

PART VI

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## Global Metal

## Personal Take IV – Malcolm Dome

### *Proud to Be Loud*

Like any journalist, those of us who write about metal can sometimes face a moral dilemma: where is the line between public and private? Of course, usually you interview bands solely about their music. Occasionally, you can stray into more uncertain territory and discuss topics outside the domain of safe subjects. But at what point have you gone too far?

As an example, people in the metal media always knew Rob Halford was gay. But none of us ever brought this up with him during interviews. It was respected as a taboo subject. This was his private business and should be kept off-limits. The corollary to this was the situation when Hanoi Rocks drummer Razzle died in a car being driven by a less than sober Mötley Crüe vocalist Vince Neil. The consequences of this were played out in public, and nobody felt awkward about bringing this up with the Crüe.

More recently, there has been controversy surrounding Marilyn Manson. Not for the first time. Only on this occasion, it has not been of his own manufacture. Actress Evan Rachel Wood, a one-time girlfriend, revealed she had once been in an abusive relationship. People speculated that it could have involved Manson. Let's stress here, the speculation wasn't based on any facts. But one magazine decided to ask him how he felt about this accusation. The result? Manson abruptly terminated the interview. Yes, he could have handled it better. However, one also has to wonder if this was a fair line of questioning.

This is far removed from the early, and I would say glory, days of *Kerrang!*. The best compliment we were paid back in that era was when someone called the magazine a 'professional fanzine'. That's precisely what we set out to create. Despite the sybaritic activities of the time, it was something of an innocent period. There was no demand on us to put only major artists on the cover. So, we could take the risk with Bon Jovi, Guns N' Roses and Metallica. All of them graced the cover of *Kerrang!*, and this was before becoming huge selling acts.

There was a close relationship between the writers of the magazine and many of the musicians from the genre. We were committed to promoting talented bands and eschewed controversy for the most part. And it was always a delight to see any young name we had actively supported finally come good and make the leap to major status.

We strenuously guarded our independence. Naturally, record companies were keen to see their acts in the magazine. But, while it was usual policy in other countries to almost buy positive coverage by taking adverts in

exchange for this, that was never the case in the UK. That's why it was believed a good album review from *Kerrang!* meant so much.

It has to be admitted that back in those days, record companies were awash with cash, and there were regular trips offered to exotic climes to interview bands. Now there was an expectation from the labels that if a journalist and photographer were taken overseas to cover any artist, then they'd receive considerable space. That was the trade-off, and you could make the point that, in effect, this was buying pages in *Kerrang!*. But at no time did we cover anyone just because there was the chance of a trip to, say, Bermuda. No, the band in question had to be worth covering in their own right.

Looking back, there was considered naivety in the way we worked. And we did work very hard. It was incredible to remember that *Kerrang!* was seen by the publishers' Spotlight as being nothing more than a nuisance, an irritant, to be hidden away from the supposedly more legitimate, weighty publications. Until that is, the company owners realised we were the biggest money earner they had in their portfolio of titles. And that was when the interference began. The magazine became a weekly instead of being a fortnightly, which led to a decline in quality. And eventually to a number of us leaving towards the end of 1987.

These days, there's more emphasis on playing it safe, looking for angles to cover bands that go beyond the music. That's why controversy is seen as a boost for magazine sales and a way of ramping up the clicks on social media. There's more pressure on those of us still lucky enough to write about metal. This is the new realism and reality.

Malcolm Dome, metal journalist (*Kerrang!*, *Total Rock*)

