

Metal Gods Of Hope And Glory

By Michelle Duffy Probably the most unlikely successful heavy metal band ever to come out of an unassuming Birmingham was the unbeatable, unstoppable Judas Priest. Named, surprisingly after an early Bob Dylan track (and it is here where the connect between Judas Priest and folk music starts and stops,) this motley bunch of guys looking like scaffold workers in 1980, appeared to us, as rather what Def Leppard would have looked like if they hadn't discovered setting lotion seven years later. By 1980, they were already causing madness and complete mayhem across the airwaves since their humble beginnings way back in 1969. In famous rock band style, they went through the usual mixture of line up changes practically every day of the week. Through their haze of sweaty gigs, a new dirty haired miserable face would appear in front of a drunken teenage sea of metal victims. It became common place for the spine of any rock band to under go abrupt 'surgery' every once in a while and Judas Priest were certainly no exception. 'British Steel,' released in 1980, is still regarded today as JP's highest acclaimed album. Perfectly polished and beautifully cleaned, despite it's raw, gritty content, this album still stands firm in the rock album hall of fame twenty six years after it's release. With five albums already under their hard leather belts, (the first two, were released but didn't chart) they, unwittingly embarked on the peak of the band's career. It was to be 'British Steel,' that gave the band their yard stick. Notably, due to the charisma of this extraordinary album, it quickly became the same yard stick for every one else. Perhaps it had been the unmistakable line up of this band at the time of recording the album that was the key to it's incredible success. Rob Halford lead the vocals throughout the set with Glenn Tipton on lead guitar, Dave Holland (who left in 1988) on drums, all recruited by the 'masters of metal,' the creators, K.K Downing (guitar) and Ian Hill (bass.) This line up lasted another eight years, that's some record in the hard, cruel world of heavy metal. Collaborating with Hill and Downing on all the tracks, the mighty, mop haired, studded Halford seemed to give the band it's urging driving force that was so desperately needed to put the finishing touches to the powerful album. Presenting us with only nine tracks (the usual set of a vinyl L.P in those days) it still only just enough to make us, the listeners, want more. Like a intimidating angry dog, this album shows off quite a bite and to an old rocker like me, it was still just as captivating and exciting to listen to it again. Even the pain of all those head banging headaches seem to fill my head once again. We can sufficiently lose ourselves in this ocean of thunderous, thrusting rock without feeling threatened by a beast that is unfamiliar. For those of us who perhaps didn't take Judas Priest into our hearts until the end of the bands' career, this early mastered album is still appealing to the numbers amongst us who hung up the leather a long time ago. Even the teeny boppers who sit surrounding us will still blush at the shock of actually recognising the odd track here and there within this album. The fast, Motorhead themed, 'Breaking The Law,' was used as 'the' Beavis and Butthead track and could forget the steadiness of 'Living After Midnight,' which always reminds me of The Eagles in forceful mode, will trigger off some foot tapping if not the odd spark of air guitar among us. Even the union moving 'United,' will have us standing with pride in an Arthur Scargill kind of way. 'The Rage,' perhaps will not appeal to the masses on a reflective note. This dirty, hill climbing track is dipped generously in molten lava with such metal grace that one can almost smell the band from here. Yet if we sit back and let the maturity of this band flow over us, we will no doubt stand at the end of 'Steeler,' and sing whole heartedly, 'God Save The Queen.' If only those hyper paced drum solos could be tinned, then we would not ever feel an empty feeling 'metal starvation' ever again. It is embarking on one of these rock journey's that I find myself aching, longingly for the music industry toady, to run incredibly hard into a brick wall. There must be a corner to turn eventually, surely we cannot go on churning out such spirit crushing, conveyer belt rubbish for all eternity? This is why I think it is important as well as inspiring to dig up such gems as Judas Priest and give them a damn good airing, whether they want us to or not. We are so spoilt in this album to be allowed to witness a hard working, beer swigging band create a piece of British rock history. The first track, 'Rapid Fire,' virtually says it all, if this isn't rock's interpretation of a dozen machine guns firing then I don't know what is. The speed of this band really is quite worrying. The pace is unimaginable, and I also don't agree that it is a good idea to visualize the band playing this track, you'll only make yourself sick. Complete with it's grinding factory like sound effects like an advert for 'Terminator,' the second track, 'Metal Gods,' is a title that you couldn't possibly argue with. It was tracks like these that put JP high up on the pedestal of British rock. The only other true fore runner of the sound they pigeon holed between punk and progressive rock, was Iron Maiden. Both bands, it was true had us hypnotised by their leads, high pitched wails, unlike rivals, AC/DC who, had yet to hand over the microphone to an equally high creaming Young. Places like Donnington would not have ever been the same without them. So, if the album title and the cover (picturing a razor blade, an example of British steel) wasn't enough to stir up any patriotic thoughts in your head, then perhaps never mind. There are not enough things in this country today that make you proud to be British. What we do have is too many things that make us ashamed rather than proud. Things were a great deal different in those days. Particularly for bands like Judas Priest. The hard rock members of this outfit, today are fast approaching their sixties. If there is one thing that this album will do and that's stir up emotion in any Union Jack hugging Brit. There is something very patriotic about this album and about the feeling of it. It's steady, forth right and dependable like a faithful pet, it will never let you down, and it will always be there in a crisis. For old rockers, new ones and even those who have never dared to taste the delights of British rock, this album should NOT be in a record collection by any means. It should be sitting on the mantle piece.

Tracks include; Rapid Fire, Metal Gods, Breaking The Law, Grinder, United, You Don't Have To Be Old To Be Wise, Living After Midnight, The Rage, Steeler.

All songs written by Halford/Tipton/Downing CBS records 1980 Bought at a record fair 2005 for three pounds. ©michelle duffy 'sam1942' 2006

About the Author

Michelle is a freelance writer and owner of the website, www.generationsounds.co.uk. She has been writing over the last year, for four major consumer websites across the world and is one of the only two music category advisors for one website in the U.K. She has written her first novel and is now awaiting publication. Her website promotes young, amateur bands and their fan clubs whilst also reviewing them for local press releases

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