

BRITISH STEEL

John Tucker Remembers The New Wave Of British Heavy Metal 30 Years On...

It was a Tuesday night in May 1979 when Sounds journalist Geoff Barton famously saw a three-band bill featuring Samson, Iron Maiden and Angel Witch at Camden's Music Machine. Titled 'If You Want Blood', his review was given the strapline 'The New Wave Of British Heavy Metal' by editor Alan Lewis and so was born the legend of the NWOBHM. Thirty years later and 500 yards up the road at the Camden Underworld, in April 2009 the fourth annual British Steel festival celebrated the NWOBHM with four original bands from the early Eighties – Cloven Hoof, Pagan Altar, Elixir and Bitches Sin (together with Ireland's Celtic Legacy) – showing what it meant to be a metal band during the heady days of the NWOBHM. The festival is organised by Elixir guitarist Phil Denton and was started up in one of those 'well, no-one else seems to be doing it so I will' brainstorming that we all have from time to time; the audience is respectable and enthusiastic, and a lot of CDs and t-shirts are sold. One of the most noticeable things though is how many of the crowd aren't actually from the UK; in fact, on the night English is almost a minority language. So, thirty years on, what is the attraction of the NWOBHM? At worst derided, at best largely forgotten

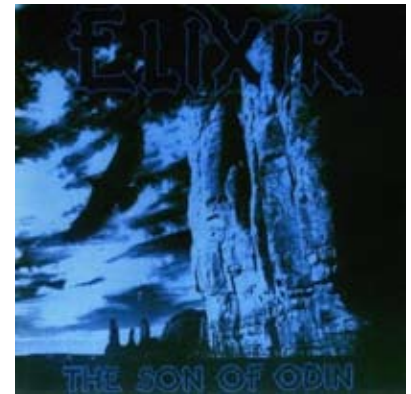
in the UK by music magazines and music fans alike, the NWOBHM is almost a Holy Grail for metal fans from America, Japan and the Continent where festivals like Keep It True



and Headbangers Open Air celebrate some of the best bands from the genre; even the mighty Wacken festival has hosted reformations by the likes of Tygers Of Pan Tang and Satan. Everyone's heard of Iron Maiden, Def Leppard and Saxon, the giants of the NWOBHM scene, and many are familiar with the bands that almost made it but just failed to stay the course like Diamond Head and Samson, for example. But the sort of bands that are invited to play the British Steel festival are those that back in the early Eighties gigged enthusiastically to appreciative crowds but never secured their future. 'Cult' these bands may be viewed as now, but in musical circles 'cult' is just another word for 'broke'.

Pagan Altar probably defined the word 'cult'. "This certainly wasn't intentional," says vocalist Terry Jones, "just the way the circumstances evolved. I would love to say that it was something I had engineered and cultivated but it wouldn't be the truth. The music was still circulating when my brother Al and I decided enough was enough and called it a day so the scenario unfolded where

you had people trying to find out about a band that had ceased to exist and had seemingly disappeared without trace. People learning that Pagan Altar even existed in the first place was a slow process, not brought about by mass advertising and hype but by word of mouth. The only problem was that by the time



enough people knew of us we had thrown in the towel and were totally unaware of the interest that was accumulating." It didn't help that, one demo cassette aside, the band didn't actually release anything in their lifespan.

"It was a somewhat hand-to-mouth existence and I wouldn't try to pretend otherwise," he continues, "but it was enjoyable in the most part and something Al and I put our heart and soul into. We managed to keep it going with very little outside assistance and we are proud of that, although we could not have believed in our wildest dreams that our efforts back then would actually resurface and reap some reward twenty-odd years later, and that we would be recording and playing to new audiences now!"

According to Jones, "By about '84, '85 we just felt that we had taken it as far

as we could with what we had and that to progress any further would require a considerable injection of finance and some professional management. You can only go on for so long banging your head against the wall and taking negativity and it just seemed pointless to continue. We weren't a pub band so that avenue was closed to us with regard to playing gigs. There was the odd large pub-cum-venue around but they were few and far between and we had been there, done that and got the t-shirt. Also Israeli John – our drummer John Mizrahi – had left rather mysteriously and trying to find a replacement of the same calibre was a daunting task. We did try some other drummers but it would have taken forever to get them to the same standard we were at when John left so we thought, no, we couldn't face it. It quelled any remaining enthusiasm we may have had, and that was that, really."

The catalyst for the band's reformation came when American label Doom Records pressed the

out trace years ago. It was only when someone we knew found it on the internet and brought to our attention the fact that honest people were being drastically ripped off trying to obtain our material that we decided to do something about it. This was actually our only aim initially with no real thought of resurrecting the old material or indeed of any form of comeback." Although not exactly technically gifted ("None of us owned a computer at the time or even knew how to turn one on!") the band set out to beat the bootleggers. "We raked out a load of old tapes we had recorded years ago including the master for the first Pagan Altar album – we were quite prolific when it came to song writing and still are when the mood takes us – and set up Oracle Records. We obviously had to rely on others to set up a website," he laughs, "and that did alert us to the amount of interest and deep feeling that existed around the world for the band and its music, and this loyalty certainly inspired us to put things back together and continue to release

been superseded."

Cloven Hoof were another of the NWOBHM's great cult bands. By the time they had signed to Neat Records to record their first album they were already well-known to the metal underground. Their 1982 debut EP *The Opening Ritual* was already becoming a rarity and their image ensured they could not be mistaken for anyone else. Cloven Hoof took the Kiss route, disguising their identities and even their names by taking on the titles of the four elements of the ancient world – Earth, Air, Fire and Water – and decking themselves out in garish stage outfits and make-up.

"Right from the start I didn't want the band to be a standard rock act with an obvious name and music," recalls bassist and founder member Lee Payne. "I wanted to break new ground and be original; I wanted the music and the image to be epic and thought-provoking. I hit on the idea of the four elements personified by the band mem-



demo to vinyl in 1995. "We had no idea what was going on with these bootlegs and just assumed that our material had sunk with-

the old material. Without the encouragement of that hardcore of fans we probably wouldn't have bothered once the bootleg had

bers. Everyone is born under a star sign and these also have the elements attributed to them. I'm Gemini, so I

was Air; guitarist Steve Rounds was Sagittarius, so Fire; Kevin Pountney our drummer was Taurus – Earth – and vocalist Dave Potter was Pisces – Water. It was uncanny that everything seemed to fit perfectly! A logical conclusion to the concept lent itself perfectly to a comic book treatment – the scope seemed endless, and was a marketing dream. I even came up with a story line to suggest how four ordinary musicians came to acquire the power of the elements. I think the Cloven Hoof concept and image was much more cohesive than Kiss; they were just a set of random characters. The Cloven Hoof concept fitted together in a much more imaginative way.”

The image had been toned down by the time ‘Cloven Hoof’ was released, but when Kerrang! reviewed the album Geoff Bar-



Bitches Sin - Ian Toomey

The British Steel Festival

The brainchild of Elixir guitarist Phil Denton, the seeds of British Steel were sown in another metal heartland, Germany. “I was talking to Cloven Hoof’s Lee Payne and Russ North after both bands appeared at the Keep It True Festival in Germany,” he recalls, “and we were basically wondering why there isn’t a NWOBHM festival in England. One thing led to another, and I decided to have a go at putting something on myself. The idea is to join forces with other NWOBHM bands to make a more attractive event. We have all these great British bands here, so it makes more sense to put them on one stage here in Britain which keeps travelling and accommodation expenses down, and so means we can then keep ticket prices down. Most of our audience is from Europe, although we have had visitors from America and Japan, and they appreciate the opportunity to see five bands at a very reasonable price.

“I did start it as a one-off event,” he continues. “It was

in October 2006 at The Pitz in Milton Keynes and had Demon, Elixir, The Handsome Beasts, Hammerhead and Overdrive on the bill. I was very nervous about not making enough money to pay the bands, and then we had an enforced line-up change: Cloven Hoof were due to play, but Lee broke his arm badly and couldn’t play for months, so they had to pull out. We then got The Handsome Beasts in their place but their singer, Garry Dalloway, died about a month before the gig. I began to think that the festival was cursed!” Simon Hall stepped in on vocals for The Beasts, and the day went well. “We did make a small profit, but not enough to cover the bands’ travelling expenses. However, all the bands enjoyed it, as did the audience, and there was a great spirit of brotherhood that night.”

The success of the event led to a second British Steel in April 2007. This time around Cloven Hoof were able to participate, and joining them and Elixir on the bill were Chariot, Tygers Of Pan Tang and Jaguar. For the third event in 2008 the festival moved to its current home in

Camden and a non-NWOBHM band Redline kicked things off (although bassist Martin Oram and drummer Mark Biddiscombe were members of Bitches Sin when the band recorded its debut album ‘Predator’ in 1982), followed by Lyadrive, Elixir, Praying Mantis and finally Witchfynde.

Denton has great aspirations for British Steel. “Ideally, I’d like to bring British metal bands back into the spotlight again, and hope to build up a following for it in this country like it was back in the Eighties. However, I need the mainstream British music press to give us some attention. We could really do with some column inches and coverage from them, championing these old-school metal bands that are still producing great music. You know,” he continues, “when you hear the miserable dross that passes for rock music these days, you think that if only you could get the younger generation aware of the passion and power of REAL rock music, as played by such bands as we have at British Steel, we could really start a revival again.”

ton hooped it firmly into touch. "I've followed their career since the earliest days" he wrote, "but sadly, this album just doesn't deliver... It pains me to be so down on this album, because Cloven Hoof really do deserve to succeed."

It's really very difficult to reconcile Barton's review with the album itself. Admittedly, like most of Neat Records' output, the production wasn't great, but the band were able to showcase their abilities, in particular in the epic 'Return Of The Passover'. But this lukewarm reception, combined with a lack of real promotion and good, old-fashioned music business machinations pretty much condemned Cloven Hoof to the sidelines. They did manage to keep afloat, releasing the live album 'Fighting Back' in 1986 and following it with 'Dominator' in 1988 and the acclaimed 'A Sultan's Ransom' the next year, although it was to be 2006 before the next album 'Eye Of The Sun' appeared on the racks. "CBS wanted to sign us on a fantastic deal that would have made the band an international act," says Payne. "But our manager died and this left us with immense legal problems. Too many people claimed they owned a piece of the band, and in the end CBS couldn't sign us. The vultures had come out of the woodwork and ruined everything for us."

For all that though, Payne has fond memories of those early Eighties' days. "It was just a time of great music, pure and simple, back then. The New Wave Of British Heavy Metal spawned bands who made timeless, inspired metal. Iron Maiden, Saxon, Elixir, Jaguar, Tygers Of Pan Tang, etc etc; they all made great, true metal music and we are genuinely proud to be mentioned in the same breath. It was a time when you thought anything was possible, and you made music that you wanted without interference." Like so many NWOBHM bands, Cloven Hoof are back in business and continue to release excel-

lent albums with their roots in the Eighties but their gaze firmly towards the Twenty-First Century; 2008's 'The Definitive Part One' is the band racing through eleven high-octane numbers pretty much live in the studio, and captures the songs as they sound on stage: "Pure Hoof stripped to the bone and playing live in the studio with minimum overdubs," is how Payne describes it. And indeed it is both a great album in its own right and a very useful introduction to the band for newcomers, featuring as it does the cream of the

band's 'Twelve Pounds And No Kinks' seven song cassette demo led to an invitation to Neat Records' Impulse Studios. "We re-recorded 'Down The Road' from the demo and recorded two new songs, 'Always Ready (For Love)' and 'Sign Of The Times', with the intention of 'Down The Road' being the single," recalls guitarist Ian Toomey, although when it came about the single featured the two new cuts with 'Down The Road' appearing on Neat's five-star 'Lead Weight' compilation cassette. As the band's debut vinyl outing



Bitches Sin - Predator Line-up

band's back catalogue – great songs enhanced by modern production values.

Like Cloven Hoof, Bitches Sin are well-and-truly back in business, as 2008's exciting 'UDUVUDU' album ably demonstrates, but like Cloven Hoof they were another band to be hit hard by the press. Virtually no-one remembers that their debut album 'Predator' copped a four-star (out of five) review in Sounds and was referred to as a "Worthy piece of plastic destined to stand them in good stead amongst their fellow practitioners..."; it was the mauling in Kerrang! that sank the album. Formed by Ian Toomey and his brother Pete in April 1980, the

'Always Ready (For Love)', with its eye-catching sleeve of model Sharalee, was a great step forward for the band. It sold well and raised the band's profile nationwide, and soon they were back at Neat's Impulse Studios to work on what was to become possibly their most famous song. "We went back to Neat later and recorded 'Strangers On The Shore' there," recalls Toomey. "We had great feedback from everyone we played it to except label manager David Wood, who said he didn't think it fitted the Neat sound. Paul Birch at Heavy Metal Records was so keen to have it on his 'Heavy Metal Heroes' compilation LP that he almost had our hands off!"

'Strangers On The Shore', a second full length demo cassette album and a BBC session for The Friday Rock Show led to an album deal from Heavy Metal Records; the result was 'Predator'. Looking back now, Ian Toomey sees the album as a something of a triumph of will over adversity. "I think we had about four days to record it, which wasn't enough time. It also didn't help that Pete and vocalist Tony Tomkinson had an almighty row about halfway through the sessions, and that made the second half of the session very difficult. I would say that the album was more engineered than produced. By the time we came to record it we'd been in studios enough to know what we wanted, but somehow that never seemed to get communicated properly. We weren't there at the final mix, and when I heard it I was very upset. We should have gone back and spent a couple of days remixing it, but there were deadlines to meet and of course it would have cost extra money as well... All the recordings that the band have self-financed we've been very pleased with, but when a record company has been involved, the results have been less than satisfactory. The Neat single, 'Predator'... Compare them to our demos and the demos sound much better, really. We've always known what we've wanted, but when a record company has intervened, the sound has never been as good."

The Kerrang! review killed the album stone dead. Hitting back after such a smack in the face might have been almost an insurmountable task for some people; but a week after the review came out Toomey seized on its final line and came up with the storming live favourite 'Ain't Life A Bitch'.

Unfortunately, 'Predator' has never been officially released on CD, although some of the material on it has appeared in another guise. The band were booked into Moor Green studios

in Birmingham, to demo 'Ridin' High' and 'Runaway' for Heavy Metal Records as a precursor to the record deal. Bitches Sin had become known for neither wasting time in the studio nor studio time, and with just an hour or so left on the clock they bashed through the rest of the album live in the studio, allowing just long enough for Tomkinson to overdub the vocals. The results can be heard on the CD 'Essential Sins'. That said, Toomey is still keen to get his hands on the 'Predator' tapes and have them remixed by collaborator, sometime Bitches Sin member

– something that guitarist Phil Denton still struggles to come to terms with. "The strange thing is that 'Treachery' was written in a few minutes at rehearsals one day, probably the quickest song we have ever written. We just came out with the riff, Kev and Nigel [the bass and drums playing Dobbs brothers] jumped in, and we had the music in minutes. I came up with the 'Ride Like The Wind' line, and that got Paul [Taylor – vocals] started with the lyrics. When we finished, I said that it sounds too much like Iron Maiden and we should scrap it, but the others



Diamond Head - Brian Tatler

and legendary producer Chris Tsangarides. "It's all there in the grooves, you know," he says. "I've heard it. That's the sad thing about it: it just needs to be mixed properly to bring it all out."

The easiest way to circumvent record company intervention was of course to go it alone, a path which Elixir, like so many other NWOBHM bands chose to take. Taking the do-it-yourself approach the movement had borrowed from punk, Elixir self-released first the single 'Treachery (Ride Like The Wind)' and then a full album 'The Son Of Odin'.

'Treachery' itself is a great song and has gone on to be recognised as a classic of the genre

talked me out of it, and when we played it live the first few times it became apparent that it was a very popular song." Recorded first as a demo track, when the band decided to bring out their first single 'Treachery' got the nod. "It was reviewed in Kerrang! by Ronnie James Dio who, of course, is a hero to us, so when he said it was good, it gave us a great deal of encouragement!" That said, the song almost got consigned to the dustbin at British Steel 3 when the band decided to omit it from their set. "Norms [guitarist Norman Gordon] said that he was a bit fed up with playing it and wanted to miss it out for once," Denton recalls, "but Kev and I weren't so sure. It isn't one of my favourite songs to play either, but the crowd

always seem to want to hear it. It's our 'Paranoid' or 'Smoke On The Water' – but without the sales!" he laughs. "So we decided, with some feeling of uneasiness, to leave it out this time. However, Kev and Nigel went over the road to Burger King before the doors opened and bumped into a few fans who said something like, 'Can't wait to hear 'Treachery' tonight!' So we put it back in the set pretty bloody quickly!

"With the release of 'Treachery' in 1985, and encouraged by the Dio review, we started thinking about an album, and booked The Lodge Studios for the first week of January 1986. It was owned by The Enid, who were disillusioned by the record industry and were releasing their material on their own label. We were encouraged by that approach and, in the absence of a decent record contract, decided to do the same."

But fame and fortune still didn't come a-knocking. "After 'The Son Of Odin' album was rejected by labels for sounding too 'British' and being told that the labels were looking for more 'commercial' and 'American sounding' bands – don't forget, by this time Bon Jovi was the big band – we decided to write a few 'commercial' numbers, figuring that we could at least get our more 'serious' songs heard by a wider audience if we secured a deal." But the band had already lost both Kev and Nigel Dobbs and were struggling on with replacement players, one of whom was ex-Iron Maiden drummer Clive Burr who helped out while a member of Dee Snider's Desperado. "We had the commercial numbers that the labels were asking for, but still we had no takers for our second album 'Sovereign Remedy,'" recalls Phil. "We toured through 1988 and 1989 but just got frustrated that we couldn't get a record deal to release it. We were still paying off the loan for 'The Son Of Odin' so couldn't afford to bring it out on our own label and with Kev and Nigel gone, I felt that there was nowhere else to go for Elixir. With my first son about to be

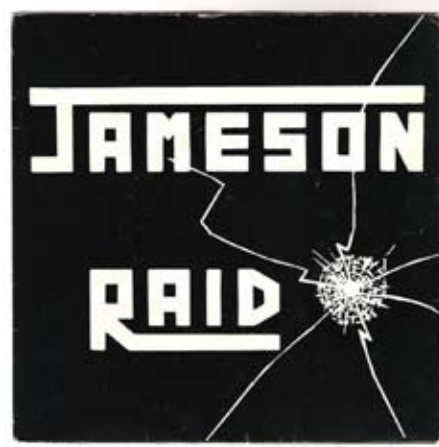
born in November 1989, I quit the band." "Sovereign Remedy' did get a posthumous release in 1990 but the label that put it out renamed it 'Lethal Potion'. "The cover was awful; the mixes had been changed, with a lot of the instrumentation missing; and some of the songs were not included at all. I consider it to be a bad bootleg, and was not happy until I finally managed to get the album released as it was originally intended."

On the subject of covers, incidentally, it's a little known piece of trivia that the landscape picture on the sleeve of 'The Son of Odin' came from the Chancellor of The Exchequer's calendar. "As I said, it was January 1986 when we were recording the album," says Denton. "Paul our singer was working in the Treasury and happened to look through Nigel Lawson's new calendar when he spotted what he thought would make a great starting point for the album cover. I think it was a picture for July or August that he tore out, so it was at least six months before Nigel Lawson would have noticed!"

The band that personified the do-it-yourself approach was Diamond Head, and Elixir's one single and one album pale against the three singles, one 12" EP and an album 'Lightning To The Nations' (another great classic of the NWOBHM) the band released themselves before finally signing to MCA Records in 1982. What fans thought was a trail-blazing devil-may-care attitude back in 1980 is now recognised as just the reality of a situation whereby the band could not come by a deal that their management approved of.

"It was obvious that something was happening," recalls Diamond Head's Brian Tatler. "Def Leppard got the front cover of Sounds. Samson got the front cover with Thunderstick in his leather mask. Each week there seemed to be a new band, you know? 'Oh look, Vardis... Tygers Of Pan Tang,' or whatever, so you could

tell there was a movement, and then it just rolled like a bandwagon really. Punk rock had benefited from a similar thing – all of a sudden all the punk bands got signed – and now it was the same thing for heavy metal bands. I suppose I was thinking, 'Right; if Def Leppard's going to get signed, then maybe Diamond Head could get signed as well.' So I think we just kind of jumped on board and went with the flow. We're a rock band, and in our minds we were trying to be like Led Zeppelin or Black Sabbath or Deep Purple, the classic bands, and then suddenly there was this thing called the New Wave Of British Heavy Metal and we thought, 'Well, we could be part of that.' Otherwise I was going to have to become as good as Ritchie Blackmore, and I didn't fancy waiting that long!" he laughs again. "It would take me fifteen years – at least! – to get as good as Blackmore and when I saw someone like



Steve Jones on television I thought, 'Oh that's OK; I don't need to be that good then! I can get away with three chords and a bit of speed!

"But it all seemed so positive," he continues. "There was an energy about it, and the do-it-yourself approach too, and it was just a good time to get cracking. I didn't realise just how many bands there were until years later. There must have been at least four hundred bands, but at the time there only seemed to be a handful. "I think it was Reg Fellows, our manager, who came up with the idea," says Tatler

on the band's decision to go it alone. "We'd already done the 'Shoot Out The Lights' single at The Old Smithy Studios and I think Reg did some kind of deal with the studio owner so that if he handled the publishing, we'd get to use his studio.

"We'd sent off a few demos and

the world, or it could be magnificent. You really don't know yourself because you are too close to it."

Although Diamond Head did finally sign a deal – a long story that Tatler details in his autobiography – it did look like they'd completely missed the boat at

collectable EPs, 'End Of Part One' (also known as 'The Hypnotist') and 'Seven Days Of Splendou'r, and an intensely-disliked compilation album track. Back in business once more, the band's best-known incarnation of Terry Dark, Ian Smith, John Ace and Phil Kimberley aims to rectify that situation, with both a return to live dates and the release of an album 'Just As The Dust Has Settled', a round-up of "The seven EP songs and seven never before released," confirms vocalist Dark. "Imagine, the band split in 1982 and our first CD is coming out in 2009. It's a crazy world!"

There were some obvious great times back in the Eighties. "The gig at Sheffield City Hall backing Judas Priest is a favourite of mine," recalls bassist and founder member Ace. "Walking on stage I looked up to see faint lights – the emergency ceiling lights – in the distance against what looked like a black 'sky', just like a clear starlit night; then bang!, the stage lights were on and we were off! It still sends a shiver up my spine thinking about it.

"But when we first started out in the mid-Seventies the record companies were all looking for punk bands and we were judged as 'old hat'. As time passed, well, I don't think we even knew it was the New Wave Of British Heavy Metal... It was just the music we'd been brought up on and the most obvious music to listen to and play live. We just did it because we enjoyed it – mostly!" he laughs.

The 'mostly' in part refers to Hard Lines, a track submitted to EMI for inclusion on their NWOBHM compilation album 'Metal For Muthas Volume II – Cut Loud' and seemingly performed by The Raid. Some people quickly worked out that this was actually Jameson Raid – it just didn't sound like them. Not at all.

"I can claim no personal credit for the original mix of Hard Lines," says Kimberley. "I just liked playing drums and was quickly bored with



Elixir - Norms Gordon and Phil Denton

stuff to record companies and they'd all pretty much said no, so Reg said to us, 'You do your own album yourselves and then I'll take it to the record companies. They wouldn't have to go to the trouble of getting you to record an album, and do demos and stuff, as they'd have a finished product.' Well, that's what Reg thought. But record companies don't like that!" he laughs. "Record companies, they like to be involved; they like to suggest what should go on the album, what should be the single, what should be the lead track, if the songs are good enough, what producer should be used, and so on... But Reg didn't realise that. He just thought that he could hawk it round the labels and one of them should bite. But nobody did! Nobody! I mean, it's a shame really as it's considered a classic album nowadays, which is great justification for what we did, and it got decent reviews. You know, you hope you're doing something worthwhile and, well, great, ideally, but you don't always know; it could be the biggest pile of rubbish in

one stage. What with one thing and another, I point out that all-in-all over the years they were a frustrating band to be a fan of. "We were a frustrating band to be the lead guitarist of!" he quips in reply.

Frustration for Jameson Raid came largely thanks to the intervention of some studio hands at EMI which has left an indelible mark on the musicians' minds. Overall though, their memories of the period are positive. "The thing about the NWOBHM," suggests Jameson Raid's drummer Phil Kimberley, "is that back then a significant part of the magic of the music for all of us, band and fans alike, was the fact that we were all young and were utterly certain that we could do anything and achieve whatever we wanted. Rock music expressed the power and pace of all that youthful confidence. The music had a great impact then, and it still does now."

Like so many NWOBHM bands, Jameson Raid left little tangible evidence of their existence first time around – just two highly

the mechanics of the recording studio. As a drummer, playing live is hard work, physically and emotionally, but totally satisfying. Recording seemed to involve a little bit of drumming and then an immense period of time spent adjusting little switches, dials and sliders.

"But for 'Hard Lines' Terry, Ian, John and the engineer spent hours in the studio, mixing, re-mixing and fine-tuning it until they'd produced an extraordinarily strong track. All the power of a live performance, preserved with the finest quality of the studio. Upon hearing it, however, EMI asked for the multi-track studio tape, saying they just wanted to boost the vocals a little. In fact they re-engineered it entirely and produced the thin, tinny, wretched little noise that you hear on the album today. The memory of hearing that for the first time is a memory I would be happy to lose permanently. Bizarre really, because the other tracks on that album sound good."

As for why the band was billed as The Raid, "That was something we did, rather than another screw up by EMI," says Kimberley. "It wasn't intended as part of a carefully planned 'start again' re-branding exercise, merely an acknowledgement that fans and local media called us 'The Raid' and, since it was a neat name either way, there was no harm – and might be some benefit – in going along with it. I'm sure it was merely experimental and, having casually started calling ourselves The Raid, I think we equally casually resumed calling ourselves Jameson Raid. I'm not even sure how long we used the shortened name, but I would guess it was no more than a few months." "Quite frankly, as EMI made such an awful job of the re-mix it may have been better for us as we could have denied all association with that 'Metal For Muthas' track," adds Ace, with more than a hint of irony in his voice.

If the NWOBHM had a spiritual home, it was The Bandwagon, where legendary DJ Neal Kay would strut his stuff up to fine nights a week and happily play anything metal that crossed his path. Lee Burrows of Lyadrive quickly became a fixture. "I was lucky to be in the right place at the right time. I lived on the outskirts of north-west London in 1979, just turned my eighteenth birthday, and was looking for somewhere to hang out. It just so happens that I'd just read about such a place in Sounds – The Bandwagon, now of course known as the world-famous focal point at the start of NWOBHM. The place was like nothing I'd seen before, packed with like-minded rockers and bikers, and my friends and I became completely obsessed with the place.

"When Praying Mantis asked Neal to advertise that they needed a couple of roadies for London gigs I took the opportunity. This culminated in their first national tour, supporting Iron Maiden, and means I got to see at first hand the groundswell of popularity for the NWOBHM all over the UK; there was definitely a real buzz all over." "We were hanging out at the Bandwagon as well," adds vocalist Nick John. "A different group of people, but we soon got to know Lee and some of the guys he was with. It felt really special, a place where you could go to hear the music you wanted to listen to. There was a definite sense of a new scene developing and plenty of great new bands playing the pubs and smaller clubs – Maiden, Mantis, Sledgehammer, Diamond Head, White Spirit, Def Leppard; it made you want to get in a band yourself!" Lyadrive, or Tempest Ride to start with, started out as a group of regulars at the Bandwagon in mid-1981.

"We had a few highlights," notes Burrows. "One was recording the song 'Another Time, Another Place' for 'The Bridge Album'; it felt liked we'd arrived. Play-

ing at Dingwalls and getting reviewed in Kerrang! and the London free paper Music was another step along the path. Getting our double A-side single 'Anytime'/'White Dress' reviewed in NME was nice too: we got one of those back-handed compliments – 'a pub rock Blue Oyster Cult', no less!"

"The front picture that we had earmarked for the picture sleeve was eventually reproduced on the insert sheet with 'The Sands Of Time' LP. We wanted to use it but then the record company told us they didn't have enough money to do a picture sleeve – so it was the white bag treatment for us!" laughs John.

"And so we so we photocopied a band picture and put it in with the first hundred or maybe two hundred copies. Proper DIY!" adds Burrows. "But the trouble with Lyadrive was that we had a propensity for shooting ourselves in the foot. We've worked out that in the original period – 1981 to 1985 – we'd had eleven line-ups! We actually split up after just five months as Tempest Ride but got invited to appear on 'The Bridge Album' so changed our name to Lyadrive and started again. But every six months, it seemed, we'd change personnel, which got pretty depressing. We got the chance to do a showcase for CBS but had to blow it out for some reason I can't quite remember now; maybe we just bottled it. But the disintegration of our 'supposed' record deal was hard to take, as was watching our first real sustained set of tour dates fold one by one. I suppose we lacked the real ruthless streak you need to get on in this business."

"But we were trying to get things together fast," adds John. "The only way to the elusive 'deal' was to write, gig, make a demo and get it to the record companies. We were barely 20 when we started out and so it was all 'wing and a prayer' stuff. Being in a proper studio for the first time though was fantastic; actually realis-



Roxxcalibur – ‘NWOBHM For Muthas’ (LMP)

“We are no great fans of tribute bands or tribute albums,” says Roxxcalibur drummer and driving force Neudi by way of introduction; “OK, you can enjoy an AC/DC covers band after several beers, but that’s about it. But I always liked it when bands had an Eighties cover on their albums, like Solstice did with Stormchild by Trespass or Kreator with Raven’s Lambs to the Slaughter.

“When my interest in the NWOBHM became an addiction about ten years ago the idea of a tribute band formed in my head. There are so many great songs that stayed unknown and many of them were of a poor sound quality due to the lack of money or label support. I never had a problem with this rough sound, but you can’t play the ARC single ‘War Of The Ring’, for example, to a sixteen year old metalhead today and expect him to enjoy it; but I was sure that he would enjoy the song itself. I tried to find musicians for that project, knowing that our singer Alexx had also been interested in the idea for some time. But it was in 2007, after we met Kalli from Abandoned and Mario that the thing got more concrete. We had a barbeque at my house and started listening to some old vinyl; a couple of days later we were rehearsing Seven Days of Splendour.”

‘NWOBHM For Muthas’ steers well clear of the more well-known NWOBHM material, so there’s nothing from Iron Maiden, Saxon or Def Leppard. Neudi also decided to avoid anything already ‘properly’ covered by Metallica, thus kicking the bulk of Diamond Head’s back catalogue into touch! “The big names within the NWOBHM are great bands, no doubt, but we don’t want to bore people with version 548 of ‘Running Free’ on a CD,” notes the drummer. “It’s different when we play live as we do have some of those sort of songs in our repertoire.

“As for choosing the songs, this was a democratic thing. Each member has different taste within the wide range of the NWOBHM. Both guitar players prefer the faster and rougher stuff like Savage or Jaguar; our bass player loves the punk attitude of bands like Girlschool or Tank; Alexx enjoys the bands with good singers like Grim Reaper while I prefer those bands that mix Seventies feeling with Eighties metal. There’s a huge difference between the fast ‘Axe Crazy’ and the melodic ‘Lady of Mars’ but a good song always remains a good song. ‘Lady Of Mars’ was in fact the last song we did especially for the CD. We wanted to do ‘Music Power’ by Ozym but we found out that we needed more time preparing that song as they did some really strange arrangements on their single!”

In all, ‘NWOBHM For Muthas’ ably tackles songs by JJ’s Powerhouse, Cloven Hoof, Jameson Raid, Bleak House, Jaguar, Dark Star, Trident, ARC, Witchfinder General, Savage, Radium, Chateaux and Grim Reaper, and visually the band do a light-hearted job of recreating both Raven’s ‘Rock Until You Drop’ album cover and Witchfinder General’s tasteless ‘Friends Of Hell’ involving a couple of cloaks, a sword, a whip and two inflatable dolls. Priceless, believe me!

ing that you might, just might, come out with something that sounded OK – and then hearing Neal Kay play it at The Bandwagon next to Whitesnake! We did have a lot of fun. I mean, it’s still a dream, isn’t it? Being in a band with your mates? Can’t be bettered in my opinion!”

“I think the most enduring thing about that period was the honesty,” suggests Burrows. “That DIY punk ethic meant that everyone thought they could now have a go. That first year or two, bands just went into the studio and bashed it out, and you got a very honest, no frills, live energy that way. It wasn’t until bands like Iron Maiden, Def Leppard and Praying Mantis started signing with the big labels that much thought was given to ‘the product’. And ultimately, I suppose, that was the beginning of the end for most of the bands right there.”

John agrees. “The NWOBHM brought back a degree of simplicity – just get some songs together and get out and play. OK, musically a lot of it doesn’t hold up so well 30 years on, but there was always a great sense of spirit, of honesty and endeavour, and very little back-biting between bands. It was great to be a part of that.”

Roxxcalibur might challenge Nick John’s assertion that 30 years on some of the music doesn’t hold up. Although NWOBHM tribute bands are nothing new, the German five-piece have gone the whole nine yards and

recorded an album entitled ‘NWOBHM For Muthas’. The CD features thirteen NWOBHM songs, faithfully rendered but with odd tweaks here and there just to keep things interesting, all encased in a Rodney Matthews cover.

Taking their name from the rare NWOBHM compilation album of the same name (although inexplicably adding another ‘x’), Roxxcalibur is the brainchild of Viron drummer and NWOBHM fanatic Neudi who roped in bandmates Alexx Stahl (vocals) and Roger Dequis (guitars), Kalli Kaldschmidt (guitars) from thrash band Abandoned and ex-Into The Abyss bassist Mario Lang. “We started Roxxcalibur mainly as a live band,” says Neudi. “We met Limb from LMP [a label home to some of the best European power and progressive metal bands including Pagan’s Mind and Eldritch amongst others] at the Keep It True Festival in 2008 and he immediately said ‘I will do a CD with you!’ It was a lot of hard work to find the sound the CD needed but also a lot of fun to record. And with a label boss who obviously is a NWOBHM fan and collector, everything is pretty much perfect. Oh, and not forgetting having Rodney Matthews cover art as well...” The band played a NWOBHM 30th anniversary show in April 2009 at the Keep It True Festival in Germany. “It was sold out,” says Neudi, obviously proud, “and many people called us the highlight of the festival. This makes me proud not

just as a musician but also as a NWOBHM fan, seeing so many people in the audience singing songs like Jameson Raid's Seven Days of Splendour. Also, some great NWOBHM musicians joined us on stage: Dave Hill from Demon, Blitzkrieg's Brian Ross, Girlschool's Enid Williams, Jess Cox from the Tygers Of Pan Tang, Terry from Jameson Raid, Graham from Bleak House (double-wow!), Thunderstick the Samson drummer, three guys from Tank, Russ and Lee from Cloven Hoof as well as Harry Conclin from Jag Panzer. This really was the best day of my life!"

"Roxxcalibur are 100% genuine enthusiasts," adds Terry Dark. "They love the NWOBHM and want nothing more than to promote it anyway they can. I was struck by their knowledge, dedication and professionalism. They met several NWOBHM singers for the first time that day, many a lot more famous than me, and were able to play all the songs without a problem in rehearsal and then do that on stage. I was delighted that they wanted to record 'Seven Days Of Splendour' as it helps prevent the song from disappearing over the horizon and, even if I say so myself, I think the song deserves better than that."

"I think there's a difference of perception between those people who were there during the NWOBHM and those like me who have to go back in time when listening to the music as to what is so enduring about the NWOBHM," says Neudi. "But the fact is that it is not just the missing link between Seventies hard rock and Eighties metal, but also the very beginning of so many sub-styles that are around today. It was so important for the development of heavy metal in general, and this, and much more, made and still makes the NWOBHM something really special."

"The New Wave Of British Heavy Metal was a phenomenon that will probably never happen again, although many hope it

will," says Terry Jones in conclusion. "Younger audiences appear to regret having not been part of the original era although their perception of it is, I feel, sometimes seen through rose coloured glasses somewhat. Everyone has a take on it and sees it from a slightly different perspective, although it has now gone into the realms of folklore and to have been through it and come out the other side is something none of its participants will forget. Its legacy will always be remembered, as it will forever have its own niche in musical history. And I'm proud of the very small part that Pagan Altar played and is still playing today."

Meanwhile, asked why he'd come to Camden for British Steel 4, one Spanish metal fan simply replied: "I have come here today to see and hear the bands in the place where the music was born."

And even thirty years down the line, it's hard to argue with a sentiment such as that.