

PART II

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## Metal and History

## Personal Take II – Brian Tatler

### *Got the Devil in Me*

Was I evil? Am I evil? Will I be evil? The answer to all these questions is a succinct ‘no’, but what I was, am and always will be is a passionate writer and performer of heavy metal.

Heavy metal was born from the need for an antidote to pop music, and the lighter the pop, the darker the rock. References to the darker sides of life are largely theatrical and the myth that playing certain heavy metal songs backwards in order to contact the devil are pure nonsense. By doing so, the only outcome is a ruined stylus. Also, the sound of a cranked Marshall [guitar amplifier] and a powerful riff can shake a mortal to the core, which is largely what drew me towards heavy metal.

My brother Dave was seduced by the electric guitar when he was fourteen years old, and I was just eight. He encouraged me to play, and soon I had fallen under the spell too. I began to learn and have been learning ever since, and it’s been my constant companion. As soon as I could move a barre chord up and down the neck, I began writing heavy rock riffs and jamming them with my best friend, drummer Duncan Scott. No sooner had I become a rock/heavy metal fan, I was hooked for life, and that passion for music has never abandoned me. I was always looking for heavier, faster, darker, and I think a lot of kids still look for exactly the same thing as I did.

I didn’t know at that tender age that I would be fortunate enough to carve a lifelong career from playing the guitar. Diamond Head signed to MCA in 1982 but were dropped in 1984 after making our ‘difficult third album’. Some people really dug it, and others found it too different from what had gone before. We naively presumed we could experiment with different styles, but in the world of heavy metal, that’s not an easy rabbit to pull from the hat. It seems punters like what they like and usually aren’t prepared to indulge a band’s trial and error, and so bands often end up playing safe and sticking to one style. I totally get it now, but when I was twenty-two, my co-writing partner and I were idealistic, still believing we could do whatever we liked.

The NWOBHM scene covered a vast array of different styles with an infusion of the DIY punk attitude. The bands at that time were listening to a much wider range of musical styles in the 1970s than perhaps the current metal bands do. This wide choice of music made each band sound unique, whereas now metal seems more formulated and carefully aimed by the record companies at a target audience. Without a very acute ear, it’s hard to tell some bands apart.

I had no idea that metal would still be around fifty years after its creation, and it seems to get bigger each year. It has a very loyal fan base from ten-year-old kids to old guys and gals in their sixties; it's a way of life to a lot of people all over the world. Metal is tribal, and people get so passionate about their favourite music and bands it becomes their escape from the normality of modern life.

When Metallica first recorded a Diamond Head song ('Am I Evil?') in 1984, it was on a B-side, and they were signed to a small independent label called Music For Nations. At that point, Diamond Head were still bigger than Metallica. It was very flattering, and it had never happened to us before, but I did not see the huge significance, nor the potential, of Metallica. It was still 'Lars's band have covered "Am I Evil?"' I did not think, 'OMG! They're going to become not only the biggest metal band of all time but the biggest live act in the world'. I had no clue.

I think one of the important aspects of music is to influence the next generation. The history of heavy metal goes back to the Black Sabbath's debut album in 1970. Black Sabbath influenced me, my band Diamond Head influenced Metallica, Metallica influenced 50,000 metal bands, and on it goes. This style of music is still evolving and splitting off into sub-genres even after fifty years. In the 1970s, no one had done fast double kick drums with guitars de-tuned to low B and A, nor had anyone done the growly, aggressive vocals that are now commonplace. Heavy metal is sometimes dismissed as simple and one-dimensional, but when you are a real fan, and you get into it, you realise there are all these different styles within the genre and a host of brilliant musicians. It's actually an increasingly difficult genre for writing songs and avoiding clichés, sounding fresh and being original. There are still the obvious references to the dark side that belong to heavy metal, and so the devil is given his due. But he can keep his filthy hands off my royalties.

The music business is tough; there are a lot of sharks out there. It's hard to keep a band together and everybody happy. It's rare for a band to make it to a professional level and then even rarer to sustain that level of success for many years. I'm very proud of the fact that Diamond Head are still making albums and touring and that I still love writing heavy metal songs. I still got the devil in me.

Brian Tatler, guitarist of Diamond Head

