

city



Deep Purple



Roger Glover

## A deeper shade of purple

Deep Purple bassist Roger Glover tells us about spending three decades on the road with one of the best-selling rock bands ever”

‘Do you get bored of playing “Smoke on the Water?”’ That’s the question Roger Glover gets asked more than anything. We know this not because we asked – but because it’s the first thing he says when we hint at the ‘classic’ status of Deep Purple’s setlist.

Mind you, it’s a fair question. It’s not that the band lack other memorable tunes – ‘Hush’, ‘Black Knight’, ‘Highway Star’, ‘Strange Kind of Woman’ and many more – it’s just that ‘Smoke on the Water’ just happens to be among the most memorable rock songs ever written (*Total Guitar* ranked it the fourth best riff ever).

‘When they go to see a band, most people want to see the hits,’ Glover says. ‘I never get tired of it. They’re great to play, and you can play them different every night. And sometimes we

play to a lot of young people, and you’re experiencing it through their eyes. It’s a moment on stage – it’s magic. We’d never get tired of it.’

Released in 1972, ‘Smoke on the Water’ is one of a number of classic tunes that the British rock band released during their ’70s heyday. Formed in English county town Hertford in 1968, the classic ‘Mark II’ line-up, featuring Glover, was established a year later. It started a run of albums that reportedly helped the band to shift more than 100 million records.

Yet Glover doesn’t believe his own band’s hype. ‘I don’t believe we sold 100 million records. People make things up because it goes down well with the press,’ he tells us, doing some sums and drawing out a figure less than half that. ‘I’m a musician, not an accountant. But I can’t imagine we’ve sold anywhere near 100 million.’

Glover’s modest approach comes across as a pleasant British anachronism. Still, that’s a lot of records. Surely he doesn’t need to work again? ‘There’s no way I could live off record sales,’ scoffs the 68-year-old. ‘I have to work. Being in a band, people assume we’re all fabulously wealthy. I wish that were true.’

One hole in Glover’s bank account may come from the 11 years – and three smash albums – the bassist spent out of the band. Like most groups of their day,

egos and wild substances fuelled numerous line-up changes. In 1973 Glover was asked to leave (‘they said it wasn’t personal, it was business’), going off to pursue a solo career, before Deep Purple combusted altogether in 1976. Since reforming (with Glover) in 1984 they’ve continued to tour, but have never captured the same commercial peak.

‘I was talking to a taxi driver and he said “Deep Purple? Are they still around?”,’ says Glover, with yet more humility. ‘We get a lot of that. People think we’re dead and buried. I don’t care. It’s not their fault.’

The public’s lack of awareness isn’t helped by the fact Deep Purple have all but given up as recording

artists. Their last album, *Rapture of the Deep*, was released in 2005; instead the band have morphed into a touring tribute to their glory days. ‘There was a discussion about whether we should release

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more albums – something I opposed,’ says Glover. The band are currently putting the finishing touches on a new LP, and the bassist admits it’s likely to be the last. ‘We’re all in our mid-60s,’ he adds. ‘You never know which will be a last album.’

We can’t help asking how relevant he thinks Deep Purple studio album number 19 will be to today’s marketplace. ‘I don’t know what “relevant” means,’ sighs Glover. ‘I’d like to think we’re relevant, because we’re real musicians. Whether that makes it relevant to millions of people – probably not.’

With more than three decades on the road, it’s tempting to suppose that each gig just blends into a haze of spotlights, airports and hotel rooms. But Glover has found a way to hoard recollections of international travel, and he remembers his last visit to Dubai, to headline Gulf Bike Week in 2009. Well, one aspect of it at least: a corridor. In a case of rock-star eccentricity greater than fiction, Glover documents everywhere he goes by taking pictures of corridors, and plans to display the scores of images he’s assembled over the past eight years in a forthcoming art exhibition. ‘It’s a strange obsession, but it’s an obsession,’ says Glover, ‘and one of my best corridors was taken in Dubai.’ Sadly for corridor-lovers, he can’t recall where. ●