

Guitarist extraordinaire Zakk Wylde was plucked from obscurity by Ozzy Osbourne in 1987 and went on to become one of the most interesting rock players out there thanks to his original and varied work with **Pride & Glory** and **Black Label Society**. "I'm truly blessed," he tells *Andrew Daly*...

WYLD
BOY!

FEW GUITARISTS LOOK AS imposing as Zakk Wylde. You'd assume that the man who resembles a furious Viking would be both taciturn and unapproachable. Not so. In reality Wylde is a teddy bear. In conversation he's immediately warm and welcoming, and given that he's spent much of his working life as guitarist-at-arms to self-styled Prince Of Darkness Ozzy Osbourne, that maybe comes as something of a surprise. Yet Osbourne lies somewhere between father figure and older brother for the 57-year-old New Jersey native who was born Jeffrey Wielandt, and when Ozzy or his wife and manager Sharon come calling, Wylde knows exactly what to do.

"There isn't any negotiating," says Zakk. "If mom [Sharon] calls Barb [Wylde's wife] and says, 'We've got one hundred bucks for Zakk to mow the lawn and clean the house. Is that cool?' It's like, 'Yeah, no problem. I'll be over tomorrow at noon.'"

That level of love and dedication to the Osbournes is, of course, fuelled by Zakk's lifelong passion for Ozzy's original band Black Sabbath. When an acquaintance helped the 20-year-old Zakk get an audition tape into the hands of the Osbournes back in 1987, little did he expect that he'd get the gig replacing Jake E. Lee, and that a friendship would form that's now lasted for more than 35 years.

"It's always smooth," Zakk says. "If you go out and play the music you love, what else is there? I don't care about any of the goofy stuff. I'm just having fun and having a good time. Regardless of what you do, you have to enjoy yourself."

Zakk initially spent five years playing guitar alongside Ozzy, but when the singer announced his 'retirement' at the end of 1992, it didn't faze his right-hand man. Zakk simply started from the bottom again, first with **Pride & Glory**, then as a solo artist, and afterwards with **Black Label Society**.

"Things were hard for a bit," he shrugs. "When you're humping your own gear, it's tough. But at the end of the day, it really wasn't that bad at all. I'm not going to complain because I could have nothing. Everything's about perspective."

Since 2001, Wylde has again worked with Ozzy on and off, both in the studio and on the road. And it's been ever more important for the guitarist to maintain that perspective, given that health issues have now seriously curtailed Ozzy's musical ambitions. Zakk's still got **Black Label Society** to keep him busy, though, and since 2022 he's also been honouring his old friend Dimebag Darrell in the returning **Pantera**.

"I've known those guys for years and years," he says. "Every night truly is a beautiful thing. Seeing the **Pantera** faithful is amazing."

Some people may have a negative opinion of this new iteration of the band, where **Anthrax** drummer Charlie Benante replaces Dime's departed brother Vinnie Paul, but Zakk doesn't care.

"I get the chance to walk down memory lane," he tells me. "For all the younger kids who never got to see **Pantera**, this is insane."

"I'm blessed in my career," he continues, "I stay as busy as I can and try to stay ready for any challenge because what I know is that you've got to put the work in. That hasn't changed."

ZAKK, WHAT FIRST ATTRACTED YOU TO THE GUITAR AND TO HEAVY MUSIC?

"When I was younger, baseball and football were the priorities. I liked guitar, but I didn't dedicate myself to it. Back then I'd rather hang out with my friends and play sports, but when I got to high school, I met a guitar teacher named Leroy Wright, and he changed everything for me."

HOW SO?

"I played guitar, but just chords and a few country songs. Leroy had a long hair and a Harley Davidson - and he could really play. He turned me on to bands like **Sabbath** and **Hendrix**."

WHAT WERE THE FIRST THINGS LEROY SHOWED YOU HOW TO PLAY?

"Funnily enough, I think he played me [Ozzy song] 'Crazy Train' when it first came out. I thought it was incredible. Seeing him playing the song right in front of me, seeing that magic trick in front of my eyes, that was when I decided that was what I wanted to do with my life. I took lessons with Leroy for about a year and a half, and it was amazing. He showed me how to play all my favourite **Sabbath** songs, and then we started getting into scales and theory. He showed me how the guitar

worked, *why* it worked, how to put it all together. But what I also learned at that time was that when it comes to writing, your best teacher is your own imagination."

"I COULDN'T BELIEVE THAT I COULD MAYBE GET THE CHANCE TO PLAY WITH OZZY. I REALLY WANTED TO PLAY FOR A FRANCHISE THAT I TRULY LOVED."

SABBATH AND HENDRIX WERE TOUCHSTONE ARTISTS FOR YOU. BUT THERE MUST HAVE BEEN OTHER INFLUENCES...

"I went for a lot of what we now call classic rock. At first, **Elton John** was my favourite, and I loved **Rush**. But I discovered **Sabbath**, **AC/DC**, and **Led Zeppelin** when I was around about 11 years old and immediately went down a rabbit hole. First I got into **Cream** and **Clapton**, then went deeper into **John McLaughlin**, **Frank Marino**, **Robin Trower**, all these guys **Leroy** was into. That more fusion-oriented stuff opened me up to different chord shapes, positions on the fretboard, and how to place my fingers in spots that would allow me to speak that particular language."

TELL ME ABOUT YOUR FIRST GROUP, STONEHENGE

"That was a band of high school buddies. We played backyards, keg parties, kitchens, basements, and living rooms, anywhere where people would have us. We used to start with 'Bark At The Moon', but we also played some **Rush**, **Cream**, **Sabbath**, **Hendrix**, all the party favourites. I loved it, it was truly awesome, and I'm still doing the same thing now really. It's still the same mentality. There are just a couple more people coming through the door."

THEN THERE WAS A BAND CALLED ZYRUS...

"**Dave Linsk**, who's now in **Overkill**, was in that band originally. When he left, I ended up coming in. We did a little bit of recording, and it was a good experience, I enjoyed it."

THE STORY GOES THAT YOU HEARD OZZY WAS LOOKING FOR A GUITARIST WHEN HE

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