired by what he did. The singer I really wanted to be though, was Glenn Hughes. I always wanted a voice like Glenn Hughes and I never got it - I still haven't! I told him once, I know him quite well and I said "You do realise you're my hero, right?" and he went "Noooo!" Honestly, if I had a voice like his, it'd be fucking awesome. But you're stuck with the voice you've got, I've had to make do with this one.

It's not such a bad one to be lumbered with!

It's okay when it works - I really messed it up when I was young. Instead of doing any vocal coaching or tutoring, I just dove straight in and screamed the fuck out of it - and broke it! After that, I had to work really hard to keep it fired up. I do struggle with it, I'm not a natural singer and I do an obscene amount of vocal exercises all the time to keep going. That works, I'm happy for that, medically all is well, I've had the camera down the throat, everybody is happy.

Also, I don't just work in rock - when I was young I worked with reggae! There was a kid reggae band called Musical Youth, they went to school and their father, Freddie Waite, used to write the songs in the daytime. To write, he had a band, and I was the guitarist in that band. So I did that, I've hooked up with an opera singer, I've got a blues band going on called Silver Horses with an album out now... just me, bass, drums and guitar - like a bluesy Led Zeppelin type thing. It's just beautiful. I'm loving that, because it's a chance to get my voice around something different.

Those who have only heard you with Sabbath perhaps don't realise your versatility - I've heard you sing all sorts, from classic Whitesnake, to Led

Zeppelin, to Deep Purple...

Yeah and I think that's mostly because I'm a child of the seventies. Being a child of the seventies, you had so much diversity - T-Rex, Led Zeppelin, The Sweet, Slade... all those different acts were in your peripheral vision, you could hear and see



ALBUM DETAILS

1. **The Shining**
(Tony Iommi)*
2. **Ancient Warrior**
(Tony Iommi)*
3. **Hard Life to Love**
(Tony Iommi)*
4. **Glory Ride**
(Tony Iommi)*
5. **Born to Lose**
(Tony Iommi)*
6. **Nightmare**
(Tony Iommi)*
7. **Scarlet Pimpernel**
(Tony Iommi)*
8. **Lost Forever**
(Tony Iommi)*
9. **Eternal Idol**
(Tony Iommi)*

BAND LINE UP

Tony Iommi – guitars
Tony Martin – lead vocals
Geoff Nicholls – keyboards

Additional Musicians

Bob Daisley – bass
Eric Singer – drums
Bev Bevan – percussion

**All songs are credited to have been written by Tony Iommi, but in fact Bob Daisley and Ray Gillen both contributed, especially lyrically.*

Produced by Jeff Glixman, Vic Coppersmith-Heaven & Chris Tsangerides

Recorded at:

Air Studios, Montserrat & Battery Studios, London

Released on Warner Bros in 1987

all of them going on and were kind of forced to take note of them. There was one Black Sabbath, one T-Rex, one Slade. Now there are hundreds of Black Sabbath types, hundreds of Led Zeppelin types, y'know? It's not rubbish, but I think if they took a

bit more time and stuck to their guns they could come up with something unique, rather than trying to copy somebody else.

You were very passionate when we spoke in Fireworks #50, about how you felt music was being devalued.

So many musicians are doing two or three jobs just to be able to play music. What you really want to do is sit and create so you can put the best into it that you can. If you can't concentrate on what you want to do, you end up following a trend, which is fatal, because trends end. It's much more rewarding to do your own thing, but it doesn't pay, so a lot of musicians end up doing what they don't want to do. I think it's time for a change. It's time to talk to the customers, the fans. There are a few who are determined to download the fuck out of anything they can get, but the majority of people just need a little more understanding of what it is we're asking them to do. For example, if you go to a cinema, you pay your ten quid, you see the film, you come out, your ten quid stays there. If you want to go back and watch the film again, you have to pay another ten quid. What we ask is you buy a record in the first place, and it's yours for life! Ten quid for an album - that's not a lot!

Also, artists are still making "albums". Very often, you put all that effort and time to make a full album, and somebody goes onto iTunes and buys one track for 79p. So what was the point of doing all the other songs? In the days of vinyl, they were all on that disk, imprinted. You may have skipped one or two, but over time you might have thought "You know what, now I've heard that a few times I quite like that now". People who download one track and disregard the rest can't do that. Maybe bands should look at doing single track releases - one song at a time and let each one stand on its own merit. Do that with maybe six or seven songs, then put them out on a CD with four new ones to make an album. That would hopefully mean people would give the album as a whole its due.

You used to have an A&R guy, a five year deal, tour support, an advance, to build it into what it was supposed to be. That's doesn't happen now - yet labels are still taking the same cuts. It's time to change. Maybe the artist is better dealing directly with the fans. It's much more personal, you can put your own worth on what you're selling. I've been into this deeply, I've talked to lawyers, union people, I think it's time the artists claim back the industry, because the industry won't do it for us.

You are the guy creating the stuff at the beginning, you are the guy looking to get paid at the end, but in-between, there's all these other people taking percentages out of it. There's no money left at the end for the artist. It needs a different way of looking at it, and asking the fans just to buy the thing in the first place and hold onto it. That's all we ask!