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NEWS

DEEP PURPLE - “Blitzkrieg”

Rock Hard

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By Martin Popoff

DEEP PURPLE’s first platter in eight years, NOW What?!, began life on the internet with a light advance track called ‘All The Time In The World’, one that had the mighty Purple eaters of the world bickering with stomachs grumbling.

“You’d have to ask the record company that,” laughs bassist ROGER GLOVER, who knows all too well the trouble such a first card might cause. “Yeah, it wouldn’t have been my choice. But then again, ‘Smoke On The Water’ wasn’t my choice either. I know nothing about that. I know nothing about the selling of music. They felt, I guess, that ‘All The Time In The World’ would get play on the softer stations, the Radio 2s of the world, or... I don’t know; I don’t know what their plan was. They’re a great company and they really believe in this record and I can’t remember... I thought to myself, how did they come to that decision? And I can only think that they had a meeting of all the staff and said, ‘Right, what are your feelings?’ I have no idea. I thought at first, you know, that’s not a good thing to put out. But then I thought, it’s certainly going to make the album much more of a blitzkrieg when it does come out.”

Deep ?urp!



NOW What

And blitzkrieg it most certainly is. Indeed all of youse who thought a haunted, unripe banana was in the cards as the Purps doddered toward old age before you... now what? Well, what's up is a suitably hard-charging record of riffs, heaviness factor likely above the last two but maybe slightly below that of Purpendicular and Abandon, zested and high-tested with lots of prog and textures and even a bit of a jam here and there, all commandeered by one Bob Ezrin ensconced in the production chair.

"Now our goal, first of all, is the sound," says Roger, asked as to NOW What's?!'s personality, moving off style into sonics, as a great producer in his own right is within his rights to do. "There's a great concern in the band that when we make a record that it sounds good. The last record was disappointing in its sound, its production. And I get given a lot of CDs by bands, and when I get back from a tour and enter my suitcase, I've got 20, 25 CDs, of bands all wanting some help—whatever I can give them, I don't know. And I play them, and frequently they sound better than we do. And that was very much... first and foremost, it had to sound good. And beyond that, there's an unspoken thing that we don't want to sound like any other record that

we've made. You never do, actually. Every record has its own character. But there was a feeling, when Bob came to see us in Toronto, he said some great things. One of which was, you know, 'Forget trying to get a big hit on the radio and be all that. That's all over. Just be who you are.' He says, 'You're great musicians, and you have great spontaneity. I want to capture that in the studio.' And I think having some time to actually prepare ourselves a bit more, we went in the studio, you know, knowing the songs. So playing them live was easy. And all the songs are played live. Everything that's there is live, aside, I'd say, from overdubs which are added later. But essentially, the tracks are all live, and I think that gives it a great spontaneity and freshness and feel. And I think he captured a great sound as well."

"I wouldn't say that at all," continues Roger, confronted with the impression that the album is indeed proggy than usual. "What I would say is that DON AIREY and STEVE MORSE are unbelievably prolific players. And it's very difficult to hold them back. You know, they'll always throw something in that to them is just a piece of music, music that other people will probably see as prog. It's just making music that is more interesting. And there was a desire to get more simple kind of themes going, on this album. Almost more riffs, as it were, than clever bits. But it's hard, as I say, to hold them back. Because as soon as you write something simple, it frequently gets complicated."



As for the profusion of keyboard licks and tones and sounds all over this grinding Purple spread, Roger figures that Don Airey has "grown into the band. He's been in the band ten years now, and I think he's in a great frame of mind. He really feels like he's in the band, not so much an interloper. And he's got strong ideas."

But despite NOW What?! being a hard rocking keyboard showcase, it also sounds very much like a blast to play bass on, given Morse's circular Purple-funky riffs and all the musical origami embedded in songs like 'Above And Beyond', 'Apres Vous' and 'Uncommon Man'.

"Absolutely, absolutely. It's a great album to play on. I use a Vigier guitar; I've used them for years now. But Bob came in and he said, 'Oh, do you want to try my guitar?'"

I said, 'What's that?' He says, 'I've got a Precision.' And I haven't played a Precision on an album since I think 1970. So he brought his in, and it has these really dull strings on it. I said, 'Well, I'll give it a go, but you'll have to change the strings.' He says, 'Don't change the strings!' He says, 'That's a legendary bass. It's been on The Wall, it's been on PETER GABRIEL, Alice's albums, it's been on loads of albums.' TONY LEVIN's played it, for example. He said don't touch the strings. Anyway, okay, and it sounded wonderful. And I've never pushed the bass up in my own production as much as he did. So that was a lesson to me, how much he used the bass in the forefront."

Ah yes, Bob Ezrin—I remember hearing he had been signed on months back, and I cringed to think how his forward-leaning Canuck persona would mesh with the Purps, who to my mind, might not take to his inevitable blurts of rapid-fire direction-slinging...

"It was actually wonderful working with him," says Glover. "Obviously a man with such a track record demands a certain amount of respect, and when I first met him, that respect was well-founded. I liked him immediately. He said very astute things about the band and how he saw us, and asked us our opinion, and when we got down to working with him, he was the admiral in charge of the ship. Very much the man at the helm. He can be a bit abrasive. He makes decisions very quickly but he get things done. And certainly he didn't piss me off at all. It's good to get people stimulated like that. Very good decisions he made, and he recognized that I was a producer as well, and he frequently talked to me about the production and what I thought, what he thought, and hammered things out. So he was very nice to me. Got on with him as a friend."



“Yes, he did some of that,” affirms Rog, on Ezrin’s tendency to reach in and pull out the entrails of a song and muck them around. “We had a writing session. Well, we had two writing sessions before we went up to Nashville. And we’d written the basic track ideas, and not too many vocals. But the track ideas. And when we got to Nashville, we had another little writing session which he came to. And yes, he did say this should be at the front and not at the back, and he moved things around.”

“This one song in particular that Ian and I had written... because we got together for six days down in Portugal, Gillan and I, where we finished all the lyrics. There’s one song we were working on which had a very strange title, and the title came from the working title, which, you know, various people in the band kind of shouted out what the working title should be. And this one title was ‘Weirdistan’. And Don shouted that out, and I thought, ‘Weirdistan’? Don kept coming up with strange titles. Anyway, when it came to writing the words, we thought ‘Weirdistan’ was actually a great title. But what are we going to write about? And we spent a long time on that session, about a day and a half, writing the song, and then we got to Nashville, Gillan and I, and finished a couple of songs, and we thought, well let’s try ‘Weirdistan’, because we liked it, and that riff is great. So I picked up an acoustic and I was just going over the tune with Ian, and Bob was sitting at the back of the studio at the computer, and all we heard was, ‘I’m not liking this.’ What? He said, ‘I’m not liking this.’ And we said, ‘You haven’t even heard it yet. Give it a go.’ ‘No, I’m not liking that.’ And we thought, oh dear (laughs). But we did have a couple of other ideas, and he joined in with that, and yes, he wrote enough on the album to warrant a credit.”

And why this insane album title? Hadn’t you gotten enough grief for Bananas? “You can see what you like in it, really,” chuckles Glover. “IAN GILLAN came up with it, very early on, along with the question mark and the exclamation mark. Actually, no one knew what to make of it. I didn’t like it at first, and then I grew to like it, then I didn’t like it again, and we all kept coming up with titles that just didn’t stand a chance, really. And by this time the record company had seen it and loved it, and we kind of went, oh, whatever, it’s whatever it will be. And I love it now. Because it’s... I think if we called it Negated Paradise Of Armageddon, it somehow wouldn’t have... it’s like an average title. This is not an average title. It’s a title that leaps out at you. And for that reason I think it’s great. I remember one of the key thoughts, the key philosophies, of the band when I first joined it in 1969, is if they love us, great, if they hate us, great. Some people are going to love us, some people are going to hate us.”



As a closing bit of crumpet, as we wait for y'all to hear this fine record, well, prepare yourself for some of the choicest Steve Morse playing on a Purple you've ever imagined, not so much in the riffing, which is somewhat the expected (but lots of it). No, I'm talking about the concision and fresh oddity and variety of the solo bits. If NOW What?! is Don Airey's record to shine, it's also one where Steve Morse quietly reminds us of why he's smart enough to fly planes.

"How has he changed? Well, I think, he hasn't changed a lot," reflects Roger on Morse and his Dixie drugs. "He still feels like he's the outsider of the band. Even though he's been in the band 20 years now. Probably because he's American and we're not. No, that's a huge thing. And he really enjoys himself, playing with us, that's for sure. And I think he's reined in a lot of his virtuoso chromatic scale kind of stuff. He's reined a lot of that in on this record. And the criticisms do sting. I think he's been criticized a lot for that, when people like to go widdly diddly. Well, you know, take it or leave it, Steve is who he is. And to have him, or to want him to sound like someone else is kind of wrong. But what he does offer is incredible virtuosity. And I think as far as I'm concerned, that's got to be a Purple trademark. You know, you start off with Ritchie on the one hand, and Jon on the other, you've got to have that balance, for us. That is our character. And they have to be virtuosos. We can't just be regular ol' players. So with every virtuoso, you're going to get difficulties. Virtuoso people generally aren't easy to get along with. But Steve is easy to get along with, as long as we live in the same world with him."

