



Black Sabbath's *Black Sabbath*
A Review

By Jacob Appenheimer

About Black Sabbath

Black Sabbath is a band hailing from gloomy, industrial Birmingham England. The majority of their peers would go on to work in the steel mills and factories, a prospect which the band members wished to avoid. This no doubt had an influence on the band members, and the music they made. Regarded as the first true metal band, they started a genre that would become one of the most influential forms of music to date.

Band Members - Original lineup

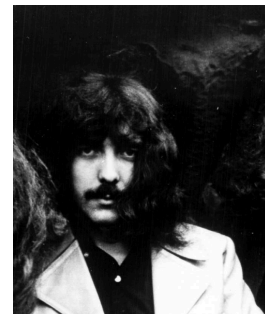


Ozzy Osbourne

John Micheal Osbourne, more commonly known by his stage name Ozzy Osbourne, was the lead singer and frontman for Black sabbath from its formation in 1968 to 1979, and from 1997 to 2017, when the band officially disbanded. During his years away from Black Sabbath, he pursued a very successful career as a solo artist. He is recognized as one of the greatest rock and metal singers and frontmen of all time.

Tony Iommi

Anthony Frank Iommi Jr, who goes by Tony Iommi, was the Guitarist and Main composer for Black Sabbath. He is the only member to have been with the band for its entire duration, from founding to disbanding. He is known for his trademark sound, which is low dark, a result of two of his fingertips being cut off while working at a factory in his teenage years.



Geezer Butler



Terence Micheal Joseph Butler, known as ‘Geezer’ Butler, was the bassist and main lyricist for Black Sabbath. He was fired from the band once, while also leaving and rejoining many times. During his youth and early adulthood, he was fascinated by the occult, which bled through onto the music he created.

Bill Ward

William Thomas Ward, was the drummer for Black Sabbath. Like Butler, He developed a problem with alcohol and drugs during the late 70’s, leading to his participation in the band becoming on and off.



Black Sabbath: The Album

Sound

The sound of this album can be likened to the auditory version of a horror movie. Dark, gloomy, and spooky. This is largely due to the fact that the guitarist Tony Iommi lost two of his fingertips on his fretboard hand. Normal guitar strings were too difficult to press down with his fake fingertips, so he down tuned his guitar. The other band members follow suit, and together create a slow, ominous sound.



Recording

The Entirety of the album was recorded in 12 hours, at Regent Sound, in London. The band had rented the studio for two days, and figured that one of those days had to be spent mixing. Tony Iommi said “We just went in the studio and did it in a day, we played our live set and that was it. We actually thought a whole day was quite a long time, then off we went the next day to play for £20 in Switzerland.” The album had very few overdubs, with just church bells, thunder, and rain being added to the title track, and double tracked guitar solos being featured on two songs, “N.I.B.” and “Sleeping village”.

Track List

Side A:

“Black Sabbath”

“The Wizard”

“Behind the Wall of Sleep”

“N.I.B.”

Side B:

“Evil Woman”

“Sleeping Village”

“Warning”

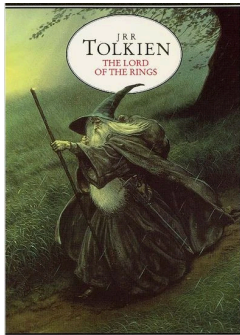


Songs

“Black Sabbath”

This is the title track of the album, and many consider it the best on the album. Starting slow, the song builds near the end. The lyrics describe a dark figure, who many believe to be Satan. The lyrics are actually based on an account of the bass player, Geezer Butler, who was fascinated with the occult. He claimed to have woken up in the middle of the night to find a black figure staring at him. It disappeared, along with one of his books on the occult. After hearing this story, Ozzy Osbourne wrote the song lyrics.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zBj4HtEWFY>



“The Wizard”

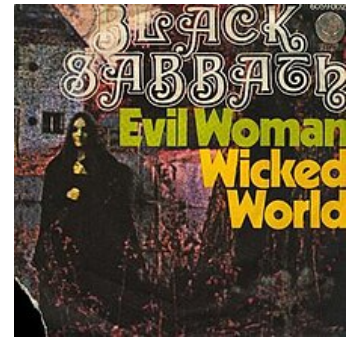
This is a unique song on the album, as it features an instrument that is not heard elsewhere on the album, the harmonica. Heavily inspired by Gandalf, from J.R.R. Tolkien's Lord of the Rings, the lyrics are about a wizard who brings hope to those around him, contrasting the dark nature that is normally, and wrongly associated with the band.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=69rU9ajj10>

“Evil Woman”

Originally written and performed by the band Crow, this song is a cover. It is about a woman who has cheated on her other half, and is pregnant because of it. It was the first single ever put out by Black Sabbath, paired with the song ‘Wicked World’.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1ytQLXg6hjU>



“N.I.B.”

N.I.B. is a perfect example of a Black Sabbath song. It has the heavy, almost crunchy riff, prominent bass, the wailing vocals of Ozzy, and a wicked guitar solo. It also is very interesting lyrically. It is written from the perspective of Lucifer, who has fallen in love with a woman. This is an interesting dynamic, as it is rare that one thinks from the perspective of the devil, and even weirder to think that the devil has fallen for an earthly being.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NsXEb-NOs88>

Legacy

Impact

Black Sabbath opened the door for many bands to follow. While there were some bands starting to pursue a heavier sound, such as Led Zeppelin, none were as drastic as Black Sabbath. While this album was not an immediate shot into the mainstream, it would form a foundation for the band to work off, which would propel them and their musical style into the minds of many young musicians around the world, who would go on to produce music of their own.

Reception

The reception of the album at the time of release was negative. The album was a commercial success, but the reviews were firmly against the new, heavy sound. Lester Bangs, from the Rolling Stone Magazine said the band were “just like Cream! But worse”. However, the perception of the album has changed with time. Rolling Stone magazine now ranks it fifth on the greatest metal albums of all time, and the title track the number one heavy metal song of all time.

Conclusion

Black Sabbath’s debut album is one of the most influential albums ever, and it still stands toe to toe with the music it inspired. Pioneers of the heavy sound, songs such as “Black Sabbath” and “The Wizard” still place them near the top. However, it was not just slow and heavy to mask poor musicianship. “N.I.B.” and “Warning” are examples of the world class musicianship in Black Sabbath. Combined with the songwriting, which is surprisingly substantial for such a young band, and you have one of the greatest debut albums of all time. I would give this album a 8.5 out of 10, with the knowledge that they improve by 1.5 or more on later albums.

