

# Judas Priest

*by Shaun McNamara*

British Steel and Point of Entry are, in a lot of ways, my favorite Judas Priest albums. Those releases were the first that really captured my attention as a kid listening to Heavy Metal for the first time. But the album that solidified the fact that Priest are, for me, a timeless band offering a wide spectrum of music was Sad Wings of Destiny. When they reunited and released Angel of Retribution, I thought, in all eloquence, this is awesome! One of my favorite bands is back together again with, essentially, all original members, and they've put out a solid Heavy Metal album that's phenomenal and gut-wrenching. Then they produced a very contrasting album in Nostradamus, and that's what Judas Priest is all about, then and now; never just one style, but pieces from many different musical aspects and genres that make up the whole of the band. As a kid I was able to hold up albums by Queen and Judas Priest, among others, to the furrowed brows and disgusted attitudes of adults who condemned my Metal, and I could say with complete confidence (riddled with what I thought was hidden angst) – you don't know it all; you haven't listened.

I ponder those teenage thoughts again, in a new era, as Judas Priest prepare to descend on the Comcast Center in Mansfield, MA on July 7th for the 30th Anniversary tour of British Steel, a seminal album for them in America. I was also able to catch up with Rob Halford and Glenn Tipton just before they went into final rehearsals before this leg of the tour. Much like commenting on their music and stage show, to say that they didn't disappoint would be an understatement.



**METRONOME: Is the diversity in Judas Priest a conscious and constant effort or was there always an unspoken need to fuel everyone's creativity in that way.**

Glenn: I think it is a conscious effort, taking pride in every album. We always said that each album is a different chapter in the book of Judas Priest; they're unmistakably Priest, but each one has its own identity. We do try and make every album different, rather than just changing the lyrics and stamping one out every 18 months. In particular, Nostradamus was a good example of that because it was probably the most different album that we've done, being a concept album, but one that we're very proud of, whatever the response is; that's the way we've always been. If you look at albums like Point of Entry for example, some people don't like it. They say - that wasn't what we expected from a Heavy Metal album, and yet there are tracks on there like "Solar Angels," "Hot Rockin," and "Desert Plains." So, every album has something to offer, and every album has its own character. That is something that we strive to achieve. One of the biggest compliments ever been paid to Judas Priest is that our music is timeless.

Rob: It's fantastic how Sad Wings of Destiny is still talked about. There's something about the first two professional recordings of any band that's had longevity. They always give a little indication of what the bigger picture could turn out to be.

I think that, in terms of the diversity, for us, it comes from what makes up a band, especially in the writing team. The bulk of the writing over the 3 decades plus of Priest has been Glenn, K.K., and I. I think we have three distinctive

sources of ideas coming forward. That's definitely the reason behind such a comprehensive flow of different songs. One minute we can be screaming in your face with "Painkiller" and the next minute can be taking you to a very peaceful, lucid place with a song like "Lost Love" from Nostradamus. Glenn has brought it up many times. If one of us wasn't here, it would be a completely different band, and that's not to dismiss the incredible work of Ian and Scott. It's a combined effort. It's all the magic coming together as Judas Priest.

**METRONOME: Concerning the upcoming live release, which is due out in July, how did you arrive at the title, Touch of Evil, as well as what tracks would be included?**

Glenn: Everybody came up with ideas that we talked about. The songs are all previously unreleased live tracks, which we wanted to get across, so we were focused on that to start with. Really though, all we could say was - previously unreleased live tracks, but then we focused on the word live, which, spelled backwards, is Evil. So we thought it was a nice little play on words and we went with that - Touch of Evil.

Rob: This has shaped up to be a really intense, heavy live album. You look at the track listing and it just kicks you in the nuts. It's powerful stuff. I love that we've still got that edge and that go-for-it attitude. I think you can sense that in our performances, and that shaped all the elements of the live album.

**METRONOME: I've seen a graphic of the cover. Can you tell me a little bit about the concept, the artwork, and the artist?**

Rob: The concept and the artwork are kind of sexy; it's evil; it's a bit sinister. You've got this

world that's kind of burnt up and burnt out, Metal-wise. Not in a bad way, but in the aging process of Metal, and yet it's still going. The older that Metal gets, the stronger it becomes. It's a very resilient form of music and we've stood by it from the day it was created. It's been an incredible journey to see how we've gone through these years together.

Glenn: We've worked with the artist for a long time. We just felt that the graphic we decided on was appropriate. The metal world - Priest conquering the world in a sense, and the words, Touch of Evil, circling. We just loved the look of it. You're presented with so many ideas that, at the end of the day, the one that sparks a real visual appeal is the one you go with.

**METRONOME: It's sort of riffing off of the fiery and colorful yet dark contrasting aspect from Nostradamus, but incorporating all the elements of Priest over the years. Will the songs on Touch of Evil make up the rest of the show after you finish playing British Steel from start to finish?**

Glenn: We'll play British Steel from start to finish and then we'll play extra songs that are retro songs from that era, or encores that we feel are appropriate for that mood and feel.

Rob: We'll talk about it a bit more when we all get together to run through the material in a few days. We're about to go into full-on production rehearsal mode for British Steel, and then look at what's left.

**METRONOME: Glenn, I'm really looking forward to hearing the live recording of your solo for the track, "Touch of Evil". Just today I watched the video on YouTube, and I've read quite a bit and heard more than a few**

**people mention that solo as one of the best solos they've ever heard. What was your feeling when you were creating it, and especially now that you're getting to hear it in a refreshed way on Touch of Evil?**

Glenn: It's strange, really. I wish I could, hand on heart, turn around and say that I was trying to write something extra special, but you write solos and some of them become classics, and you can't really say why. When I'm doing the solo I either get a backdrop of chords that's interesting to play with or I play the solo and put an interesting backdrop of chords with it. I think the thing about the "Touch of Evil" solo is that it builds, it's climactic, and it's not all fast, but there are some fast runs in there. They're appropriately fast runs though, they're not there just for the sake of it, they actually do the job. To me, that's the most important thing about a solo. A solo should only be there if it benefits and complements the song. It has to become an integral part. It shouldn't just be there to say - see what I can do, see what I can play. Probably the solo in "Touch of Evil" does just that. It is quite long, but it doesn't detract from the song. I was very fortunate to put that together, along with a few others, which just worked.

**METRONOME: Likewise Rob, I can't wait to hear your singing on the live versions of "Death" and "Prophecy," as well as personal favorites of mine from your back catalog, like "Dissident Aggressor" and "Beyond the Realms of Death." After hearing the recording, did you have any nostalgic thoughts or get into any mode of pondering your singing on the original recordings and**

## progress throughout your career?

Rob: When you're doing any kind of recording and you come to the final moments of playback, it's mostly about self-critique. We've never lost that determination of doing the best we can on stage or in the studio. A lot of it is personal critique and making comments on each other's contributions. We really support each other, like any team, whether it's in business, sports, or music. The greatness of the outcome is from the team effort. Personally though, I haven't hit that moment yet. I'm waiting to put it in the car and roar up the freeway. I'm loving it as it is, but there's a letting go experience that you have to go through. I think Touch of Evil is a wonderful live effort from Priest and will become a classic in its own right, much like Unleashed in the East.

**METRANOME:** Glenn, you and K.K. really have a way of complementing each other, yet being very different. How do you maintain that freshness 30 years after the release of the landmark, British Steel?

Glenn: After all this time we know each other as guitar players. We work together and we've got sort of a 6th sense. We're very fortunate that we've got very different styles as guitar players, and that's the intriguing bit that works so well. A lot of it is luck, really. We're lucky that we came together and that we have this communication. Our styles blend together to make the backbone along with Ian's solid bass, Scott's drumming, and Rob's vocals. It's all about the character of Judas Priest. I think we're very fortunate to have a character and chemistry in the band, not just musically, but also as writers. If you've got that going for you, you're obviously very fortunate.

**METRANOME:** I've heard that you're going to create a full sensory experience for the British Steel tour, recreating the look from the era as well. Is that true? What can we look forward to in terms of the stage show that's different from your stage shows in recent years? Given shows I've seen, I get the sense that even the people in the very back seats feel like they got their monies worth; not just in the audio, but visually as well. You just can't miss what's going on during a Priest stage show.

is a fantastic producer, and you can't underestimate what he did for us. He's a great guy too, and I don't think it would have been right to use anyone else on Touch of Evil.

**METRANOME:** I think the question on everyone's mind is will Tom be smashing milk bottles and throwing trays of cutlery about on stage to recreate the effects from British Steel?

Glenn: I think he probably has been the last few weeks.

**METRANOME:** Reading the liner notes for the British Steel reissue really gave a sense of that immediate and spontaneous creativity - smashing bottles, etc. Do you ever create or think about creating those natural effects on new albums, rather than utilizing today's technology?

Glenn: We actually did on Nostradamus. There's a battle scene on the track, "War," and we got some old swords and scythes and slid them together and clanked them to get some effects for the battle. We're still in there doing bits and pieces. We don't take everything from music libraries and samples. We create a lot of our own sounds, and it makes for a lot of fun in the studio.

**METRANOME:** Did you know going into the Nostradamus recording that it was going to end up on that epic level, or did it evolve to those heights?

Glenn: We didn't know it was going to evolve to the point it did going in, but we found it very inspiring, the story of Nostradamus; his life story, really; not particularly his predictions, but the fact that his life was full of tragedy, new beginnings, and the church coming after him. That, combined with his alchemy and everything else, was very mysterious and inspiring. So we just started to compose a lot of the stuff on piano to give the whole thing a more dramatic feel, a more classical, operatic feel. We transposed a lot of it to guitar and synth guitar after that, but we did a lot of the basic writing on the keyboard.

**METRANOME:** And Don Airey came in and provided some direction too, right?

Glenn: That's right. We've worked with Don since the Painkiller days. We knew straight away as soon as he started to play that we wanted to work with him. He's a master of the keyboard.

it's just another form of music.

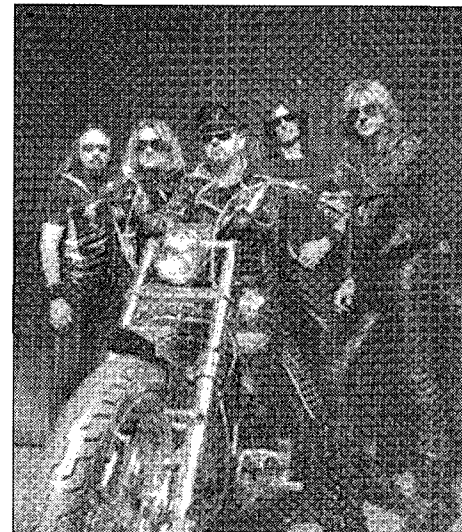
Rob: I think you have to be very careful how you deal with reaction. When people push back for whatever reasons, it shows that you're doing something, whether you're irritating people and pissing them off or whether they're saying - hey, thanks for the great time. It doesn't really matter. That's what art and music are all about.

**METRANOME:** In addition to reading about K.K. building a golf course near his home, I've read about your Metal God Apparel company, Rob. Can you tell me a little bit about Metal God Apparel? Will the current line of shirts be available at the shows? Are you going to be expanding to pants, jackets, etc.? And will your company be working on any designs for the band?

Rob: Everything associated with Metal God Apparel is independent of Priest. I have the wonderful luxury of Priest leading my life with everything I do, and then I have this great opportunity to continue with these separate ventures like Metal God Entertainment (the record company) and Metal God Apparel. It's just a world that I love to dabble with on the side. We will have some incredible merch at the shows to go with the British Steel anniversary, so it's really the best of both worlds.

**METRANOME:** Glenn, do you have any personal ventures in the works, and I'm hoping the answer is going to be another solo album. I loved Baptism of Fire and Edge of the World.

Glenn: At the moment I'm concentrating on Judas Priest. I loved working on my solo albums, and I'm very proud of them. It was fantastic to work with such icons as John Entwistle and Cozy Powell, as well as the young guns like Billy Sheehan, and everybody that worked on those two albums. Those albums really came about because there was a lull in Judas Priest activity, but solo albums are great for getting musical things off your chest. I can step into appropriate areas for me as a solo artist that aren't quite appropriate for Judas Priest. I'll probably do some more solo work at some point, but while Priest are active, I'm fully committed. We're concentrating on the next leg of the tour, and there's the possibility we'll go out next year and do Nostradamus.



loyal. We were apart for about 13 or 14 years from Rob. We did the Ripper years, which produced some good albums, but given the choice, I would rather that Rob never left. He wanted to pursue his own career and his own form of music though, and you can't really blame people for that. Artistically, you get desires and you have to pursue them. I think, in a way, it was a good thing. They say absence makes the heart grow fonder. It made me appreciate it more because there's just something special that happens when Rob and K.K. and I sit down to write. I think it made us all very aware of that, and we're grateful. We just got on a roll again, like we'd never been apart.

**METRANOME:** Rob, I've always wanted to ask, concerning the video for "Locked In," when K.K. is freeing you from that contraption that the skeleton people have you in. He slaps you across the face a couple of times, and you look at the camera with that, what the hell was that look? Was that rehearsed or improvisational?

Rob: It wasn't part of the script at all. It was very unexpected. Here he is trying to set me free and he's beating me up at the same time. It's funny that you picked up on that. We had a lot of fun doing the conceptual videos back in those days.

Glenn: Oh yeah, we felt it was appropriate, you know. I might even bring out the old SG rather than the Hamers, just to play "Grinder" or something like that. It's a nostalgic retro-type of feel. It's almost the 30th anniversary of British Steel, and we just felt that it would be nice to do something like that. I had a meeting with a guy yesterday that's making me some stage clothes, and I've discussed things along the line of the clothes I used to wear in that era. I think the rest of the guys will do the same, and I think it will make for a really nice night. Obviously our music is first and foremost and very important, but you want to give people a show. You want to give people value for their money. I think they appreciate that.

Rob: We are definitely doing the retro thing as far as the clothes. I wish my body mass was what it was back then, however, I shan't look like something old and fat in spandex. I'm just having a bit of fun, it's going to be great. Again, we always emphasize the importance of the live material that we play. We want you to see us at work. The stage set is going to be a little more stripped down with an emphasis on the light show. I've still got the bike of course.

**METRONE:** Was there ever a thought to use a producer other than Tom Allom for Touch of Evil, who produced both British Steel and Unleashed in the East, among others? Do you think you might work with Tom on an upcoming studio album now that he's sort of back in the fold?

Glenn: Working with him on an upcoming studio project is definitely not out of the question. We chose Tom for the very fact that he was a key man round about that era. He was and still

is. You could sit in a studio and ask him to play absolutely anything, give him a couple of seconds and he's got it down. He's just got a brilliant mind and we've got a lot of respect for him.

**METRONE:** Possibly I'm missing out on the news of mass Judas Priest album burnings, but given the cover of Angel of Retribution and Nostradamus, as well as the lyrical content, and recent releases by peers of Judas Priest, including Heaven and Hell (The Devil You Know) and Alice Cooper (Along Came A Spider), do you find it odd that there isn't the kind of over-the-top backlash that you experienced in the 80s and early 90s from so-called morality groups. Do you think it marks a sense of apathy or acceptance in the world today?

Glenn: That's a difficult question to answer. On one side of the coin, we've never put subliminal messages on albums or encouraged bad things. Our music is about battles, but they're harmless futuristic, Sci-Fi type lyrics. Unfortunately though, in playing Heavy Metal, you do get an element of Metal bands that are out there to shock or to do things that aren't great – lyrically and otherwise. I think they're doing it to get exposure, and of course, you get tired of the same brush stroke after awhile. Heavy Metal, in one way, is its own worst enemy. Having said that now, I do think people are aware, if you look at a lot of Ozzy's antics for example, that it's all very tongue in cheek. It's a very popular form of music. We can play in Chile and 15,000 kids come to see us. We played Turkey and 20,000 kids showed up. So I think that people are getting educated to the fact that

**METRONE:** Is it a bit eerie listening to Edge of the World, knowing that you lost two friends who were also music icons on a very grand scale, or is it a warming sort of last chapter for you in having known and worked with them?

Glenn: Edge of the World just makes me feel very proud. I was privileged to work with two great guys. John was an incredible bass player. He came down to the studio we were going to work at (Cozy and I had already arrived), and we started to kick a number around called "Give Blood." I looked across at Cozy and we just started to smile. There's no other bass player in the world that sounds like John. He's just got his own unique style. I have to say that even though I was aware of how good a bass player he was with The Who, I just wasn't prepared to see exactly how good he was when playing with him. The guy could play any form of bass guitar.

I don't need to say anything about Cozy. Cozy was probably my favorite rock drummer, along with John Bonham. When Cozy played a fill, he played a fill. It just took your breath away. They were both great guys and their deaths were a great loss. After we lost Cozy, I found a drum kit that was his, so I bought it and set it up in the studio. I thought that it would be good to look at the kit, but every time I walked past it, I missed him. So I had to get rid of it because it just brought me down, really.

**METRONE:** How do you feel about your rise over the last several years to your previous level of success, and quite possibly beyond? Are you just blown away by the fans?

Glenn: Yeah, our fans have always been very

**METRONE:** Since both Iron Maiden and Judas Priest have been back together, I've heard more and more kids that are 12, 13, and 14 talk about Dance of Death or Angel of Retribution, and I've chimed in with – do you know Rocka Rolla to the often puzzled and anxious response of – what's that? They're just so ravenous for your music. I'm happy that the music I listen to is being appreciated by kids who are so young.

Rob: It's brilliant. In today's world – the speed of light that we live at – everybody's Twittering away. Everybody's texting, MySpacing, and Facebooking. It seems to me that a lot of the younger Metal fans, more than ever, are living in their own world. They're not being dictated to by radio and the record companies. They're going on their own journey of discovery. It's a world wide phenomenon.

Glenn: It's great to see a lot of young faces at our shows. Some are with their parents, but other kids have discovered Priest themselves. That's always very important. I remember when I was young, thinking that I'd discovered a band and getting together with friends to buy records. They did become our bands though, so it's joyous to look in the first few rows and see so many young faces. To me it means that we're appreciated and that we're doing something right.

Priest fans, new and long standing, have a lot to pick from: a vast and dynamic back catalog, new contrasting studio albums, an upcoming live album (all previously unreleased in live form on CD), and a tour date in Mansfield that cannot be missed. Where to start? [www.judaspriest.com](http://www.judaspriest.com)