



BILL WARD

THE LEGENDARY BLACK SABBATH DRUMMER ON WHY THE BAND IS MORE THAN JUST A RIFF MACHINE, SURVIVING HIS HEALTH SCARES, AND HIS ENDURING LOVE FOR OZZY, TONY, AND GEEZER...

INTERVIEW BY HOWARD JOHNSON

YOUR PASSION FOR DRUMMING

"I was always interested in the sound of drums from a very young age, but it was really when I was about nine and first heard Buddy Holly's 'Peggy Sue' that I decided I wanted a piece of the action! I needed to learn the drumming on that song. I had cardboard boxes for drums and went down the local hardware store to buy four inches of cane for drumsticks. I'd put 'Peggy Sue' on and play along. I remember it had a lot of tom tom work, and when they went into that famous two-one beat, well I learnt that too. By the time I was 10 years old I'd started to get a bit serious about drumming and wanted to see how far I could go with it. The first Beatles record came out in October of 1962, when I was 14, and what I loved about it was the fact that although Ringo was a great drummer, he somehow made drumming reachable. The Beatles showed everyone where I was growing up in Birmingham that you could be in a band, that you could go out and have fun – and that there might even be some girls involved!"

MEETING TONY IOMMI

"That was in 1966. I was drumming in a band called The Rest and Tony had already been in various Birmingham bands. We'd bump into each other watching local groups. In The Rest we decided we could do with another guitarist, so we went to Tony's house at Park Lane in Aston to ask if he wanted to join, and he was very quick to say yes. We organised a little audition and suggested playing a Chuck Berry song, because we did some of his numbers in our set at the time. Tony got his Strat out and absolutely nailed it. We were all looking at each other, going 'Holy crap!' I'd never been that close to someone who could play that well – and Tony was still so young then. He really kicked things up a notch or two. What was funny was that after totally killing it, Tony said, 'Is that OK?' quite apologetically. We all said 'Oh yes, that'll do.'"

MYTHOLOGY

"Tony got offered a job by a band called Mythology up in Carlisle in the north of England. He'd heard the original drummer was leaving so he told me, 'If we do it right we can get you in there.' And that's what happened. We all lived in the same house in Carlisle and it was fantastic. It was a big adventure and while there were a lot of bands up there, again there was a lot of work. We had an agent called Monica Lynton and she'd get us gigs as far away as Dumfries in Scotland. We played all over Cumbria and the border towns, and we loved it. The music was starting to get a little bit more adventurous. We were covering the Grateful Dead's 'Morning Dew', which was the big number at the time, but we'd also do these blues things, with Tony stretching out his lead work. And we were playing a few of our own things too. The band got tight and we got to meet some interesting people, like the guys from Spooky Tooth, who were originally called Art. The bass player in Humble Pie, Greg Ridley, was from Carlisle, so we knew him too."

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MEETING GEEZER BUTLER

"Mythology fizzled out when we all got busted for cannabis, which was a pretty big thing back in those days. We went up against the judge in Carlisle and I think we all got a two year suspended sentence and a 10 or 15 pound fine each, which was a lot of money. I don't think that helped our work prospects much, because promoters were a bit wary of that kind of thing. So the bubble kind of burst. Tony and I went back to Birmingham and ended up hanging out at Tony's house in Park Lane. Geezer would get off the bus and walk past the house almost every day. Tony and I would look at him and go, 'What the f*ck?' because Geezer was a very *unusual* looking person. He'd be wearing these lime green trousers that were tight around the ass and would then flare out at the bottom. He wore flowery shirts, too, and to me he looked like a real oddball. I used to think he was f*ckin' nuts! It turned out that Geezer was in a band called The Rare Breed and Tony and I would go and watch him play. He was insane! Geezer was playing guitar at that point – he'd never played bass in his life – and I loved to watch him because of the way he moved. He was everywhere, acting really crazy. So somewhere along the line me, Tony and Geezer ended up together, I'm not quite sure how."

FINDING OZZY

"The three of us decided to get a singer and we

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answered an advert in a music shop window that said, 'Ozzy Zig needs gig. Has own PA.' Ozzy did have his own PA, actually, a couple of 12-inch speakers. It was a big deal if you had your own PA back then, so it didn't matter that he wasn't worth a crap. He had a PA! When I first met Ozzy there

was something about him that really connected with me. I felt like I could have talked to him for hours – and often I did. He was a skinhead at the time, but that was cool. We organised a rehearsal and I was absolutely blown away by Ozzy's natural blues voice. I think it can get lost inside all of the gloss and the triple tracks and the tricks we have today, but Ozzy's voice is absolutely pure soul and blues, with perfect tonality. His core singing is fantastic. I listened to him and went, 'Oh my God!' He was good. We didn't think about anything too much. We just got on with it, and the first song we wrote was 'Wicked World'."

BECOMING BLACK SABBATH

"At first we called ourselves The Polka Tulk Blues Band. We had another guitarist and a sax player to start with, but the line-up slimmed down to just the four of us and we changed the band name to Earth. We got some opportunities to play in Germany and around that time we found out that there was another group called Earth, which was getting confusing. On the ferry back from Germany one time Geezer said, 'Let's call it Black Sabbath.' We'd already written the song 'Black Sabbath', and because Geezer had noticed people enjoyed spending money on horror films it seemed like a sensible thing to do."