

10 Years of Paranoia & Chuckles With

BLACK SABBATH

BY JUDITH SIMS

They certainly don't look ten years older; an early Black Sabbath photograph shows Osbourne with shorter hair and Iommi, Butler and Ward with considerably more; Ward has a beard now. That's about it. They're still selling out arenas across this country (and have been since August, with one month off while they sold out auditoriums in Europe) and they're not through with us yet. Their first new album in 18 months, *Never Say Die*, is finally out, after a recording process roughly analogous to a Caesarian section.

And after all these years people still think they're Satanists. Vocalist and chief lurcher Ozzy Osbourne shakes his head. "There's always one of these people in the audience doing all these weird black magic signs . . . throwing garlic on the stage . . . it's raining Bibles these days, all with little quotations underlined spelling out, like, 'Ozzy, you are going to die,' stuff like that. They must spend a lot of time on this, underlining and all. Why me? I don't do it to Frank Sinatra."

Osbourne keeps all the booty thrown on Sabbath stages, or so he claims. "I've got vaults of Bibles, I'm a hoarder. Built a room especially for my junk. I have a stuffed bear, seven feet tall, a Russian bear. I call him Eric."

Osbourne and company have long been characterized by the press as having personalities like their music—dour, somber, lethal, a four-part barbiturate inducing numbness of the skull. At times this has been true, because they are simple lads and don't often bother to put on an act for the press. Earlier on this tour Osbourne, upset and miserable one day, granted an interview, the extent of which was Ozzy saying "screw this and screw that, I wanna go home." But on a good day—and they're not all that infrequent—Ozzy is a comic, a rapid-fire, staccato machine gunner who can exaggerate any subject to a laugh. Such as Iommi's vitamin pills, lined up on his dresser like squat brown soldiers. "He used to take much more," Osbourne says, grinning wickedly. "He was like a rattle at the end of the day, shake him and he sounded like an avalanche . . . he gave me a huge niacin horse pill once, said 'take this you'll feel better,' aha . . . it was so big you had to take it in three chapters . . . I started to feel hot, I thought I was dyin' . . . my hands and arms were all red . . . Chirst, I'm explodin' . . ."

It's hard to imagine the band without the rough energy of Osbourne, but they lost him for two whole months when he quit the band last year. "My father was dying," Osbourne said. "I went through a lot of trips in my own head, I couldn't get it together while I was with the band. When you're in a band you're a part of it 24 hours a day." Later, when he faced certain career decisions, "what was the point of leaving one band and going into another with the same trips? If it ever happens again, I think I'd give it up completely. Eventually everyone has to slow down."

One happy outcome, they claim, of all the leaving and regrouping and retiring and not retiring: they no longer have a manager. "Managers! All you get is a broken heart and a tax bill." (They employ a man who does managerial tasks—without the usual percentage.)

When Osbourne left the others carried on. According to soft-spoken Iommi, "we were writing new numbers all the time; we wrote some with Ozzy, then Ozzy left, we wrote

some more numbers, Ozzy came back, we wrote some more numbers." In between, Dave Walker, who was once with Fleetwood Mac and Savoy Brown, joined the group "and we wrote new songs for him. We had so many songs, we just kept doing them." They had to edit and choose and record . . . in Toronto, for tax reasons. "Toronto was absolutely bloody freezing, we couldn't believe it."

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Still hairy after all these years: (left to right) drummer Bill Ward, vocalist Osbourne, bassist Geezer Butler & guitarist Tony Iommi.

