



SLAYER

BY BRANDON RINGO

You're standing in the middle of a field, in the middle of Tennessee, in the middle of June. Throughout the day, you've seen bands like Hozier, Belle And Sebastian, My Morning Jacket, and Childish Gambino. Now, you've grabbed a churro and settled by one of the main stages. However, instead of being greeted by the safe, soothing sounds of indie-folk darlings Mumford & Sons, you begin basking in the glow of an intimidating red light, which gives way to a wailing wall of feedback, followed by a tribal drum intro with chanting. All of a sudden, all hell breaks loose and you are now the property of Slayer and their raging, psychotic war ensemble.

At this year's annual Bonnaroo music festival, not only did the band completely destroy the preconceived notions that "hippies hate death metal," but they provided a stunning glimpse at just how far-reaching the impact of these titans of '80s thrash really is. "Slayer has become some sort of subculture," states Gerardo Martinez, label manager of Nuclear Blast Records. "It's funny, you can have people who aren't really metalheads, but their favorite band is Slayer. I think Slayer is like the people's band. They're the one band that—don't be surprised if some big time lawyer is a huge Slayer fan, the same way a construction worker is a huge Slayer fan. I think they tap into all the demographics and that's the beauty of Slayer."

is their steadfast refusal to be held back. With former drummer Paul Bostaph back in tow, and Exodus guitarist and thrash metal icon Gary Holt holding down Hanneman's spot full-time, the band have continued to soldier on without relent over the past two years.

Though many have criticized their decision to carry on without Hanneman, for guitarist Kerry King, there was no other choice. "At the end of the day, do I wish Jeff and Dave were still here? For Jeff, absolutely. For Dave, for continuity, of course. But things come up and you have to move on," insists King. "At this point in our career, it's definitely fired up. Gary makes us better. He's a mean motherfucker of a guitar player, so he keeps me on my toes, and Paul is just a machine. He had a 10 year stint with us

it's not hard work. Some people obsess over stuff like that, but I go in like, 'If it feels good, fine.'"

Naturally, transitioning from having two main songwriters to placing those duties on the back of one person can be a very stressful situation. Fortunately, the band began the process early enough to give them plenty of time to work out the bugs. "If I would have waited until Jeff passed to start writing new material, it would have been a gigantic burden," admits King. "Luckily, I was smart enough to—when Jeff got injured, I said, 'I don't know if this guy is gonna come to the party at all, so I better start writing stuff.' I had a ton of stuff by 2013. So, over that long time period, it wasn't such a burden, because I had basically the better part of four years to make this stuff up, go on tour, and

from Def Jam/American Records, and subsequently signed to underground titans Nuclear Blast Records. Choosing a new label, especially in 2015, is never easy, but they were confident they would be in good, capable hands with Nuclear Blast. "We know Slayer inside and out as far as musical terms go, so for us, we knew that we could do the job," Martinez states. "I think both [the] band and management realized we were the right team for the band, especially at this crucial moment for them. I think Slayer in 2015 is more relevant than even 10 or 15 years ago."

Due to their departure from Def Jam/American, *Repentless* marks the first time in almost 30 years that the band did not work with legendary producer Rick Rubin. For King, this change was worked out well. "A producer to me, is a guy who's there before I'm there and leaves after I leave," he says. "[He] gets his hands in it and makes it his own as well, and Terry [Date] was awesome to work with like that."

This is the legendary producer's first time working with Slayer, and the choice was a no-brainer. "I had been friends with many of the band's friends over the years, but hadn't met with them," explains Date. "I'm always excited to work with people I would hang out with outside the studio." Despite the massive pressure that comes with producing a Slayer album, Date's approach to the album was unfaltering. "I feel every record I work on is important to the band's career, this was no different. I just wanted to represent the band as accurately as possible."

Among the major benefits of Terry Date's work on *Repentless*, the most beneficial is without a doubt his powerful production. "I think it's definitely heavier and I love the production," Holt exclaims. "I think the guitars are the biggest that Slayer's ever had on a record; they're like huge! It sounds killer and Terry did a phenomenal job."

Despite all of these changes over the last couple of years, at their core, Slayer have never changed. *Repentless* is easily the band's rawest and heaviest album since 1990's *Seasons in the Abyss*, and their dedication and durability are major reasons they're still operating at such a high level after all these years. "Slayer's never sold out, they've always remained true," says Holt. "Some people obsess too much over the past. What you need to concentrate on is that you're still talking about a band that's remained true to its core sound for its entire career. How often do you find that?"

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As the band laid waste to the Bonnaroo crowd—much like they have crowds the world over for three decades—they appeared completely indestructible. However, the entity performing onstage at festivals like Bonnaroo and Mayhem Fest this summer and gearing up for the release of their 12th studio album, *Repentless*, is a completely different beast from the one formed all those years ago.

For this incarnation of Slayer, the construction truly began in February 2013 with a very public and dramatic separation from drummer Dave Lombardo. A few months later in May, they were struck with tragic news that guitarist and cowriter of some of their most iconic riffs, Jeff Hanneman, had passed away. For a lot of bands, this tragedy would have been a deathblow. However, one of the reasons that Slayer are such a dominating force

in the past and he has his own particular Slayer fans, which is pretty cool too."

In addition to fans being upset that the band was carrying on without Hanneman, the announcement that *Repentless* would feature minimal contribution from guitarist Gary Holt only made things worse. According to Holt, though his contribution on the album consisted mostly of showing up and shredding solos, it was actually a big relief compared to his normal duties in the studio with Exodus. "It's liberating not to have to wear 20 hats," he says. "I just went in and did my thing, and everybody was pleased and stoked with what I did. That was that. It's nice after a career of always having to sit behind the controls, so to speak. I went in and busted 'em all out in a day. Playing solos ain't exactly rocket science. I mean, it's fun. I don't mean to say

come back and see if I still liked it, which we didn't have on previous records."

Even though the band got a head start on the writing process, it's still incredibly difficult losing someone they've written with for three decades. For King especially, there was an immense amount of pressure to make the new album sound awesome, but most of it came from within. "The main thing I felt was, I better come through, because if I don't come through, I let Slayer down, I let the fans down, I let Tom down," he says. "I wanted to make this a great record that people are gonna say, 'You know what? This is still Slayer and I can't wait to go see 'em!'"

Over the past two years, change seems to be one of the only real constants for Slayer. On top of their altered lineup, the band departed