

Nostradamus: The Redemption of Judas Priest?

By Michael Makuch

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2005 saw the return of long-estranged vocalist Rob Halford to new Judas Priest material with the release of "Angel of Retribution," an album that made no mark or broke no new ground. Halford had actually rejoined the band a few years earlier and marked the time, first by touring extensively, and then in the studio to record a new album: The first one together with Glenn Tipton (guitar), K.K. Downing (guitar), Ian Hill (bass) and Scott Travis (drums) since "Painkiller," released in 1990. The album, which was promised for early 2004 but not released until the summer of 2005, was a dismal let down considering the amount of time the band spent on it.

I don't mean to knock the mighty Priest, but for a band that made it's way from the bottom to the top as trendsetters, it was disappointing to see them step backward by releasing an album that would have been more at home in 1985 than in 2005. Making this step backward all the more egregious is the fact that for the dozen odd years Halford was away, Priest continued on, creating two dynamic albums (Jugulator, released in 1997 and Demolition, released in 2001) with singer Tim "Ripper" Owens. These two albums, especially "Demolition," saw Priest move with the times and break new ground by incorporating new musical elements, buttressed by Owens's powerful vocals, into the lexicon of Priest's sound. Judas Priest had survived, in spirit at least, the acrimonious withdrawal of Halford by aggressively moving forward after a six year absence from the music scene: Capturing a new audience and rewarding only the most stalwart (and open-minded, I would add) of flag bearers from the Halford era. It is unfortunate that, though Priest continued on, even the most hardcore of Priest's fans refused to buy or listen to a Judas Priest album without Rob Halford on it, which ultimately set the stage for Halford's return to the band in 2003.

However, not everyone looked at the return of Halford as being a positive move for the band, myself included, as it was presaged that Priest, for the first time in their brilliant 30 year career, would do the unthinkable by taking a step backwards musically. This notion was confirmed as Priest played no material from the Ripper albums, opting for a safe (and stagnant, by those of us who had already seen Priest live many times) "greatest hits" set list on their tour preceding the release of "Angel of Retribution." It is a delicious irony that most of these fans, with whom Priest were ultimately catering to, all later admitted that "Angel of Retribution" was a weak album, thus uniting those who liked and disliked Priest with Owens at the helm together again in mutual disappointment.

And now, in June of 2008 and three years since the band's last studio album, Priest's fans anxiously await the eminent arrival on June 17 of "Nostradamus," Judas Priest's 16th studio release. There is a lot of buzz in the air about this release as it marks some notable new ideas for the band as well as and because of the hope that this album will return Priest to their rightful place as adventurous trendsetters. First, "Nostradamus" is Judas Priest's first concept album, which focuses exclusively on the life and predictions of Michel de Nostredame, popularly known as Nostradamus: A 16th Century French prophet. Never mind whether you believe in the validity of Nostradamus's prophecies, it should be an interesting ride regardless. Second, this will also be Judas

Priest's first double length studio release, which portends the notion that Priest has enough strong material to fill two compact discs. Along with this is the fact that the band has stated that, because of the room afforded by two discs, there will be room for songs that will be in the traditional Priest mode, as well as songs that boldly encompass new musical elements. Supporting this point further is the album cover and graphics, which gives us a new logo (significant to those who pay attention as: an altered or, even more rare in Priest's career, a completely new logo has always indicated a bold new turn or leap musically for the band) along with cover art that is unlike anything, with the exception of "Sad Wings of Destiny" (1976), Priest has ever used before. In all the interviews I have read regarding this new album, all the band members have stated that they were truly inspired and excited by this project: A feeling that I don't believe existed when they were creating "Angel of Retribution." Let's hope this is true as, with the average age of the band members being in the mid-fifties, this could be Priest's final statement as a band, regardless of whether it is good or bad. I would hope that Priest realizes this and so would make an effort to go out on a strong note.

Frankly, I'm excited. What follows is the track listing, in order to wet your appetite, for "Nostradamus."

'NOSTRADAMUS' TRACK LISTING:

Dawn of Creation
Prophecy
Awakening
Revelations
The Four Horsemen
War
Sands of Time
Pestilence and Plague
Death
Peace
Conquest
Lost Love
Persecution
Solitude
Exiled
Alone
Shadows In the Flame
Visions
Hope
New Beginnings
Calm Before The Storm
Nostradamus
Future of Mankind