

John Michael "Ozzy"
Osbourne, 2010




PERFORMER

OZZY OSBOURNE

THE CHARISMATIC ROCKER REMAINS
THE GODFATHER OF METAL AND ITS DEVILISHLY
GRINNING PRINCE OF DARKNESS.

BY PARKE PUTERBAUGH

 zzy Osbourne is the ultimate rock & roll survivor. He has persevered through addictions, accidents, illnesses, and conditions that would've felled almost anyone else. His seemingly superhuman constitution and indomitable will to carry on have kept him going well into his seventh decade. However, Osbourne is not being inducted into the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame for the second time – with Black Sabbath in 2006 and now as a solo artist – because of his survival skills. His considerable talent as a singer, songwriter, bandleader, performer, and hard-rocking standard-bearer have earned him this honor.

From hardscrabble origins in Birmingham, England, Osbourne rose above his circumstances to carve an impressive niche in the world. With Black Sabbath, he invented heavy metal, releasing the paradigm-shifting albums *Black Sabbath* and *Paranoid* in 1970. Ten years later, Osbourne reinvented the genre as a solo artist. He kicked off his triumphant second act with *Blizzard of Ozz* and *Diary of a Madman*, as trendsetting in the 1980s as Black Sabbath's earliest releases had been in the 1970s.

Joined by axe-shredding young virtuosos such as Randy Rhoads and Zakk Wylde, Ozzy injected the genre with fresh energy and a broader range of sounds and styles – everything from pop songcraft and neoclassical

filigrees to power ballads and rafter-rattlers. He was unafraid to incorporate acoustic guitars, synthesizers, and soul-baring ballads among all the iron-fisted rockers. There is plenty of metal Sturm und Drang in his work, but it's in the service of hook-filled, flesh-and-blood songs – a commitment that stems from Ozzy's Beatles-obsessed childhood.

As a solo artist, Osbourne has released twelve albums of original music, each containing enough hard-rocking anthems to keep legions of loyal fans filling arenas and banging heads for decades. By 2020, Osbourne had sold 51 million albums in actual sales and streaming equivalents. Combined with his Black Sabbath output, that number surpasses 115 million units.

While Ozzy is mainly viewed as an album artist, he also has earned gold (“Mr. Crowley”) and multiplatinum (“Crazy Train”) singles in the U.S. – remarkable feats of sustained popularity since neither cracked *Billboard*'s Hot 100 when released. He placed a half-dozen other songs in the Hot 100 and more than that in the U.K., where his duet with daughter Kelly on the Black Sabbath power ballad “Changes” went to Number One.

Osbourne's influence extends beyond music. Working with Sharon Osbourne – his manager, muse, and wife of forty-two years – Ozzy has made significant marks on reality television (*The Osbournes*), rock fes-



Black Sabbath at the start: Bill Ward, Tony Iommi, Ozzy Osbourne, and Geezer Butler (from left), London, 1970

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tival promotion (Ozzfest), and podcasting (an online reboot of *The Osbournes*).

Ozzy has become one of those ubiquitous pop-culture figures familiar by name and reputation to nearly everyone. Over time, he has become a beloved figure, accepted for his eccentricities, and respected despite his controversies. He even had an audience with Britain's Queen Elizabeth II.

More to the point, Ozzy has collaborated with other legends across the musical spectrum, from Eric Clapton and Jeff Beck to Alice Cooper and Motörhead's Lemmy Kilmister. He teamed up with Lita Ford ("Close My Eyes Forever") and rapper Post Malone ("Take What You Want") on what turned out to be his biggest hits, both reaching the Top Ten. The avuncular rocker even duetted with *Sesame Street*'s Miss Piggy on Steppenwolf's "Born to Be Wild." Osbourne has risen to the upper echelons of pop-culture celebrity. But despite the mainstreaming of his family brand, one should never lose sight of the fact that Ozzy Osbourne remains the Godfather of Metal and its devilishly grinning Prince of Darkness.

John Michael "Ozzy" Osbourne was born on December 3, 1948, in Birmingham, England. He had five siblings:

three older sisters and two younger brothers. Both parents held factory jobs, with his father working the late shift as a toolmaker and his mum taking the day shift at a car-parts plant. Recognizing his oldest son's uniqueness, his father predicted, "You're either going to do something very special or you're going to go to prison." Ozzy has done both, although his impact on music and culture far outweighs his handful of brief incarcerations.

Success didn't come easily, however. Ozzy had severe dyslexia and dropped out of school at 15. He worked a series of jobs that included plumbing, bricklaying, and a stint at the car-parts factory where his mother worked. He also labored in a slaughterhouse, characterizing it as both "a job I grew to like" and "bloody, filthy, putrid."

As a teen, hearing "She Loves You" and buying *With the Beatles* were life-changing experiences for Osbourne. "It might sound over the top to say it now," he wrote in his autobiography, *I Am Ozzy*, "but for the first time I felt as though my life had meaning." In 1968, he formed a band eventually called Earth with three other struggling scruffs from Birmingham: bassist Tony "Geezer" Butler, guitarist Tony Iommi, and drummer Bill Ward. Britain was besotted with blues-rock, and Earth



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Tony and Ozzy face off, 1978; younger days in London, 1972; two finger salute, Poplar Creek Music Theater, 1986; hot tub moment, Beverly Hills, 1982.



With guitarist Randy Rhoads, Rosemont, Illinois, 1982





**CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT:
Ozzy onstage, Long Beach,
California, 1984; Kelly, Ozzy,
Sharon, and Jack Osbourne
(from left), 2002; with wife
Sharon, New York City, 2006.**



followed suit. But a startlingly new original song carried them in a completely different direction. It bore the ominous title “Black Sabbath.”

Renaming themselves after that song, Black Sabbath became rock legends, pioneering a genre steeped in horror-filled imagery and pulverizing, riff-based music. They viewed their style as “heavy underground,” but the term *heavy metal* forever attached itself to them. With Osbourne as their charismatic frontman, Black Sabbath ruled the rock world of the 1970s. Working at a demanding pace, the original lineup recorded eight albums and toured incessantly until 1978. Mounting internal conflicts and well-documented excesses led to Osbourne’s ouster in April 1979.

Convinced his career was over, Ozzy holed up in an L.A. hotel room for a three-month drug and alcohol bender. However, it didn’t take him long to bounce back with the assistance and support of Sharon Arden, the daughter of Don Arden (Black Sabbath’s manager). The couple had met in 1970, but their relationship didn’t turn professional or romantic until after Ozzy’s exodus from Black Sabbath. Married in 1982, they have been together ever since.

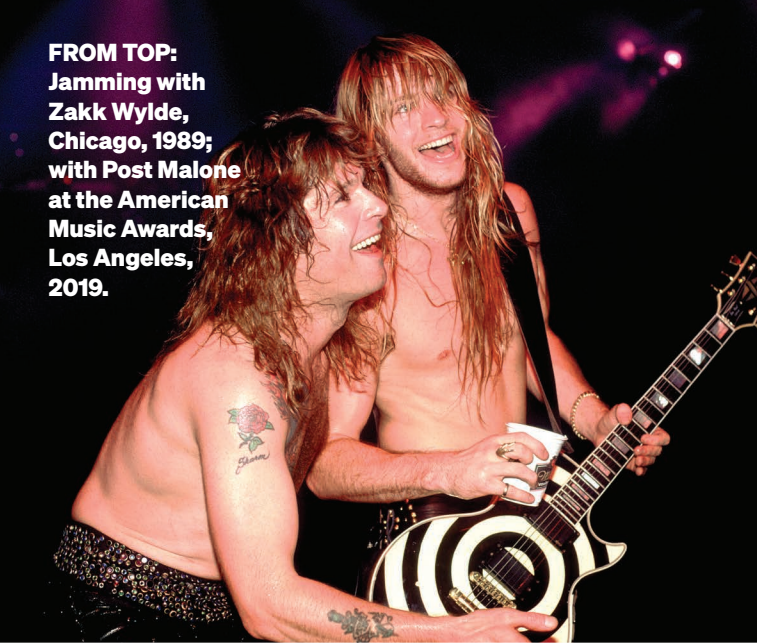
Ozzy was incentivized to reboot when introduced to guitar phenom Randy Rhoads. Eight years Osbourne’s

junior, Rhoads cofounded Quiet Riot in 1973. Osbourne instinctively knew Rhoads was his musical soulmate when he heard him warming up to audition for his band. “Randy, just stop right there,” he said. “You’re hired.”

The classically trained Rhoads brought speed, taste, and blinding technique to Ozzy’s updated take on metal. Theirs was one of rock’s greatest vocalist/guitarist tandems. Ozzy has called Rhoads “a gift from God” and claimed, “I owe my career to him.” Joined by bassist Bob Daisley and drummer Lee Kerlake, Ozzy and company cut stunning back-to-back albums, *Blizzard of Ozz* and *Diary of a Madman*. Released in September 1980 in the U.K. and six months later in the U.S., *Blizzard* overflowed with career-defining classics: “Crazy Train” (Ozzy’s signature song), “Mr. Crowley” (a satirical look at a fiendish occult figure), “Goodbye to Romance” (a farewell to Black Sabbath), “I Don’t Know” (with Ozzy declaiming, “Don’t look at me for answers”), and “Suicide Solution” (a personal reflection on alcoholism). Moreover, as was often the case in the misunderstood metal realm, the messages were nowhere as diabolical as some presumed. Take “Crazy Train,” in which Ozzy sings: “Maybe it’s not too late / To learn how to love / And forget how to hate.”

Diary of a Madman built on *Blizzard*’s foundation with

FROM TOP:
Jamming with
Zakk Wylde,
Chicago, 1989;
with Post Malone
at the American
Music Awards,
Los Angeles,
2019.



the epic title track, the tributary “You Can’t Kill Rock and Roll,” and raging rockers “Over the Mountain” and “Flying High Again.” Ozzy was back on top. *Blizzard of Ozz* spent two years on *Billboard’s* album chart and sold five million copies in the U.S. *Diary of a Madman* did nearly as well, going triple platinum. Ozzy sold out arenas around the world. Then an unimaginable tragedy struck. On March 19, 1982, midway through the lengthy *Diary of a Madman* tour, Rhoads died in a freak accident when a small plane he was riding in clipped the tour bus where Ozzy and Sharon were sleeping. Two others were killed, and the Osbournes narrowly escaped with their lives.

An inconsolable Ozzy told Sharon, “Let’s call it a day. It’s not meant to be.” She responded, “No, you are not calling it a day. This is what you were meant to do.” As he would do many times in his life, he gathered himself together and soldiered on. A shaken but stoic Osbourne told David Letterman just six days after the accident, “I’m not gonna stop ‘cause you can’t kill rock & roll.” The

tour resumed on April 1, with the remaining dates completed by replacement guitarists. In 1983, Ozzy cut a new album (*Bark at the Moon*) and undertook another world tour without missing a beat. But Rhoads was never far from his mind. In 1987, the live album *Tribute*, taken from early 1980s tours and jointly credited to Ozzy Osbourne and Randy Rhoads, reached Number Six and sold more than two million copies.

Over the years, Osbourne’s bands have served as proving grounds for other hot young guitarists, including Jake E. Lee and the long-tenured Zakk Wylde, who has been with Ozzy on and off since 1987. Lee played on *Bark at the Moon* and *The Ultimate Sin*, which successfully moved Osbourne in more of a pop-metal direction. Wylde brought a spirit of renewal with his arrival on *No Rest for the Wicked* (1988), followed by *No More Tears* (1991) and *Ozzmosis* (1995). Looking backward and forward, both albums were reflective and inspired.

Osbourne himself deserves greater recognition as

Performing during halftime
at a Los Angeles Rams game,
SoFi Stadium, Anaheim,
California, 2022



a singer. Neither a death-metal growler nor a mock-operatic screamer, Ozzy has always delivered well-pitched and articulated vocals. “I go for the melody,” he told *Goldmine* magazine. “One thing I got from the Beatles, they always had great, great melodies and great harmonies.” Osbourne also has a sure sense of rhythm and can sing on the beat or syncopate against it. Moreover, his double-tracked vocals are uncannily precise.

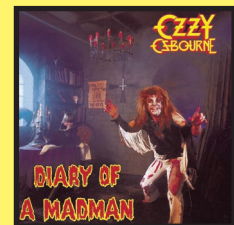
Despite all the ups and downs in his life and with his health, Osbourne has continued to evolve as an artist and human being. Who would’ve believed he would release an album as strong as *Patient Number 9* in 2022? Its highlights include a few of Jeff Beck’s final recordings and collaborations with Black Sabbath’s Tony Iommi. Ozzy himself sounds inspired and in control. The album earned two Grammy nominations (Best Rock Song, Best Rock Performance) and one win (Best Metal Performance, for “Degradation Rules”).

Reflecting back on his life and times in 2018,

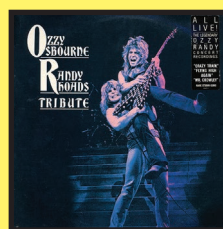
SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY



Blizzard of Ozz
1980 (Jet)



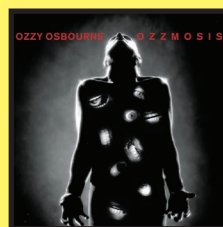
Diary of a Madman
1981 (Jet)



Tribute
1987 (Epic)



No More Tears
1991 (Epic)



Ozzmosis
1995 (Epic)



Patient Number 9
2022 (Epic)

Osbourne told *Rolling Stone*, “I wouldn’t change a thing. If I changed anything, I wouldn’t be where I am now. My life has just been unbelievable. You couldn’t write my story; you couldn’t invent me.”

A Tribe Called Quest:
Jarobi White, Q-Tip,
Phife Dawg, and Ali
Shaheed Muhammad
(from left), 1990

