

HELL-o over there ? How is Great Britain

today ?

Great Britain is the fucking pits. We have a shit Government, shit weather and mostly shit people. We pay between 25 and 40% of everything we earn in tax – when we spend the little bit we have left, we pay another 17% in VAT tax on everything we buy. If we buy gasoline, diesel or cigarettes, 80% of the cost goes straight back to the Government. Finally – when we die, we have to give these bastards 40% of everything we have worked our whole lives for. In return, we have out-of-control immigration, out-of-control crime, a jammed-up road network, a fucked-up financial mess, crazy house prices, and there's no manufacturing industry any more. The cost of food has risen 40% in one year because of huge diesel prices, our gas and electricity bills have doubled..... it's almost as bad as France.

I was wondering how did you choose HELL as a band name ? Were you influenced by "Welcome To Hell" that was released one year before you created the band ?

It was chosen because it's short, simple and very much to the point. No, we weren't influenced at all – in point of fact, I had *never* heard *anything* by Venom at all until about six months ago when I found something on YouTube. One of the problems I hear with almost all Metal nowadays is that you can immediately hear where the influences have come from – I put on an album, and halfway through the first song, I'm thinking "Yeah, these guys have been listening to Testament, or this guitar player is trying to sound like Jeff Loomis" - it's all so derivative, there's so much laptop Metal around now. Back in the day, because HELL were part of creating this whole genre, it was completely fresh and original, and a key objective was always to keep the listener guessing all the time. On the new album, there is so much light and shade – it changes dramatically all the time, you'll hear something which is so dark, so sinister, so oppressive and so heavy – and then seconds later you'll suddenly think you're listening to Enya. Life isn't about black and white. It's all about hundreds of shades of grey, and the music 100% reflects that.

Did you remember how the first track of HELL was created and which one was it ?

HELL

England was the cradle of N.W.O.B.H.M with combos such as Judas Priest, Venom and bafe iron Maiden, Motörhead, AngelWitch, Saxon, Venom and so many others. All those bands are now worldwide known thanks to great promotion and intense touring. But England had also smaller combos to offer in the early 80's, bands that unfortunately never got the opportunity to sign a label deal and weren't welcomed by press. One of them was HELL. This band was ahead in time in the way of writing dark and lugubrious songs, using theatre-like stages and extremely occult imagery. They had recorded 4 demos and a single between 1982 and 1986 but the band split after the death of their singer and the collapse of their label for the full-length. Twenty five years later, the remaining of the band has reunited to record the album. Their guitarist, Kevin, has accepted to speak about past, present and future. (answered June 2008)



The writing was done almost totally by myself and Dave Halliday (RIP) – about 50/50, either working individually or sometimes together. The first-ever song was "No Martyr's Cage" which was written just a few weeks after the band had formed. The song recycled some riffs from Race Against Time and Paralex (our previous bands) – I wrote new lyrics and wrote the arrangement, although obviously on the new album I have done almost everything because Dave's sadly not here any more. There's a brand-new version of that song appearing on the new album which should be finished towards the end of this year. Andy Sneap is doing the production and it's sounding absolutely huge – just killer. For me – it's great, because Andy and I have

been able to incorporate all the stuff on that (and other songs) which have been in our heads for 23 years, but which we didn't have the technology to incorporate back then. We're so alike in the way we think – we come up with exactly the same ideas over and over again.

Regarding back to your music, we can say that HELL was miles away from what was done in the early 80's. I mean your music was a kind of mix between Merciful Fate,

Venom and bafe cave stuffs. And considering that Venom was always mocked at, I guess that the reviews of HELL weren't that much great ? The problem was always that because we were so different, no-one really understood us until

they had seen the band several times and had got their heads around it. We did a lot of stuff which even today sounds lunatic and off-the-wall. For reasons which still escape me, we were completely unable to generate any interest from the media or from A&R guys at record companies. The journalists of the time were lazy, uninterested bastards who would not travel outside of London to see bands – so we organised shows in London, doing gigs at places like the Woolwich Tramshed, taking coach loads of our fans down there with us. The journalists just didn't show up. Remember also that 1983-85 was the period of big-hair, pretty-boy soft-rock which was selling albums by the million, so why would they bother investigating anything different ? The frustration and disappointment was immense – just look at some of the stage show photos at www.myspace.com/bowersdad and remember that HELL were an unsigned band, inventing and creating all this stuff ourselves on a tiny budget.

In Snakepit magazine you stated that the aim of HELL was to scare people around you, make them believe that you were practising sacrifice on stage. Were you considered as Satanism back then and were you into Anton Lavey and Alester Crowley's stuffs ?

Look, Eric – when we went out and did a gig, we were performing a show. It wasn't faked or artificial, but to do that effectively required proper research and a proper understanding of what the subject was all about. So yeah – I read books, I researched the subject thoroughly including the writings of Crowley and others. As a result of that, what we delivered was believable and came totally from the pits of the soul – there was nothing fake about it. But

I'm not going to answer your question, because what I'm into on a personal level is my business and mine alone. And again – an objective of HELL was always (and still is) to make people question stuff and think for themselves, so if I just present it to you, all nicely gift-wrapped on a silver plate, it won't make you think, will it ?

Let's keep on this topic, I think that you were aware of what happened in Scandinavian in the 90's with Black Metal, church desecrations, and satanic murders. In some way the kids from the 90's realised what you were speaking about and what you wanted people to believe about HELL, don't you think so and what's your regard on this ?

I think that what was happening in Scandinavia in the 90's with the topics of your question was a very interesting period, but not always for the right reasons. There was a lot of stuff which came out which was desperately close to reality – but also a lot of bandwagon-jumpers who were spouting total bullshit, and just becoming part of this movement because it was seen as a cool thing to do. I would refer you back to the previous question, and how it's important for people to think for themselves and reach their own conclusions. One of the great advantages we have as musicians is that we are able to say exactly what we want to say at any given time, and do this through our music, which will hopefully get listened to – really listened to – in a way which is much more intense than a guy standing on a box in the middle of a town, or by a guy standing behind a pulpit talking down a microphone. As a musician and as a writer – I don't expect anyone to believe anything I say – it's my opinion and mine alone, religion and beliefs are a matter for one's own consciousness. All I'm doing is presenting my point of view as a musical slice of time.

Do you remember under which circumstance you created "In Depth Of Despair" that sounds like a morbid ballad ? I think that it perfectly represents the mood of the early 80's and in all honesty I find the slow tempo part a bit cheesy....

It is a morbid ballad which deals with a sad subject. Dave Halliday wrote it when he was at one of his lowest periods, and for reasons which I know about, but which I'm not going to talk about here because he was my dear friend and I just don't think it's appropriate – it's completely disrespectful to his memory to splash that stuff all over a magazine. Remember also that this song was written by a guy who was so totally unable to deal with life, that he fucking killed himself. If you find it cheesy, don't listen to it. Go fuck yourself.

I guess that with all the macabre image and satanic gifts you had back then, your local clergy was a great friend of yours, ahahah. Did you get trouble with the local religious men or even police as Satanists weren't welcomed in England in the early 80's...?

We had numerous public battles with the clergy, and we have dozens of newspaper cuttings and front-page headlines from newspapers back in the day. Me ? I just regarded it as great publicity for the band, but Dave would take it all very personally and would write great long letters back to the newspapers, defending our beliefs and our position. It all kinda refers back to what I was saying about religious (or any other) beliefs being a matter for one's own conscience. We had our opinions, the clergy had theirs. They just didn't know how to deal with that, so they presented themselves as narrow-minded fanatics in the press which probably did them more harm than good. We had priests outside gigs, trying to turn people away, just all sorts. The whole topic inspired the song "Save Us From Those Who Would Save Us", there's another new version of that song coming on the album.

According to you, which label could have signed you back in the 80's ? And do you think they'd have given you total freedom to release album and titles ? I mean perhaps they'd have asked you to be a bit more "normal" to get a larger distribution ?

To be perfectly honest, I don't really know – because within the band, it was run like a business and we all had our own jobs and tasks. I took care of stuff like the stage show, PA, lights, pyros and trucking, Dave took care of all the record company correspondence and publicity, so I never really knew who he was talking to at any given time. I guess that Neat would have been a prime contender. With regard to your question about musical freedom – if an offer had been made which didn't provide that, we wouldn't have signed. Period.

To keep on this topic, what prevented you from getting a deal with a label as Martin Walkier did a brilliant musical career after quitting HELL ?

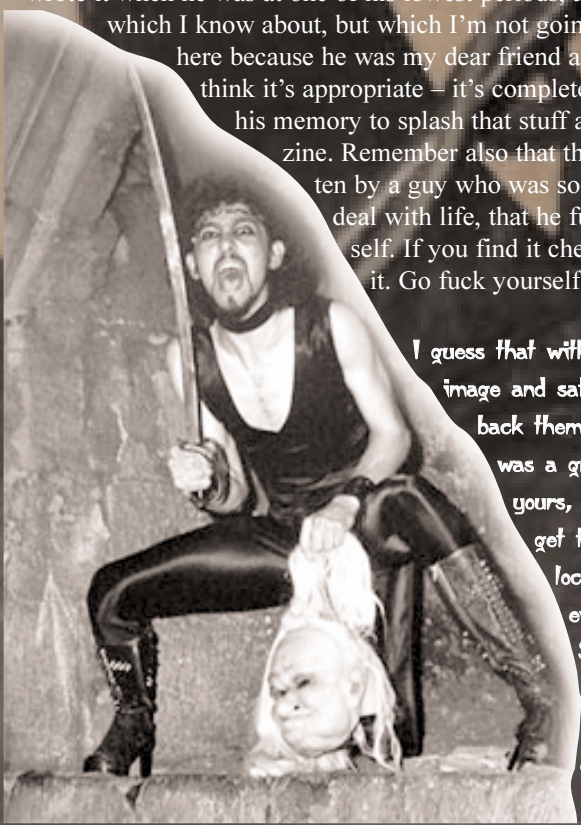
WTF ? Martin Walkyier never was in HELL. He was the singer in SABBAT and then later in SKYCLAD – he's also just finished working with a project band called The Clan Destined, but he will be doing the vocals with me on the new album. Why ? Because he saw HELL about 20 times back in the day, we were his #1 influence and only he really knew what was needed to deliver this 25-year-old material into 2008 with a cutting, new-age feel to it. What prevented us from getting a deal was that the journalists and record companies in 1987 were fucked-up retardards.

According to me a tune like "Let The Battle Commence" could have been a perfect title to spread HELL's name in the underground, don't you think so ?

"Battle" is a real shit-kicker of a song. We used it as our opening song for almost all of the band's career until late '85, when it was replaced by "On Earth As It Is In Hell". Both songs will also be on the new album. The lyrics don't preach any special gospel – they were principally written just to introduce the band and the show.

The band started in 82 while Black Sabbath, Venom, Iron Maiden, Motorhead were extremely popular in UK. What kind of memories do you have from this period ? England was probably the best place to be in 80's....

You're 100% right about that. Looking back, it was an amazing period – but like any other really productive period in any genre – music, arts, whatever – when you're there and you're right in the middle of it all, you just don't realise just how good it is. When Vincent van Gogh



painted some sunflowers using borrowed paint to pay his rent, did he realise the impact his work would have so many years later ? I think that the whole artistic productivity of the 80's and the NWOBHM movement is only now being recognised – as indicated by the massive resurgence of interest in the whole period. Sure, there's a lot of shit, but the shit's studded with diamonds. It's all a question of searching round until you find them.

Back in the 80's French Metal scene was pretty alive with combos such as Vulcain (who played in UK), ADX, Sortilege, and so on. Were you fan of these combos and how did they sound for you as you couldn't understand any French lyrics ?

Definitely – there were some really good French bands around, and I saw some of them on the rare occasions that they came over and played in the UK. I really liked Sortilege, they had a real sharp edge to them, which for me was ahead of the other "Asterix Metal". I also liked some of the other non-UK and non-US bands such as Loudness from Japan – their guitar player was fucking superb. Regarding the language – it wasn't a problem for me because my French was pretty good, but for almost all other fans it wasn't a problem either, just as HELL now have Spanish-speaking fans in South America who have learned all the English lyrics, and have taken the time and trouble to figure out what the words actually say. Go to any 80's disco in the UK today, and you will hear 500 people singing along with Plastic Bertrand's "Ca plane pour moi" even though they have no clue what it means.

Don't you think that sometimes the vocals weren't top notch and not enough strong for your materials ? I mean they sometimes lack of "balls" if you know what I mean....

Two things Eric – First - every piece of HELL you have ever heard consists of Dave singing through a cheap microphone and a cheap rehearsal PA system and being recorded on a 1980's flip-top mono Philips cassette recorder. It's not surprising that the quality wasn't so great – and secondly, listen to anything from the 80's – the thin-sounding guitars, the cheesy analogue synthesizer sounds, and compare them to what is being done today using 2008 digital. Of course today is better – time, techniques and technology all advance. What I can tell you is that in preparation for the album, Andy Sneap (who has produced and mixed over 100 Metal albums) tried very hard

to find a guy who could replicate Dave's voice. He couldn't find ANYONE.

Do you feel like keeping on with HELL and releasing the full length you never had the opportunity to record and how would it sound ? As I said, this is happening now. The album is in production and it sounds fucking amazing.



It's so different, so fresh, so brutal, yet so musical all at the same time. It will be called "Human Remains" and it should be finished sometime towards the end of this year. As I explained, the whole project is being completed by Andy Sneap as a total labour of love – he has waited 20 years to do this, and as the band who started him on



the road to the great success he has had as a producer, he feels that he owes it to the world to ensure that this music is heard by a new generation.

Around 1984/ 1985 Heavy Metal was turning down because of the rising of Thrash Metal. Combos such as Slayer, Exodus, Exciter, Metallica were offering more brutal and faster Metal than any previous Heavy Metal bands. How did you live this transition ? Were you aware that with bands from Bay Area the Heavy Metal couldn't be as strong as before ? When "Human Remains" is finished, if you listen to HELL songs such as "Save Us", you'll quickly realise that the speed and aggression of this Metal is not too different from the Bay Area stuff of the late 80's. It just wasn't produced properly, that's all. Of course musical genres evolve and change – that's what keeps it interesting for the fans. What

would have happened if HELL had survived beyond 1987 ? I don't know. What I can tell you is that the band progressed and evolved over 5 years, and it has continued to evolve and progress over the last 23 years in my head. Listen to the album and tell me what you think.

Let's keep on this topic, were there Thrash Metal combos you enjoyed back then ? How did you view these new competitors and have you ever thought of killing HELL to create a pure Thrash Metal band ?

I didn't like Thrash Metal then and I still don't now. To me, it was just an excuse to play stuff too fast and for bands to consist of a singer yelling poetry over 100 riffs. There was no structure to many of the songs, no musicality and therefore for me – no pleasure in listening to it. I would rather have watched Angus Young playing 3 chords and going mental.

Do you still have an eye on Metal scene and what are the latest albums that impressed you ?

Of course – I have a 16-year-old son who is a Metalhead and he keeps me up to date with what's happening on the ground. The problem for me is the same one I referred to earlier – I spent so much time in studios, and much of this stuff is so same-sounding and derivative, it's difficult to listen to it objectively and hear where the real quality is. I can hear where the producer has cut & pasted whole sections, I can hear all the fake drum blastbeats which have been programmed at the studio, all that shit.....and again, if you take away all the production, all the computer trickery and all the effects, there's just no fucking *song* there. The only 2008 band which really turns me on is Dimmu Borgir – I just think they are so good at what they do. I like the huge, symphonic quality much of their music has, and I really admire Mustis as a keyboard player. The new album from Cradle Of Filth is also excellent (*hug ??? are we talking about quality music ???-ed*).

Do you feel a bit bitter that some combos from your time are still alive and were really less great than HELL in the 80's ?

No. Bitterness, envy and jealousy are three totally pointless emotions, and I think 'good luck' to anyone who has any success in any field. They were just luckier than HELL.

Thanks a lot for your time and answers, feel free to close the gate of HELL....

Thanks to you and your fine magazine for your interest, and thanks to anyone who is still reading this shit.....buy the album, and fucking marvel at it.....it has taken 25 years to make, and Dave gave his life for it. As the little guy used to say – « Let Battle Commence !!! »