

# FEBRUARY - MARCH 1980

ROCK CANDY'S DAVE LING LEAPS THROUGH THE BACK PAGES OF THE UK ROCK PRESS TO BRING THE BIG NEWS ITEMS OF THE DAY BACK TO LIFE AND ANALYSE HOW THOSE STORIES REALLY PLAYED OUT...



Ronnie Dio fronting Black Sabbath at the Oakland Coliseum, Oakland, California, 27 July 1980

## RONNIE TO THE RESCUE! DIO REPLACES OZZY IN SABBATH

DATELINE: 8 MARCH 1980

MAGAZINE: **SOUNDS**

TO MANY, THE IDEA of Black Sabbath without Ozzy Osbourne was simply unthinkable. But when the band elected to fire their larger-than-life singer in 1979 after drink and drugs had brought Sabbath to its knees, that unlikely scenario became a reality. Given Ozzy's huge personality and distinctive vocal style, it seemed entirely feasible that no other rock singer would be able to fill his shoes. The truth was that almost nobody would be able to fill his shoes. Former Elf/Rainbow frontman Ronnie James Dio was the exception. The American may have been small in stature, but he had the biggest voice and a sense of self to match. As Sabbath prepared to release 'Heaven And Hell', their first album to feature the 37-year-old, *Sounds* dispatched reporter Sandy Robertson to Paris to dig into the whys and wherefores of the new band line-up.

DESPITE THE fact that Sabbath had been given a new lease of life, Robertson found the band - particularly bassist Geezer Butler and drummer Bill Ward, who was

getting over a family bereavement - in a grumpy mood. Over a particularly unappealing meal, Robertson dared to suggest that the law of averages alone meant there had to be at least one nice location in Paris. "Yeah," the bassist glowered sullenly, "the airport." Facing a world tour that would last from April 1980 to February 1981, Butler would be seeing a lot of airports over the following months.

IN THE wake of the of the band's previous two albums, 'Technical Ecstasy' (1976) and 'Never Say Die!' (1978), which had been dismissed by some as lacking focus and substandard, 'Heaven And Hell' was precisely the album Black Sabbath had needed to make. "Dio has injected a whole new energy into the group. Just sit back, turn it up and feel your brain explode," said *Sounds*. Given that he apparently didn't own a single Black Sabbath album, journalist Robertson was a strange choice to discuss the return of the Sabs. But maybe his appointment was supposed to tie in with the overall spirit of rebirth.

FAMILY ISSUES aside, Ward was in a fairly bad mindset at the time anyway. His drinking was spiralling out of control. As Robertson arrived at the Intercontinental Hotel for the interview, a plumber who'd been hired to remove the vomit from the sink in Ward's room had just left. The drummer would quit the band months later, citing not only his addiction issues but also the fact that he missed Osbourne terribly.

During the Paris encounter, though, Bill couldn't speak highly enough of Dio. "For a start, he's more intelligent," he said. "Ronnie is a musician; he can arrange a song a lot better than Ozzy could. I think he's an excellent singer, period. He blends perfectly into the band."

Perhaps ironically, considering his own situation, Ward revealed that Osbourne's lifestyle had played a huge part in the split. "About this time last year [spring 1979] Oz wasn't looking after himself," said Ward. "His health. Stuff like that. It's the reason why [the singer's job in Sabbath] went out the window," the drummer revealed.

FOR HIS part, Robertson admitted to being more interested in the band's manager at the time, Sandy Pearlman, than the group's internal bickering. Pearlman, who died in 2016, was a noted rock producer, professor, songwriter and record company executive from New York, who also oversaw the affairs of Blue Oyster Cult. Sabbath and BOC would co-headline a tour of North America, called 'The Black and Blue Tour', later in 1980. Pearlman had declared himself a fan of the band. Butler found that to be a blessing.

"With most managers, all they think about is the money, how much they're going to earn off you," he sighed. "It makes a change for somebody to come in who's really a fan of the band."

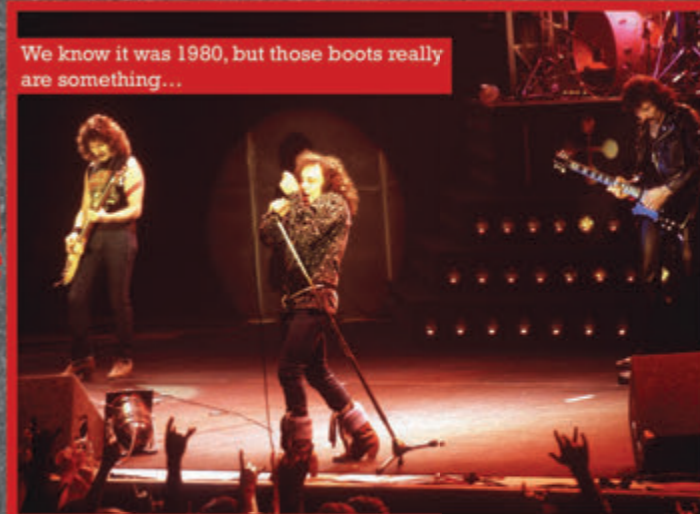
"Plus," Ward guffawed, "Sandy is one of the scruffiest arseholes anybody could wish to meet. That's why I liked him. I thought I dressed badly... this guy is worse."

## ROCK CANDY SAYS...

RONNIE JAMES DIO'S ARRIVAL in Black Sabbath represented more than a change in personnel. It wasn't just a way of resurrecting what had gone before. Before 'Heaven And Hell' Sabbath were tired and jaded. Being blown off the stage by an exuberant support act called Van Halen in 1978 only highlighted the band's malaise.

With his golden voice and sophisticated compositional skills Ronnie Dio handed Sabbath the tools to grow into something new. He brought them finesse and a sense of tuneful gravitas without sacrificing the heaviness the band's brand had been founded on. When 'Heaven And

We know it was 1980, but those boots really are something...



'Hell' was released on 25 April 1980, people who hadn't considered themselves fans of Sabbath's sometimes-simplistic *sturm und drang* were seduced. One of the very first pieces the band worked on was what Butler had called "an old blues song" written by Tony Iommi called 'Children Of The Sea'. It had been discarded in the Osbourne days. But with Dio's melody and lyrical prose, the "new" Sabbath rebuilt it into an all-time great hard rock track. "Quite frankly, [that song] would have been beyond us with Ozzy," was Iommi's honest assessment. So would the lyrical content of the record's title track, pondering the balance between good and evil.

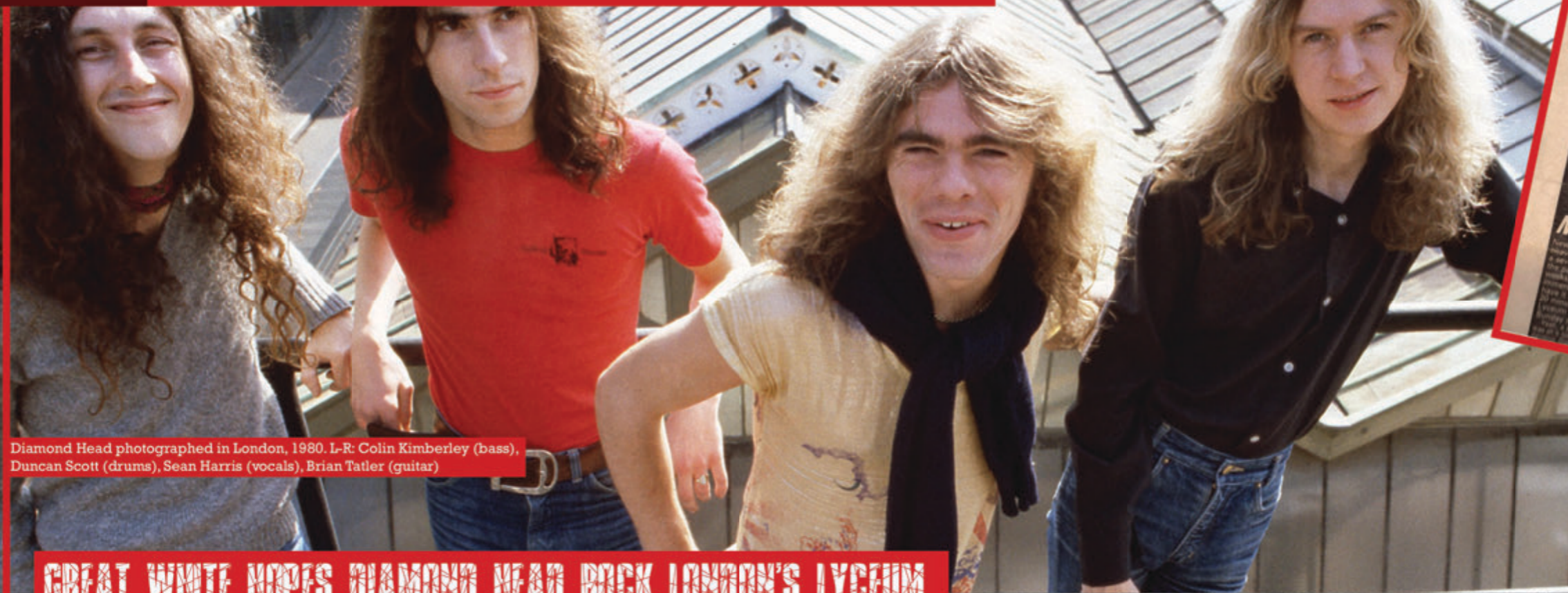
DIO WAS, however, a man who was very aware of his own self-worth. When he started to believe Iommi and Butler were tampering with the levels of his voice during the mixing of 1982's 'Live Evil', Ronnie didn't shirk from confrontation and that resulted in his exiting the band. Dio returned for 1992's 'Dehumanizer', but another point of principle - whether or not to open for his forerunner Ozzy Osbourne - would cause further bad blood.

"I'm not doing that," stated Dio. "I'm not supporting a clown." Again he walked away. Fortunately for Butler and Iommi, Judas Priest's Rob Halford was available and honoured to step into the breach.

When Ronnie, Tony, Geezer and drummer Vinny Appice re-grouped as Heaven & Hell in 2006, most rock fans were delighted. This was the happy ending they all wanted. Sadly it didn't work out that way, as Dio died from stomach cancer on 16 May 2010, before a follow-up album to 2009's 'The Devil You Know' could be recorded.

RONNIE LEFT behind three touchstone career records; 'Rising' by Rainbow, his own band's 'Holy Diver', and 'Heaven And Hell'. The latter really does stake a legitimate claim to being the finest Black Sabbath album of them all.





Diamond Head photographed in London, 1980. L-R: Colin Kimberley (bass), Duncan Scott (drums), Sean Harris (vocals), Brian Tatler (guitar)

## GREAT WHITE HOPES DIAMOND HEAD ROCK LONDON'S LYCEUM

DATELINE: 23 FEBRUARY 1980

MAGAZINE: *SOUNDS*

WRITER GEOFF BARTON'S LEGENDARY introductory piece on Diamond Head from the pages of *Sounds* was almost as memorable as the band he was writing about. "There are more good riffs in the average single Diamond Head song than there are in the first four Black Sabbath albums," famously declared Barton in praise of the four-piece from Stourbridge, in the West Midlands. And you know what? He was lying, of course. But the statement was based on a thread of truth.

AT THE time, Diamond Head were one of the leading lights of the New Wave Of British Heavy Metal. Still in their late teens, singer Sean Harris, guitarist Brian Tatler, bassist Colin Kimberley and drummer Duncan Scott were four schoolfriends who were three years into what would prove a hugely influential career.

Barton met the band at their gig at London's Lyceum as part of the 'Metal For Muthas' tour, headlined by Iron Maiden and featuring Praying Mantis as special guests. According to Barton, Diamond Head were "very much poor relations" at the show, performing a set of just four songs - 'Am I Evil?', 'Helpless', 'Sucking My Love' and 'Lightning To The Nations' - and doing so "squeezed onto a stage area the size of a postage stamp." But their blitzkrieg display on the tour confirmed the writer's hopes for the fledgling band, at the same time renewing his faith in the NWOBHM movement following what he called the "profoundly disappointing" 'Metal For Muthas' album release.

"Their mountain-moving, riff-laden songs may not say anything particularly new or different but are probably the hardest hunks of epic metal to be heard since Judas Priest's 'Victim Of Changes'," Barton claimed.

The writer was struck by frontman Sean Harris's heavy Brummie accent, so strong "it makes the *Crossroads* actors sound like the cast of *To The Manor Born*". But the singer still managed to get his points across.

"We get carried away," Harris explained when asked about the sheer density of riffs in the band's material. "We come up with these great licks and feel that we have to stick them all in [to a song]. We can't waste them." The singer was proud that Diamond Head had never resorted to playing other people's music. "Our set-list is all-originals," Harris told Barton. "We don't do cover versions, never have done."

AT THE time of the interview the band's independent debut single, 'Shoot Out The Lights', was still a few months away. Aside from the Lyceum, Diamond Head had been used to performing for no more than two or three hundred people a night until they bagged a prized support slot with AC/DC on the 'Highway To Hell' tour. What Diamond Head really wanted next was to sign a record contract, as so many of their contemporaries had already done. "We can write ballads, but onstage we try to knock our audiences dead," Harris said.

"I felt for my pulse," concluded Barton in his review. "But it had stopped."

Photo: Iconic Pix/George Rodnar. Archive: Iconic Pix/PG Brunelli

## ROCK CANDY SAYS...

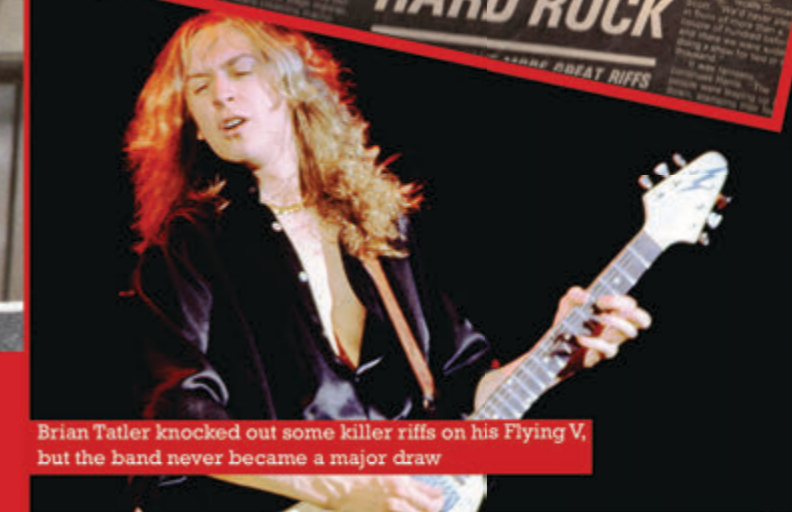
FOLLOWING THE SELF-RELEASED first album, 1980's 'Lightning To The Nations', Diamond Head did get to sign a contract with a major label, but choosing to go with MCA ultimately proved to be the band's undoing. Iron Maiden had EMI and Def Leppard were part of the Phonogram empire. Both bands had professional management. Diamond Head, meanwhile, were represented by Harris's mum. MCA had very little experience of working with rock music and the relationship was plagued by pressure to write shorter, less-complicated songs.

"Apart from MCA, all we'd been offered was deals for two singles and if those weren't hits then we'd get dropped," guitarist Brian Tatler told me years later. "Or they wanted us to change our drummer or something."

Diamond Head released the 'Borrowed Time' album on MCA, but during the troubled recording sessions for the following year's third album, 'Canterbury', MCA asked the band to change their drummer. The band acquiesced and reluctantly sacked Duncan Scott. Disgruntled bassist Colin Kimberley soon walked.

"We got a better drummer but we didn't necessarily become a better band," Tatler pointed out sadly. "U2 stuck with their original line-up and despite the limitations of certain players it saw them through. Dunc and Col were the heart of this band and their replacements were just on a wage."

'CANTERBURY' WAS an undeniably brave and interesting record, but it wasn't what the band's fans



Brian Tatler knocked out some killer riffs on his Flying V, but the band never became a major draw

wanted to hear in 1983 - and when a mistake in the pressing stages meant that all 20,000 vinyl copies jumped when played, the band's future was doomed. Diamond Head broke up two years later.

Harris and Tatler tried to work together again during the 1990s and noughties, though with somewhat inconsistent results, and after Sean jumped ship for the final time Tatler pushed on with singer Nick Tart from 2004 to 2014.

The addition of singer Rasmus Bom Andersen has given Diamond Head a considerable kick up the backside and the band's current, eponymous album - 2016's 'Diamond Head' - is the best thing to bear the band's legendary name in decades.

THE PATRONAGE of Metallica, who have covered several Diamond Head tunes though their career, continues to put bread and butter on the table. Of course, it could be argued that the San Franciscans robbed their UK counterparts wholesale, though Tatler insists there is no jealousy at all.

"Metallica worked 50 times harder than us," the guitarist once told me. "Lars Ulrich was very sussed in that he figured out who was the best manager and what was the best label, and he put it all together perfectly."

Sadly for Diamond Head, this wasn't a lesson they learned - they seemed to do the exact opposite.