

# Ozzy Osbourne

*The metal legend on why he can't stop working, why Zakk Wylde had to go, TV stardom and being crap at parking.*

Words: Geoff Barton Portrait: Ross Halfin

**O**zzy Osbourne is determined to put the stumbling spectre of *The Osbournes* behind him with his latest release, *Scream*. Having been treated to a preview – an Ozzy representative paying *Classic Rock* a visit and playing us the album on the office stereo, no less – it sounds like a monstrous return to form for the nefarious Back Sabbath founder. *Scream* also marks the recording debut of Ozzy's new guitarist, Gus G. The Greek six-stringer, who was in a band called Firewind, and replaces the Prince Of Fucking Darkness's longstanding sidekick Zakk Wylde.

**Scream gets a firm thumbs-up from us. But what would you say to someone who, these days, might think of you more in an Osbournes sense than a Sabbath sense?**

Contrary to what people might think I never left my roots. *The Osbournes* was just like an experiment that got crazy and wild. With the new album, I'm not 'back' 'cos I've never gone away. I do appreciate that there are people out there who only know me from the television. But you know what? I hate working in television. And you know why people can't understand what I'm saying? Because I'm fucking panicking. I'm saying the first thing that comes into my head.

**What can you say to persuade people to forget their prejudices and give *Scream* a listen?**

If you hear it and you like it, that's great. If you don't like it, that's fine too. Just give it a chance. Personally I'm proud of it. I'm not singing about boy-meets-girl or some fucking slurpy shit, it's hard-core. It's a well-planned-out album. I worked on it for eighteen months. Not continually, but it's taken that long. [Producer] Kevin [Churko] is the one who's spent all the time on it. He's fucking nuts, he is.

**Nuts in what way?**

Kevin lived in The Bunker [Ozzy's Los Angeles home studio] for a year and a half. He comes from the Mutt Lange camp. He's a very patient man. He'd ask me: "What do you think of this cymbal sound? Do you prefer it to go 'swish-swish', 'ker-chink', or 'clang'?" I'd go: "I don't care. It's a cymbal."

When I stopped drinking, I thought: "How am I going to write songs?" But Kevin was great; he helped me a lot, he made it so easy for me. I thought I'd lost the spark, so I was tempted to have a beer on more than one occasion, just to get the creative juices going. But I really don't want to do that any more.

**You've got a new guitarist, Gus G, who has replaced Zakk Wylde. Why the change of six-stringers?**

I don't want anyone to think I've fallen out with Zakk, that I've fired him and he hates me. It's not true. I'm not putting him down at all. I love his stuff. But I've been putting off the inevitable. I've been thinking about trying to find a permanent replacement for two or three years. I suppose it came to a head on the last tour, when Zakk was opening the show with his band [Black Label Society] and fucking closing it with my band. I was beginning to sound more like Black Label than Ozzy, and that's not right.

***Scream* was originally called *Soul Sucka* but you changed the title due to adverse fan reaction. What's the story behind that?**

It's a fucking computer world now. But I'm glad it is, because otherwise I would never have known how much people disliked the title. I thought *Soul Sucka* was a great name. But then someone told me my website had gone nuts with complaints about it. Apparently people were saying they're not going to buy the record because it's a crap name – and, what's more, it's associated with hip-hop.

**What inspires you, as an artist, to record new material? Because you could easily rest on your laurels.**

I remember the time when my father was offered voluntary redundancy: a big, fat, juicy cheque. I asked him: "What are you going to do?" He said: "I'm just going to quit and do some gardening." So he got made redundant, did the garden, and fucking died. I can see myself going the same way if I retired. I've got to work; I'd go crazy if I didn't. You just can't go [claps hands] and stop. Most of my time is spent watching DVDs in hotel rooms, so the best part is the gig. If I can't do a gig or make an album, I'm fucking pissed off.

**Has Ronnie James Dio's illness affected you? [NB: This interview happened in the week preceding Ronnie's death.]**

I did send him a get-well message when I heard he was sick. I bumped into [Heaven And Hell drummer] Vinny Appice at an awards ceremony a while back and I said: "If there's anything I can do to help Ronnie out, please let me know." Sharon had cancer a few years ago, and it's fucking miserable to watch somebody going downhill.

**You're playing some UK dates this summer, Ozzfest is returning, and we understand you've got some serious touring coming up later in the year. How will you hold up, physically?**

I'm feeling fit. I'm raring to go. And I'm going to countries I've never been to before: Turkey, Istanbul, places like that. I've got to work hard because there's a lot more tours going out now. But if it doesn't work out, I can't complain. I've had a load of musical success.

**Last time we spoke, for the launch of your *I Am Ozzy* autobiography, you'd just passed your driving test.**

I wanted to get an Aston Martin. But eventually I settled on an Audi R8. It was five seconds of flash. I was driving along in it with Sharon and suddenly I had this moment of clarity. I thought: "Fucking hell, I'm 61. What do I need a sports car for?" So I got a Range Rover. Don't tell anyone, but I can't park. And I don't know any of the road signs.

**There's an Ozzy movie in the pipeline. Who would play you?**

A lot of people have been suggesting Johnny Depp. If it was down to me I'd prefer a young, unknown guy from Birmingham.

**How about Jasper Carrot?**

No. No. Fucking Jasper Carrot? Tell that to my wife and she'll punch you in the fucking mouth. 🍌

*Scream is out now on Epic Records.*