

The New Titan: Gus G Rockets into Rock Royalty as Ozzy's newest Guitarist

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Rule One: Old Guys Rule

I have been following the world of rock music since I was a teenager in Washington, D.C. I am now a middle-aged geezer in my early fifties, living in Athens, Greece, eking out my living as a music journalist and writer of uncategorizable trash fiction. As a kid I devoured magazines like *Creem*, *Circus* and *Rock Scene* digesting every piece of innocuous information I could about the bands I loved such as New York Dolls, Iggy Pop, Grand Funk Railroad and the rest of the golden age artists who are now lumped into the quietly ostentatious category of "classic rock."

Ozzy Osbourne, then the front man of pioneer metal band Black Sabbath, was a staple in all the music periodicals. He was the second-in-command, big-time, faux-psycho wacko behind the media-omnipresent Alice Cooper. But, in their recorded material there were profound differences: Alice used ornate, intricate musical styling in many of his pieces, while Black Sabbath was the primogenitor of the big, flabby, oceanic, skull-fracturing power-chord. Ozzy Osbourne and his legendary guitarist Tony Iommi, changed the face of metal music forever with the first few Black Sabbath releases.

Profound Greek Absenteeism

As a Greek-American I was always miffed at the lack of Greek musicians in the scene; the top bands were practically littered with Italians and Jews and nearly every other nationality was represented somewhere. Rod Stewart even had a left-handed Japanese bassist. Greeks were nonexistent; high profile Greek rockers approached the absolute zero status. In the 80s and 90s a few exceptions occurred: Motley Crue's Tommy Lee and Everclear's Art Alexakis gave us some small representation, but the numbers were still anemic.

Today, in 2010, we have Gus G (aka Kostas Karamitroudis) to thank for giving us a new, strong foothold in the world of rock music. The thirty-year old guitarist from Thessaloniki blasted into the pantheon of metal from relative obscurity with his band Firewind and has impressed critics and fans alike with his world-beating musical skills. I give Ozzy, now in his

early sixties, high marks for having the foresight and guts to take on a gifted youngster into the top ranks of the high-pressure, high-reward rock world. The success of their first album together, entitled *Scream*, is a glowing example of what Ozzy's forty years of experience as a songwriter and front man and a fresh, new guitar whiz-kid with an open mind can accomplish.

Scream

The first collaboration of Ozzy and Gus G has hit pay dirt and critical acclaim. *Scream* is a tour-de-force, in-your-face, maximum musical achievement which rivals Ozzy's quintessential 1981 masterpiece *Diary of a Madman*. The CD's remarkably crisp, digital production incorporates state-of-the-art recording that is so true to the live sound it is almost frightening to listen to. It is a far cry from the early days of Black Sabbath, where monolithic power chords and blues scale leads were practically the only offerings on the disc.

Gus G shows his remarkable musical virtuosity on each track, while Ozzy, who remains one of the finest lyricists in metal, gives the listener cleverly dark, tongue-in-cheek libretto that stays with you long after the song is finished. Gus gives the listener the full pallet of electric guitar possibilities to hear: everything from minor scale stir-fry flash leads, to metallic chatter, snorts, wheezes, dive-bombs and, of course, plenty of to belt-fed weapon style, low-end ker-chunking are present throughout the album.

The song construction on each piece is cleverly crafted, and holds one's attention in a near death-grip throughout each of the eleven tracks. It is hard to choose standout cuts as all are clever, nearly perfectly constructed platforms for Ozzy's dark art-songs. Personal favorites include "Let me Hear You Scream," "I Want it More," and "Fearless."

Gus G Speaks

Gus, albeit one of the busiest men in show business at the moment, with tours and new lines of guitars, amplifiers and effect pedals to promote, was kind enough to answer a few questions for me when in Greece for Ozzy's September 25 show at Terravibe Park in Malakassa.

How did you meet Ozzy? Were you hired on the spot or go through auditions?

I received a mail from his management in late Spring 2009 and they told me they had me in mind for the guitar position in Ozzy's band and asked me if I'd be interested in auditioning. Couple of weeks later I flew to L.A. and auditioned. It went really well and they asked me right away to come back and do an event with Ozzy, which was the gig @ BlizzCon Convention in Anaheim, CA.

Do you listen to/follow any current Greek rock and metal bands?

Not really.

With your current prominent status in rock, would you ever consider producing, promoting or recording Greek metal bands for a wider, global audience yourself?

At this time I'm so busy with what I'm doing. Obviously, I have a huge world tour ahead of me with Ozzy and I'm also leading my own band Firewind who's been around for a while.

We're just releasing our new album this month, so all my time is consumed with all these activities. I never saw myself as a producer really. Of course never say never, but it's not in my near future plans to produce other artists.

Why do you believe there are so few Greek bands in the top echelons of the rock/metal genre?

Greece never had a big market for Rock and Metal music and the whole business always remained at a local level. Only those who toured abroad mainly, got some recognition. Believe it or not, I got my career started in Japan! That was the place where my records sold most and had successful tours. And that gave me a platform to expand into Europe, which I did with Firewind.

It seems only recently the local Rock and Metal bands have realized that it's possible to have an international career. Of course it's not an easy path either, so maybe lots of them have been content by remaining at the local level.

Anyways, I hope mine and Firewind's example can inspire younger artists and make them believe that everything is possible!!

You are the newest name in a band which has featured the top guitarists

in the history of the metal genre (Randy Rhodes, Jake E. Lee ,Zakk Wylde). How do you keep your sound

from becoming staid and predictable while still staying loosely within the confines of

the arena rock traditions of intricate, fast leads and simple, foundational riffing?

I have my own sound and style and I approach Ozzy's music with the biggest respect. These are the songs I grew up with and I stick to the originals. That's what fans also expect and that's my approach too, being one of them!

I love playing fast, but I love playing bluesy and simple riffs too. When you play arenas, every note has to sound big and fill the room. And I want my notes to sound as big, no matter if I'm playing fast or slow. Hopefully I can bring a new excitement to Ozzy's band and rejuvenate his sound.