

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

Ozzy 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.

Ozzy Osbourne: Prince Of Darkness, Highway Code duncce, inventor of the Rat Toupé.



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