

Randy Rhoads
during the
Blizzard of Ozz
sessions, 1980



RANDY RHODES

HIS ORIGINAL PALETTE OF SOUNDS PUSHED
THE BOUNDARIES OF THE GUITAR SOLO AS AN ART FORM.

BY TOM MORELLO

Randy Rhoads (1956–1982) is my favorite guitarist of all time. A peerless talent, he fused timeless riffs and solos of ingenious beauty and emotional fire. In his all-too-brief career, he created a catalog that has thrilled and inspired generations of musicians and hard-rock fans. He melded compositional genius and raw intuition in a way that is unique in the annals of electric guitar playing. He was a member of Quiet Riot, a heavy-metal band he co-founded in California. Then, as the gunslinger sideman, he revived Ozzy Osbourne's career. His playing created a sonic landscape previously not in existence; he expanded the art form of rock and metal playing exponentially. His entire career was defined by inspired musical excellence. When I was a young guitarist practicing eight hours a day, a Randy Rhoads poster hung on my wall.

I vividly remember when I first heard his playing. It was in the early days of MTV. My home did not have cable, so one Saturday afternoon we had an "MTV party" at a friend's house. Me and three of my more new-wave-oriented friends were pulling into the driveway when a brand-new song came on the local Chicago radio station: "Crazy Train."

We'd missed the introduction of the song, so the first thing I heard was this incredible, kickass guitar riff. And

then I heard Ozzy Osbourne's voice and I thought, "Hold on . . . this isn't Black Sabbath! And this guitar player is INSANE!! What's going on here?"

Everyone else in the car was waiting to go inside to watch the latest Kajagoogoo video, and they're making a lot of noise. So I just yelled, "Shut UP!! I want to focus on the miracle coming through the speakers of this Toyota!" At the end of the song, the DJ said it was Ozzy Osbourne, from the *Blizzard of Ozz* record. That same day I bought the cassette, with my mind absolutely blown as I was introduced to Randy Rhoads and an entirely new world of exceptional guitar playing.

When Randy Rhoads auditioned for Ozzy Osbourne in 1979, he was hired before he even finished warming up. That feeling of immediate greatness pervades *Blizzard of Ozz*. The album, first released in the U.K. in 1980, is a hard-rock masterpiece and a tour de force for Randy, featuring one genre-defining classic after another: from the crushing power and swagger of "I Don't Know," "Suicide Solution," and "Crazy Train" to the gorgeous nuance of "Goodbye to Romance," "Revelation (Mother Earth)," and the delicate classical solo piece "Dee," dedicated to Randy's beloved mother, Delores. And then there's "Mr. Crowley," a composition that features not one, but two of



the greatest guitar solos of all time. The solos are singing, soaring masterpieces announcing that a generational talent had arrived.

It quickly became obvious that Randy was operating on an entirely different level than other guitarists. He topped the best new talent polls in every guitar magazine. On the 1981 followup album, *Diary of a Madman*, Randy's playing got even better. "Over the Mountain," "Flying High Again," and "You Can't Kill Rock and Roll" dominated rock radio while further cementing him as the hottest new guitar talent on the planet. He pioneered the technique of "triple-tracking" his guitar solos, harnessing phenomenal dexterity and poise and creating an entirely original palette of sounds that pushed the boundaries of the guitar solo as an art.

"Diary of a Madman" is the most difficult song I have ever learned to play. I had to take months and months of lessons to even come close. It's a stunning and brilliantly composed piece of music – a sonic cathedral of complicated chords, stirring melodies, and fiery runs. Randy came from a classical music background (his mother ran a music school), and that was his secret weapon as he conquered the world of rock. He took the building blocks from classical music in terms of composition and technique and forged an unprecedented alloy with powerhouse heavy metal. He was one part Paganini, one part Angus Young.

His dedication to the instrument and to constantly improving and evolving as a player was extraordinary. When on tour with Ozzy, Randy took classical guitar lessons in each city on his days off. This chart-topping virtuoso – who was featured on the cover of every guitar magazine in the world – would go into some local classical guitar shop and see what that person could teach him. Often, not surprisingly, Randy ended up teaching them something. But that dedication to the art and craft

of guitar playing is still inspiring to me. Here was someone who identified as a musician first and a rock star second. And as a fan of the often attacked or disregarded genre of heavy-metal music, I could always reply to the detractors, "We have Randy Rhoads, and *he is no fucking joke*." When I was practicing my twenty thousand hours, his was the voice in my head.

Randy Rhoads gave guitar players like me hope. Jimi Hendrix felt like he was from another planet. Eddie Van Halen too – he was otherworldly. You could admire those guys, but you were never gonna be those guys. But Randy was a guy looking for a gig, just like me and a million other guitar players. His dedication to his instrument was something anyone could aspire to. There was a path: that if I practiced as much as Randy did, I might unlock my own voice on the instrument. There was a way any of us could be GREAT.

He tragically passed away at age 25 in a twin-engine plane crash in Florida on March 19, 1982. I named my firstborn son Rhoads in his honor and as a thank-you for showing me the way. And my younger son, Roman, is one hell of a guitar player. We rock "Crazy Train" together, and we are even thinking about tackling "Diary of a Madman." He practices with the same determination I did, and I feel the same spark in him – that pride in playing and that commitment to the instrument Randy has inspired in yet another generation.

The posthumous live album *Tribute* cemented Randy's legacy as one of the greatest rock & roll guitarists in history, and he is universally acclaimed among hard-rock and metal fans as an apex talent. When it comes to musical excellence, there is no one more deserving of the highest echelon of recognition and praise. And now the incomparable Randy Rhoads stands where he belongs in the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame, enshrined in the pantheon of greats.

OPPOSITE PAGE: With singer Kevin DuBrow, fronting Quiet Riot at the Whisky-a-Go-Go, Los Angeles, 1977.
THIS PAGE: With Ozzy Osbourne, onstage at the Rosemont Horizon, Rosemont, Illinois, 1982.



Rhoads digging
into the
moment, 1980



“

HE MELED
COMPOSITIONAL
GENIUS AND
RAW INTUITION
IN A WAY THAT
IS UNIQUE IN
THE ANNALS
OF ELECTRIC
GUITAR PLAYING.

”

