

ROCK AND ROLL ANGEL

Ronnie James Dio may be gone, but he'll never be forgotten. With his sad passing earlier this year, the Dio estate have issued in a digi-pack set recordings documenting both of Dio's appearances at the Monsters Of Rock festival held at Castle Donington. As well as that, Heaven And Hell are represented on a brand new DVD/CD recorded 'Live at Wacken' - a terrific gig which was one of Ronnie's last ever live recordings. It features live renditions of some of the band's most recent work from their album 'The Devil You Know' interspersed with all their classic tunes from the past. Ronnie gives a truly memorable performance and proves beyond all doubt just what a great singer he was. To hear all about the show at Wacken, memories of the Donington gigs, life as a member of Black Sabbath, Dio and Heaven And Hell, James Gaden got in touch with the famed drummer who was there for it all - Ronnie's good friend Vinny Appice.

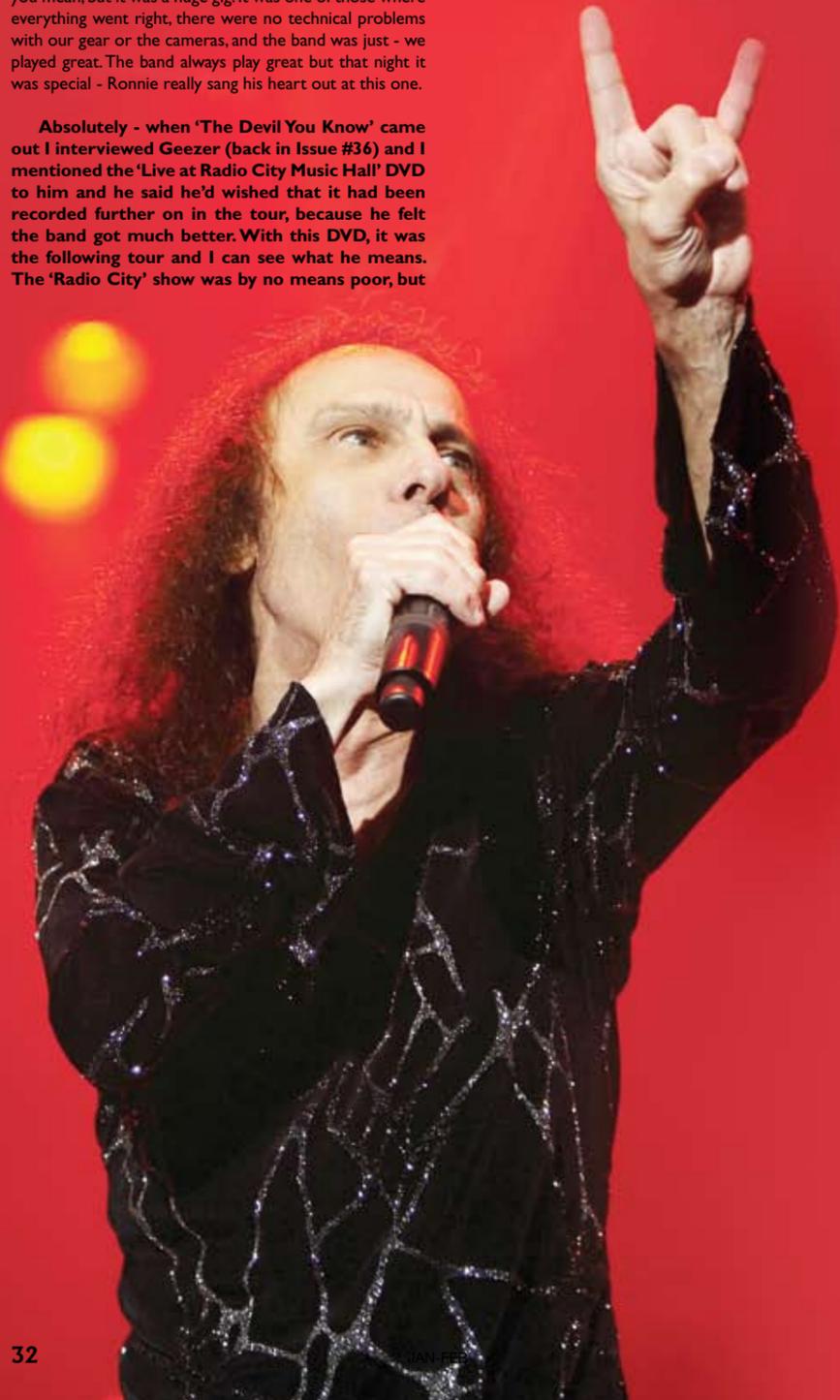
I'd like to start off by talking about the Wacken show - I was really impressed by what a strong show it was. Do you have any specific memories of it, or was it just another show to you at the time?

Well, being on tour, it is just another gig, I know what you mean, but it was a huge gig. It was one of those where everything went right, there were no technical problems with our gear or the cameras, and the band was just - we played great. The band always play great but that night it was special - Ronnie really sang his heart out at this one.

Absolutely - when 'The Devil You Know' came out I interviewed Geezer (back in Issue #36) and I mentioned the 'Live at Radio City Music Hall' DVD to him and he said he'd wished that it had been recorded further on in the tour, because he felt the band got much better. With this DVD, it was the following tour and I can see what he means. The 'Radio City' show was by no means poor, but

this one it at another level.

It's true - I agree. When we did the 'Radio City Music Hall' DVD, that was in 2007. It was only about eleven or twelve shows into our first tour together since we became 'Heaven And Hell', so we weren't as tight and



as developed as it became later on. We hadn't played together for a long time and it's definitely not as tight as what you see on the Wacken DVD. We were one unit at that point.

I enjoyed the 'Radio City' show but with this one, Ronnie seems to be prowling the stage a lot more, there's a huge crowd that are really into it, and like you say, the band were just one living, breathing unit. I'm really pleased it was documented and able to come out on DVD and CD. Obviously, it would have been better to have come out under better circumstances, but it makes for a very fitting example for people to see just how good Ronnie was - with this being one of his last shows.

Y'know, another big difference between Wacken and the Radio City Music Hall was we were only eleven shows in, we were doing a sound check and the union guys come in and tell us we have to take a break. We wanted to go over the ending of one of the songs, but we had to stop right in the middle, because the union said so, that's the way it was. In New York, there's a very strong union presence, so there was a lot of pressure from that side of things. We're doing our first DVD for years, the union hampered our sound check, we couldn't warm up properly, it created a lot of tension. At the Wacken gig, man, we just showed up at the gig, no sound check, nuthin', went out and played tighter than ever! (laughs). We became a band, y'know?

I suppose there's chemistry there from past experience, but I thought the band sounded so much stronger than previous shows. The other thing I liked was the chance to hear the live versions of stuff from 'The Devil You Know'. I reviewed that album when it came out and I thought it was a strong record anyway, but when I heard them live at this show, juxtaposed with the classics like 'Mob Rules', 'Children Of The Sea' - they really held their own, they sounded great. Did you guys worry that the new stuff might not be accepted, with their being such a big gap between albums?

The new songs fitted in so well I think, because the band never changed with the shifts in music itself, we always stuck with what we started as. It's not like we ever jumped on a bandwagon, Tony always played the riffs that came to him... even when music shifted over to grunge we still pounded our stuff out. That's why the new ones fit with the old - and live we're always a bit more powerful, more aggressive. This band is not one that had different periods of time - you're not going to look back at us and say 'Yeah, that was their jazz period' or 'on that record they wanted to sound like Weezer when they got popular'!

(Laughs) Imagine that!

(Laughs) Yeah! But no, we stuck to what we did and I think people respect that in the long term.

When I watched the DVD, 'Bible Black' in particular stood out - it's such an epic track, and the sort only you guys could do, so I think you're spot on. I also liked that the set list included some of the lesser heard tracks like 'Time Machine' from 'Dehumanizer' and there's a bit of 'Country Girl' in there too... did you all start getting involved in the set list with a view to dusting some rarer ones off?

We usually email each other, Geezer would usually start it, listing a whole bunch of songs. We'd start eliminating tracks here and there until... basically we wound up with the set we always played! (laughs) 'Wait a minute, we played this set on the last three tours!' So we'd have to try and get out of our comfort zone. A lot of them, people really want to hear them, the classics like 'Heaven And Hell', 'Children Of The Sea', 'Mob Rules'... they have to be in so you have the skeleton of a set already. Then we'd look at changing a few. Some of them Ronnie sang really high and the vocals were brutal to replicate, so he'd take a look and decide what the set would do to him.

Although, saying that, he always seemed to be able to deliver them with no problem.

This is it, I'm going to get to the Dio At Donington set shortly, but all the things I've heard of Ronnie live, from the times I've seen him in person, to recordings and DVD's of him in Rainbow, Sabbath, Dio... he never seemed to give a poor performance. I'm struggling to think of another singer who was so consistent live.

Oh yeah, Ronnie was always consistent. Actually, I played so many shows with him, hundreds of shows, and I can only think of one time, in Chicago I think, where he had a bad cold. His voice was a little bit crackly, but he still went out there and sang his heart out and was great. Even now, with the Heaven And Hell stuff, he's older, in his sixties, yet he just went out and nailed it every night. On top of that, the last couple of tours he was in pain. He still sang his heart out - I'd look at him and just... how much pain could he be in, how sick could he be when he could still do that? Some nights he sounded better than ever. Unbelievable.

He was amazing. The other things I liked about the Wacken DVD is there are some interviews, with each of you individually, talking about your time in the band. You mentioned that you were asked to join Ozzy Osbourne's band, and turned it down, only for Sabbath to ask you a few weeks later. Do you think that was dumb luck, or are you a guy who believes in fate and thinks it was meant to be?

It's a weird thing, y'know? I got the call from Ozzy and it was an odd time - I turned it down and the other half of Sabbath call me a month later. Weird, right? But I always think of it that, hey, if I'd joined Ozzy's band, I wonder if I'd have been in that plane with Randy (Rhodes), y'know?

Oh God, yeah, I never thought of that.

Right. I knew Randy from years ago and it was a long time ago, when you're young you're a bit crazy, I could see it - 'Hey yeah, I'll go up in the plane'... and who knows what would have happened? I look at that. And the other thing is, when that plane crash happened, I was out with Sabbath on the Heaven And Hell tour and we were at an airport somewhere, fogged in, couldn't get to the gig. We had to charter a plane at four o'clock in the afternoon and we got some friggin' five seater plane. The pilot got in and there was me, Ronnie, Geezer and our tour manager in the back. We had to fly two hours through a storm, bumping around in this thing. We didn't know Randy's plane had crashed but we were in the same kind of small plane. We make it to the airport and we kiss the ground of course, and we found out Randy died in a plane crash. It was strange.

In your interview on the DVD, you spoke at length about learning the songs and studying Bill Ward's style and how to fit in with Geezer's playing. I wanted to ask if you picked all that up quickly, or did you have to basically forget what you had been taught and learn from scratch to become Black Sabbath's drummer?

Yeah, it wasn't just like learning songs for some band. They were huge and played differently from how a lot of people played. The played stuff very slow but built in time changes, there was a dark vibe to it... plus Bill calls himself more of a percussionist than a drummer, which was different to me. He doesn't play with the guitar and the bass, he plays over it, which is creative. I tend to lay it down more like a John Bonham, playing with the band. I tried to split the difference, keep that but throw in what Bill played as best I could. Even when we made 'Mob Rules', I'd tried to visualise what Bill would have played if he'd been in on those sessions, try and incorporate that. They had their own sound that they had developed, so I saw my job as the new guy as to not change that sound, just try and add to it if I could.

When you spent your time in Sabbath, it was 'Live Evil' that resulted in the rifts appearing and ultimately you and Ronnie would leave in order to form Dio. Did you find that daunting, going from a big, established band like Sabbath to starting from scratch, or did you prefer it because you weren't "the new guy" and therefore weren't in anyone's shadow?

You know what? Back then, I was really young, in my twenties, so I wasn't thinking about security and stuff like that. And to work with Ronnie in a new band - I just never felt it wouldn't do well. I wanted to do it, I was a fan and he became a good friend, so I was confident that with him at the helm it could be something. I probably wouldn't have been that confident if it had been some other singer. Sabbath did want me to stay, so if it hadn't have been Ronnie setting up maybe I would have stayed. I love Tony and Geezer and we go way back, they're great guys to play music with and it was a hard choice. But because Ronnie lived near me in L.A., it was easier to jump ship with him than it was to stay on in Sabbath and go back and forth to England all the time. It wasn't that I didn't like anyone or had an axe to grind, I went with what was easiest and I wanted to see if it would work, what Ronnie was putting together. I didn't think about if it would fail, and luckily it didn't.

Of course, the first record you put out was 'Holy Diver', a real classic among the rock community. On that album your name is on a lot of the writing credits - did you have more freedom to express your ideas there, or was that always the case in Sabbath and you just weren't credited?

I did do things here and there with Sabbath but I didn't chase credits - it was their band, they were huge, I was the new kid on the block, I was cool with that, I was playing with legends! With Dio, there was much more creativity because there were no rules, a new band, new slate. With Sabbath, they had their history so we had to respect that. With Dio, we could do whatever we felt and I could express myself more in the songwriting and it felt more of a team effort. It was two very different creative experiences.



Which brings me to the new double CD set of Dio recorded live at Donington. The first CD features you playing material from 'Holy Diver' live. What are your recollections of that show?

The first show, that one recorded in 1983, that was our first European gig I think. We began touring for 'Holy Diver' in America, playing small theatres and big clubs. We had Queensryche supporting us. As we toured, you could see the album climbing up the charts... that's back when Billboard actually reflected album sales. I don't think anybody can figure out what it does now! (laughs) It kept going, selling and selling, it went gold and we started playing arenas. We were like 'Oh, cool!' We get over to Europe and it's the Donington Festival with that huge crowd. We were young and crazy for it, and though we weren't that high on the bill we knew we could go out there and kick ass - which we did. We hit the stage and burned. I remember that excitement and what made it was, with Sabbath, we only really played England, Japan, the US and Canada. We didn't really do Europe. For some reason I never had chance to see much of Europe or play any of those big festivals over there - it's so much different over there. So Dio gave me that chance and I loved it. And we came back to Donington in 1987 with Craig Goldy on guitar instead of Vivian Campbell. The band had settled a bit, with experience. The first show I think everything is played fast, tearing it up. On the second show I think we played it steadier, more seasoned. And we were higher on the bill too so that was nice! (laughs) I remember them both as being good shows.

They are, they're both excellent and I always

thought Craig Goldy was an underrated guitarist. He proves his worth on that Donington gig - how did you find it when he joined the band?

I liked Craig, I thought he fitted in really, really well. He had a different kind of sound to Vivian and I think it's a shame, when you start out with a band, there's magic in that group. If there's a member change, sometimes it's not for the worst and Craig was good, but I thought 'Oh man, we just built it up, get successful and then Vivian isn't in the band anymore', y'know? I don't care for that so much. Luckily Craig filled his shoes really well and we made some good music together. I think he's a good player.

This brings me up to something I wanted to ask you - when Ronnie was working on the 'Lock Up The Wolves' album, he had an entirely different group and you left Dio around that period. I've not heard the reason why - were you fired, did you quit, get another offer?

What happened was I rehearsed for that album, but the problem I had was it had become... Jimmy Bain had gone, we had a new kid on bass, then Rowan Robertson came in on guitar who was only 18... it didn't feel like Dio anymore. The band I mean. It was more like Ronnie and a solo band to back him, not the Dio band I was involved with at the start. It was a brand new band, the whole band were really young, so I did rehearse the album, but I felt maybe I should have a change. Somewhere in Ronnie's house there are demos of the whole album on twelve track. I did those, then I decided to leave and Ronnie got in Simon Wright who ended up recording the final versions. I did half, the sort of making of, if you will, and he did the mastered bits. I just felt it was right for me to change bands at that time.

I see, I'd just never heard the reason why. Later on you'd reunite with Ronnie in Sabbath, before going back to Dio for 'Strange Highways' and 'Angry Machines'. Those two albums have a much darker, heavier sound and you write a lot on those two records. Did the band look to actively seek a new sound on those records or was that just the result of your frame of mind at the time?

Yeah, I was gone after 'Lock Up The Wolves' and I was in a band called World War III in which Tracy G played guitar. Jimmy Bain was there too on bass. I met up with Ronnie again for 'Dehumanizer' and when that version of Sabbath broke up again we decided to try Dio again. I recommended Tracy G for the guitar slot, and we had a great friend, Jeff Pilson for bass on 'Strange Highways'. It was a different kind of band, y'know? It was darker stuff but when we went out and played... Tracy was a very dark guitar player, which was one of the things I loved about him. But the fans didn't accept him, it wasn't melodic like the old Dio stuff. Although old Dio stuff was heavy, it was melodic. Working with Tracy, we had that darker side, but the old fans didn't take to it.

You guys paid tribute to Ronnie at High Voltage by getting Glenn Hughes and Jorn Lande to do the vocals. It was a great way to celebrate Ronnie's work and gave him a great send off. So what happens next for you, do you know what you're going to work on in the future?

That was great to do that show, it raised money for Ronnie's cancer fund but I gotta say, it was very, very strange rehearsing. We went to Wales to rehearse and we had done a lot of stuff with Ronnie there. It was really weird to be all set up and he wasn't there. Then we start playing and there's somebody else singing. Wow, this is really, really weird. But the High Voltage show itself, it almost felt like he was there with us. That was the last time we played together. We're still in communication with one another - Tony calls me, I call him, Geezer emails... we're talking about ideas of what we can do in the future, but we have no plans right now, we don't know if we'll continue or not. I'd love to play with those guys again but we'll see. I have a new band myself - it's called Kill Devil Hill and has Rex Brown from Pantera on bass, me, and two guys from L.A. We have Mark Zvonon on guitar and Dewey Bragg singing. Really, really cool band - sounds like a cross between Sabbath, Zeppelin and Alice in Chains. I'm having a lot of fun putting it together, we're writing, it's new and exciting. We just got some management and hopefully we'll have it out early next year.