



I AM OZZY THE GREAT AND TERRIBLE

Everyone believes Ozzy Osbourne is the devil, the perfect scapegoat for hysteria and madness. "To be Ozzy Osbourne, you got to be special," he says. "Because they hit you with so much. If you were soft, you'd be dead."

Article by Glenn O'Brien

Photography by David Michael Kennedy

It was a dirty job, but somebody had to do it. I like to keep busy. Besides, this guy is something else.

What did I know about Ozzy? Not much. He bit a bat. He bit the head off a parakeet in the office of the president of Columbia Records. He used to be in a famous group called Black Sabbath. Now he is a solo act. All of his records are platinum. He was one of the rock stars targeted by the Parents Music Resource Center.¹ He's a happily married family man and is friends with Dr. Ruth Westheimer. I also knew that he had attacked a robot cocktail piano in the bar of a Central Park South hotel and then wrote a manifesto to the musicians' union on why he did it. And that he was being sued by the parents of a fan who committed suicide allegedly while listening to Ozzy's "Suicide Solution."

I figured, Hey, why not write about him? This is an interesting person.

OK, that's all I knew about O.O., I admit it. I say admit only because one expects a writer to be an expert on the subject, if not a partisan or foe. But everybody's writing about Khaddafi. If they can write about Khaddafi, I can write about Ozzy. At least I've met the man.

I have never seen Ozzy perform. To my knowledge,

before meeting Ozzy I'd never heard an Ozzy Osbourne or Black Sabbath record, and I'm almost as old as Reggie Jackson. Ozzies will say I should stop here, but I say, "By golly, it's not my fault."

I wouldn't have accepted the assignment if I hadn't seen this video on MTV. It was psychedelic in a real farmer cheese kind of way. The group had really long hair and looked really adolescently cool and had a sort of Cro-Magnonesque nobility about them. They were just standing there playing in front of a pastel light show that resembled the effect achieved by placing moderate pressure on the eyeballs. The music was really janitorial. I dug it. I figured it was the next big group. This is the most Stoogesque group of the '80s, I reflected casually. Seconds later, I wondered if Redd Kross could have grown up so fast.

When the little tag came on at the end, it said the song was "Paranoid" by Black Sabbath. "Gosh," I thought, "Black Sabbath is fresh."

"Maybe," I said to myself later without moving my lips, "I really missed out on those 16 years of Black Sabbath." Of course, I soon realized that was all water under the bridge. But it was not too late for me to meet Ozzy Osbourne.

Ozzy is on tour. His tours last years. He travels the country by bus with his band, his crew, and the guitars and flamethrowers and hardware. Today he's

in Garden City, NY. Tonight he's at the Nassau Coliseum.

When you first see Ozzy, sitting there getting his hair blown dry by his personal hairdresser, you realize that you are in the presence of somebody.² He looks like somebody. Maybe it's aura. Maybe it's attitude. Maybe it's practice. Ozzy reminded me a little of Iggy Pop and a little of Mason Reese. His eyes are too big for his head. Baby fat makes him look smooth and cute.

Ozzy looks like a wild, fat, happy kid, like Piggy from *Lord of the Flies* grown up.

Ozzy looks like the perfect scapegoat. He's so cute. He looks like the chunky kid caught with his hand in the cookie jar. Is Ozzy the devil? It looks doubtful. Is he in league with the devil? Well, what league? The majors, the minors? Let's look at the facts. If we're going to have a witch-hunt, let's at least bone up on our demonology. Let's call a devil a devil, a gremlin a gremlin, and a troll a troll.

Ozzy is certainly not a devil. If anything, he is a benign gremlin, not too dissimilar from the early-American TV star Froggie the Gremlin.

Plunk your magic twanger, Ozzy. Hiya kids! Hiya! Hiya!

Ozzy doesn't believe in magic, but he's got the magic of rock 'n' roll. I think Ozzy is basically into a demiurgically wholesome boogeyman mode. It's a little primitive. Like postmodern Visigoth minstrelsy.



"I believe in God. Every night onstage I say, 'God bless you all,' and that's from the heart, man."

One of these Bible punchers who puts down heavy metal. I go on a chat show. The story is about a kid who has found this secret thing in a record and has become possessed by the demon in a heavy metal record. And he can do things."

Do you think anybody ever put any secret messages in their records?

"I'm sure they did after people started claiming there were secret messages in there. I honestly believe that people don't understand that as soon as they come up with an idea—they, not us—there's always some little guy in a back-street band thinking, 'Fuck this, I want to be where Ozzy is—I'll do it!'"

If I was going to put some backward message in a record I'd put in something like, "This is the Devil! Buy six more copies of this record."

"Six hundred and sixty-six more."

"A coauthor of the Mr. Ed theme song, which two Ohio ministers say conveys satanic messages, says his tune about the talking horse is innocuous—backward and forward. But the fuss is OK with songwriter Jay Livingston. Radio stations nationwide have been playing the song backward since the ministers complained, and Livingston gets royalties for it."

—New Orleans Times-Picayune

But it's important for the kids. It's a Resource, if you like. Oz is a panic, and as such rates as something of a landmark and deserves all the protections accorded landmarks.

Ozzy moves his chair into the sun. He looks out over Garden City and says to his valet, "Bring me a packet of those vitamins, will ya?"

"You look good, Ozzy."

"I lost some weight."

"How much?"

"Twenty-eight pounds."

"How did you lose twenty-eight pounds?"

"Jogged. I started jogging a lot. At one point I was jogging three miles a day."

They counted those miles on the speedometer of the bus from which dangled the bottle of wine Ozzy chased. Just kidding.

"I know this guy who was a bone bender—what do you call it?—a chiropractor! He's also got a sort of a clinic where he does hydro. Hydrol! You know, they sort of suck all the shit out of your body, clean your whole system out. He says red meat is fucking disgusting shit. It stays in there forever."

Ozzy takes a large magenta antibiotic.

So, Ozzy... tell us a little bit about yourself!

"I'm Ozzy. I work hard. Play hard. Father of five children who I love dearly. I take vitamins every day."

Ozzy is most effectively, some say brilliantly, managed by his wife Sharon, professionally, personally, and maybe intimately, too. Between community property and the usual 10 to 15 percent, that would seem to give her a majority of Ozzy. But he seems to have enough of himself left to be happy. Sharon is home minding the kids. Ozzy has assistant

managers, valets, hairdressers, and a big bodyguard to mind him and watch out for flying cookie jars.

So, Oz, what's your day like?

"I live at night more than the day. I travel through the night. It keeps me out of trouble. If we stay in the town after the gig, it's crazy. A photographer from your magazine came to the show last night, and he was white with fear at the end of the show. The audiences tend to get sort of very, uh... I don't know why this last tour... I've noticed a hell of a lot of violence and destructiveness from the people. I don't know if it's the changing of time or what. When we did the Meadowlands, there was \$172,000 worth of damage to the hall. I remember different tours from different incidents. But there seems to be a hell of a lot of tension in the people now."

"It is obvious that a person living in a state of pain requires a different form of religion from a person living normally."

—Antonin Artaud, *Theater of Cruelty Manifesto*

Do your audiences change?

"Definitely. The last tour I did, they were all into this glam kind of thing. We were touring with Mötley Crüe, and there was lots of chicks there. This time we got lots of chicks, but the guys get real heavy. I don't know why. But they're cool, my people. They're all right."

"I sat down and thought last night. I thought, 'Fuckin' 'ell, Osbourne, you been down' this an awful long time. Eighteen years I been down' this. It's wild, man. It's bigger than ever!"

"I'm doing a part in a movie on Wednesday. The movie's called *Trick or Treat*. It's quite interesting. I'm looking forward to it. I play a vicar, a priest.

"You can make whatever you want out of whatever you want. They're trying to sue me in California about this kid who shot himself. It says in this one line, 'Breaking laws, locking doors, but there's no one at home/Make your bed, rest your head, but you lie there and moan/Where to hide? Suicide is the only way out', or something. But that's one paragraph in the song, and the song is about alcoholism. The danger of alcohol. A certain percentage of alcoholics can't stand it anymore, and they jump off a fucking building. They can't live with it anymore. But the press picks up on one line in a song and keeps showing it down people's throats. They're saying this fucking song forced this kid to shoot himself. The kid was fucking well sick in the mind long before he ever heard an Ozzy Osbourne record. Why are they trying to tag it on us guys? To be Ozzy Osbourne, you got to be somebody special. Because they hit you with so much shit... if you were soft anywhere, if you were susceptible, a magnet for emotion, you'd be dead. And I cannot no way take no responsibility for some guy who puts a gun to his head."

"A guy in New York a few months ago got a big tax demand, and he couldn't pay it, and he jumped out the window of a fifty-story apartment. What does his wife do? Sue the government!"

"You see a perfectly normal kid there who doesn't show any signs of depression at all—happy. Then six hours later, he's dead. Nobody can explain it. The only thing we know is that he was listening to this music."

—Mr. McCullum¹

"The police photo shows the headphones were still on when he died."

—Mrs. McCullum²

"They knew this record was going to encourage or promote suicide. ... I think we have in this case

opposing forces: Satan and God. . . ."
—the McCullums' attorney?

"It's gettin' crazy. It's like watching the rise and fall of the Roman Empire. Being an outsider. . . . I mean, I spend a lot of time in America, but I am a foreign person. . . . and I really do love this country. . . . but watching the different political changes and fashions, I see it going from happy faces to anger.

"I don't know why they're angry. Whether they're getting high on some weed shit or what, I don't know. It's kind of vey radical."

Are there songs you don't do now because it's a message you no longer want to project?

"No. I suddenly realized that when I was a drug addict, I used to write things like 'flying high again,' 'snowblind,' all this shit. And the other night, I thought, 'Fuckin' 'ell, I sing one song for it and then straight after I sing one song against it.' But the thing is, that's OK. Because that was where I was when I wrote that, so why shouldn't I do it? It's part of my life. It's a part of what I am and what I will be. I might start singing fucking religious songs. I don't think so, but if I choose to, why not? To think that you can't sing stuff from your last album because now you're a different man is bullshit. If they're good enough to write and good enough to hear and to buy, then they're good enough to sing onstage, you know? I'm not ashamed of anything that I've done in the past.

"We all have a little bit of a skeleton in our cupboard that we think, 'fuck, I don't want to talk about that again. But it doesn't really bother me, if I can help it. It's like saying, 'I wish I hadn't bought a red car.' You bought it, so drive it."

"I'm a Christian. I was christened as a Christian. I used to go to Sunday school. I never took much interest in it because. . . . I didn't."

"My idea of heaven is feeling good. A place where people are all right to each other. This world scares the shit out of me. We're all living on the tinderbox. It's like there's some maniac somewhere trying to devise a new means of destruction. It always amazes me that mankind always goes to find the biggest, powerfuller means of destruction before they find anything good. It's always the negative things they find first."

"Since I've had kids I've thought, 'What are we leaving these people? Nothing.' What a future we've got for mankind."

Andrew Vollenweider said, "I wouldn't play on the same bill as Black Sabbath or any other group with such an obvious unconscious negative approach." Do you think you have an unconscious negative approach?

"These people are so ignorant. They've never listened to the band. They look at the album cover and think it's shit. They ought to stop and listen to the lyrics. I write so much positive stuff! Food for thought. Like 'Killer of Giants,' 'Revelation Mother Earth,' 'War Pigs'—I could go on for years. If anybody thinks for one minute that I am a negative person, then they're fucked. Because I am not a negative person. I am a very truthful person, true to what I believe. I can only do what I believe in. If I was a fake at what I was doing, I couldn't do it."

What does your audience get out of your music?
"Energy."

"OK. I mention the word 'death.' I mention the word 'evil,' but in the context of the story—it's like 'Mary Had a Little Lamb.' They all think I'm singing, 'Satan, Satan, Satan, Satan. . . . death, murder, murder.' They think that's all that comes out of my mouth. They never stop to listen. They've already prejudged me and tried me, and I ain't gonna sit there trying to defend myself. Anybody that knows

Ozzy Osbourne and knows what I'm about knows me anyway. And if doing what I'm doing is wrong, I'm sorry."

Are there negative groups?

"I don't really know. I never judge anything. I always think if people like it, there's got to be something good about it. I don't like certain things—trash metal is too intense for me, and punk's even worse. But that's what I don't like."

"They're telling me I'm putting ideas of people shooting themselves in their heads. I was watching MTV the other day, and there was a band come on called the Pet Shop Boys, and you want to hear the opening lyrics of that song? 'There's a madman in town/Put a gun to your head/Pull the trigger.' Something like that. I thought, 'My God, that's probably going right over their heads, but if it was Ozzy Osbourne singing that song, I'd have fuckin' pilgrims down at the hotel in a minute.'"

"I'm not sober. I still drink. Not as heavily. When I was on drugs, I always tried never to go onstage stoned. I used to get my highs after the show. The reason I quit taking drugs was I was bored. I was bored of being bored, sick and tired of being sick

and tired. I should try and quit the booze, but I got to have some release. I don't drink as much hard liquor as I used to. I drink a bit of wine and a few beers. It's not as bad as it was. I shouldn't be doing that. I should be totally sober. I can't get to grips with it. It's a hard thing to do."

"Osbourne was unhurt when, on March 19, 1982, near Orlando, Florida, his tour plane, which was buzzing his tour bus, hit a house. Osbourne and most of his band were in the bus; Osbourne's guitarist Randy Rhoads, hairdresser Rachel Youngblood, and pilot/bus driver Andrew Aycock were all in the plane and were all killed."
—Encyclopedia of Rock and Roll

"If hell is worse than this place, then those of us going to hell are on a hard ride down, baby. Hell, to me, is nuclear holocaust. It's the biggest fear I have as a man. It worries the pants off me that we're all going to blow ourselves to shit. And it will happen, I believe. I can see it will happen. I asked my old drummer Tommy, 'Do you think they'll use the atom bomb?' And he said, 'Ozzy, they've never made a gun that hasn't been fired in anger.' I thought, 'Shit, that's right, man.'"

"I'd rather have people get rid of their aggression at an Ozzy concert than by beating some old lady over the head and running off with her purse. It's a release of aggression. It's built-in aggression. Why do they get young people to join the army? Because an older guy thinks, 'Fuck you! I'm not going over that hill. You think I'm crazy?' And a young guy will go, 'Yeah! Let's go get 'em.'"

"Hell, to me, is nuclear holocaust. It's the biggest fear I have as a man."





"I went to join the army once when I was depressed and pissed off. They wouldn't have me for some reason."

"I always wanted to be a Beatle. And I guess I sort of am in a funny way. This is my dream come true."

"I know guys I went to school with, same age as me, and you talk to them and it's like talking to a fucking backward person. Being in touch with young people, you get to know what's going on a lot more, you know? I'll always be a rock 'n' roller."

"I don't see where he [guitarist Tony Iommi] gets off using the name Black Sabbath on his own. To me, it's almost sacrilegious."

—O.Z. in *Hit Parade*

"I think it's a sin what they've done with the name. I can't relate to them. I don't even remember being with them. It's like an old girlfriend, and you can't remember what it was like to sleep with her. I mean, we were the pioneers of this mode, this form of music: Us, Deep Purple, Led Zeppelin, Uriah Heep . . ."

"But I don't understand the word heavy metal. I don't know where it came from. It certainly wasn't from us people."

"I think it came from William Burroughs. From who?"

"We didn't have a clue what we'd done. I remember we were walking around with no dough. We were trying to find a gig. And Tommy said, 'You know what we should do? Look at that fucking movie

house over there.' There was the fucking *Monster From the Bottom of the Bog* or something on, and there was a queue for this hideous stupid horror film. And he said, 'Why don't we do a band and make it horror rock—see how it goes?' Geezer thought of the name Black Sabbath. We decided to call the band Black Sabbath on a ferry going to Germany."

"We were so original, we came to America and leaked everybody out."

Black Sabbath may have taken its name directly from a movie marquee. The film *Black Sabbath* was a 1964 Italian production directed by Ario Bava and starring Boris Karloff, Michelle Mercier, and Mark Damon. Boris plays Gorca, a Balkan vampire who preys on his loved ones.

"I never have been involved in the occult. I wouldn't know how to conjure up a spirit any more than I could conjure up a teapot. I'm not what they think I am."

It was reported in the papers that 65 percent of the college kids in America believe in angels. Do you believe in angels?

"In angels? Like fuckin' Gideon or something? Sixty-five percent of the college students in America believe in angel dust."

"After I bit the head off the bat, the animal rights people came after me every night. Probably right after they finished eating their Colonel Sanders or whatever, telling me I shouldn't be biting the heads off bats. I'll tell you what bats taste like. Like a good

McDonald's.

"If I come back to this earth, I'm coming back as an animal, because people in this world do far more good for animals than they do for people. If a guy is stuck up a tree, they'll leave him there."

"I used to work in an abattoir, a slaughterhouse. Those same people that put me down ought to take a trip down there, fucking walk around one of them places and see how Colonel Sanders gets his chickens. They're not born fried. Somebody has to do some dastardly number on that chicken."

"I once went to an egg farm, and it was hideous. They played loud music for God knows what reason. The eggs are flying out of their assholes like tenpin bowling. The chickens last about a week. It's hideous that people are so fucking naive that they can be concerned about what I do with animals when they're not all vegetarians. Where do they think a steak comes from? Out of the sky? It's OK to kill a cow for a steak, but it's not OK for Ozzy Osbourne to accidentally pick up a bat and bite its head off."

Do you have any pets?

"Yeah, and they all taste fuckin' great."

Without Oz, there would be no Spinal Tap. Oz was among the first rockers to realize that if cartoons imitate life, life can imitate cartoons.

In a way, Oz is the Phil Ochs of heavy metal.

When Ozzy isn't in his demurgically wholesome boogeyman mode, he needs protection, like all landmarks.



Moore/EMI

Oz, when you come right down to it, does protest music. Oz is the Texas Chainsaw Massacre of folk music. He might not be the latest fashion, but he's about the same old real issues. Ozzy is walking wounded. He is the son of the industrial wasteland, the TV baby born under a bad sign, the sign of the bomb.

"You talk about religion—Jim Jones was religion. Religion can be a good thing. But religion and entertainment are separate. I don't believe in Jesus Christ. I believe in God. I believe there's a higher power. Every night onstage I say, 'God bless you all, and that's from the heart, man. I think godliness is within you.'

"It's like this entertainer in England, at the end of his show he says, 'Good night, and may your God be with you.' That's the way it should be. Because you believe in one thing, you haven't got the right to stuff it down somebody else's throat.

"I send my children to Bible classes. My children go to church. And my kids are my legacy."

So, Ozzy, do you suffer from any occupation-related ailments?

"Alcoholism."
Did you ever have any hearing problems?
"Pardon?"

SIGN: Sagittarius.
REAL NAME: John Michael Osbourne.
FAVORITE VEGETABLE: Potato.
INVESTMENTS: I think so. I don't know. I own some property.
HAT SIZE: Big.
HOBBIES: Hunting and fishing.
FAVORITE GAME: Rabbits and pigeons.
ATHLETIC SHOE: Nike.
QUALITIES TO LOOK FOR IN BODYGUARDS: Tactful and alert.
LAST BOOK READ: *The Amityville Horror*.
FAVORITE PERFORMERS: David Bowie, Mick Jagger, David Lee Roth—the greatest front man I've ever seen.
FAVORITE VACATION SPOT: Home with the kids.

Ozzy Osbourne has never heard of Ozzie Smith, the greatest shortstop in baseball.

"I'm a Christian. I was christened as a Christian. I used to go to Sunday school."

How many corporations are you an officer of?
"I couldn't tell you. It's got to be about twenty."

In Ozzy's new video, he plays a J. R. Ewing facsimile in ten-gallon hat and cowboy boots—the chairman of the board of Ozzy Oil, a kookie bigwig, the corporate figurehead, the board's torturer and its prisoner. And watching him roll his eyes with the charisma of a great silent-screen star, one realizes that Ozzy is something like the J. R. Ewing of the unconscious mind.

Ozzy's show opens with a giant demonic puppet—Ozzy being lowered to the stage. Its caped arms open like Dracula's to reveal—Ozzy. The real Ozzy jumps out of the giant puppet Ozzy's lap and scoots across the stage in his bare feet, toenails lacquered black, spreading his silver Lurex jacket like Drac's cape, leering and bugging out his already bugged eyes and exhorting the Ozzytives to go crazy.

It might be frightening in printed accounts, but seeing's believing. Ozzy is inescapably cute and lovable, whether he's feigning fangs or simulating rabidity. And that giant puppet Ozzy with the fangs. It seems nothing more than the symbol of Ozzycorp.

What's your favorite rumor about yourself?

"After the bat incident, a lot of rumors preceded me. One of the rumors was that I wouldn't perform until I'd sawed the legs off a Doberman pinscher. I'm sure a Doberman pinscher is going to sit there while I saw his legs off. Must have been some serious Quaaludes or something."

What's the toughest thing you've had to face in your career?

"Leaving my kids at home. It breaks my heart. I call them every single day at least four times. It's the last thing I do at night and the first thing I do in the morning. I miss the little things in life that mean so much. Seeing the kids get their first teeth or take their first step. This year I'm on tour all year.

"We were touring with this German band and the guy used to put a sign on the microphone to tell him where he was so he could come out and say, 'Hello, Seattle!' We were always changing the signs on him."

"Every night, ten minutes before I go onstage, I go take a dump. I don't need any laxatives. Once you're onstage, you're on there. Some nights I'm good, and some nights I'm terrible. But I think that don't matter. It's the fact you got up there."

Billy Idol said in *SPIN* that he liked Black Sabbath when he was 14 but not when he was 15.

"That's about right."
Is there any product you'd like to endorse?
"Billy Idol records."

"... What the Public Wants, as it is practised today, must lead its practitioner into lunacy or some form of imbecility, or else, with the stronger minded and more cynical, into a mood of hatred where their millions of 'little changes' are concerned. Hatred of stupidity must result, where it is not succumbed to, in those whose business it is to be incessantly isolating and exploiting it. But a great specialist in stupidity... could only become what he does thanks to the clairvoyance of hatred of some sort. The great journalist or publicity figures with which everybody is familiar probably started with an intense irritation and dislike of the stupidity out of which subsequently they made their great fortune."⁴

—Wyndham Lewis, 1931

What advice would you give to a young band just starting out?

"Have a lot of heart and a lot of determination. Do what you do the best you can."

As I left Ozzy, he shook my hand, smiled, and said, "Thanks." As I walked out the door, he called after me in a stage whisper. He said, "Go easy on the religion, OK?" I understood. Sometimes late at night I'll be watching Dobie Gillis and Father Knows Best on the Christian Broadcast Network, and I'll drift off to sleep and wake up in the middle of The 700 Club to the news of a 5-year-old child checking books on black magic out of a school library. It's a rude awakening. Don't worry, Ozzy. I understand. So do the kids.

But as I got into Epic Records' stretch limo and realized it was two hours until showtime at Nassau Coliseum, I remembered Ozzy telling me about photographer David Kennedy turning white with fear at his show. I told the driver to take me back to Manhattan. I knew Oz would understand.

Back at home I started getting into "Paranoid" and "War Pigs" and all those humongous Oz records I never knew.

For a few months I've been saying to people, "Don't you think it's time the heavy metal bands did something for the ecology?"

It's all part of my Zen training. Now I realize that Ozzy is where it's at in metal consciousness. Ozzy is one guy who's still worried about the bomb. He wants his kids to grow up in a world free from that fear. And he isn't counting on some miraculous intervention. He knows miracles aren't where it's at. The man is a worker. He's working for the continuation of life on earth. And for the entertainment of millions of endangered kiddos. Ozzy's not stupid, but he's able to sing about stupidity at the highest levels.

Peace and love, Ozzy babes.

¹Has anyone ever explained what a Music Resource is? Is it some kind of lyrical gas, or rhythmic fossil fuel? ²And, pretty much, not in the presence of something. ³West 57th Street, television interview. ⁴Ibid. ⁵Ibid. ⁶Wyndham Lewis, *The Diabolical Principle*, Haskell House.