

Vinny APPICE

Story by Robyn Flans • Photos by Paul La Raia

Heaven And Hell, the band featuring the '80s lineup of Black Sabbath, is selling out concert halls around the world. For veteran rocker Vinny Appice, it's a return to the music he loves.

BACK IN Heaven



There's a reason classic rock has become as popular as it has. Clearly, when it was created back in the '60s and '70s, the music was innovative, fresh, and imaginative. As the '70s began, an outrageous group of musicians took the stage and played a heavier style, with strong backbeats, a pulsating bass, and screeching guitars. That band was Black Sabbath, who would become known as the forerunners of heavy metal. Although many critics at the time were horrified at the heavy treatment of music, this band would go on to huge success and influence generations of musicians to come.

Drummer Vinny Appice joined up with the band in 1980. Ozzy Osbourne had recently left the fold for a solo career, and Ronnie James Dio had replaced him on vocals. By 1983, Dio had left to go on his own, taking Appice with him to create the band Dio, a group that, for a period of time in the '80s, was a top concert draw. Once Dio had called it quits in 1998, the original Black Sabbath, with Ozzy, came back together for a reunion tour.

Earlier this year, the Dio-fronted lineup—Tony Iommi on guitar, Geezer Butler on bass, and forty-seven-year-old Appice on drums—reunited to support a new Rhino compilation, *Black Sabbath, The Dio Years*, which features three new songs. The band is now called Heaven And Hell. It shouldn't have been a surprise, but the success that this group is having on tour this year has been nothing short of remarkable.

Appice, who began playing at age eight, was influenced and encouraged by his brother Carmine, eleven years his senior. Vinny took lessons from Dick Bennett, his brother's former teacher, for three years, practicing every day, playing to records with headphones, and taping his playing. By the time he was fifteen, Vinny had a nine-piece horn band and a manager with connections. It wasn't long before the young drummer was playing with legendary guitarist Rick Derringer and then Black Sabbath, establishing himself as a noteworthy heavy metal drummer. In fact, Appice laughs as he recalls that one of his first Web sites touted, "No ballads, no love songs, no problem."

Now back with Sabbath, Appice is in his glory. "It's been long enough now that what we did has become truly classic and legendary," Appice says. "There's even a whole new audience out there listening to it. At the show, it's half young kids, and sometimes it's the kid of the original fan. It's the right time for us right now."



MD: How would you say your drumming has changed since joining Sabbath back in 1980?

Vinny: I have a lot more licks now. Over the years, you practice and come up with different things. I tend to listen more on stage now, too. I scan while I'm playing; I'm listening to the bass, the guitar, the vocal—I keep scanning

around. If you do that, when somebody plays something, you're able to jump on that riff and jam with that a little, and then go back to the song. If Tony plays something interesting, I might play to that a little, and then go back to the song. I always tell kids at clinics to make sure they're always listening to the band.

MD: Can you identify what this genre of music expects from a drummer?

Vinny: Sabbath plays very heavy riffs. We're not speed metal or anything like that, so this requires a lot of power and stamina, good sound, and an attitude of "less is more." With Sabbath, sometimes what you *don't* play is

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important, because their riffs are so open. Sometimes it's nice not to fill the holes up too much, because that's the original sound of the band. It requires a lot of feel. This is the stuff I love to play.

MD: What do you have to think about now, at forty-seven, to play this music?

Vinny: You have to take care of yourself a little bit better. I remember back in the '80s, we did the tours and the parties, no problem, and we didn't really feel it. I didn't really work out that much back then, although I always rode bicycles and stuff like that. Now I've been working out in the gym, which really helps. When we go back to touring after a break, I don't get out of breath playing the set.

MD: What is your favorite Sabbath material to play?

Vinny: One song I love is called "After All," from the *Dehumanizer* album. It's a very slow, pumping song, and there's a lot of things I can do in there because it's so open. I also love playing "Children Of The Sea" and "Heaven And Hell." All of it is so much fun. I think we're the heaviest band in the world.

MD: Of the songs you recorded, what are your three favorites?

Vinny: "We Rock" is one. I recorded it with Dio, and it's almost a drum anthem. It's got a lot of drumming on it, with some cool fills that really drive the song. I also like a song on the *Dehumanizer* album called "TV Crimes," which is very fast with some cool drum licks. There are a couple of parts in there where I'm not just playing a beat. I'm playing more of a melodic part that I created.

To me, that sort of thing is important, because when you're playing more than 2 and 4 in a song, it shows creativity. A good example of that is some of the stuff Ringo played, like "Come Together," with that thing on the hi-hat and triplets on the toms. It's a musical little part. It's not complicated, but stuff like that shows that the drummer is thinking.

The third song would probably be "Armageddon," which I did with my own band, Axis. It's on a record we did called *It's A Circus World*. The song was actually written against this beat I had that was in 7/4. It really kicks butt and has a lot of energy to it.

MD: A lot of people don't know that you worked with John Lennon.

Vinny: That was in the mid-'70s. I was sixteen at the time and had a nine-piece funk rock band with four horn players. Our manager owned the Record Plant studios in New York City, so he signed us to a deal and we got to

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rehearse in a little room upstairs at the studio, which is where John Lennon used to work. We were rehearsing up there one day and Jimmy Iovine, who Lennon was working with, called and said, "Can you guys come down here? We need you to do some hand claps for John Lennon's record." We went down into the recording room and saw John Lennon and Elton John, and they said, "We just want you to clap on the 2 and 4 on these parts," so we did that on "Whatever Gets You Through The Night." After that we went back to rehearse.

John asked Jimmy, "Who were they?" He said, "That's Roy's band. They rehearse

upstairs all the time." A couple of days later, in came John and Yoko. They sat down on the

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step and watched us play. He liked the band and he would come up all the time and hang with us. Then he asked us to perform on a TV show he was doing on ABC that was broadcast around the world. They wanted us to wear black jumpsuits, and they had masks made of our faces for us to wear on the backs of our head so we all had two faces, which I think was making a statement about being two-faced.

It was a very formal affair at the New York Hilton. The van picked us up and we rode with John and Yoko to be fitted for the jump suits, and we hung out with him all week, going all over the city, getting the masks made and the fittings, and it was very cool. We did two songs with him on that show—"Imagine" and "Slippin' And A Slidin'"—and he asked us to do a couple of videos with him that were shot at The Record Plant.

The last thing we did with John was play on a record he produced for our manager's wife. We did eight songs in the studio with John as a producer. We got to know him pretty well, and it was amazing. By the way, I was still in school at the time. I would work with John at night and then have to go to school the next day!

MD: What prepared you for being able to work on that level as a sixteen-year-old?

Vinny: I started playing drums at about nine and was a dedicated student, taking lessons for years. I worked through several books and really studied the instrument. I had the patience and desire to put in the time.

These days, it seems like a lot of kids don't have the patience for that. The world is moving a lot faster. There are so many more distractions—the Internet, computers, cable TV, iPods, cell phones. I've given lessons to kids, but they don't want to take a year to go through two books.

MD: So how do you convince them that it's important?

Vinny: I'll play something and ask them if

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they can do it. They can't, because they don't understand what I'm playing. They don't know note values and how the notes sound against each other.

I feel if you go to lessons and learn how to read, when you hear other people play, you'll be able to almost see the notes they're playing, rather than just hearing them. You'll be able to pick up things much quicker that way.

When I first joined Black Sabbath we only had four rehearsals before our first gig, so I had to write out little charts. I've written charts throughout my career, especially when I've gone into the studio with somebody. A couple of years ago I did a tour with George Lynch, the guitar player from Dokken, and I had to learn over twenty songs. I had my little book next to me.

MD: How did you learn to play in the studio?

Vinny: I mentioned earlier about being in a band at age sixteen that had a manager. The nice thing about him owning a studio was that we got to do a lot of demos.

When I first went in, I didn't know you had to play so steady. They gave me a metronome and taught me a lot of stuff. When you're able to hear what you record, you understand how important it is to keep steady. I learned a lot about recording at fifteen and sixteen, so when I got to work with Lennon and later on with Rick Derringer, I was prepared to go into the studio.

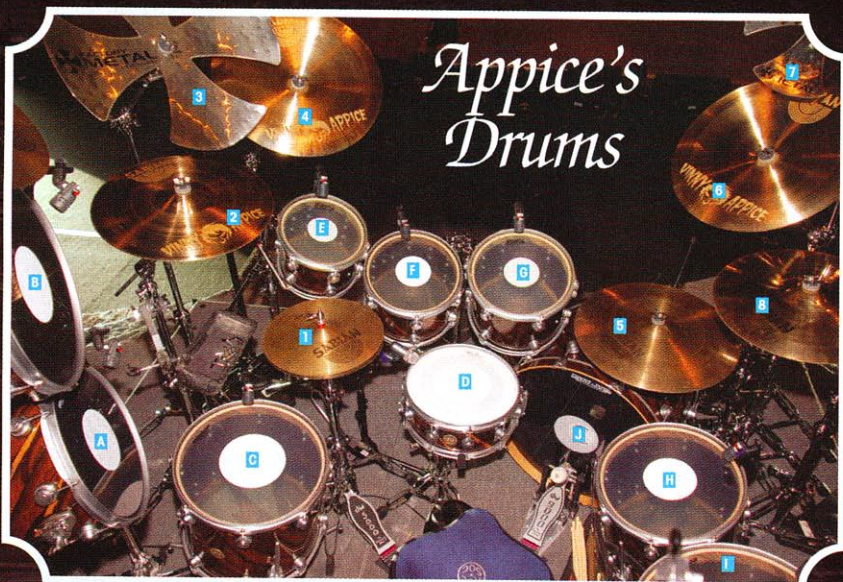
MD: You had a pretty monstrous drumset with Black Sabbath back in the '80s, with tom-toms "flying" all over the place. What are you using these days?

Vinny: Back then my kit was one of the

biggest out there, with all these aerial toms, which are floor toms that are up on stands at shoulder height and above. I kept adding toms because it looked great, but it was also fun to play.

On this tour, I got a new set from DW that includes aerial drums and a big gong bass drum behind me. I'm back to a big kit, and everybody's loving it.

We did something to the stands that hold the aerial drums, where, when I'm playing, I'm able to grab the top of the drum and pull it down toward my shoulder and hit it, and then push it and it rocks back and forth. It looks like



Drums: Drum Workshop Collector's Series, clear lacquer over exotic twisted ziracote, 10-ply VLT, with satin chrome hardware

- A. 12x15 "aerial" tom
- B. 11x14 "aerial" tom
- C. 16x16 floor tom
- D. 5 1/2 x14 snare
- E. 8x10 tom
- F. 9x12 tom
- G. 10x13 tom
- H. 13x15 floor tom
- I. 16x18 floor tom
- J. 16x24 bass drum
- K. 11x14 "aerial" tom (not shown in photo)
- L. 12x15 "aerial" tom (not shown in photo)
- M. 8x24 woofer (mounted up and behind)

Cymbals: Sabian

- 1. 14" Flat Hats
- 2. 18" AA medium crash
- 3. Factory Metal Percussion Cross-Crasher (large)

- 4. 20" Chinese
- 5. 20" AA Rock medium ride
- 6. 20" Chinese
- 7. Factory Metal Percussion Cross-Crasher (large)
- 8. 18" AA medium crash
- 9. 19" AA medium crash (not shown in photo)

Hardware: DW 5000 and 9000 series stands and pedals (spring tension on bass drum pedal tight as possible)

Heads: Aquarian Signature coated with dot on snare batter, Classic Clear snare-side (medium-tight top and bottom), Classic Clears with power dot on tom batters, Classic Clears on bottoms (no muffling, tuned medium-tight), Classic Clear black with power dot on bass drum batter, with no head on front (small DW pillow for muffling)

Sticks: Vic Firth 5B model (hickory with wood tip)

VINNY On Record

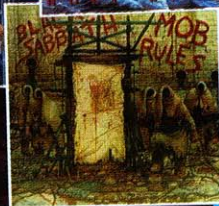
RECORDINGS:

Artist

Dio
Black Sabbath
Black Sabbath
Dio
Axis
3 Legged Dogg

Album

Holy Diver
Dehumanizer
Mob Rules
Last In Line
It's A Circus World
Frozen Summer



FAVORITES:

Artist

Led Zeppelin
Jimi Hendrix
Billy Cobham
Mahavishnu Orchestra
Mahavishnu Orchestra
Buddy Rich

Album

all
Are You Experienced
Spectrum
Inner Mounting Flame
Birds Of Fire
anything

Drummer

John Bonham
Milch Mitchell
Billy Cobham
Billy Cobham
Billy Cobham
Buddy Rich

it's going to fall over. I'll do a fill with one hand on the snare while I'm pulling the drum down with the other hand, I'll play a fill on the aerial tom, push it, and it looks like it's rocking. People seem to be pretty excited about them.

MD: Are there adjustments you have to make when you're playing a big arena?

Vinny: The only thing is, in a bigger arena, sometimes you have to adjust your playing because some of the fast licks you might be doing might not come across as well through a big P.A. system. Sometimes you have to play a little more open here and there, particularly with the fills. You play according to the room.

MD: Heaven And Hell has become a big suc-

cess. But what else have you been up to?

Vinny: Recently I've been working with a band called 3 Legged Dogg, with Jim Bane from Dio on bass, Carlos Cavazo from Quiet Riot on guitar, Chas West on vocals, and Brian Young on guitar. We released a CD on the Internet recently and everyone seems to love it. It sounds like Audioslave meets an old-style '70s vibe. But the band is on hold while I'm doing this.

MD: Where do you see yourself ten years from now?

Vinny: I hope to still be playing and making music. I love making music, writing songs with people, creating, and just playing.

MD: You don't get tired of the road?

Vinny: I love the road. I'm a road warrior. On this level, it's been pretty amazing. But I've also done tours where we've driven in a mini van, and I think it's all fun. You've got to love it, because if you don't, you're in the wrong profession. I love playing for people. That's when it all pays off.

