WINNERS
REQUESTS
BACKSTREET BOYS Jive
ENRIQUE Interscope
JAY-Z Roc-A-Fella/IDJ
BRITNEY-SPEARS Jive

EARPICKS
CREED Wind-Up
PINK Arista
EVAN & JARON Columbia/CRG
NICKELBACK Roadrunner/IDJ

BREAKOUTS
GOD BLESS AMERICA Columbia/CRG
OZZY OSBOURNE Epic
ANDREA BOCELLI Phillips
JOHN MELLENCAMP Columbia/CRG

WILDCARD
GINUWINE Epic

HOT NEW RELEASES
AFROMAN Crazy Rap Universal
LFO Life is Good J Records
DAVE MATTHEWS BAND Everyday RCA
usher U Got It Bad Arista

OZZY OSBOURNE
MORE THAN A GREAT ROCK & ROLL STORY OF EXCESS AND SURVIVAL, Ozzy and Sharon Osbourne are a great love story. She learned all there was to know about the industry from her dad, UK impresario Don Arden. She grew up around it, going on tour starting at the age of three with everyone from Gene Vincent, Little Richard and Jerry Lee Lewis to the Rolling Stones and the Everly Brothers. Sharon met Ozzy in 1971 when she was working in his father's office. He came in with his Black Sabbath mates, wanting Don to manage them. “I want you to know,” said Ozzy, “that I had on a pajama top for a shirt and for jewelry, I had a hot water tap (faucet) on a bit of string around my neck.” It wasn't until eight years later that they got together, when Sharon offered to manage his solo career. They soon fell in love and our fable begins.

Almost unbelievably, Ozzy has only been on two record labels in his storied career—Warner Bros. with Sabbath and Epic as a solo artist—and has become, through no fault of his own, a true rock icon, transcending boundaries of age, creed and format. Now with "Down To Earth," his first album in seven years—which bowed at #3 on the HITS chart this week—Ozzy is back. With old cohort Zakk Wylde on guitar, Robert Trujillo on bass and ex-Faith No More tubthumper Mike Bordin on drums, Ozzy is more than ready for the Merry Mayhem tour co-billing with Rob Zombie to rock your world. Among his goals are raising funds for NYC with the Oz Bless America campaign. Over fish cakes and mineral water, HITS' fellow Millander John Sutton-Smith "And Wexson" chats with the Osbester about the mutual pain of giving up nicotine and doing an interview with this rag.

Ozzy, you're a legend. How did it happen?

Ozzy: Exactly the same question I ask myself. Believe me, I didn’t go, "I’m going to become a legend." I just thought I was good for one album, you know, and here we are 32 years later. I don’t understand any of it, really. I don’t know the secret. I’m in as much shock and surprise as anybody else.

It's been seven years since the last album. Ozfest has taken up a lot of your time, hasn’t it?

Ozzy: When it started, I thought that all I’ve got to do is 12 weeks a year on the road, and then it would just fade into the realm of history. And every year, it’s become bigger and bigger. I kept saying to Sharon, “How long is this Ozfest going to last?” And now we’ve got another new album, it’s happening all over again. The double-whammy this year is that I’m getting a star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame. I thought that was brilliant: Mind you, mine’s probably in Puss Alley or something.

Now you’re going out on tour, starting on Halloween, with Rob Zombie. Ozzy: Rob Zombie is a great guy, really down to earth. Ozzy Bless America will offer special merchandise items, with the money going to a charity that’s affiliated with Howard Stern for the Trade Center victims’ families.

Sharon: I know that nobody will mess with Howard, because he’s watching the money every step of the way. That’s why we chose him.

What kind of items are you selling?

Sharon: There’s an armband with an American flag and a T-shirt with Oz Bless America on it. All proceeds from the Meadowlands show will go to the families. Tell me about recording “Down To Earth.”

Ozzy: Over the last three years, I’d break off and do Ozfest or the Sabbath thing. In condensed time, it took about six months or so. Tim Palmer [the producer] was really a good support, and the people from Sony, like Kaz [Utsunomiya]. He was there for every rehearsal, every song, everything that was going on. I’d turn around and he’d be sitting at the back of the room, and I’d go, “Where the fuck did you come from?” One minute, he wouldn’t be there; the next minute, he was. I had a very good support team around me. One of the first songs we did was “Dreamer,” with Mick Jones from Foreigner and Marti Frederiksen, who does a lot of work with Aerosmith. I’d forgotten how much fun it can be. Now, everybody uses Pro Tools... In the six years since I made an album, the technology has gone from the ark to the wheel.

You and Tim wrote a bunch of the songs on the album. How did you work together?

Ozzy: Tim played a bunch of rhythm on the tracks, like “No Easy Out” and the single “Gets Me Through.” I owe a lot to him. He’s very English and he has a sense of humor, so we had a good laugh along the way. I allow myself to be produced because I don’t have the technical ability, but I know when you’re doing it wrong. I always have the last say on what goes down. If I feel very strongly about something, I’ll make that known. Tim would go, “Ozzy, you should really listen to this song that we’ve got going here,” and I’d go, “you know what, Tim? I don’t really fancy it today.” He’d say, “Come on, come on,” and when he got me in the studio, he’d go, “What do you think about this? While you’re here, do you think we could work something out for this part?” And he’d coax me into doing it, you know, because I’m a lazy sonofabitch. People say to me, “What music do you listen to for relaxing?” The only music I listen to now is bandsaws and a bit of bricklaying around my house. You should see my house. It’s like a fucking terrorist training camp.

Sharon: We don’t listen to a lot of music at home. We never have the time. Ozzy: My wife has gone mad over Enya. I’m going, “What is fucking Enya?” It’s like the music they play in mental hospitals.

Sharon: It’s a joke, because every time Ozzy asks who’s playing, it doesn’t matter who it is, I always say, “Oh, it’s Enya.” It could be U2, and I say it’s Enya. Ozzy: Enya’s like psychotic music. The kind of stuff they play when you’re in Betty Ford.

What are your favorite tracks?

Ozzy: There’s not any one favorite. I look at an album as a piece of work, as a single entity, but I never get tired of listening to “Dreamer.” I think it’s one of the coolest ballads that I’ve ever had anything to do with. I don’t play an instrument, but my hair stands on end, you know, when it sounds good. If it can make me feel good, I know I’m on to a winner. Rather than a favorite, I always have a track that I’m not that keen on, and every time, I’ll bet you $1000, someone
will come up to me and go, "Why don't you ever play that song?" And I'll go, "You like that track."

I never go into a studio and say, "Well, I've had a good run. I'm going to make the worst album ever," but I've been bowled over with the good response so far. I'm not used to that. I mean, Tim Palmer reads every review. If he sees the words "Tim Palmer," he'll read it. And he read something bad about himself, and he was all pissed off. I said to him, "You know what, Tim? One thing I've learned over a lot of years. I never read anything about me, because critics, they wouldn't be called critics if they didn't criticize. And if you are going to read everything about you, eventually you're going to read something that says you're the biggest piece of crap since the Stone Age."

How did you and Zakk get back together for the album and tour?

Ozzy: Sharon kept saying that the kids all wanted to know if I'd ever play with Zakk again. He's great with his band, and Ozzy's great, but Zakk and Ozzy are the greatest. I must confess, he's definitely got a presence about him. You know when he's in the room. He's a very good player, and he's good to have on your team.

Have the young bands on Ozzyfest influenced your music?

Ozzy: To be truthful to you, it really should be called the Sharonfest, because I don't know one from the other. Sharon, my son Jack and my office work feverishly on the Ozzyfest. It's unfair that it's called the Ozzyfest, because all I do is end up being on the top of the bill at the end of the day. What Sharon does for Ozzyfest is monumental, and then she comes home, buys this house, re-furnishes it, takes care of the kids and the dogs, then me. And I don't know how she does it.

Sharon: It's like a big machine. It just rolls in and out. I'm lucky because I have a great staff, unbelievable people that have worked with us for years. In that respect, it makes it so much easier.

Tell me about the birth of Ozzyfest.

Sharon: It started because, in this industry, people love to categorize everything. Everyone has to be put in a bag; everybody is safe with that. If you do this kind of music, you belong on this station or that station. But Ozzy goes beyond those boundaries. You can't categorize Ozzy. You can't liken him to anybody else's career. He's broken the mold. Ozzy is the sort of artist that can do anything, and go anywhere. And I wanted him to do Lollapalooza. I mean, everybody was doing it.

Ozzy: They said to my wife my genre of music had no place on Lollapalooza.

Sharon: They said Ozzy didn't fit. And I told them they were wrong. He does fit. I do my own festival, so that's what happened.

Do you think a little younger to you each year at Ozzyfest?

Ozzy: I look at it this way. If my father had said, "Hey son, there's this guy playing at the Hippodrome named Al Jolson with a fabulous voice," and I go with my friends and we all dig him—that would never have happened back then. Whatever my father liked, I'd go, "What the fuck are you on about?" you know. I'm 53 this December, but I always think that my audience has remained the same. I mean, when the chicks flash their tits, I go, "Boring, been there, seen that." I like to see it, but you know...

Sharon: You're lucky that you don't get 53-year-old chicks flashing their tits, because they'd be down to their waist.

With so many management companies merging, you've remained independent, Sharon.

Sharon: I never wanted to have a huge roster of clients, because I don't see how you can do it properly. Then you need to get the day-to-day people, then they need an assistant, and then you become so far removed from your clients that all you do is do business deals for them while other people handle them. I don't see how you can be in a position to handle all the creative aspects of an artist's life when you've got 10-12 superstars. You just can't do it. It's impossible. There's not enough time. And I like dancing to my own tune; I couldn't go in and report to anyone. Everybody is different, but I couldn't report to anybody and have somebody tell me what to do. I couldn't do it. I never wanted to rule the music industry. I've worked with a million different artists and I decided three years ago that I didn't want to manage anybody else, so I stopped taking on clients. I do it for the love of it. I don't know anything else.

Who would have thought after the infamous bat-chomping incident that you would still be on the same label 20 years later?

Ozzy: Times just fucking flies by, man. It really, really does. Sharon's got collages of photos when the kids were babies and now they're young adults and they're telling me, "Shut up, dad," and "You're embarrassing me, dad."
You Are The Wind Beneath My Bat Wings!

an interview with tim palmer

By Martin Popoff

it’s no secret that the producer of an ozzy album plays a huge and likely under-appreciated and under-credited role in creating the small nation state that is an ozzy osbourne record. back down on earth for ozzy’s first album in six years, that role fell in the lap of a man named tim palmer, a big name in producing circles, a somewhat tinier name when it comes to metal. here’s the man behind the curtain offering a few comments on filtering out the politics and ultimately coming up with the damn fine ozzy ‘01 album called down to earth.

Wrack ‘em up...

“At the beginning Ozzy was not feeling too positive about the idea of making a new album. He had lost on his plate, writing with Sabbath album, planning a new Ozfest tour, moving home etc etc. So I had to really work hard to get up his enthusiasm. I now knew why there were six years between albums. He had tried to start this album a couple of times with other producers, but those sessions had been scrapped. I needed to make Ozzy feel excited and involved. We started collecting songs that Ozzy felt good about and began to demo some new ideas. Just as I felt I had broken the ice and we were becoming closer to getting a fire burning, Ozzy rang to say that his mother had died and he was leaving for England. I knew that he would be gone for a while and needed time to get over this, but I wanted to keep moving forward.”

Now what?

“I felt that the last Ozzy album was a little tired so I wanted to make sure all the songs were well chosen, dynamic and had something to say. On the last album I felt that coming out with a single like ‘Perry Mason’ was unrewarding. It was a lyric that did not mean much to his core fans. I wanted the record to have power, be contemporary but not to the point of sounding conserved. An Ozzy album must ROCK and be vital and have songs with good middle sections. Ozzy loves middle sections!”

Role Call...

“The band was constructed and deconstructed a couple of times during the recording so it was important to stay focused. Zakk was out, then in, a couple of times, so I cut backing tracks with Mike Bordin (Faith No More), Robert Trujillo (Suicidal Tendencies) and Reeves Gabrels (David Bowie). It was soon apparent that Zakk would be firmly back in the fold, so now I could work with him alone on the guitar tracks.”

Shut up and play guitar!

“I am a fairly competent guitar player - I am no lead guitarist - but Ozzy liked the simpler feel that I played on some of my demos. For that reason, when required, I was happy and proud to play some guitar. Zakk could have done it all, but if it’s not broken, why fix it? Contrary to what Zakk has implied in Guitar World magazine, we really had no run-ins during the guitar tracking on the album. It’s a shame that he rewrites history. He was a gentleman, open-minded and fun to work with. He likes a beer or two but so what! As long as someone does their job... well it’s none of my business to inquire on the nature of their inspiration. I respect him as a guitar player and I never took the guitar out of his hands as he implied in Guitar World. That is just bullshit. He was unhappy at the idea of playing some of the song ideas but he played like a ‘trooper’ or a ‘stormtrooper’ in his case. We were recording a larger number of songs than we needed so as it happens many of the songs he didn’t like, didn’t actually make it onto the record. He definitely has opinions and they are encouraged by Sierra Nevada’s (the beer), but sometimes airing them doesn’t do him so many favours.”

Hey, you, bearded Viking, try this...

“I may be guilty of suggesting that Zakk use a Telecaster on a couple of small parts, but why not! It’s my job to stretch the sound textures in the songs. The Telecaster was a good enough guitar for Jimmy Page or Joe Strummer. When was a Telecaster made an uncool guitar?”

Please use the suggestion box under the Dio voodoo doll.

“Some songs were submitted - good songs as it goes – by the likes of Dave Grohl, Offspring and Mike McCready from Pearl Jam. The way it works with Ozzy is you play him the musical ideas and he is either inspired to sing a melody and lyric or he is not. You cannot get Ozzy to sing on a track that he does not like. Zakk had contributed some great songs that were recorded but never finished. These will not go to waste as a Black Label album is due soon.”

Oz, it’s the wife!

“There were no disagreements with Ozzy or Sharon; we knew we had to make a great album. Ozzy was really easy to work with and we had fun. There were no external pressures only that Epic really wanted an Ozzy record finished. You can’t really rush Ozzy. Kas, the A&R man was a great support and visited us every day. He gave us constant printed updates which we renamed The Daily Kas. They soon included weather and world news headlines. I think he enjoyed making those newspapers because he continued sending them when we were not actually working on the record! Sharon was always aware day to day of the progress on the record but she leaves Ozzy to his own devices when he is working in the studio. She was always there with her thoughts when we needed them.”

Name that tune...

“Some of the songs were very new and some were up to two years old by the time the record was finished. ‘No Place For Angels’ (extra track for Japan) was actually recorded that very last week. ‘Facing Hell’ was originally ‘Bang Bang You’re Dead’! We lucked changed the title of the song before the terrorist attacks. The climate now, as it turns out, is not right for those sort of titles at the moment.”

Where’s me fags? Oz, you gave up smoking, remember?

“Ozzy is an incredible vocalist. As soon as he sings a vocal and doubles it, there it is! The Ozzy sound. He works hard on his vocal tracks. He doesn’t like to spend too long or he gets bored, so we generally sang the songs about four times. I would then choose all the best bits and play the finished vocal for him the next day. He gave up smoking during the recording of this album and his vocals got stronger and stronger. After Ozfestival he had not had a ciggie for about two months so we re-cut some of the earlier vocals because his voice was so much fuller.”

Er, I guess we should just order, then?

“I am not too sure how I got this gig. We went to meet for breakfast at the Beverly Hills Hotel and I didn’t turn up as I had confused the dates! When we did finally meet, we just hit it off. I love Ozzy; he is a true gentleman and I am lucky to have had the pleasure of working with him. I think he must have been aware of my previous credits. I have been very lucky to have worked with a variety of great artists, some amazing singers. I have produced for David Bowie, Robert Plant, Tears For Fears, Texas and mixed for Pearl Jam, U2, Live, The Cure. Check out www.timpalmer.com!”

Oz, it’s Garth Brooks again. Fuckin’ ‘ell, tell ‘im we’re not home!

“One night I got a call from Ozzy at midnight to say he and his management had received death threats against me on various phone answer machines. He said I should go to the police and warn them. I said ‘Who is it that could be doing this?’ He said he felt it was a fellow musician that he had been working with, who had decided that he had lost him job. It was rather surprising to think someone was leaving these messages! The sad point is that my role as a producer of an Ozzy album qualifies me to choose the correct musicians for the project, so I quite easily could have had him fired, but in fact I hadn’t. I made one call to the guy to set the record straight, told him some home truths and all was fine. He is actually a really good player as it goes. I cut the backing tracks with Mike Bordin on drums, and Robert Trujillo on bass. They are a solid session and heavy, but when required can play in a variety of styles that were required for some of the more gentle tracks.”