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Blaze Bayley

Reviews

**Alive In Poland
(Metal Mind Productions/
Music Video Distributors)**[Interview with Blaze Bayley - Vocals](#)

I have a confession to make; when pioneering NWOBHM legends Iron Maiden announced they were reuniting with long-departed vocalist Bruce Dickinson (and was thus parting ways with Dickinson's well-intended replacement Blaze Bayley), I was more than a little disappointed. Was I indeed sincerely overjoyed by the prospect of once again having the opportunity to vicariously partake (or even overindulge) in the authentic Iron Maiden experience? Yes, but I also found myself speculating '...what might have been...' had the group opted to continue writing and recording with the Birmingham, England-born vocalist. Fortunately for all parties involved, eight inexplicably long years and four albums later, Bayley is again poised to take the Heavy Metal community by storm with yet another slab of carefully crafted mayhem.

On the stellar *Alive In Poland* (2007), an expertly captured sixteen song collection of blistering concert footage (taken from the group's March 24, 2007 performance at the Metalmania Festival in Katowice), each track, beginning with the relentlessly pummeling "Speed Of Light", and a searing, hook-laden take on the Wolfsbane classic "Tough As Steel", immediately commands the rapt and undivided attention of even the most hopelessly jaded and unimaginative of listeners (myself most definitely included). Undoubtedly attempting to distance themselves from the shameless, payola and chart position-driven tactics so often employed by their few '...working man...' contemporaries, the group proves their mettle early and often, effortlessly delivering a deliciously airtight ensemble quite easily worthy of the highest of critical and commercial accolades.

Continuing with the maddeningly infectious, *Falling Down*-fueled "Man On The Edge", and the impossibly soaring "Two Worlds Collide", the relatively unknown combination of ex-Wolfsbane/Iron Maiden vocalist Blaze Bayley, guitarists Rich Newport and Nick Bermudez, bassist David Bermudez and drummer Rico Banderra (who has since left the group due to the proverbial '...creative differences...') steamrolls ahead with the greatest of ease. Tearing through an impressively varied and refreshingly lengthy set that wisely accentuates Bayley's already much-celebrated lyrical and vocal proficiencies without burying the average listener amid an avalanche of virtuosic idiocy, the newly rejuvenated quintet wastes little time effectively reaffirms their still burgeoning reputation as a creative and commercial force not to be ignored.

Fortified throughout by a delightfully vast array of '...guilty pleasure...' bonus material, other standouts, including the thunderous (albeit thought-provoking) "Silicon Messiah", and the sweat-soaked, equally impressive closer "Born As A Stranger", only further solidify the erstwhile Mr. Cook's ironclad reputation as one of the genre's premier live performers. Although Bayley's decidedly faithful delivery on the obligatory Maiden-era gems contained herein (most notably the previously mentioned "Man On The Edge" and the quasi-epic "Sign Of The Cross") will almost assuredly leave many a die-hard nutswinger endlessly clamoring for more, what ultimately distinguishes the mighty *Alive In Poland* as a genuinely memorable release is the group's frequently razor-sharp delivery of Bayley's often unjustly overlooked solo material.

So what's wrong? *Still* not sure you'll like it? Believe me, dude...I know what you're probably thinking. But don't let that stop you from thoroughly enjoying what is, without a doubt, one of the finest '...in concert...' DVD experiences of the rapidly waning year. Even if you somehow can't forgive the multi-octave frontman of his undeniably dubious ties to the sonic atrocity that is Maiden's *Virtual XI* (or, for that matter, 1995's arguably underrated *The X Factor*), one must, at the very least, sincerely admire Bayley for boldly trudging ahead despite the most dire of odds. Not surprisingly, if you once again

found yourself in search of a slightly less than obvious alternative to the painfully mindless din and clatter that is so often force fed en mass, then this, my friends, might just be the cure for what ails you. Trust me, you won't be disappointed.

Interviews

Recently, acclaimed vocalist **Blaze Bayley** (ex-**Iron Maiden**, **Wolfsbane**), never a man of few words or interesting stories, was kind enough to take a break from his decidedly hectic schedule to speak with us regarding, among many other things, the filming of his forthcoming live DVD **Alive In Poland**...

Todd: What ultimately led to the demise of Wolfsbane?

Blaze Bayley: "...We'd been together for quite a while from the start, really. For all of us, Wolfsbane was our first serious band. What happened was we were offered the support slot for Iron Maiden around the UK. I think it was thirty one sold out shows, which is a lot of shows in the UK, so we did that, got to know the guys and everything. ...When they were looking for a singer for a replacement for Bruce Dickinson, they knew me, knew what I was like onstage and everything, so they asked me if I'd like to have an audition. I've always liked Iron Maiden...they're one of the first bands I listened to when I started to get into Metal, so I was definitely interested. I went along and had an audition with a lot of other people, got very, very luck and managed to get the job. That's how it came about. I went off and joined Iron Maiden, made some albums and did some tours. ...It was very sad to see the end of Wolfsbane, but I couldn't pass on the chance to become the singer for Iron Maiden."

Todd: Were you initially surprised when you were offered the job?

Blaze: "Well, the audition process is quite lengthy. You have to learn ten of the classic Maiden songs and sing them and at the second audition, you're invited back to sing in the studio as well so they would know what you sound like live and on the record. I really didn't think I would get the job because my voice is so different than Bruce Dickinson's. He's much more of a technical singer and I'm much more of a blood and guts singer, ya know? I'm more about the emotion and the passion of the song. When they chose me, I was very, very surprised that they had chosen somebody with a very different voice. But if you listen to the two albums that we made, they're just slightly different. The music's just slightly darker than what Maiden had been doing before. I was absolutely over the moon that I got it, but I never really expected to. ...I felt like the luckiest guy in the world when I got the job."

Todd: Personally, I've always felt you have more of a Hard Rock voice...

Blaze: "Yeah, I suppose I've always had that emotional investment...I wanna find the truth and the emotion of the song. I suppose it might be a small contradiction that I love Metal, but my voice is more of a heavy Rock voice. But I suppose that's given the sound that we've got with my own band."

Todd: In all honesty, are you truly happy with the music you recorded with Iron Maiden?

Blaze: "...Going from my days in Wolfsbane, I worked with a lot of different producers...and some top people. With Iron Maiden, I was working' with people that had Platinum albums all over the world. What was great about it was that I had a lot more confidence in my songwriting because all of the ideas I was working with were fitting right in with Iron Maiden. I came from this small band

and now I was in the huge band, but my songwriting ideas and everything were goin' great. I suppose one of the biggest things was that we did "Man On The Edge", which was all my lyrics and melodies...and that was the song they chose to be the first single from the (The X Factor) album. That was absolutely fantastic, ya know? It was a dream come true for me...that one of my songs would become a top ten single across Europe in the Rock charts. ...It was like a fantasy."

Todd: In hindsight, do you feel Wolfsbane should have been more successful?

Blaze: "Yeah, I really do. All we ever wanted to do was live on a tour bus and play shows. The music business was just the wrong shape, really, for us. We started off just playing gigs like any other Rock band in our own town. Tiny little gigs...packed with friends from school and stuff like that. It just seems that the music business has more to do with getting in between the bands and the fans at some point than it does about promoting the bands so fans get to know about it. I think that was the situation with Wolfsbane, ya know? We had the opportunity to go play live, we had the support of the record company and we seemed to do well, but we always wanted to do a lot more in the USA and we always wanted to do more work in continental Europe. ...We just never seemed to get the opportunity to play in those places. I think our record company at the time was looking for some type of cash crop, like if they spent all of this money, it would come back to them with the first record. They were never interested in investing in the band or us as musicians like it was way back in the '70's. I think that was it, really. We signed up at a funny time when it was all about major labels and Def American wanted to become a big company. I think we were more a band of the people. ...It was just the wrong time for us."

Todd: How did you end up with the nickname Blaze? Was it a marketing-motivated move or something that happened naturally?

Blaze: "...When we first started Wolfsbane, we were just tryin' to get an audience, so we did just the most outrageous things we could possibly do. We weren't great musicians, so we just tried putting on the biggest show in our home town, which was just a tiny little place... We had the biggest backdrop of any band at our first gig because we were all big Kiss fans. We all wanted to have these really dangerous sounding names. My real name is Bayley Alexander Cook. In England, the name Bayley is more commonly known as a last name, even though it's my first name. Through most of my life, people would say like in a telephone conversation or whatever '...what's your name?' and I would say '...Bayley...' and they'd say '...no, what's your first name?' ...After three or four hundred times of doing that when you meet people (laughs), you get pretty sick of it. So we were all thinking of stupid names. The drummer as going to be called Slut Wrecker and the guitarist was going to be called Jace The Ace, with an homage to Ace Frehley. Mine kept coming up as Blaze because it was dangerous sounding like being on fire. The first time I introduced myself to somebody and they said '...what's your name?' and I said my band name...I said Blaze, they never said '...what's your first name?' I thought it was pretty cool because no one was asking me what my first name was."

Todd: What are your current touring plans?

Blaze: "This is like the kick off for us. ...We have two big shows booked in Spain. One in Grand Canary and one in Barcelona. Then were going to Germany, the UK and Finland and I think Norway. So there's not as many dates, but we'll be doing one or two dates in as many of those European countries as we can get to. In between times, we'll be figuring out our new material...working on that. Then, perhaps in February, we'll start our world tour with a new album. There will be a new Blaze Bayley album featuring the new line-up. We'll be out there and I'm hoping we get to go everywhere."

Todd: Does “everywhere” include the United States?

Blaze: “We’re hoping to play the Milwaukee Metal Fest. That would be great. We’re talking to the guys over there. We’d love an opportunity to come over and do that. Hopefully, with the DVD and the new album, it will give us lots of opportunities to come over and play in the US. I haven’t played there hardly at all with my own band, so I’d love to go and see the fans there. ... (With Iron Maiden), I toured for both albums over there...some big shows and some small shows. ...I’ve always had great support from the fans in the US, but it’s such a huge place. We just didn’t get that many opportunities to play... I really enjoyed touring with Iron Maiden over there, but I just haven’t had any real opportunities with my own solo project to go over there. I’m hoping we can do that with the new album.”

Todd: Any truth to the rumors that you’ll be recording a forthcoming show for inclusion on a live DVD?

Blaze: “...What’s happening is that we’re doing a gig in Poland at Metal Mania...and that’s going to be the first Blaze Bayley DVD. So we’re all hoping it goes well. We’re all pretty nervous because even though I’ve made a lot of recordings, I’ve never recorded a DVD and it’s a live performance. I’ve been promising the fans a DVD for quite a while, so it’s great to have the opportunity to do it. I haven’t played Poland with my own band before...I haven’t been here since the Maiden days. The fans here were just so great to me when I was in Iron Maiden. Even though I was the new boy in the band, they opened their hearts to me and were very generous...very, very supportive. To come here and make the first Blaze Bayley DVD and have the Polish fans as the audience...that’s absolutely fantastic, ya know? ...We couldn’t be in better hands.”

Todd: Have you finalized a set list? Is there a particular era you’ll be focusing on?

Blaze: “Yeah, we worked out the set list quite a while ago. ...I haven’t played in Poland for such a long time that the fans aren’t so familiar with my solo stuff, so we’re doing a nice mix of the old stuff, the stuff that I did with Iron Maiden on The X Factor and Virtual XI and then some of my solo material.”

Todd: As a solo artist, you’ve gone through quite a few line-up changes. Has there been a reoccurring motivation behind these changes?

Blaze: “...It’s not for everyone...being in a band and making a living and trying to make your life work this way. It’s just not for everyone, ya know? ...And I think a lot of people, when they first join a band and get into the music business, think it’s going to be very glamorous and it’s all going to be MTV, naked chicks and cocaine. The reality is quite different, ya know? For me, it’s always been about the music. Even in the Wolfsbane days, when we were all hell raisers, it was all about the music and doin’ the best show that we could for the fans. And that hasn’t changed for me since I first started. When I was in Iron Maiden, it was a really huge band...really successful, but the basics were still the same. Doing it because you love the music and making the best performance you possibly can for the fans. I’ve carried that on with my own band and I think with some people, it’s just not enough. For me, all I’ve ever wanted to do was live on a tour bus and do the best shows that I can. ...Play the best that I can and give the fans the best value that I can. For some people, that’s just not enough. For me, I’ve lived Metal music and lived through Metal music. It’s been my whole life since I started, ya know? And I think it probably always will be. It’s been a complete obsession with me. Line-ups change, ya know? Some people...maybe they’re not physically strong enough and some people...they miss their families and their girlfriends and stuff like that. ...In the end, either the band folds or you just keep going and going. Hopefully you eventually get a line-up full of people that are tough mentally and physically that are doin’ it because they love the music

and are people who love and respect the fans.”

Todd: All things considered, do you consider this line-up to be the definitive version of the group?

Blaze: “I think this is something very, very special. All the work me and the guys have done together so far in rehearsals and in preparation...has been absolutely great. I’ve got some really tough guys with me. Everybody’s in it because they love the music and everybody’s in it because they respect the fans and they know that the fans are the most important part of any band. I think the material that we’re going to come up with, even though we only have the most basic of ideas...are so aggressive but still powerful and melodic...it’s going to be something very special. I just hope the fans enjoy what we come out with.”

Todd: At this point, do you have any idea what the new material will sound like? Will it be more akin to *Silicon Messiah* or *Blood And Belief*?

Blaze: “I don’t think we can really say until we get into the studio. ...I’ve been pretty pissed off over the last year, so I know lyrically and melodically a lot of the ideas are quite aggressive. I would expect it to sound darker and more aggressive in places, but equally, I’ve come to terms with a lot of my personal issues, so perhaps in places it will sound more emotional. Some of the ideas that we’ve had so far sound really Old School and some of them sound very modern, so I think all we can say is that the next album will have all the hallmarks that you would expect of a Blaze album. ...Power, passion, interesting lyrics and good quality songwriting that’s based one hundred percent on what you believe in your heart and not on trying to be big and trying to be huge... We write what we feel, we write with passion and hopefully the kind of fans that listen to our music are people that understand that and will enjoy it.”

Todd: So why were you so pissed off?

Blaze: “Well, the record company that I had. I’ve gotten rid of them now. They lied, cheated, blackmailed me and stole money from me. They told me that playing live gigs does not sell CDs in their opinion. For me, with my background coming from getting the band together just from a live perspective...hearing someone say something like that goes completely against everything I stand for. You’re gonna go in the studio but then you’re not gonna go tour with your album? That’s absolute lunacy to me. So I had to get out of the record deal and get rid of the record company. The management I had before I had problems with as well. Sanctuary Management, when I was with them, they tried to bury me...they put out my album the same week as Iron Maiden. ...This is no fault of Iron Maiden or the Iron Maiden management now, but Sanctuary management then did not want me to get anywhere with my own stuff. They didn’t want me to take the lights away from Iron Maiden, which is impossible, basically. Sheer paranoia they had. ...The band line-up changed because people were more interested in the money and how much they were going to get out of it instead of making the best record that we could or getting out and putting on the best show. ...I’m not interested in being a millionaire, ya know? I’m interested in playing a million shows for a million fans. That’s what I live for. In the end, it took a long time to sort them out. You know who your friends are when you go through something like that. I’ve come through that now even though at times I didn’t think I would. I’ve got the strongest band I’ve ever had, I’ve got a fantastic manager and now I’ve put together my own record label. Nobody can fuck with me anymore and the fans will get absolutely the best value that I can give them...”

Todd: Wow...that’s a rather ambitious undertaking...

Blaze: “I think it’s better to have one band on the record label and a manager that manages one band and does it well than a hundred bands and not do them good at all. ...For me, the fans have

always been there and they've given me so much support and encouragement. Big business and big record companies always seem to get in the way of the band and the fans. There always seems to be something. ...At the show where you're staring into the face of the fans, breathing the same air, singing the same songs...how can that be so great and yet you sell hardly any CDs? It doesn't make any sense. Well, the person responsible for the CDs is the record company, so if they're not making those records available for the fans or even telling them that there are CDs that they could buy if they are interested, then that's really fucked up. The mainstream music business now...the big dinosaurs, the big daddies of the mainstream music business...is now on it's last legs. In the next ten years, the whole music business will be in very different shape. And I predict the power will be back in the hands of the artists and the performers because that's where the talent is. The fans and the performers will have a much better relationship than what they have now."

Todd: I understand you recently got married. How has everything gone thus far?

Blaze: "...It's gone great, actually. I've known this lady for eighteen years. I met her at somebody else's concert, not at my own, which is the usual way I meet 'em, so I suppose I'm a bit lazy in that way. ...We've had a friendship for that entire time, but we've both also had careers. I've never put anything in front of my music and the band, but there was a time when I was really down and we got back together... ..We got married and since then, I've had good luck. ...She's supported me through the last eighteen years...when I've been through some really dark times with arguing with the record company and things didn't always go so well with the band. So now I've got a ring on my finger and things seem to be going well. ...Things seem to be going a lot better for the band and my singing career, so I think it's been a good move."

Select Discography

Blood And Belief (2004) ***
As Live As It Gets (2003) ***
Tenth Dimension (2002) ***
Silicon Messiah (2000) ***
Virtual XI (1998) **
The X-Factor (1995) **
Wolfsbane (1994) *
Massive Noise Injection (1993) *
Down Fall The Good Guys (1991) *
Live Fast, Die Fast (1989) *

* as a member of Wolfsbane

** as a member of Iron Maiden

*** as a solo artist

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