

Sometimes I Wanna Scream...

Stepping into the shoes formerly filled by Ozzy Osbourne, Ronnie James Dio, Ian Gillan and Glenn Hughes is not easy task, but Tony Martin did it, and did it so well he stayed in Black Sabbath longer than almost all of his predecessors. From there he filled David Coverdale's role in the classic Whitesnake act M3, and then handled a variety of material in the rock extravaganza 'Whole Lotta Metal', performing hits by everybody from UFO to Bon Jovi. After years of interpreting other people's material live, Tony is ready to go solo again after dipping his toe in the solo career waters back in 1992. James Gaden spoke to the vocalist about his new CD 'Scream', Sabbath, touring and plans for the future.

Well, I'd like to talk about your new solo album first. How does it feel to be making a solo album again after spending the last three to four years on tour with various projects?

I know - years in the wilderness. It feels really good. It's always been a hope, a dream and a desire to have a solo album out. I did do one before, about ten years ago, called 'Back Where I Belong', and that really wasn't me. It was kind of constructed for the period, that year, that sound. It didn't portray me very well I don't think. It was a bit Bryan Adams in style, that album. This one is much more me, much more my voice and my kind of songs. It's my direction and it feels much better than the other solo album that I did. It's been a long time coming - I'm just tired of singing for other people. It's time to do my own thing. Ronnie James Dio, and Ozzy, they've had their solo thing for years. I never did that, I was always busy singing for other people. I have to stop and make my own mark somehow. I'm not sure how I do that now, because the industry has changed so much.

I think the problem is, you're always going to be seen as the man who resurrected Black Sabbath - you spent ten years of your career with them so it'll be difficult to shake that tag off.

That's right, and a lot of the people I spoke to when it came to doing this album wanted me to start with that direction, the Sabbath sound. As it happens, I'm very comfortable in that style, so that wasn't a problem, but I didn't want to go backwards. I wanted to go forwards! Originally I was aiming to do something a bit more modern, but they didn't want me to do that. So having Geoff Nicholls on board, he inspired me a lot. He helped me find the right vein for the album. It's been exciting, and pleasurable, and all the other things you'd imagine having a solo CD out.

I've heard 'Back Where I Belong' and this one is fresher, more in your face. It's very much sat in the hard rock vein. There's suggestions of Sabbath, but not to the point where it's a Black Sabbath album in all but name. You have a

distinctive voice anyway, but I found most of it is just a classic hard rock sound.

Thank you - that's what I was trying to do. It's very easy to slot into the Sabbath style after being with them for ten years. It would have been no problem to go completely down that road and just take on that mantle again. I was very conscious of that, so I would send the tracks to Geoff for honest feedback, and he'd say things like 'That's a bit lommi in style, we need to change that', and he helped to make sure we didn't end up just making a direct rip off of Black Sabbath.

It must be difficult. When I saw the Black Sabbath segment you did in the 'Whole Lotta Metal' shows, that part of the show was more like Black Sabbath than Black Sabbath have been for the past few years. They have really lost it!

That band was great - I'd like to have as good a sound as the 'Whole Lotta Metal' show did with these guys I'm taking on the road with me, but it's really hard right now because we don't have our own PA or our own sound guys. We're limited to what's at the venue for the moment. You know what that's like - it's kind of Russian Roulette as to what kind of sound you'll get.

Did you write brand new material specifically prior to recording 'Scream', or is a lot of it stuff you've

amassed while being on the road?

A lot of it is things I've amassed. The oldest one on there is 'Raising Hell', which has Cozy Powell on it. That was started about twelve years ago when I was working in Cozy Powell's Hammer. We wrote bits and pieces in rehearsals and I put that song together as a demo way back then. Cozy heard it and loved it - he said 'Yeah, that'd be really good for a solo album if you make one'. I forgot about the demo to be honest. Years later I discovered the demo, but obviously Cozy had died since then so I couldn't meet up with him to record it properly. So I managed to restore the rehearsal tapes of him drumming and work around that. I actually have 22 Cozy Powell tracks that have never been released, and I'd like to do something for him. Maybe invite some of the people he's worked with in the past like Brian May, Ritchie Blackmore, people like that, and see if they wanted to write something around his drums and demos. Then release it on his behalf, because I think people have sort of forgotten really what an influence he had on the industry. People talk about him in the industry, people like us know what he did, but to everyone else he seems to have disappeared and I don't think that's fair.

It's not. He was a legend.

He was, and it's unfair for a bloke like that who put in as much effort and had as much significance.... not just drumming, but the music in general. When I was a kid I used to listen to Rainbow, and 'Rising' was the first thing of theirs I bought, and I was totally inspired by it. The drumming was a huge part of that, and there was a lot about Cozy to celebrate.

Any other big names or collaborators on 'Scream'? My promo only lists the tracks.

Cozy's the biggest name, and then we've got Geoff Nicholls from Sabbath of course. As for the other guys, one of the guitarists is my son, Joe Harford. He's twenty four years old, and he does a great job. My bass player is called Jamie

Mallander - he's a midget! (laughs). His bass is about as big as he is, but he's a great player and throws some nice poses on stage, so he's on board. My drummer, Danny Needham, is really good at just sitting behind the kit and making it work. He's adaptable and can get into anything. He enjoys himself. They're also quite young - late twenties, early thirties. I'm the oldest - no, I'm not the oldest bastard actually, Geoff Nicholls is the oldest bastard in the band! I'm a close second! But the whole band is made up of people who are really into it, you know?

As for the playing on the album itself, I did most of the drums using Studio Kit - an electronic kit with pads. I played most of the bass, some of the guitar parts and bits and pieces on the keys. And also the violin. My son did the other guitar parts and solos, and Geoff handled the majority of the keyboards.

That's what a lot of people don't realise about you - people think of you as a singer but you can actually play a lot of things can't you?

As a writer, I learned how to play lots of different instruments to be able to put demos together.

That must be the beauty of doing a solo album. You have the freedom to do all that.

If you can do it, there's no reason why you shouldn't, no reason at all. I mean there's a lot of things I simply wasn't good enough to play by myself.... some of the guitar parts for example. I've been playing guitar since I was seven, but I can't get my fingers around some of the stuff, so my son played solos, and stuff he could do faster than me, or better than me or whatever. The other guys could come in if I'd made a mistake and fix it, or do it better than me if that was what was needed.

We talked about 'Raising Hell' which is my favourite on the album. Have you got a favourite?

Oh my God...er.... I do like 'The Kids Of Today (Don't Understand The Blues)', because that is such a piss-take, with the blues section at the end. It's a piss-take of the Whitesnake thing I did with M3 - Marsden and Moody. They said 'Eeee, the kids of today, they just don't understand the blues'. I like a lot of the stuff the kids do nowadays, I think it's vibrant and healthy. So it was just a track inspired by that comment and I put the blues section in at the end for a laugh really.

It comes across like a fun track, and again, that's the sort of thing you can do with a solo album isn't it?

Yes it is. I couldn't have done it with Sabbath! With them you were fixed in a certain direction, which I understand. I don't have a problem with that, never did. It was a bit restricting because sometimes you just wanted to go off on a tangent, and you couldn't. But now I can!

The only time I remember Sabbath going off on a tangent, and it did not work on iota, was

the rapping on 'Forbidden'. It was so weird!

(Laughs). We told them that wouldn't work! There was a huge meeting, and Cozy was there, he hated it. I hated it. Neil Murray wasn't sure. All sorts of people thought it was shit, and asking why Sabbath should be fused with rapping. They kept saying to us 'Well, Run DMC...' and all that stuff. Well, yeah, Run DMC had it right, but it was a different kind of rock music. They got that right, you can't do it again. Especially with Sabbath! They're Black Sabbath, you can't fuck about with it! Anyway, they insisted it was going to work. After the event I feel, and I don't know if I'm right or not, but I feel it was just a way of getting us out of the record deal. I think they just wanted it out of the way to concentrate on the Ozzy thing. Also, if I looked bad going out, it would look better for Ozzy coming



back in. There were a lot of politics in Sabbath, a lot of reading between the lines.

And you actually go on tour tomorrow don't you? What can fans expect - I presume a certain amount of Sabbath material, but what else?

There has to be at this stage, so I'm starting from the point of the Tony Martin years of Black Sabbath. One reason for doing so is unless I do them, nobody plays those songs. Geoff Nicholls has been in Sabbath longer than Ozzy, he's seen every singer come and go. He said all the years Sabbath were together, there was only a short period of playing Tony Martin songs. Nobody else has

ever done them. I wanted to bring some of those songs back to peoples attention, remind them that I was there, this was me. I'll add in some of my favourites, and from there, when I'm more established, tailor the set more toward me and the things that I've done, aside from Sabbath. But I have to start here.

I actually think one of your Sabbath songs is one of my favourites, and that's 'The Shining'.

Ah, right. Cool. That wasn't actually my song, that was written by the time I got there....

Yes, I know, but it was your first album with them and it was the first vocal the listener hears on it, and I really liked it.

That was actually the first song I ever sang for Black Sabbath. That was my audition. When I auditioned, they gave me 'The Shining'. They heard me sing it and said 'Fucking hell, that's brilliant!' and gave me the job.

I presume you'll be including the 'Headless Cross' in the set - what other Sabbath tunes will get an airing?

Yes, we'll do that one. I actually live in a place called Headless Cross, it's a little village in Worcestershire. We'll do 'Devil and Daughter', things off the 'Cross Purposes' album like 'Dying For Love'.... quite a mix really. And I'll throw a couple of favourites in, just because I can, and I want to. I have great respect for the Dio era, so I'll do something like 'Children Of The Sea' or something like that. And maybe throw in one of the original line up tracks, like 'War Pigs'. It'll be a good selection of material. Like I say though, we're at the mercy of the venue at the moment. I'm scared they're be some idiot on the desk that'll fuck it all up for us! We'll have to wait and see.

And finally, you performed on the new Phenomena album didn't you?

Yes, I did. I actually sang on it about a year and a half ago, it's just taken them a while to put it all together to get it out. The other thing I'm doing is called Empire III. I did Empire II, which wasn't fantastic. I just happened to step in for them at the last minute. But with Empire III, I actually wrote with them. It's got a lot of Sabbath style sounding songs and it's quite a good album. That should be out in the next few months.

Well, on that note Tony, I wish you all the luck in the world for your new tour.

Yeah, just getting on with it now! Thanks for your time, and I hope you enjoyed the album. Come out and see me if I'm in your neck of the woods!

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