Osbourne wants people to take him seriously these days

by George_Varga

Sober and happy at 59, Ozzy Osbourne feels stronger and more focused than ever. "I'm not bragging," he said, "but I've overdosed quite a few times and I didn't die."

OZZY OSBOURNE - Sober and happy at 59, Ozzy Osbourne feels stronger and more focused than ever. CNS Photo courtesy of MSO. Even by rock's brain-shriveling standards of debauched self-abuse, Osbourne repeatedly set a new standard. But no more.

Clean and sober for the past two years, he sounded like a new man during a phone interview recently from a concert tour stop in Montana.

His speech, which was often slurred almost beyond comprehension, is now relatively clear. His thoughts, which used to seem addled on even his best days, are mostly lucid. His latest album, the rock-solid "Black Rain," is the first of his career that he recorded and wrote all the songs for without any chemical or alcoholic intake.

"I don't drink or use drugs today. I don't even smoke cigarettes," said the 59-year-old singer. "I reckon nicotine is the hardest to give up; I've been in rehab with junkies who can get off of the smack, but they can't put the cigarettes down.

"Somebody asked me, 'What would you have done if you couldn't have done the new album without alcohol or drugs?' I suppose then it would be time for me to call it quits. But this person on my recovery program team said: 'Ozzy's got a lot more years in him. It's not a sin to ask for help.'"

Accordingly, his first radio hit in years is titled "I Don't Wanna Stop" (sample lyric: I'm like a junkie without an addiction). And his once infamously batty behavior - which ranged from biting the head off a pigeon during

a meeting at his record company to getting arrested in Texas for urinating on the Alamo (while wearing a dress he took from his wife) - is also now apparently a thing of the past.

What hasn't changed is his love for his second wife and manager of 25 years, Sharon; their three children, Jack, Kelly and Aimee; and his two kids from his first marriage, Jessica and Louis.

"I love my wife more than anything. I wouldn't be in the position I'm in without her," said Osbourne, who later in the interview noted: "My wife is the best person in the world not to argue with. Because once she gets going, it's like 'Whoa!'"

Also unchanged is his frequent use of a word that sounds a lot like "trucking" and his passion for the hard-rocking music he makes as a solo artist and on periodic reunion tours with Black Sabbath, his pioneering heavy-metal band.

The contrast between the clear-eyed Osbourne of today and the stumbling, mumbling, drug-and-drink casualty of the past is remarkable. But the clear-eyed and newly pragmatic singer is quick to note that his recovery is a work in progress.

"Even if I don't drink, the disease of addiction is still going on; everyday I have my (12-step recovery) book in front of me," he noted.

Osbourne's new lease on life was largely inspired by his wife's battle against colon cancer a few years ago. Now that he's straight, he no longer wants to be a walking punch line.

"Even straight people aren't happy all the time. Even straight people have a bad day or an argument,"

Osbourne observed.

"But what I am getting sick and tired of is, well, I've been sober for a couple of years now and I want people to take me seriously. Because I used to be a piece of (sounds-like-'trucking') flesh and drool on the floor. And now that I've got my (sounds-like-'trucking') head out of the bottle and the bag and whatever (stuff) I was doing, I want people to take me seriously.

"I have a therapist, and he says: 'Look, do the math. How many years were you geting loaded?' I answer: 'Most of my life.' Then he asks: 'How long have you been clean?' People don't change because they got clean; you have to work at it."

Osbourne is now at work on a Broadway musical, his first. It's based on the life of Rasputin, an enigmatic Siberian mystic who was often referred to as "the Mad Monk" and lived a life as debauched as that of a rock star.

In the past, such a life of debauchery mirrored Osbourne's own. Today, he is embarked on a new chapter that could just change his future legacy for the better.

"I want to be remembered as a working-class hero, not for biting the head off a (sounds-like-'trucking') bird, or whatever it was," Osbourne said.

"Next year will be my 40th anniversary as a professional musician. I remember when the first Black Sabbath album came out (in 1970), and I thought: 'Oh, this will be good for a few years; I'll be able to afford a few beers and a bit of dope.'"

He paused for dramatic affect.

"Number one, I don't know how I'm alive.

"Number two, I don't know." The (sounds-like-'trucking') passions of Ozzy

"Am I surprised to be alive?" asked Ozzy Osbourne. "Is the pope a Catholic?"

But what might surprise you about Osbourne, the godfather of heavy metal, is his passion for The Beatles, Elton John, antiques and, um, exercise.

The Beatles: Regardless of age or musical style, rare is the band or solo artist interviewed who doesn't cite the perpetually fab Fab Four as an influence. Osbourne is no exception.

Osbourne: "Hearing Paul and his mates is what made me want to do what I do. I love The Beatles; I'm not so much of a Stones' fan. I also like Peter Gabriel, Kate Bush, early Genesis and Bowie, some Elton John; a lot of Elton John. I haven't sung only about Satan or suicide; I've done a fair share of ballads."

Working out: Back in his drug-fueled past, a typical workout for Osbourne might have entailed waking up, crawling on the floor in a stupor and trying to figure out where he was. He became a physical fitness fanatic in the 1990s, in part to kick his endorphins into high-gear naturally.

Osbourne: "In 1990 I (messed) my right leg up and I had to work out because it atrophied. Then, I broke my foot and they set it wrong, so I had to have a pin put in my toe. But it won't stop me. I'll go on stage in a wheelchair if I have to. The only way I'll stop is if the audience diminished to four people in a (sounds-like-'trucking') coffee shop."

Antiques: Osbourne and his wife, Sharon, have acquired several mansions worth of fine art and high-priced furniture. They're now auctioning off dozens of these items to benefit the Sharon Osbourne Colon Cancer Foundation. (For a preview, log on to: ozzy.com/news/osbournes-julien-s-auction-ebay-link-posted.)

Osbourne: "When I get a bit of money I don't keep it; I buy a (sounds-like-'trucking') antique or something. I was recently looking at this ad in a magazine, and I said, 'That's my (sounds-like-'trucking') hand-carved pool table!' Sharon said, 'You don't play pool anymore.' And I said, 'Yeah, but it's my (sounds-like-'trucking') pool table!'"

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