

# Deep Purple!

*Legendary rockers Deep Purple have a long and illustrious back catalogue of work, surviving numerous line-up changes and internal battles since their beginnings in the late 60s. While some fans still bemoan enigmatic guitar hero Ritchie Blackmore's departure, the band continued with Steve Morse, who has now been in Deep Purple for a staggering seventeen years! He, alongside founding member Ian Paice on drums, vocalist Ian Gillan, bassist Roger Glover and keyboard player Don Airey have just released their first record since 2005's 'Rapture Of The Deep'. The new album, 'Now What ?!' is a masterpiece, a serious return to form from one of rock's most talented quintets. James Gaden spoke to Ian Gillan to hear all about it.*

Eight years is a long time to wait for a new Deep Purple album, but fortunately 'Now What ?!' has been more than worth it. The album broke into the upper echelons on the UK charts, right in amongst mainstream darlings Rihanna and Taylor Swift. Similar impressive chart positions are happening all over the world. Does such a thing matter to a rock veteran like Ian Gillan?

"Well, to be honest with you," he replies with a chuckle, "we're looking at each other wondering what's going on! We've never understood any of the commercial aspects of music at all – we're the arch dummies of the commercial world of music! When we made 'Machine Head' we actually tried for once in our lives to make a conscious effort to write a track that could be a single. 'Black Night' and those that went before were always album tracks really. So we recorded 'Never Before' – it never got played, nobody listened to it, it's the least listened to track on the album. Yet we had tracks like 'Highway Star', 'Smoke On The Water'... 'Smoke On The Water' was a filler track, because we were short of time! I'm constantly bemused, excited and baffled by what goes on in the commercial world. We have no talent for that at all I'm afraid!"

When the new album was initially announced, famed producer Bob Ezrin was named as the man to sit at the helm in the studio. Personally I was very excited by the prospect as a fan of many of the albums Ezrin has guided. I query who contacted whom to start the process.

"I'm not entirely sure who made the final connection," Ian states. "I've heard second hand that Bob expressed interest in working with us but he never said that to me. He turned up at a couple of shows we were doing on a tour of Canada in 2012. We had a long chat and out of that came quite a few things. I forget exactly who said what, but Bob was certainly involved in rousing our interest about going back into a studio. He helped remind us that Deep Purple are primarily an instrumental band. He said to focus on the music first,

then the songs, not to worry about time constraints or anything like that. Just let the arrangements flow – it was great, it was like unchaining us. Overall, Bob was a great influence in three categories: he's a brilliant technician with his own studio and his personally trained technicians who work as a team, he's a fabulous musician with a broad taste from orchestral music to jazz to rock and roll. Thirdly, he has an experience of life, he's of a certain age where he still has energy and hunger, but also has wisdom of the years. We treated him as an equal and he basically became a sixth band member during the making of the album. With those elements in place,

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**Ian Gillan**

you couldn't go wrong. We didn't really do anything different, we went in the rehearsal room, wrote it, learned and arranged it, then went in and recorded it, all at the same time, together. I'm not commenting on the music, but for actual sound, this is the best sounding Deep Purple album, ever."

With the band being allowed to flow, there was a possibility they might have been in prolific form. Sometimes bands write too much material for one record. I ask if that was the case with 'Now What ?!' "No, nothing was left over. A few fell by the wayside approaching the finishing post!" the vocalist laughs. "There was one early on, a complete reversal for anything we do with Purple. Normally the tune and the lyrics get written last. Every other writer I've worked with, we always start with a tune and the words and put the arrangement around it. That's the conventional way to do things. With Purple, the music always comes first. If

a song emerges out of it, then we make something of it, the lyrics always come last. However, on this occasion, there was one song where I got so excited, I finished all the lyrics in literally an hour... and the band hated it!" he laughs. "So that got dumped, although I kept the lyrics somewhere – I'll make a song out of it one day! There was another song called 'Rain Rain Rain' that was just too bizarre. It had an odd time signature and just didn't fit with the rest of the music. So two or three things like that fell by the wayside, but there wasn't a single finished track left over. There are a couple of bonus tracks which have been released as promotional things in certain countries, but there's nothing else left."

Throughout his career, Ian has written lyrics for countless Deep Purple songs, the Ian Gillan Band, Gillan, Black Sabbath and his solo material - a dizzying amount. I wonder if he relies on the excitement of the music to keep writing, or seeks inspiration from other sources.

"You wake up in a morning, something's happening. Something on the TV will piss me off," he laughs. "I can go out for a drink and have a glorious conversation with someone... we travel a lot. I get a lot of input from different cultures via friends I've made, insight into their attitudes. If you look at what's going on in Syria for example, if I talk to my mates in Russia, they have a totally different take on it to what you hear from the British media. It's all propaganda and vested interests anyway. If you travel, you get a broader perspective on a particular issue, you basically get the bugger surrounded. You can evaluate it easier. I'm digressing, but the point is there's always something of interest. If you're really stuck, you can look at a tile on the ground, or a door knob, a trash can... that's what we used to do at school in composition. You'd have to write an essay about a nail or whatever came into the teachers mind. Anything to simply stimulate your imagination."

Deep Purple have always been a band that could write in the studio itself, without the need for long sessions beforehand. However, with such a long gap since 'Rapture Of The Deep' I'm curious as to how long it took to get back to the blistering form found on 'Now What ?!'

"There had been a couple of abortive attempts to whip up enthusiasm," Ian confides. "We went to Spain for a week last year and the guys met up in Germany to jam through some ideas for a long weekend. Basically though, we turned up without anything at the rehearsal room in Nashville. Bob turned up every day, making notes and comments – it would just be our usual routine. Nothing has changed since the beginning. We turn up at noon, work until six. We have a coffee break at 3 o'clock. It's a routine, like being at the office, Monday to Saturday, we have Sundays off.

After four weeks, you have the songs. It's wonderful to see how they emerge, how they rise to the top from these jam sessions. It's just non-stop jamming basically. Every now and again a song candidate leaps out, we put it to one side and work on it later. So four weeks for writing, four weeks for recording pretty much, two for mixing... two and a half, three months is the norm to complete a record like this."

With Deep Purple's slightly unorthodox approach of letting jams evolve into songs, I reason that perhaps a live studio jam which becomes a song will be a natural contender for the concert set list. It would seem the opposite is the case.

"It's hard to tell what's going to transfer to the stage," Ian explains. "Sometimes you think it's an obvious candidate, but then you put it in next to what's already in the show... it's all about juxtaposition and context. You can put songs in and you suddenly realise it sticks out like a sore thumb for whatever reason. One of my all time favourite Deep Purple songs is 'Razzle Dazzle' from 'Bananas'. On stage, it just didn't happen for whatever reason, just didn't work at all. Maybe we didn't try hard enough, maybe it was a contextual problem, but it just didn't happen. I've got a bit of an idea from when we rehearsed through a few things in Moscow – we ran through some of the new stuff live in a rehearsal room and we're not totally sure, but 'Above and Beyond', 'Vincent Price', 'All The Time In The World' and possibly 'Hell To Pay', I can see all those fitting in really well. 'Above

And Beyond' is glorious live. Those chords and key changes are majestic."

One of the highlights of the new album is the performance of Don Airey. While I hesitate to mention Jon Lord for fear of unfavourable comparisons, I mention to Ian that I felt this record really captured Don as a fully fledged, integral part of Deep Purple. This album sounds much more Deep Purple than it's immediate predecessors, due in no small part to the organ playing.

"Yes, I think that too is to do with production," Ian agrees. "I don't think Don has stepped up a gear or anything like that, I think he's been balanced properly in the mix. When you hear the first track coming, it sounds like Vanilla Fudge, it's awesome. I think it's a really hard job to get the balance of keyboard and guitar right in the rhythm section, as oppose to when they are soloing. When they play together, they cross over in the sound spectrum so much, they take up a lot of each other's space acoustically - it's hard to get that separation. The technical values of Bob's studio were amazing, it made everything possible. Don's fully integrated in the record – he shared a lot of the same values and influences Jon had, in terms of orchestral composition and perhaps even more so in terms of jazz. I'm glad the album has done well for Don, I don't think he was properly featured on the previous albums."

The afore-mentioned live contender 'Vincent Price' has also been turned into a video, with the band featured amongst

many of the lyrical descriptions. It's a great track and the video works really well for it. I ask Ian what the experience was like, as Deep Purple were never a band normally associated with promo videos.

"It was hilarious! I made a note on my website, saying it was funny that it never occurred to me to include a pole dancer in the lyrics!" he laughs. "The lyrics came about very simply, Roger came out to Portugal and we were going to do a week of refining a few tunes and problems and tidy up and complete some lyrics. I asked him, if he was a film director, and he was doing a Hammer Horror movie from the 60s, what would be the ingredients? So we listed thunder and lightning, creaking doors, howling wolves, blood sucking vampires, sacrificial virgins, zombies to die for... that was it! Job done, lyrics finished. It's just a list of horror movie clichés, but that's what makes it fun. Hell, music is not supposed to be serious all the time! It was great fun making that video. I personally don't find any enjoyment being on a small screen; it's completely alien to everything we do. We are very limited – we're only really any good at writing songs and performing them live - the concept of videos has been alien to us since the beginning! Thank God we were virtually bystanders on this one, pretending to be wax dummies! It worked out fine and it was very nice to get some tits and arse in there so it might even get played... When we were listing the ingredients for the thing, whatever you do, do it in a dungeon and get some tits and arse in it!"

