



Leppard (L-R): interviewee Rick Allen, Rick Savage, Phil Collen, Joe Elliott, Steve Clark.

None So Def Leppard's Skin Man

It seems nothing can stop the determined Def Leppard from making their own special mark in rock history.

Despite all the misfortune that's beset them over the last few years, none of it has affected their attitude and ability at making good time hard rock 'n' roll in the Leppard wine, women and song tradition.

Ninety minutes before playing to another capacity crowded arena, drummer Rick Allen discusses the *Hysteria* tour — and explains how he has adapted his skills since losing an arm in a car crash.

"We did about 16 dates in England, and now we're in San Diego and driving down to LA tonight. It seems to be just picking up. The album's sold just over two million copies — we got a platinum disc the other day — and the single's doing really well in the charts. We're really pleased with the way

things are going ... and I can play drums again!"

Musical Youth

Although Def Leppard have only released four albums (including *Pyromania*, which in the States sold over six million copies in one year), a decade has passed since their beginnings in Sheffield.

"We're extremely close," says Allen. "People sort of met at school, but I actually answered an ad in the paper for the job, 'cause I wasn't the original drummer. It was like

'Leppard Loses Skins,' so I went for the job and got it. That was round about '78 — I joined Def Leppard on my 15th birthday."

"The first major English tour we did was with Sammy Hagar, and after that we did the 'Highway to Hell' tour with AC/DC, and that was good to see. It gave us a taste for a real good live show. I always loved that band, but when you see them live, it's like wow — a real powerful live show. The presence that they used to put over on stage was so intense, it was really good. But you know," he laughs, "... we're getting there."

Allen says Leppard were influenced by "loads of other people" from their early days. "All the glam rock stuff like

Sweet — Mick Tucker is really good, I was always really impressed with him — T Rex, Mott the Hoople, Led Zeppelin, Queen, the list goes on and on."

High Energy

With *On Through the Night* the band created their own youthful sound, releasing in 1981 the excellent *High and Dry*, which contained plenty more energy and direction.

"The same sort of spirit is still in the band, while the songwriting we tend to think is more mature. Everybody has a hand in what goes on in the writing, but probably me less than anybody. We all have suggestions to make for the songs, it's a real team effort."

The new album was four years in the making because of all sorts of delays. "We scrapped the first lot because we weren't happy with the way that [producer] Jim Steinman was working out. Then we produced ourselves for a short time and that didn't work out. Then we ended up working with an engineer that had worked with us and Mutt Lange before, so we got him back in again."

Of course the biggest blow came on New Year's Eve, 1985, when Rick's accident meant his left arm had to be amputated. But three weeks later he left the hospital and he was back in the studio to help with the Fairlight drum programming. A few weeks after that he was behind the drums again.

"It's actually given me a better start with sounds because of the nature of electronics. Obviously, dynamically, sound-wise it's a hell of a lot more controllable, so it's working out real good. The rest of the guys in the band like it, everybody seems real happy with what I'm doing, so you know, I'm having a lot of fun."

Backbeat

"The kit is pretty much off the shelf. It's like, Simmons equipment, and I've got a couple of Akai samplers, and

the pedals that I'm using are called Shark pedals. The only thing that's unusual about them is the fact that I use a lot of pedals in line — it's like a set of electronic pads for my right hand, and then a set of electronic pedals for my left foot. So I'm playing pretty much everything I used to play with my left arm with my left foot now. I was always a single bass drum sort of player, so it was the obvious thing to go for."

Initially the band brought in a backup drummer to see how things would go. "What happened was I got to the third or fourth show, which was in Ireland, and the stage wasn't big enough to get two drum kits on there. So he sat it out for the night, and came up to me after the show and said, 'Well, I guess I'm going home.' We never made any decision for me to stay, it just happened that way."

"So I wasn't complaining, it was great. I just wanted the drums to be the best for Def Leppard. I didn't have any selfish thoughts or anything — I just wanted it to be good for the band, and it worked out how I wanted it, so that was great."

Playing to the huge audience at last year's Donington festival was their return to the big time after Allen's accident. "It especially stuck out in my mind because of the reception that I got from the crowd when Joe [Elliott, vocalist] introduced me. It was quite emotional for me because my parents were there and the whole bit. It was real good — I enjoyed it immensely."

Getting Hysterical

Leppard then completed all the tracks for their new album, which cost over a million dollars to make. "*Hysteria* was the end result, and it covers the whole period that we've been away. Songs like 'Pour Some Sugar on Me' were written towards the end of the recording, so there are some old ones and some new ones."

It's a lengthy album, with 12 songs and a playing time of 63 minutes. "We figured that was the only way we could justify being away for so long. It wasn't intentional but it kinda worked out that way."

At this stage do the band want to think about their next album?

"We've got a basic idea. We've got quite a bit of material, we just need to come up with a bit more. I think we're producing this next one ourselves, just to have a bit of a crack at it. We've gathered a little bit of experience having spent that long working on *Hysteria*. So if we put our minds to it we think we could do a pretty decent job."

And what are the chances that Def Leppard will include New Zealand in their tour?

"It all depends on how things go. It would be nice, we've never been to New Zealand. The only place we've been is Australia, and that was really only small time. We only did a few shows — Sydney, Melbourne and the Ngarara festival, that was it. We would like to spend a bit more time down there and do more shows, it would be good — the more the merrier, y'know."

What sort of audience are the band getting this time around?

"Quite a cross-section. There are people that were hard core from *Pyromania* days, and now we're getting a lot more of a younger audience coming in from the singles and what-have-you, so it's good. A lot of girls as well — a hell of a lot of girls, but you know, nobody's complaining."

Moments after this interview, Rick Allen, Joe Elliott, Steve Clark, Phil Collen and Rick Savage would be on stage getting things hysterical with their San Diego fans. And then what, Rick?

"Probably visit the bar for a while, and then try and sleep as much I can. It can get pretty tiring when you're doing three shows on and one day off."

Geoff Dunn

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