



Iron Maiden mascot Eddie and guitarist Dave Murray enjoy an intimate moment in the shower, circa 1981. Here, the man behind the mask is Maiden manager Rod Smallwood.



NEVER MIND THE BOLLOCKS

THREATENED BY PUNK, LED ZEP, SABBATH AND PURPLE
CAME UNDER FIRE IN 1977. A YEAR LATER IRON MAIDEN,
DEF LEPPARD AND SAXON LED A NEW WAVE OF BRITISH
HEAVY METAL THAT TOOK PUNK ON. AND WON...

WORDS: PAUL ELLIOTT. PHOTOGRAPHY: ROSS HALFIN

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UNDAY NIGHT. APRIL 1979. FIVE HUNDRED PEOPLE ARE CRAMMED INTO THE back room of the Prince of Wales pub in Kingsbury, north-west London. The air, hot and thick, smells of sweat, beer, cigarettes and the odd whiff of patchouli oil. The place is shaking with the sound of music which blasts at excessive volume from two giant speaker stacks at the far end of the long, narrow room. These speakers, part of a state-of-the-art, concert-spec rig, are at odds with the cheap wooden décor reminiscent of a spit-and-sawdust Mexican cantina. Between the PA towers, on a stage bedecked with flashing multi-coloured lights, stands an exceptionally hairy

moustachioed man, his blond mane bobbing excitedly, as he spins tracks by Rush, AC/DC, Black Sabbath and even a swift blast of Hocus Pocus by Dutch progsters Focus. Beneath him a packed dancefloor greets each track with a throaty roar. Two years after punk's Year Zero this should *not* be happening.

Unflatteringly described by journalist Garry Bushell as "a sawn-off Catweazle", Neal Kay, the DJ in question, is not a man affected by the trifles of fashion or what he terms "plastic people". Instead, the one-time soul aficionado is on a mission: a crusade, if you will, to repel the marauding punk unbelievers and recapture the spirit of what he views as *real* rock music – the heavier the better.

Tonight is a special occasion. Two VIP guests are present: Steve Harris and Paul Di'Anno, bassist and vocalist with Iron Maiden, the hottest young metal band in Britain. Kay is the only DJ in the UK to have received a copy of Maiden's very first demo tape, handed to him by Harris just a few weeks before. In that short space of time, he has played it so many times here at his enthusiastically named Bandwagon Heavy Metal Soundhouse that it has become a firm favourite with the regulars. Indeed, the current issue of rock weekly *Sounds* features a new Heavy Metal chart collated by Kay from Bandwagon requests and has Maiden at Number 1 with >



< Prowler, the demo's lead track – above such heavyweights as Judas Priest, Ted Nugent and even the mighty Led Zeppelin.

Flushed with this success, Steve and Paul are at the bar, pints in hand, playing it cool – especially the short-haired Di'Anno, all gezer-ish Cockney swagger. This affected nonchalance soon turns to wide-eyed astonishment when Kay plays Prowler. The song's opening staccato riff is greeted like an instant classic. The audience – mostly teenagers clad in denim and leather – are either punching the air or headbanging furiously. The floor becomes slippery with lager. And one lanky, slightly bedraggled figure is playing along to the riff on a fake guitar made out of hardboard.

Harris, an ex-architectural draftsman from Leytonstone who has just turned 24, grins at his singer and, through the volume, yells in Di'Anno's ear: "Fucking 'ell! This is a bit of all right!"

IN THE SUMMER OF '79 THE '80S BEGAN EARLY. JUST AS the Tory party led by the so-called Iron Lady, Margaret Thatcher, ousted 'old' Labour to begin a new era in British politics, so too a new British rock scene – coincidentally led by Iron Maiden – was emerging. Musically speaking, the change had been coming for some time.

As the '70s drew to a close the three iconic British bands of that decade were either defunct or on their last legs. Deep Purple's slow acrimonious break-up had yielded three successful splinter groups in Ritchie Blackmore's Rainbow, Gillan and Whitesnake. Led Zeppelin, meanwhile, were weakened by Jimmy Page's heroin addiction and John Bonham's alcoholism, the latter eventually proving fatal for both drummer and band. Black Sabbath, too, were undone by booze

diverse as Japan/Kiss-influenced Girl playing gigs alongside Purple devotees Samson and the burgeoning scene's progressive standard bearers Iron Maiden.

"It was a magical time," recalls Bruce Dickinson, the singer with Samson in '79 who would later join Maiden. "There were so many great bands, so much great music. There's never been a scene like it."

It was a scene that weekly musical bible Sounds dubbed The New Wave Of British Heavy Metal, or, to accord it its correct cumbersome acronym NWOBHM (pronounced: Ner-wob-um). A scene that, as we will see, would lead to the rebirth of rock.

Joe Elliott (Def Leppard, singer): "The New Wave Of British Heavy Metal was born out of a couple of Sounds articles. Leppard got a double-page spread when we were still unsigned. We had the energy, the youthfulness, the spandex! Uriah Heep weren't the future. Listen to the first Van Halen album – it was time for a clean sweep, a tighter version of rock. The NWOBHM was the logical next step."

Steve Harris (Iron Maiden, bassist): "When Sounds started doing all these features on the NWOBHM, it was obvious that something big was happening, and that was great for us, being right in the thick of it."

Geoff Barton (Sounds, deputy editor): "The entire music press back then was obsessed with inventing musical movements, from punk to new wave. The NWOBHM was that week's thing. In May 1979 I reviewed a show at the Music Machine in Camden, featuring Maiden, Samson and Angel Witch, and that was the first time the term 'New Wave Of British Heavy Metal' was used. It was about a certain energy and attitude."

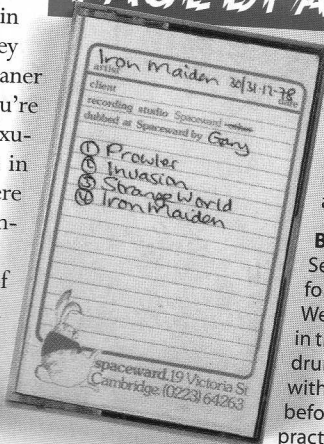
"THE SOUNDHOUSE REGULARS MADE OUR DEMO TAPE FAMOUS. THEY WERE THE HARDEST."

PAUL DI'ANNO, IRON MAIDEN

and drugs, and would sack singer Ozzy Osbourne in 1979 following a disastrous UK tour on which they were routinely blown off stage by their younger, leaner LA-based support act, Van Halen. "Lewisham! You're the rock'n'roll capital of the world!" exorted over-exuberant frontman David Lee Roth while on-stage in south London. Foolish this may have been, but there was no disputing the impact of Van Halen's showmanship and fresh musical attitude on UK audiences.

If Van Halen were hungry, so too were a number of acts ready to step into the breach as the old guard waned. AC/DC, Thin Lizzy, Rush, UFO, Scorpions, Judas Priest and Motörhead were among the second generation of rising stars. These acts, however, already possessed a certain pedigree. Some even boasted band members in their thirties, as in the case of Motörhead's Lemmy Kilmister and AC/DC's Bon Scott, both 33 by 1979. And while metal's teenage audience admired outlaw qualities of typified by Lemmy and Bon, at a time when musical tribalism ranged from Mods to skinheads to punks and on to rockabillies, they also sought a scene that was truly theirs.

The result was a nationwide grass-roots movement buoyed up by naïve enthusiasm and informed by punk's Do-It-Yourself spirit, each town boasting local heroes with their own individual sound born in garages, bedrooms and, in some cases, garden sheds. The far north, for instance, begat the devilish 'black metal' thrash of Newcastle trio Venom; Yorkshire spawned Sheffield's glam-inspired classicists Def Leppard while Barnsley five-piece Saxon fused AC/DC-styled riffs with earthier biker sensibilities; the Midlands glass-blowing town of Stourbridge was home to Diamond Head, a band later described as boasting "more great riffs in a single song than Sabbath had on their first four albums"; while the capital saw acts as



Cronos (Venom, bassist/vocalist): "I didn't like metal bands with socks down their spandex – I liked punk bands that gave you the middle finger, the Pistols and Sham 69. Venom was a Judas Priest covers band before I joined in 1979. I wanted to add some spit and snot to it."

Brian Tatler (Diamond Head, guitarist): "Hearing the Sex Pistols in 1977 was a revelation. Diamond Head formed the year before, when we were still at school. We wrote songs in my bedroom, all four of us crammed in there, with Duncan [Scott] using biscuit tins for drums – with biscuits in, because it sounded too clanky without them! We loved Zeppelin, Sabbath, Purple, but before punk I thought, Are we going to be stuck practising in my bedroom for 15 years before we can go on stage? Then I saw the Pistols with that have-a-go attitude, and it was so inspiring."

Graham Oliver (Saxon, guitarist): "In 1977, a band like Saxon was so unfashionable. We supported The Clash at the Belle Vue in Manchester. They all talked about anarchy but they arrived in limos! Their audience didn't know what to make of us but we had so much energy, we'd really stick it to them. And we could play!"

Joe Elliott: "Leppard had more of a punk influence than anybody who's heard our music might ever believe. We played Pretty Vacant in our set. We rarely had long guitar solos: we cut all the fat off the songs. We were cleverly influenced by punk."

Kim McAuliffe (Girlschool, guitarist/vocalist): "Punk gave everybody the idea that they could just get up and do it. We were playing for free in our local pubs around Tooting when we got our first record deal."

Geoff Barton: "All these homegrown indie singles were turning up that weren't by punk bands. To assimilate what was going on, I wrote a singles column in Sounds called 'WOOOARGH!'"



DIAMOND HEAD



**BANDWAGON HEAVYMETAL
SOUNDHOUSE**
Kingsbury Circle NW9
(Nearest Tube Kingsway on the Jubilee Line)
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FRIDAY 14TH SEPTEMBER
Special Guest
IRON MAIDEN
Doors open 8 pm admission 70p before 9 o/c
£1.10 after 9 o/c inc meal ticket (strictly 18+)

ARTS
THEATRE the home of

TOM STO
DIRTY
& NEW-FO

Scenes from the Soundhouse (clockwise from top right): Sounds' Geoff Barton and Judas Priest's Rob Halford share a Tuborg; Neal Kay, the man on a mission; Iron Maiden's first Sounds photo session (from left) Tony Parsons, Steve Harris, Doug Sampson, Paul Di'Anno, Dave Murray; Motörhead's Lemmy and Maiden's Dave Murray and Steve Harris judge a Soundhouse air guitar competition; Focus's Hocus Pocus goes down a storm on the dancefloor; the hardboard guitar army in full flight; Centre pic, Rob Loonhouse, the man who journeyed one step beyond the full tennis racquet.

KER-ANNG!

13 PAGES OF HEAVY METAL START HERE

THE HEAVY METAL TOP 100

- 1 SPACE STATION NO 5, Montrose, from Warner Bros
- 2 2112/TEMPLES OF SYRINX, Rush, from World's A Stage, Mercury
- 3 AIN'T TALKIN' 'BOUT LOVE, Van Halen, Warner Bros
- 4 GENOCIDE, Judas Priest, from 'Unleash East', CBS
- 5 LET THERE BE ROCK, AC/DC, from 'Let Rock', Atlantic
- 6 BURN, Deep Purple, from 'Burn', Purple
- 7 FREEBIRD, Lynrd Skynrd, from 'Pronounced Lemmy', Epic
- 8 QUEEN OF SPADES, Styx, from 'Piece A&M
- 9 OVERKILL, Motorhead, from 'Overkill', Polydor
- 10 ROCK CITY, Riot, from 'Rock City', Arion
- 11 STARGAZER, Rainbow, from 'Rainbow', Polydor
- 12 IRON MAIDEN, Iron Maiden, Demo Tapes
- 13 LIGHTS OUT, UFO, from 'Lights Out', Epic
- 14 ANTHEM, Rush, from 'Archives', Mercury
- 15 CAPTURED CITY, Praying Mantis, Demo Tapes
- 16 TAROT WOMAN, Rainbow, from 'Rainbow', Polydor
- 17 BOOGIE NO MORE, Molly Hatchet, from 'Disaster', Epic
- 18 MOTOR CITY MADHOUSE, Ted Nugent, Epic
- 19 SABBATH BLOODY SABBATH, Black Sabbath, Phonogram
- 20 ANOTHER PIECE OF MEAT, Scorpions, Harvest
- 21 DOCTOR DOCTOR, UFO, from 'Strange Night', Arion

Sounds, the weekly magazine that launched a thousand riffs, with the KER-ANNG! 13-page gross-out, plus the Top 21 run-down of their Heavy Metal Top 100 from December 1, 1979. And (below) Maiden and Leppard's self-financed EPs, plus an early Def squad Vertigo label promo shoot, with Joe Elliott (centre).

Cronos: "If a job's worth doing, you do it yourself. I was working as an engineer for Neat Records in Newcastle, so I got studio time for free. Venom recorded a demo, sent it to Geoff Barton, and he went nuts! It felt like anything was possible. We were just kids, and you feel immortal, it's the arrogance of youth."

Geoff Barton: "It was an exciting time, but to have this thing explode out of all proportion, I never thought that would happen."

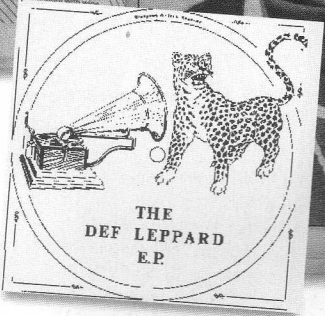
SOUNDS' PARTRONAGE OF the NWOBHM scene peaked on December 1, 1979, when the paper ran a cover featuring Samson's masked drummer Thunderstick (né Barry Purkiss) and spotlighted 'The New Face Of Heavy Metal'. Inside readers were presented with a "13-page gross-out" entitled KER-ANNG! – the headline spelt out in suitably shattered type-face to mirror both the sheer volume of the content but also the larger-than-life aspects of the music. Added to

Barton's list of NWOBHM protagonists – Maiden, Saxon, Leppard and Diamond Head – were Buckinghamshire-based Sledgehammer ("meaty, magnificent!"), Mansfield's hellraisers Witchfynde ("satanic, hard hitting!"), the titanicly named Whitley Bay troupe Tygers Of Pan Tang ("knocking 'em dead in North East working men's clubs!"), and, from London, both Praying Mantis ("purveyors of American-styled metal!") and Angel Witch (advocates of "early Sabs demons'n' wizards heaviness!"). Barton insisted that this was the tip of the iceberg, listing Wakefield-based Vardis (featuring bare-footed guitar-playing frontman Steve Zodiac, a clear Fireball XL5 fan) with Mythra, Hellenbach, Ethel The Frog as names to watch.

Also included in the supplement – alongside a piece on Home Soundproofing For Beginners (handy hint: "Old curtains, rugs or

bedspreads draped across walls will help absorb sound") – was a run down of the Heavy Metal Top 100 tracks, once again compiled by Neal Kay from a fans' poll conducted at the Bandwagon Heavy Metal Soundhouse. American hard rockers Montrose occupied the top slot with Space Station No 5, with Rush, Van Halen, Judas Priest, AC/DC, Deep Purple and Motörhead nestling in the Top 10. Iron Maiden's self-titled track was listed at Number 12, just as the band prepared to follow Leppard's lead by releasing the demo as a three-track EP on their own Rock Hard label.

The three-track demo had been recorded at Spaceward studios in Cambridge on New Year's Eve 1978, ensuring a knock-down price of £200 for the session. Like Leppard, Maiden did a roaring trade. Five thousand copies of the EP, now titled The Soundhouse



IF BARTON, AN AVID READER OF Marvel and DC comics, set the movement's hyperbolic tone, Def Leppard led the way in terms of ambition. In January 1979 they released their debut single, originally titled The Def Leppard EP but later known by its lead track, Getcha Rocks Off, and forwarded a copy to Geoff Barton with a handwritten note. The EP, a DIY job, was issued on the band's own label, Bludgeon Riffola. The phrase had been used in a scathing Record Mirror review of a September 1978 Leppard gig at Sheffield club The Limit, supporting The Human League. The EP's initial run of 1,000 copies (sleeves glued by Joe Elliott's mum!) soon sold out; a second pressing of 15,000 followed. Major record companies took note, as did other up-and-coming metal bands.

Joe Elliott: "We'd only done six gigs when we made that first EP. I borrowed £150 off my dad, which he barely had. The studio bill came to £148.50, so we all bought a celebratory bag of chips on our way home. John Peel was the first to play the EP on the radio. He was DJing in Sheffield one night and I jumped on stage and said, 'Play this! He phoned me the next day to say he'd be playing it that night.'"

Geoff Barton: "There were no middle men. It was just you and the bands talking. No PR was selling you an act. The bands were sending in their singles and badgering you on the phone. Joe Elliott was very persistent. He got us up to Sheffield to see Leppard at Crookes Working Men's Club. It was all flat caps and whippets and old dears with bingo cards, a strange ambience, but the band's trousers were tolerated."

"JOHN PEEL WAS THE FIRST TO PLAY OUR E.P. ON THE RADIO. HE PHONED TO TELL ME HE'D PLAY IT."

Tapes and available principally by mail order for £1.20, sold so fast that retailers placed orders for a further 20,000. Maiden declined.

Paul Di'Anno: "The regulars at the Soundhouse had made that tape famous. It was something that was strictly for the mob you got down at place like the Bandwagon, the real hardcore, the hardest of the hard."

Steve Harris: "When we played there, we packed the place out, and the atmosphere was amazing. Everything snowballed from there. Neal Kay's help was very important. When he put us in his Sounds chart, it was unheard of for an unsigned band to be mentioned in the same breath as bands like Rush. Like, who the hell are these young upstarts? We were hugely indebted to Neal and the Soundhouse crowd."

Neal Kay: "We also started to get some big stars coming down to make personal appearances at the Soundhouse. Ted Nugent came and he even signed a bloke's arse! Sammy Hagar came after that, then Rainbow, Whitesnake, Motörhead. They didn't come to play, they came to meet the fans, which included an élite squadron of Soundhouse maniacs led by Rob Yeatman, known to all as 'Loonhouse.'"

Gerry Kelly (Soundhouse regular): "Characters like Loonhouse made up what was a unique atmosphere in a truly unique place. Neal Kay was our metal guru – we used to hang on his every word! Of course we loved the music, but we also recognised its absurdity. The Soundhouse was escapism from the outside world. While the rest of the country's youth were complaining about the government, we were getting on our mates' shoulders and headbanging to AC/DC!"

Neal Kay: "Loonhouse was a photographer by trade but he'll always be remembered as the man who invented the hardboard guitar – not cardboard, he got real mad if you called it that. It was a Flying V, and it had a whammy bar on it! I said to him, 'There's no strings on it, and he said, 'Don't need 'em!' Soon, every fucker had hardboard guitars. There was a whole army of them. And they formed bands! Willy Flasher & The Raincoats was Loonhouse's outfit – they were fucking good. They even had a hardboard drummer. We had a competition between these bands and I organised an all-star judge's panel, with members of Motörhead, Priest and Maiden."

Steve Harris: "It was great fun, very tongue-in-cheek, though a few of them took it seriously. Rob Loonhouse was unbelievable!"

Neal Kay: "Loonhouse ended up in the video for Judas Priest's Breaking The Law – and his 'band' supported Maiden at the Rainbow in Finsbury Park. When they did their opening number, Rainbow's Kill The King, many people actually believed they were playing it for real! It was total madness."

IF THE PASSION OF THE FANS lay at the heart of what Bruce Dickinson describes as "a benevolent scene", strong friendships also existed among many of the bands. Girl's guitarist Phil Collen and Paul Di'Anno were old schoolmates from

JOE ELLIOTT, DEF LEPPARD

Walthamstow. Phil's mum let Joe Elliott sleep in their spare room whenever he was in London. But amid the bonhomie, there were rivalries too. Some were provincial, some musical. Others developed when young bands posed a threat to established acts, as when Maiden supported Judas Priest in 1980. Paul Di'Anno's boast to Sounds that Maiden would "blow the bollocks off Priest" ensured that tensions were high when the tour kicked off on March 7 at Cardiff University.

Steve Harris: "Priest made it difficult for us. Their sound man started mucking us around. But that just made us more determined to deliver."

Rob Halford (Judas Priest, singer): "The NWOBHM was a combination of inspiration and competition. It was big moment in metal music. Inspiration is a vital part of what keeps music alive. Maiden quickly developed their own sound, but it was obvious they enjoyed what Priest had been doing."

Biff Byford (Saxon, singer): "There was a camaraderie between the bands, but with singers there's always a bit of competition. I used to be big mates with Joe Elliott, but, well, he went off me."

Joe Elliott: "There was something so... Northern about Saxon. Maybe it was the moustaches."

Phil Collen: "The NWOBHM was very much a working class, beer-drinking culture, whereas Girl were part of a very different scene. There were models and movie people around. That was down to the bravado of Phil [Lewis, Girl singer]. The way he talked us up you'd have thought we were the Stones! In 1979, Phil was seeing Britt Ekland. We were the ponces of the scene! It was all very debauched. We had a lot of druggy people around us."

Biff Byford: "We liked a drink but we never got into drugs, thank God. The press always went on about us being big tea drinkers, but that was only because I liked a cup of warm tea to open my throat before a gig. Tea drinkers and hell raisers, that were us!"

Bruce Dickinson: "I was the drinker in Samson. Paul [Samson, guitarist] was a big stoner – he once got busted in Grimsby for rolling a joint outside the nick while wearing a bowler hat! Thunderstick liked downers and the bassist liked speed. It's no wonder we sounded a bit... eccentric! I didn't have a home to go to for most of those years. I slept at a squat on the Isle Of Dogs. Everybody looked after everybody else."

Kim McAuliffe: "All the bands seemed to be in the same boat. We were starving and penniless but we were having a great time. When we toured with Motörhead in '79 we had £1 a day per diems. You could

buy something to eat or a pint. But every night, Lemmy would come to the rescue with a crate of lager. Maybe he was trying to get us drunk!"

Revealed! How the NWOBHM inspired rock's greatest movie.

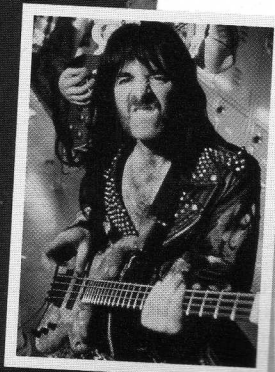
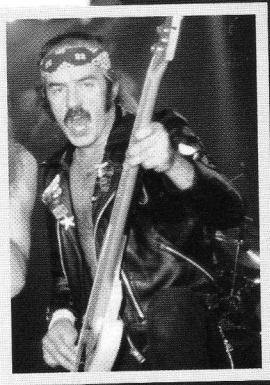
STEVE 'DOBBY' Dawson (left) is a cult figure among heavy metal fans. Not only was he bassist for Saxon in their glory years, he was also one of the key inspirations for Spinal Tap. Actor Harry Shearer, who played moustachioed Tap bassist Derek Smalls (below), travelled with Saxon on a UK tour in 1981 and found in Dobby the perfect role model.

"Harry asked if he could come on the road with us because he was researching a film," Dobby says. "We had no idea what it would be like, but he was a nice bloke. He kept asking us about all the funny stuff that had happened to us over the years."

"When I finally saw the film I couldn't believe he'd modelled himself on me: the moustache, the one-finger bass style, the pointing at the audience... it was all me."

"It's something I'm very proud of now. Yes, they were taking the piss, but it was all in good fun, wasn't it?"

Many other bands are parodied in Tap, notably Black Sabbath, whose 1983 Stonehenge stage set was too big to fit into many venues, hence Tap's miniature version that was in danger of being "crushed by a dwarf". But Saxon's outstanding contribution to rock's greatest movie does not end with Dobby. All through that 1981 tour, they supplied Shearer with on-the-road anecdotes: one of which inspired the scene where Tap's Nigel Tufnel plays a guitar solo on his back, only to find himself unable to stand up again without the aid of a roadie. This happened to Saxon's lead guitarist Graham Oliver at London's Hammersmith Odeon in 1979.





Monsters Of Rock!
A spandex wrapped Saxon take to the stage, Donington Park, August 16, 1980.

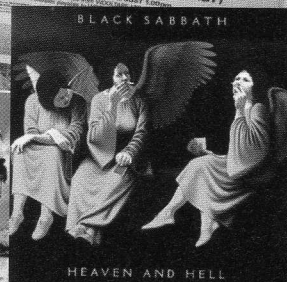
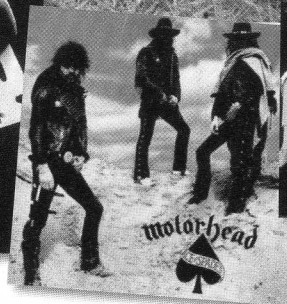
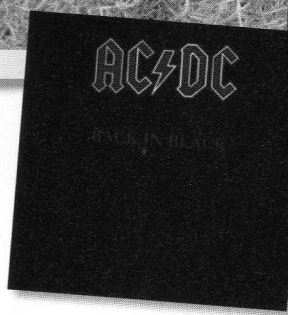
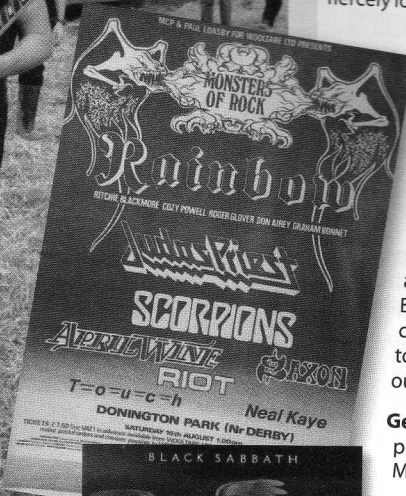
Because Rick [Allen, drummer] was only 15, his parents had to sign on his behalf – we did it at their house!”

Brian Tatler: “We met Peter Mensch but Sean’s mum was managing us and, of course, he was fiercely loyal to her. Maiden and Leppard had been signed, but we had no record company interest.”

Biff Byford: “The Saxon team wasn’t as powerful as Maiden’s or Leppard’s. Peter Mensch and Rod Smallwood were like another member of the band. We didn’t have that.”

Bruce Dickinson: “Samson had absolutely dreadful management. Because I’d been social secretary at college, I ended up booking a 22-date tour when I joined the band because our agent had sacked himself!”

Geoff Barton: “Unless you had a powerful manager like Smallwood or Mensch, that quantum leap to a major



FOR THE NWOBHM’S RISING STARS, INDIE SINGLES provided a start, but a major label deal was the big prize. However, getting the right deal, with the right company, required legitimate business savvy. In that sense, Def Leppard and Iron Maiden were again ahead of the game. Leppard were managed by Americans Peter Mensch and Cliff Burnstein, whose clients included AC/DC and who later founded Q-Prime (home today to Metallica, the Chili Peppers, Gillian Welch and Muse among others); Maiden were represented by Rod Smallwood, a loud, astute Cambridge-educated Yorkshireman who’d previously booked the MC5 to headline the May Ball, managed Steve Harley and worked as a booking agent (later he too would establish a multi-layered musical empire, Sanctuary). Diamond Head, meanwhile, were managed by their singer Sean Harris’s mum, a former factory secretary.

Rod Smallwood (Iron Maiden, manager): “I was thinking about studying law when a mate at my rugby club gave me a copy of The Soundhouse Tapes. It had incredible energy. So I went to see Maiden at the Swan in Hammersmith, and as soon as I arrived Steve told me Paul had been arrested – he’d been showing off with a knife. I got straight into the manager’s role, trying to get Paul out of custody, but they kept him in the cells for the night and Steve ended up singing the songs. There was something about them that night; an intensity, the way they looked the crowd in the eyes. I knew this was the band I wanted to work with.”

Neal Kay: “I heard a knock on my door one night around 11.30. Two Americans introduced themselves: Peter Mensch and Cliff Burnstein. They’d come looking for bands to sign. I said they were too late for Maiden, but I played them a Praying Mantis tape. They loved it, so I arranged a meeting with the Troy brothers, Tino and Chris; it was their band. Mensch and Burnstein wanted them to get a frontman and a keyboard player, but Tino and Chris said no way. This was before they’d signed Leppard. Mensch asked me to talk them round, and I begged them, but they turned them down. Tino has kicked himself ever since.”

Joe Elliott: “Burnstein had connections at Mercury Records, which is how we got the deal with their sister company in the UK, Vertigo. We signed it the day after seeing Led Zeppelin’s first Knebworth show [August 4, 1979].

label was doomed to failure, because nobody else understood how the industry worked.”

Rod Smallwood: “Maiden signed with EMI in December 1979. I got a three-album deal, worldwide. It was a long-term strategy, and in return we got a very small advance: £50 grand, plus recording budget. We took £35k for the first album, £15k for the second and nothing for the third. I put the band on £60 a week for the first three years.”

Steve Harris: “Having that three-album deal, guaranteed, was very important, even psychologically. We knew we had the commitment from the label. It gave us a lot of belief.”

1980. ARGUABLY THE GREATEST EVER YEAR IN METAL. Among the classic, watershed albums released were AC/DC’s *Back In Black* (40 million sales to date), Motörhead’s *Ace Of Spades*, Judas Priest’s *British Steel*, Ozzy Osbourne’s first post-Sabbath album, *Blizzard Of Ozz*, and the Sabs’ creative rebirth, *Heaven And Hell*, featuring new singer Ronnie James Dio. In this exalted company, the NWOBHM’s leading pack held their own, fuelling the fans’ enthusiasm with a huge onslaught of releases as labels rushed to cash in on the scene’s popularity.

Def Leppard and Iron Maiden released their debuts, the latter also playing their first EMI single, *Running Free*, live on *Top Of The Pops* – the first band to do so since The Who in 1972. While Leppard’s *On Through The Night* set hit Number 15 in the UK, Iron Maiden’s self-titled debut reached Number 4.

Other major debuts included the Tygers Of Pan Tang’s *Wild Cat* on MCA (the first in a long line of acts signed by major labels from the prolific Wallsend indie label Neat Records whose roster would also include Venom, Raven, and Fish, to name but a few) as well as Girl, Angel Witch, Girlschool and Vardis, while Diamond Head continued on the indie route with their first album, *Lightning To The Nations* (aka *The White Album*), issued in a plain, signed cardboard sleeve and sold for £3.50 via mail order.

Saxon, meanwhile, released their second and third sets, *Wheels Of Steel* and *Strong Arm Of The Law*, within six months of each other. They were also the scene's leading representatives on the bill at the inaugural Monsters Of Rock festival, hosted at Castle Donington on August 16, alongside Priest, Scorpions, Riot, April Wine, headliners Rainbow and opening act Touch (whose bassist Doug Howard allegedly swallowed a bee at the end of the US pomp rockers' set!). The festival itself – recorded and released as an unsatisfying cash-in live set, minus a Priest track – was a further confirmation of the NWOBHM's impact and effect.

Biff Byford: "1980 was a great year for us. *Wheels Of Steel* sold 250,000 [in the UK] and *Strong Arm Of The Law* did the same. And when we played at Donington, we got this feeling off the audience, like they were saying, 'These are our boys!' It must have been good 'cos I wrote a song about it, And The Bands Played On! [released as a single in May, 1981]"

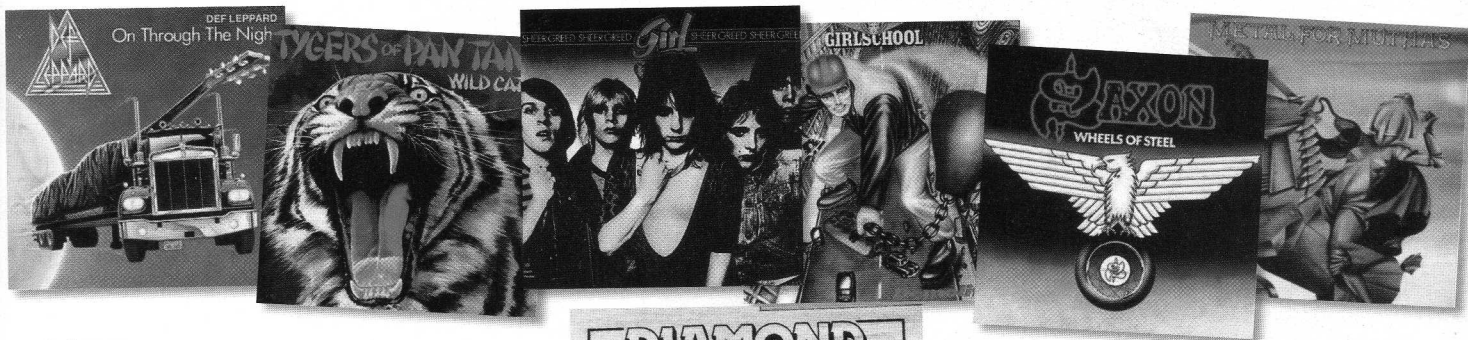
Glenn Tipton (Judas Priest, guitarist): "Donington was a very special day for us and for the metal fans. It was funny, though – we had tons of really powerful fireworks but Rainbow wouldn't let us use them, so we each took some of the fireworks home. I let mine off on Bonfire Night and blew some of my relatives off a garden bench! It was a very heavy metal bonfire!"

Biff Byford: "We toured with Priest in Europe. They had *British Steel* and we had *Wheels Of Steel* – how much more metal could you get?"

Geoff Barton: "As an album that was supposed to be representative of that time, it didn't do the business. When you're on a bit of a crusade, anything that queers that pitch, you've got to criticise. Sometimes you take things ridiculously personally. With Leppard, it was because I loved that band so much, and Hello America seemed to encapsulate that whole too-much-too-soon vibe. After the independent ethic surrounding the NWOBHM, that corporate nonsense just didn't seem right. And at Reading they had a really bad performance after Slade had torn the place apart."

Noddy Holder (Slade, singer): "We'd wound Slade down by '80. But when Ozzy pulled out of Reading with two days to go, the organisers asked us to step in. Def Leppard were supposed to be on before us but they insisted on being moved to above us, and our new slot was perfect. The crowd went crazy. We even got them singing Merry Xmas Everybody in the middle of summer!"

Joe Elliott: "We did have a hard time following Slade, who'd played six Number 1s – anybody would have found that a bit difficult! But, contrary to popular opinion, we didn't get canned off, and the damage was at worst temporary. It's an urban myth that we buggered off for the Yankee dollar. We'd already toured the UK in halls and were waiting for Mutt [producer Robert John 'Mutt' Lange] to finish the Foreigner 4 album before starting on ours. We were so broke I even went to work on a building site where my ex-girlfriend's dad was the foreman. I was so pissed off, I snapped a copy of Foreigner's Double Vision in half! Touring the States was the next logical step for us. Zeppelin did it. And Maiden were doing it too, but the perception was that we'd sold out."



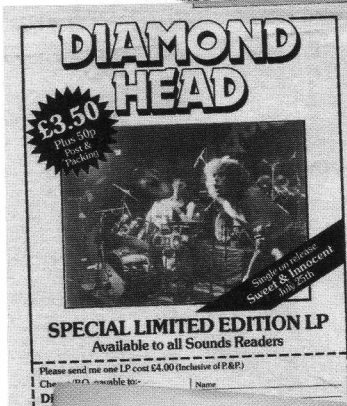
Rob Halford: "It was thrilling to see Maiden, Saxon and Def Leppard coming up, flying the flag for metal. Priest wasn't part of the NWOBHM – we were established in our own right. But the new bands reinforced our movement against punk and new wave. It was a united metal front!"

Steve Harris: "We knew we'd made a strong album with that first album, but when it went into the charts at Number 4, we were amazed. We were confident that it would chart because we'd built up a hardcore following, but we never thought it would go in that high. It was like we'd fulfilled our dreams right away. We had a few beers that night, as you would..."

FOR SOME OF NWOBHM'S KEY FIGURES, however, 1980 was a mixed year. On March 1 a readers' poll in Sounds declared Def Leppard the best new band of the year, but the accompanying cover story posed the question: HAS THE LEPPARD CHANGED ITS SPOTS? The charge levelled by their champion, Geoff Barton, was that Leppard had sold out by releasing a pop-oriented single called, heretically, Hello America. The mud stuck: when Leppard appeared at the Reading Festival, two weeks after Donington, they bombed.

So too did Neal Kay's 'NWOBHM flagship' album *Metal For Muthas*. Released on EMI on February 15, 1980, and featuring tracks by key NWOBHM heroes like Maiden, Praying Mantis and Samson alongside no-hopers like E.F. Band (who were, anomalously, Swedish), the album was described in Barton's Sounds review as "a bummer of the first order".

Neal Kay: "Barton's review was a real kick in the teeth, because I honestly felt that I was doing something important."



WHILE LEPPARD WOULD recover from this set back, Neal Kay found himself fired by the club he'd created when another promoter offered to run the Bandwagon for half the price. Kay left the venue on October 17, 1980, moving the Heavy Metal Soundhouse to the Music Machine in Camden and taking his crowd with him. The end of what Kay affectionately terms "The Bandwagon Years" was emblematic of fast-changing times, and in 1981, the NWOBHM enjoyed its last hurrah.

As Iron Maiden and Def Leppard continued their well-managed, inexorable rise, the idiot savants of Venom emerged in 1981 with their cro-magnon debut, *Welcome To Hell*, ushering in a more extreme element to the scene. Meanwhile, a carbuncular former tennis prodigy from Denmark-via-California found inspiration in the unlikely setting of Woolwich, south London, for what would become the greatest metal band of the modern era.

Lars Ulrich (Metallica, drummer): "When I heard Diamond Head they blew my head off! *Lightning To The Nations* is one of the classic pieces of vinyl of all time. I just had to see them live, so I saved money for a trip to the UK."

◀ **Brian Tatler:** "Lars came to see us at the Woolwich Odeon in the summer of '81. He just introduced himself, saying he'd come from California. We were impressed! It was a big effort, and he was only 17. He stayed at our flats for a month. One day he went out and bought 50 records! He never mentioned he was going to start a band or that he played drums. A year later I got a letter from him saying he'd formed a band called Metallica."

Lars Ulrich: "Metallica's whole vibe came from Diamond Head. Fast heavy metal, unorthodox arrangements, and that aura of arrogance: for us it was so inspiring."

Cronos: "Metallica were exactly like Venom at the start. We were the heaviest band around, no question. The Venom sound was like World War III. Nasty, evil shit! We didn't care about tuning instruments. We went for the feel."

Geoff Barton: "When Venom released *Welcome To Hell* in 1981, that was the first NWOBHM record that was completely original, creating one if not two brand new musical genres – black metal and thrash metal. It had, as I recall, the hi-fi dynamics of a 50-year-old pizza! And at the other end of the spectrum you had Def Leppard. Their aspirations were plain: to become this monster band. And when they put out their second album, *High 'N' Dry*, you couldn't knock it 'cos it was a brilliant album."

Joe Elliott: "We wanted to be the biggest band in the world. Our blueprint was to be AC/DC with Queen harmonies. And *High 'N' Dry* was the album we'd always wanted to make."

Neal Kay: "Leppard and Maiden were way ahead of the rest by 1981. But Paul Di'Anno was always a short bet because he just didn't have the voice."

Steve Harris: "We had to make a decision. We all liked Paul as a person, but singers are supposed to look after themselves, and Paul didn't. He liked the lifestyle – we'll leave it at that. We just felt that he wasn't up for the long haul and if we didn't make the change, we thought he might take us under with him."

Bruce Dickinson: "I was at Reading with Samson when Rod [Smallwood] and Steve came to see me. We went to Steve's hotel room and they offered me an audition. I said, You know if I audition I'll get the job – I want it and I'm exactly what the band needs."

Biff Byford: "When Bruce joined Maiden you sensed that the band was complete."

Steve Harris: "Changing singers was a big deal. We knew how good Bruce was, but to be honest, we were really worried about it. But in the end it was the right choice. We made a really strong album and it went from there."

NUMBER OF THE BEAST WAS THE ALBUM IN QUESTION, an international hit that topped the UK charts in March 1982, thereby signalling the end of what had been, to all intent and purposes, an underground scene. In the UK a slew of garage metal aspirants attempted to keep the NWOBHM flag flying – the likes of Jaguar, Savage, Blitzkrieg and the Van Halen-inspired Hellenbach all being worthy of mentions in despatches – but none managed to keep up with Maiden or Leppard. And then came the American metal invasion. "When we played at the Whisky in LA in 1982, we had Metallica supporting us and Mötley Crüe came to see us," reflects Saxon's Biff Byford. "They were telling us how much they loved British metal. But the American bands re-packaged it better and a lot of the British bands just got wiped out."

For Bruce Dickinson, the contrast between success and failure

among NWOBHM bands is particularly acute. After he joined Iron Maiden, Samson floundered without him. In the early '90s Bruce heard that drummer Thunderstick was working as a gardener in Eltham, south London. And in 2002, his old friend Paul Samson died from cancer. "I hadn't known Paul was so ill," Bruce says. "I was just glad that we spoke a couple of times before he passed away."

And yet for Bruce himself, the NWOBHM was the key to phenomenal success. Iron Maiden have now sold over 70 million albums, influencing three generations of bands (from Slayer to The Mars Volta to Trivium), and underlining their enduring appeal with a sold-out world tour in support of their current album, *A Matter Of Life And Death*. Likewise, Def Leppard achieved their goal of world domination via the success of 1983's *Pyromania* (estimated sales to date: nine million), its 1987 successor *Hysteria* (18 million) and 1992's *Adrenalize* (a UK and US

Number 1 with sales of over seven million). Leppard's achievements are more remarkable because they have also survived the near-fatal car crash of drummer Rick Allen in December '84 (which saw him lose an arm and retrain himself to play a modified electronic kit) and the tragic drink-related death of guitarist Steve Clark in January '91.

Metallica, the scene's most famous devotees whose initial live sets were packed with NWOBHM covers, have enjoyed unparalleled success in the last 20 years while constantly acknowledging their influences. In 1988 drummer Lars Ulrich and Geoff Barton began compiling a double album designed to celebrate the NWOBHM's 10th anniversary. The project, entitled *NWOBHM: '79 Revisited*, was fraught with licensing issues due to the obscure nature of some of the tracks, duly missing the anniversary and emerging in 1990 only to sell appallingly. Meanwhile, Metallica also included covers of tracks by Diamond Head and Holocaust on their 1987 \$5.98 EP: *Garage Days Revisited* which was expanded in 1998, retitled *Garage Inc.*, and saw covers of tracks by Sweet Savage and Blitzkrieg added, among others. This set alone has sold in excess of five million copies, providing the likes of Brian Tatler suitable payback.

The influence of the NWOBHM, however, runs deeper than these individual success stories. The chain reaction it triggered not only revitalised metal, it has left an indelible print on the wider music industry. The pioneering spirit of Neat Records is mirrored in several indie metal labels that include the likes of Roadrunner and Relapse. Elsewhere, NWOBHM-inspired acts such as Mötley Crüe helped to usher in the MTV-led video age, and the Monsters Of Rock festival regenerated the outdoor circuit as a whole, culminating in its current Download incarnation at Donington and the 'rock' day at Reading and Leeds. Barton's *Kerrang!*, meanwhile, was launched as a magazine in its own right in 1981 and now stands as the world's biggest-selling rock weekly with its own radio and TV stations.

And while the NWOBHM has never attained the aura of cool afforded punk or even Britpop, its revolutionary impact can still be felt today. A revolution has to start somewhere. In this case, it was in the back room of a pub. Twenty eight years on, Neal Kay still has the original Iron Maiden demo tape that a young Steve Harris gave to him back at the Bandwagon in '79: the Holy Grail of the NWOBHM. And when he plays it for MOJO, his eyes sparkle.

"You have to let go," he sighs. "Where Maiden were going I couldn't follow. But what started back in the Bandwagon... it's just incredible."



An early, rural Venom promo shot (top); their debut album; Iron Maiden's first shoot with new singer Bruce Dickinson (centre); NWOBHM fan Lars Ulrich.

