

Judas Priest Writes Own Epitaph with Final Tour Announcement

By FuMaku!

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It is with mixed emotions I ponder the news that Priest has announced their final tour which will commence Summer 2011. On one hand I'm sad to see them go but on the other hand I'm glad: I don't want to see them go because they have been a part of my life since 1982, but not since Demolition have they broken new ground and it has been hard for me, as a die-hard fan, to see their decline in the Post Halford Reunion years.

This is truly an end of an Era. Judas Priest were the Vanguard in the wave of Heavy Metal that came on the heels of Black Sabbath, Led Zeppelin, Cream, Hendrix, Deep Purple, etc. Bands who, in the late 60s and early 70s, that in piece or by part, created the brew that would become Heavy Metal music. Priest recognized this and turned it into a celebration, bringing all the heavy elements together while simultaneously extolling the virtues of "Heavy Metal" openly in their lyrics. They were the first to acknowledge the brotherhood comprised of heavy metal fans, they united us and made us feel proud to be metalheads. We take metal in the mainstream for granted now, but it was different in the 70s and 80s. Metal was considered subversive, satanic and stupid. But we knew better.

To be a Priest fan meant you were on the cutting edge of something good. But time passes and times change. It's easy to forget now but Priest were gone before. Unlike now with final announcements, Priest ceased to exist for several years in the 90s. Halford left, somewhat acrimoniously; to start a Panteraesque band called Fight and Priest were considered done, despite the fact they were looking for another singer. I held the torch but it seemed they were done as I read news that Glenn Tipton was working on a solo album.

I was just about to toss my torch away, disgusted that neither Priest nor Tipton had released anything, and that any news of Judas Priest had more or less completely ceased. And then it was announced they'd found a singer: Tim "Ripper" Owens. It would be another two years before Jugulator came out but it was enough to stoke my nearly extinguished flame. In the meantime Glenn Tipton released his excellent Baptizm of Fire album. The album astonished me with its modern and hungry ferocity and I looked forward to Jugulator's eminent release. I must admit that I didn't glom onto it immediately. Tipton's album had raised the bar musically and Jugulator, written several years before Baptizm of Fire, didn't compare. Though, taken in context it is an excellent album and it showcases Rippers powerful vocals and persona. It was weird hearing someone else sing in Priest but any doubts I had were soon dispelled after seeing Ripper with Priest live. HOLY FUCKING SHIT!

The Priest were back! After releasing Jugulator they released a live album called '98 Live Meltdown, which they toured on as well. Three years later they released Demolition, a powerhouse that continued what Tipton started on Baptizm of Fire and proved that Ripper had his own style. Demolition was Judas Priest at the height of their creative and adventurous powers. But few bought the album. Why? All my Priest brothers scorned anything Priest without Halford. It divided us. I was moving forward with my band and the others had grown old and jaded, unwilling even to listen to the "new" stuff. Fuck them, it was quintessential Priest and they had become close-minded because of who was singing. I was still holding the torch.

Halford released his own Priest album, called Resurrection, after the failure of his weak Industrial album, Two, which came out at the same time Jugulator did. It was obvious he wanted back in the Priest. I'd seen it before with Bruce Dickenson and Iron Maiden a few years before.

And so it came to pass that Halford rejoined the band in 2003 and I felt I was the only one who thought that it sucked. Priest were moving backward. I held out hope that they would take the logical step after Demolition with Halford but I feared they would backslide, rest on their laurels and produce an album that would offer no challenging material. Unfortunately, I was right about the backslide. The reformed Priest have played it safe in my book, mostly playing greatest hits tours in support of no new albums. In seven years they have only released two albums of new material: The first, Angel of Retribution; a nostalgic trip down Greatest Hits Memory Lane and Nostradamus; an ambitious concept album that somehow fails to deliver. I respect this album, though, and I have staunchly defended it on the merit that it was not a safe album to do. And yet, as good of an album as it is, taken on its own merits (forget that it was done by Priest), it is not really a Heavy Metal album. Nostradamus is a low key, keyboard heavy, symphonic album with occasional bursts of metal, much of which harkens back to more obscure moments in their career. It is a long and demanding album (2 CDs), too, that could have been cut down to one disk.

But enough bitching, this is the end of an era after all. I'm glad for the music and memories that Priest have given me and there is some hope that we'll get one last good album from them before they embark on their final tour. In any event, Halford has made it clear that his band will continue on and maybe Tipton will do another solo album. KK seems to be pretty much wrapped up with his golf course, so it's safe to assume he's done. Also, let's not forget that Ripper is still around.