

# THE BLACK CROWES

## That sweet southern harmony

BY MICHELLE MILLER

**I** remember the 70's. I grew up in the 70's. Well, what's the story with these Black Crowes then? I mean, aren't they dripping with the 70's? But wait, rumor has it that they are suppose to be the new Rolling Stones. (I thought the Stones were still around). In any event, they have a definite rock and roll sound, interspersed with R and B and yes, even a little country twist. So who or what are the Black Crowes really?

Let's review the facts. The group sold more than five million copies of "Shake Your Money Maker", which was also a top 5 album on the Billboard charts. They copped a grammy nomination and two MTV awards. According to the articulate, extraverted Crowe Chris Robinson, "People talk about chart positions, but what about the chorus, what about the line in the bridge that made you put your glass down and scratch your head and go 'Oh, wow, you know? What about that? People are so fascinated with figures. I don't think there can be anything more impersonal than numbers. And I don't think you should judge music on, specifically, its commercial appeal and where it is on the charts, 'cause at the end of the day, who really cares?" Oh come on Chris. Don't you care? Even just a little?



**Rob,** let's begin with the most obvious question: now that you've announced that you're doing a solo project, does this mean the end of Judas Priest?

Well, I don't think so. I'd like to feel that this is the time for us to regroup our ideas musically—and to some extent, visually—and that as a band, we're able to let some time pass in order for us to make sure than the next "metal masterpiece" as we call it, will set the same standard as our previous records have done. The longer you're in this incredible profession, the more important it is to have something valuable to say, and not go out there only because you have to fulfill a record contract or that your fans expect something from you every 12 months. We've never worked on that level, even though in the past we were pressured to work that way, as many new bands are.

**There was a time in Priest's career when you were pressured into taking on a more commercial and accessible aspect.**

That's true—because metal was still very undefined and record companies really hadn't a clue as to how to handle metal music. But I'd like to make it clear that Judas Priest has by no means broken up. We are on excellent terms with each other, and I've had incredible support and encouragement by everyone in the band as far as my solo project goes. In fact, I talked to Glenn Tipton just the other day—he fell off a ladder and broke his foot!

**That's great to hear—not about Glenn, but that you're staying together! After all, Judas Priest has had a 20-year marriage.**

In 1994, it'll be twenty years. I think that just goes to show you that time is a difficult concept to grasp in this business. You just sort of zoom through it, then you look back thinking, "Wow, has *that* much time gone past?" It's sensational, really!

**Would you agree that Judas Priest should be one of the few bands who could take credit for creating the term "heavy metal" as well as the musical concept? Back in '74, there was no such thing, was there?**

In all forms of art, people tend to label things, and it's a good idea because it focuses people, like, "Oh, it's heavy metal—maybe it will sound like this." But

the meaning of heavy metal, but we were sure a part of its early evolution.

**It also seems to be true that musicianship is making a comeback.**

Absolutely. You know, it kind of moved off in different focuses when it started out in the early 70's of almost trying to pin itself down musically, because it was very much an evolution of previous musical styles like psychedelic, electric rock, bringing in elements of blues and playing instruments heavier. Early on, bands like Sabbath, and to some degree Priest, were very much a mixture of metal and progressive blues rock. As it moved through the 70's it sort of shifted focus. That's due largely to the way American musicians reacted to it, which was a great thing to see. In its earliest forms in the U.S., metal began to divert to bands as different as Ratt in one aspect and Van Halen in another—who, in my opinion, had their various concepts and understanding of this metal music. After that period, it moved on to take a more aggressive position and now it's as popular as it ever was. It's a very cohesive statement which is being made.

**Well, that brings us exactly to what you're doing on this solo album. What can we look forward to?**

Over the years, I've become increasingly frustrated about not being able to express myself in other us musical directions outside of Judas Priest. Always inside of me, I've never been completely happy about not being able to do what was "left over" when we'd finish a Judas

Priest project. It's just that in the years and years in which I've been involved with this thing called metal, I find myself getting excited more and more by the new breed of musician and their musical interpretation of their moods. What I'm attempting with this solo venture is to create a band which has, to a great degree, unknown, hungry, and

*(Continued on page 42)*

# ROB HALFORD: BEYOND THE REALMS OF JUDAS PRIEST

BY AIMEE KRISTI

Photo: Keith Celentano

it was a brand new, definitive musical statement that was in its infancy when we first came onto the scene. Now I think in my mind that heavy metal is an attitude, a state of mind, a perception because it says so many different kinds of things. I mean either us, Ministry or Corrosion Of Conformity—you know, it's different for everyone. I'm not sure we actually created

(continued from page 30)

Well, the new album is titled "The Southern

Harmony and Musical Companion". Let's hear what Chris says about this. "I'm sure there's a meaning - I think it has something to do with the fact that people have never really grasped the real sort of vibe that we have about being Southern, which was never to do, really, with Southern Rock music. It was more of just a feeling. So I think this title represents that - I stole it from a hymn book." Did you hear that! Chris Robinson stole his album title from a hymn book! We still love you Chris.

So, tell us all about the recording of this album. It "was recorded in Atlanta, Georgia at a studio with lots of

knobs, dials, speakers, instruments, rolling papers - all the things you need in a studio. We did it in about eight days or so, and that's about that. All the bands tracks were live, but basically, we just went in and did it pretty quickly. We used analog gear, so you still get things like tape hiss and sounds that are real. I guess with our success came the leverage of getting to do things our own way. We were able to call the shots this time, and people listened. On "Shake Your Money Maker" we were a bunch of kids who put together some good songs and went out and played then for people. The new record comes from more seasoned, experienced musicians who really, if anything, have become more militant and less complacent. "The Southern Harmony and Musical Companion" is more aggressive, yet in the same sort of strange stance, gentler."

If you know anything about the Black Crowes, you know that Chris's brother Rich is also in the band. Are the two best of friends? According to Chris, "Rich and I can pull it together once in a blue moon. Actually we're probably better friends than we have been, but still, there's a lot of, for lack of a better word, tension, and sometimes violence is the result of that. But I think passionate and emotional music has come out of that situation... Rich doesn't surprise me anymore. I've just gotten to the conclusion that whatever's unexpected is going to come from him." Hmm... I wonder how Rich feels about this?

But what one can't wonder about is that The Black Crowes definitely have an attitude, maybe the right attitude in that they

## THE BLACK CROWES

refuse to be neatly packaged. Chris wanted to put a sticker on the album that said "Within

Contains No Apathy'. "Everyone's so jaded - they say I've seen it before, heard it before.' We really have chosen, and I think some our fans have too, to step outside of that jaded thing and look at the music for what it is. And that's something very spontaneous and real and emotional, it's right here and now, it puts chills down your back."

Well Chris, what might also put chills down our backs is the controversies that the band keeps finding themselves in. True or not true that over an almost two year period the group has had several well-publicized demonstrations of their collective integrity and rebellious nature? These supposedly range from a

dubious encounter at a 7-11 convenience store to being kicked off a major U.S. tour by snubbing corporate America (national beer company), to pointing the finger at a few top rock groups for the practice of performing with backup tapes. But Chris admits to being an arrogant person "and that arrogance is what lets me make decisions and lets me get on stage. I was never really outspoken or controversial for its own sake. I only told the truth." So tell us the truth Chris. Did The Black Crowes really come out of 'nowhere'? "...everyone said 'nowhere'. Well, that's because we refused the hype. The industry's mind set is

such that no hype means, I don't know, boring? Not interesting? No, where we come from, no hype means we let what the band does speak for itself."

It seems that this band certainly does do alot. Their upcoming tour is called "High as the Moon" and the first show is in July. It's their intention to create a mood as if you are just hanging out with them at their place. Says Chris, "If you want to go to the show and you're in a theatre with three thousand other people who want to see the band, well, jump up and down; take your clothes off and run around, whatever you want. We're all there to listen and to hang. The Crowes are going to create our own vibe, from the way the stage looks to the way the gig smells. It's going to smell like rock 'n roll."

Yes, my conclusion is that The Black Crowes definitely enjoy being rock stars. But that's ok because we enjoy having them. See you at the 'Moon'!

