

# ALL HAIL THE METAL GODS!

As **Judas Priest** return to the front line with their 19th studio album 'Invincible Shield', *Andrew Daly* catches up with vocalist **Rob Halford** and guitarist **Richie Faulkner** to discuss strength through adversity, the band's absolute dedication to the heavy metal genre, and the enduring legacy of this indomitable band...

**IF ANYONE WAS THINKING** that Judas Priest might not be able to retain their status as undisputed Metal Gods in the face of major adversity, then the release of the English band's 19th studio album 'Invincible Shield' put paid to any doubts. The new music shows that the Birmingham outfit - feted for such classic metal albums as 'Sad Wings Of Destiny', 'British Steel', 'Screaming For Vengeance', and 'Painkiller' - is still set to stun, defying time with an energy and songwriting prowess that's as admirable as it's surprising. Vocalist Rob Halford is 72, bassist Ian Hill has turned 73, and figurehead guitarist Glenn Tipton is now 76 years old. But age has not withered them and new songs such as the furious 'Panic Attack' and the classically melodic heavy metal of 'Crown Of Horns' are not only some of the most addictive tunes the band have ever recorded, but are also an uplifting riposte to the serious problems Priest have had to face down in recent times.

The band first started work on 'Invincible Shield', produced by long-time collaborator and touring guitarist Andy Sneap, way back in February of 2020, but progress was stymied by the arrival of the COVID pandemic. As everyone knows, Priest had already been working around Glenn Tipton's Parkinson's disease diagnosis since 2008, fully 10 years before the guitarist went public about his illness. And then in September of 2021, the band had to postpone their US '50 Heavy Metal Years' tour when youngest member and guitarist Richie Faulkner, the man who replaced original guitarist KK Downing back in 2011, suffered a ruptured aorta while performing onstage with Priest in Kentucky on 26 September 2021. The then 41-year-old had to undergo over 10 hours of emergency heart surgery, but thankfully made a full recovery.

**SUCH A** combination of setbacks might have done for a lesser band, but with 'Invincible Shield', Judas Priest have drawn on reserves of strength that maybe even

they didn't know they had to return both musically stronger than ever before, and tighter as people. Some of the lyrics Halford has written for the new album suggest that it hasn't been an easy ride, though.

"I learned the hard way that what you dream for/ Comes from the pain you hold inside," he sings on 'Crown Of Horns', while on 'Trial By Fire' he says, "Life is so cruel and unbearable I can't let you get in my way/ What I need now is a miracle to get through the end of each day." These are not the words of a man who's simply been sailing though life in recent times, but all the same it feels as if Priest have not only gained in strength but have become even more attached to the music they make and the bonds they've formed both with each other and with their fans.

"We thought long and hard to make sure we made a strong statement with our new music," insists Halford. "I'm never satisfied, and neither are our fans. I love the fact that they're so attached to what Judas Priest stands for, so we look and listen, and are extremely careful not to bring the wrong kind of ideas and attitudes to the table. We always want to make a strong, focused statement, which isn't always easy given that the Internet is full of people with opinions. If you're not careful, that stuff can put you into panic mode, which is what 'Panic Attack' is all about. 'The clamour and the clatter of incensed keys/ Can bring a nation to its knees.' But if you know your music and you know your metal, then you can keep your eye on the ball. If you listen to the complexities of the arrangements on 'Invincible Shield' you'll see that we're moving forward as we always do.

"And yet despite those complexities, the primary Judas Priest mission statement stays the same. We're about producing great heavy metal. We've always worked hard to retain a sense of who we are, while at the same time looking to add a new dimension to our music."

Judas Priest's catalogue of metal stretches back