

"I DON'T REALLY ANALYSE STUFF. I JUST DO IT!"



Incredible! Iron Maiden's bassist and leader **Steve Harris** has managed to turn his beloved band into an all-time legendary act simply by going on gut instinct and staying true to his deeply-held belief that fans respond to honesty and integrity. Harris settles down with *Rock Candy Mag* editor *Howard Johnson* to discuss the fine detail of a stellar journey...

WHAT IS IT ABOUT Iron Maiden? The heavy metal band from East London, formed by bassist Steve Harris back in 1975, celebrates 50 years of existence this year safe in the knowledge that their status as legends of the genre is assured for all of time. Musical trends come and musical trends go, but good old, reliable old Iron Maiden are always there, operating in a musical bubble of their own deliberate making, packing out stadiums all over the world, uninterested and most likely unaware of fads and fashions, dependable as ever in their ability to produce music and a live show that their millions of fans adore.

Why has Maiden been impermeable to the vagaries of the music industry? Well maybe I can offer some insight into that, having once worked as part of the management team within the Maiden organisation. Iron Maiden has always been driven by two men, Harris and the band's one and only ever manager Rod Smallwood. Smallwood took the band on in 1979 after hearing Maiden's first independent EP, 'The Soundhouse Tapes', and proved his credentials by quickly getting the band a major deal with EMI Records and a publishing contract with Zomba Music. While Smallwood and Harris didn't always agree on everything, what they both shared was an absolute passion for Iron Maiden, a bull-headed belief in what the band was capable of achieving, and a determination not to let any outside forces influence Maiden's direction of travel. Smallwood succinctly summed up what drove this uncompromising spirit as "pride and ego."

By the time I was working for Maiden's Sanctuary Music organisation in 1990, Maiden was already established as a primary force in rock worldwide, but you sensed nevertheless that Harris and Smallwood were just getting started. And now here we are 35 years later. Iron Maiden are bigger than ever, and their yearly three-month stadium-straddling runs are a guaranteed highlight of any metal fan's calendar.

Steve Harris doesn't spend much time analysing the whys and the wherefores of his band's incredible success and astounding longevity, though. "We do what we do, and that's it," he tells me in his usual no-bullsh*t manner. I've spent many hours in many different countries chatting with Steve over the years. I missed a flight from Belfast one time because he kept me up most of the night telling me an endless stream of jokes. I've published countless interviews with him in magazines such as *Kerrang!*, *Metal Hammer*, and *Burrn!* I've even stopped him from doing something he might regret when he turned up unannounced at the *Kerrang!* offices one time, swearing he was going to swing for a fellow writer who'd written something negative about a Maiden album. Can't remember which one. I've played football with Steve on more occasions than I care to remember in the Iron Maiden soccer team. Amazingly, he's still pulling on his boots at the age of 69, whereas I hung mine up a couple

of years ago even though I'm a good few years younger than him.

Maybe that says a lot. Steve Harris is one of the most determined and single-minded men I've ever met, and like that famous Adidas advert, his worldview is best summed up by the phrase 'Impossible Is Nothing'. Iron Maiden completed the European leg of the 'Run For Your Lives World Tour' in Warsaw, Poland, on 2 August. Most musicians would then want to put their feet up and count their money. Steve Harris, however, chose not to take a single day off, rather opting to get stuck into a pile of dates with his 'other band' British Lion.

Clearly his passion for the music still burns as bright as ever, and that much is evident when he calls for our latest interview, which feels more like a long pub chat between mates. It's the second time Harris's phoned actually. We know each other well enough for him not to need a PR intermediary hooking us up. The only problem is that the first time he gave me a bell I was right in the middle of doing my shopping at Lidl! Two days later, though, I'm sat at my desk, looking forward to a good old chinwag when the phone rings...

"WE JUST DO WHAT WE DO. WE DO WHAT WE FEEL IS RIGHT FOR US, AND IT'S ALWAYS BEEN THAT WAY. WE MAKE MUSIC TO SUIT OURSELVES FIRST AND FOREMOST, AND HOPEFULLY PEOPLE COME ALONG FOR THE RIDE."

WELL STEVE, I GUESS WE NEED TO START OFF WITH THE BIG ONE. HOW WAS IT TO BE PERFORMING IN

IRON MAIDEN WITHOUT NICKO MCBRAIN BEHIND THE DRUM KIT AFTER HEALTH PROBLEMS FORCED HIM TO STEP DOWN IN 2024?

"To be honest, we didn't really have a choice and had to make the change after Nicko suffered his health issues [McBrain had endured a stroke in 2023]. It was what it was, and we had a decision to make as to whether we wanted to carry on or not. Obviously we had a tour booked at the time that it happened, and the rest of us all wanted to continue. But ultimately, after we got through that, it was Nick's decision to step away and we all respected the fact that he'd decided to do that. It had been a difficult time for everyone since Nick had his stroke because once that had happened and we were due to go out on tour again, we knew that we needed a back-up plan in case Nicko wasn't up to it. Insurers demanded it in order to underwrite the tour, which is probably something most people wouldn't think about. But we wouldn't have been able to play those 2024 shows without that back-up plan."

AND PRESUMABLY SIMON DAWSON WAS THE ONLY LOGICAL CHOICE GIVEN THAT HE'S YOUR DRUMMER IN BRITISH LION...

"Of course. Simon was already doing shows with me with British Lion, so it just made sense to look to him first. I've been playing with him for the last 12 years now, so I know how he works and thought he was capable of doing the job. I asked him to do his homework in case Nick had a problem, and with Nick's blessing we had a little

Photo: John McMurtrie