

TWISTED SISTER

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ers and there aren't that many individuals. Maybe if you can save a few — and that's literally what it is — then that's one less person who falls into that trap. And I *know* I've saved a few. That's what I feel it is, a fuckin' black hole and I see the kids fallin' over the edge into the life of imitation, this life of trying to be like your parents, of having a dream that you don't tell anybody about, that you really wanted to be a carpenter but carpenters don't make money these days so you go into school to learn how to be an accountant."

State Of the Amalgam, Part 3

You're giving your fans a very positive message. How do you feel about metal bands who sing, say, about Satanism? Or promulgate a kind of sexism that a lot of people find offensive?

"With the devil thing, most of the bands singing about it are doing it for shock value, it's horror, a scary movie. I don't do that with Twisted Sister because I feel that you shouldn't write about something evil in a positive light. Whether you believe it's a matter of religion or not, Satan has always represented an evil thing. For instance, I'm an AC/DC fanatic, I *love* the band, but I just couldn't write or sing something like 'Highway To Hell'. Bon Scott's rationale would be that he didn't believe in Heaven or Hell and he had a very good sense of humour. But to me this is black and that is white and Satan represents evil and God represents good, whether you're an agnostic or atheist or Christian or Bhuddist.

"I just can't put across negative concepts. I can write a horror song — 'Captain Howdy/Horrorteria' is a horror song, but it resolves. Captain Howdy, a child molester and torturer, gets off on a technicality in court but gets caught by an angry mob. Good wins out over evil.

"I look at Twisted Sister as being the Dirty Harry of rock 'n' roll. Dirty Harry was an extremely right-wing good guy. I mean, if you took him on face value, he was so good and so fuckin' law abiding that it made the average person throw up. What I like about Dirty Harry is that he's not a goody two-shoes, he fights back like a bad guy. Most people are on the side of good but they hate the good guys. Dirty Harry and Charles Bronson in *Death Wish* these were good guys, but using the bad guys' tactics. An eye for an eye pal — these were good guys, but using the bad guys' tactics. You fuckin' shoot a gun at me I'll shoot a gun at you first. I'm not gonna sit there and say 'hey, let's

talk about this'. And that's not Twisted Sister either. Twisted Sister uses a sledgehammer to get its point across.

"The thing about sexist metal bands — locker room humour is standard, guys have it. Girls have it — if you've ever been in a girls' room in a bar you'll know. You'll see 'Johnny has a big dick' or whatever written on the wall. That's what it is, it should be locker-room humour.

"Twisted Sister, we don't cater to men, we don't cater to women. By writing songs about 'Get down on your knees and please me baby', you can't relate to men and if you write the opposite; 'You call that a dick? I thought it was half a packet of lifesavers!' that's catering to men. Twisted Sister feels that's limiting the audience with an already limited heavy metal audience, so I just cater to people. So I try and keep it general in topics."

This is one concept that Dee Snider hasn't grasped at all

"As far as drugs and alcohol go, I don't. But I don't try to force my concepts on people. I understand why people do — society has created a situation where they can't let themselves go unless they have an excuse and the excuse is 'I was stoned'. This way if they make a fool out of themselves they're protected."

Whereas your excuse is you're on stage?

"No, I just do it on the street. Actually, for a long time on stage I used to tell people I was stoned because in bars if I said 'I'm straight', they'd walk away. Because if I was stoned, dressing and acting in that fashion was okay. If you weren't then there must be something wrong with you.

"I use the classic situation of you go into a pub really drunk and stand on a table and piss on the floor the barman will probably tell your friends to get you home and make sure you have a good night's sleep and your friends would laugh at you the next day. Now if I did it straight, same action, the barman would probably call the police, the police would arrest me for indecent exposure, destruction of private property, take me in and probably call in the psychiatrists to make sure I was sane before they tried me on criminal charges. I had no excuse. As long as society creates that kind of situation, drinking and drugs will be rampant."

Through the Looking Glass ...

Forgive me for saying it, but many of the things you've said and talked about doing remind me of ... Boy George. A man who has made strange clothes and makeup acceptable, doesn't do drink or drugs, exhorts his fans to be themselves ...

"Yeah — I don't like Boy George musically and I wanted to hate him personally because he represented a lot of the things musically that I

despise. We did *Top of the Pops* with him in England and I would slag him off on stage regularly. Our dressing rooms were next to each other and we met and the first thing he said was 'I think you guys are brilliant. I have your video'. And I have a very difficult time being mean to people who are nice to me. And he was really nice and honest and I have to admit that even before I met him I always had to give him credit for having the balls to do what he does. I've walked down the street with makeup on, I stopped wearing it. And he's not a big guy like I am, he's a wimp. He's not actually too small but he's very effeminate, he's bisexual. He's stuck to his guns and you've got to respect the shit of that. Musically, we're miles apart ..."

But isn't he just trying to make the music he loves, sweet soul?

"Oh yeah. I will say I don't like his music but I would never try and stop anybody's music. My thing with heavy metal for a long time is that it is still often not treated equally. Radio stations play what they wanna play and not what people wanna hear. It is standard that if a metal song is a hit single it's the last to be added to the playlist and the first to be removed. I think the music people wanna hear should be accessible to them, equally. In America there's a resurgence in metal at the moment so we get treated equally in terms of video and it's getting better on radio."

It's interesting, however that the biggest metal band in America is Van Halen, who have probably the cleanest visual profile.

"Van Halen? Well, first of all, their music varies. Like Twisted Sister, it can go from kind of pop metal, hard rock, to heavy metal. The difference with Van Halen is they've got the underpinnings of a boogie band. Everything seems to be like 'Aarumramdam, Hey we're goin' to a paaaarrrrry ev'ry day, owwww!' even when it's not, every song seems to have that kind of feel. 'Owwwwww! We're walkin' down the street and we're drinkin' Jack Daaaanyells!' even when they don't. They're not exactly clean — more the classic sex and drugs and rock 'n' roll band. It's very *happy* — that would be the best way to describe their image. You see their pictures and they're always smilin'."

"Twisted Sister and most other metal bands are angry and mean. That's especially so when we're playing live — the speed doubles and melody goes out the window, it just gets in the way. We come on like we're on *fire* and the, as the anger subsides, you'll see some laughing and joking with the audience."

I take it the show is less camped-up, too.

"There is no camp. It is five, aggressive, masculine heavy metallers. Live we *are* heavy metal. Well actually, it's almost punk. The feeling is intense and I just wanna scream. It's raw energy.

"There's not one explosion, no nothing. We

wear makeup, we are the special effects."

Time comes up and it's time for the photo session. The idea had been to capture him against some of the weight training equipment in the gymnasium below. A weight trainer back home, he's amenable until he peers in on the lunchtime crowd sweating and straining at the bars.

"No, this is *serious*. This is a serious gym, like my one back home. We wouldn't want anybody fooling round while we were training.

"I'm gonna really get into weights when Twisted Sister winds up," he explains as we descend the stairs. "Twisted Sister as it is can't last much more than two years before the anger and the hunger that keeps it going has all gone. When that happens I wanna really get into pumping. I wanna get big — really *humungous*"

Outside on the road he's a photographer's dream, snarling, baring teeth, pulling ferocious poses.

He spies an oil drum with the letters 'FTW.' painted on it. "See that? Know what that means? It stands for 'Fuck The World'. That's nihilist. Let's take a coupla pictures here, huh?"

The last series of shots is taken atop a small wall. By now the occupants of a nearby office block have seen him and are gazing out the window. A wolf whistle sounds out from above ...

"Who's the whistler? I hope it's not a *guy*! I *hate* gays!" he shouts in a tone quite different to any he has employed that day, angry and unfriendly. "At least I'm down here and not locked up in there!"

"See?" he turns round. "THIS is what brings out the character you wanted to see!"

And it's true. Eerie, but it's true.

So Dee Snider came and went, a perfect gentleman. He's not your average metallor and within the glam-metal chants of Twisted Sister songs lies a real conviction.

But if Dee Snider has set himself towards championing the right to be different, the right not to conform, then he has a few yawning holes in his philosophy. He plainly doesn't see there's equally no need for men to conform to what society lays down as "masculine" (or for that matter, for women to be "feminine"), that rebellion need not be loud and muscular, that loudness and muscularity as a standard is often the *opposite* of rebellion.

Ah, but hell, nobody's perfect. Dee Snider has battled a long time to do things his way and that in itself deserves respect. Twisted Sister are fun for their unselfconscious boisterousness and laudable for Snider's exhortations to youthful self-respect. There's better 'n' worse but there's a place for Twisted Sister.

Russell Brown

Chaka Khan



'I Feel For You'

On 12", Album and Cassette.

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