

Black Sabbath: Reunion sure is sweet

► After the success and excess of the '70s, the original heavy metal icons return to the road with clarity and confidence.

By Chris Rolfe

FOR THE DAYTON DAILY NEWS

They say everything must rise from the grave before the new millennium, and heavy metal pioneers Black Sabbath are no exception. The band's demonic, genre-defining aesthetic first raised eyebrows 30 years ago. But

even these lords of darkness were not immune to the trials of fame. The original lineup—

singer Ozzy Osbourne, guitarist Tony Iommi, bassist Geezer Butler and drummer Bill Ward—finally succumbed to drugs, infighting and managerial rip-offs in 1978.

Time—and the promise of considerable money—heals all wounds, though. The band members regrouped in 1997, and recently released the long-awaited, live album, appropriately titled *Reunion* (Virgin). New Year's Eve saw the kickoff of a massive world tour that will come at 7:30 p.m. Friday to the Ervin J. Nutter Center.

The tour promises to be a cleaner affair than Sabbath's famed, '70s outings. This was the band, after all, that penned seemingly pro-drug songs such as *Sweet Leaf* and *Snowblind*. Iommi claims he can't remember

How to go

- **WHO:** Reunion of Black Sabbath; Pantera and the Deftones open.
- **WHERE:** Ervin J. Nutter Center at Wright State University, 3640 Colonel Glenn Highway, Fairborn.
- **WHEN:** 7:30 p.m. Friday.
- **TICKETS:** \$51.50 and \$40, available at the Nutter Center box office and all Ticketmaster outlets, or charge by phone at 228-2323.

many anecdotes from those heady times.

"Back then it was all booze, coke and smoke," he recalls. "But we didn't take notes or anything, because it was just the way we lived every day."

"It was everything goes in the '70s," agrees Butler, chuckling. "There was no AIDS, or anything like that. Whatever I could get, I'd do back then. We sometimes ask ourselves how we survived."

"The turning point for me," Butler continues, "was getting married and having kids. You have to either knock it on the head, or kill yourself with it. We saw so many of our friends getting burned out—they were just the shells of the people we once knew. With us, it started affecting the music, and how we felt about each other. That's why the original band split."

After the breakup, singer Osbourne went on to an extremely successful solo career, despite struggles with addiction and the tragic death of guitarist Randy Rhoads. Sabbath also



Reunited at last: Geezer Butler (from left), Tony Iommi, Ozzy Osbourne and Bill Ward say they're 'long in the tooth, so we can take our time' in working on a new, full-length album.

pushed on, finding renewed success with singer Ronnie James Dio. But a clash of egos led to Dio's resignation in '82, leaving the band in a Spinal Tap scenario of revolving-door vocalists. Disillusioned, Butler and Ward left to sober up. Iommi remained to carry the Sabbath name alone.

Fans speculated whether the original group would ever be heard from again. Bitter press jabs among the former band members made a reunion seem unlikely. But finally, after years of rumors, Osbourne, Iommi and Butler hit the road in the summer of '97, as part of the OzzFest Tour. Something still wasn't quite right, however.

"It was just the three original members, and Mike Bordin (from Faith No More) on drums," Butler says. "Even though it was good, and musically it went down well, it just felt like something was missing. We didn't actually

realize how important Bill really had been to the overall feel of Sabbath. No other drummer has got that, and it's never really complete without him—or any of us, really."

"With all of us coming from the same town, we all relate so much to each other," Iommi adds. "It's always been a thing with this band. When somebody's new, there's a weird feeling. With this lineup it's like old friends getting together."

Butler claims the band now has more clarity than it ever had. "We'd lost a lot of confidence by the end of the '70s," he says. "We were slagged to death in the press, and the record company lost interest in us—even though we were selling out every gig, 20,000 people a night. Now we've got all the confidence in the world—and it shows in the music."

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