



Machine Head:  
Roger Glover, Ian Gillan,  
Ritchie Blackmore,  
Ian Paice, and  
Jon Lord (from left)

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PERFORMERS

# Deep Purple

Their sound will always epitomize a singular expression of rock's power.

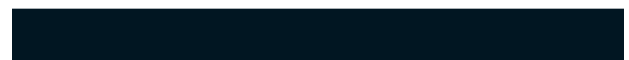
BY JIM FARBER

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hey created a riff everyone knows, a concert format no one had previously presented, and a sound to which countless bands owe a great debt. That gives Deep Purple at least three claims on history.

The chugging chord progression of "Smoke on the Water" became so deeply embedded in the culture, it now has the resonance of a Biblical quote. The 1969 *Concerto for Group and Orchestra* was the first live release ever to pair a rock band with a full symphony, while Deep Purple's essential musculature forged the hard-rocking sound that later solidified into heavy metal.

"If there were a Mount Rushmore of hard rock, it would have only three heads – Led Zeppelin, Black Sabbath,







**This page, from top:**  
 With Royal Philharmonic  
 Orchestra conductor  
 Malcolm Arnold,  
 1969; Rod Evans, original  
 lead singer with  
 Deep Purple, 1969.  
**Opposite page:** In 1969.

and Deep Purple,” according to guitarist extraordinaire Tom Morello. “They are the Holy Trinity of hard rock and metal bands.”

Of the three, Deep Purple has the fastest attack. While Zeppelin and Sabbath weighed their music down, to powerful effect, Purple has kept theirs fleet, presaging the pace that later helped define thrash. They further distinguish themselves with a particular mix of classical and proto-metal sounds. Several other groups in the late sixties may have drawn significant inspiration from the classical world, including the Nice, Procol Harum, and the Moody Blues. But none of them grounded it in such a fiercely rocking style.

Such assets allowed Purple to progress through a range of incarnations while holding fast to their prime hue. The consistent power of the band’s lineups explains why players from iterations both preceding and following the version that fans know best are being inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame. Of course, the band’s peak lineup – singer Ian Gillan, guitarist Ritchie Blackmore, keyboardist Jon Lord, bassist Roger Glover, and drummer Ian Paice – minted the most indelible works, including *In Rock* and *Machine Head*. But every incarnation has held the music to a high standard, anchored by the encompassing drumming of



**This spread, clockwise from left:** Deep Purple, Mk III: Glenn Hughes, Paice, David Coverdale (top), Blackmore, and Lord (from left); Hughes and Coverdale, 1974; Blackmore shreds onstage, flanked by Hughes, 1974.

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Paice, the sole member to bash with the band from Day One.

That day occurred in 1968, but its roots snaked back to 1967, when Chris Curtis – the former drummer of U.K. band the Searchers – had an idea for a “supergroup” of revolving musicians. It was to be called, aptly enough, Roundabout. Curtis’ first hire was Hammond organ player Jon Lord, a classically trained musician who had worked with the Artwoods (led by Ron Wood’s brother Art). Next he brought in Ritchie Blackmore, a successful session player who performed with the campy Screaming Lord Sutch. When the mercurial Curtis lost interest in the project he conceived, Lord and Blackmore decided to fill out the lineup on their own. For the bass, Lord brought in Nick Simper, with whom both he and Blackmore had played in the past. Another audition drew a twofor of talent from a band called the Maze: vocalist Rod Evans and drummer



Ian Paice. Both made the cut. (Previously, Lord and Blackmore had asked singer Ian Gillan to audition for the band – an interesting foreshadowing of the band’s future – but he turned them down, believing that his group at the time, Episode Six, had a better chance of breaking through.)

The finalized lineup began rehearsals in March 1968 in Hertfordshire. During those sessions, Blackmore suggested a fresh name: “Deep Purple,” which referenced his grandmother’s favorite song. (The band’s best rejected moniker was Concrete God.) Two months later, the group recorded its debut, *Shades of Deep Purple*, in just three days, which accounts for four cover songs balancing an equal number of originals. Luckily, the band had a role model for turning other artists’ compositions into vehicles for personal expression in the American group Vanilla Fudge. That U.S. band went gold by larding pop hits from Motown and the

Beatles with heavy doses of psychedelia. Purple’s LP was released in America on the Tetragrammaton label, followed by a U.K. release on EMI/Parlophone.

The United States was first to embrace the band, making its cover of the Joe South song “Hush,” burnished by Evans’ commanding vocal, a Top Five hit. Purple’s sonic treatment of “Hush” as well as the Fab Four’s “Help!” was distinguished by a rash of classical quotes and flourishes borrowed from composers Rimsky-Korsakov and Ravel. Much of the impetus for this came from Lord, balanced by Blackmore’s own feverish leads in the opening instrumental “And the Address” and the funky psychedelia of “Mandrake Root,” a clear homage to Hendrix’s “Foxy Lady.” Grounding their differing approaches was the holistic drumming of Paice who, at 18, had the voraciousness of Keith Moon, but with far more precision. The album reached *Billboard*’s Top

## SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY



SHADES OF DEEP  
PURPLE

Tetragrammaton 1968



CONCERTO FOR GROUP  
AND ORCHESTRA

Warner Bros. 1969



DEEP PURPLE  
IN ROCK

Warner Bros. 1970



FIREBALL

Warner Bros. 1971



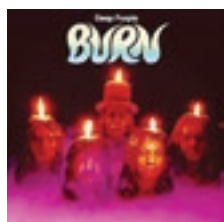
MACHINE HEAD

Warner Bros. 1972



MADE IN JAPAN

Warner Bros. 1973



BURN

Warner Bros. 1974



PERFECT  
STRANGERS

Polydor 1984

Twenty-Five, and the band garnered an opening slot on Cream's Farewell tour.

Purple's second LP, *The Book of Taliesyn*, was released in the U.S. a brisk three months after the band's debut. It featured three covers, including Neil Diamond's "Kentucky Woman," which entered the Top Forty. To vary things, the songs ran longer and delved deeper into prog-rock soloing.

The original lineup's first two albums may have been promising, but with their third release, a self-titled effort issued in June 1969, they encountered a creative standoff and a business disaster. Their American label folded, ruining the prospects of any promotion for the disc. At the same time, the ruling body of Lord and Blackmore felt that the harder direction on the album should be pushed exponentially, and sacked Simper and Evans. Blackmore wanted to

replace Evans with the powerhouse vocalist Terry Reid, but when Reid turned him down, the band tapped Ian Gillan – Episode Six, it turned out, had gone nowhere. (Reid, incidentally also rebuffed Jimmy Page, who wanted him as frontman for a little band to be called Led Zeppelin.) This time, Gillan signed on, as did the bassist from Episode Six, Roger Glover.

The revamped band began its next phase with a bold twist. Fulfilling a long-held dream, Lord created a symphonic extravaganza to be known as *Concerto for Group and Orchestra*. In September '69, Purple recorded that groundbreaking, three-movement work with the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra live at the Royal Albert Hall. Though, in places, the music seemed less a collaboration than a face-off, the concerto's most exciting sections proved the connection between the drama of classical music and the impact of rock. The novelty helped heighten the band's press profile, and gave it its first U.K. chart presence. The album also included a new rock song, "Child in Time," which would find ideal expression on the band's next album, the pivotal *Deep Purple in Rock* (1970).

*In Rock* presented the first fully focused sound for Purple, with a velocity, density, and skill that formed the blueprint for heavy metal to come. It found a thrilling balance between Blackmore's flight-of-the-bumblebee leads and Lord's surging organ solos – an argumentative, call-and-response pattern that established Lord as one of the only rock organists with the power to challenge the primacy of the electric guitar. It was on this album that Gillan perfected a scream that would become one of metal's defining *cri de coeurs*; a yowl so hallowed that it inspired Andrew Lloyd Webber to cast him in the lead on the original *Jesus Christ Superstar* recording the same year.

*In Rock* holds as much value in the annals of metal history as Sabbath's *Paranoid* and Zeppelin's second album, offering the ideal setup for its chaser, *Fireball*, released one year later. The title track opens the album like a bullet out of a gun. In the style of Zeppelin's "Communication Breakdown," it predicted the racing subgenre that, decades later, became known as speed metal.

Still, those albums served as mere test runs for the band's masterpiece, *Machine Head*. The thirty-seven-minute disc contains not a single slack second, from the opening rallying cry, "Highway Star," to the final freak-out, "Space Truckin'." With its flickering riffs and pulsing rhythm, "Highway Star" captures the excitement of automated travel, with more wind-in-the-face veracity than any song this side of "Born to Be Wild." Yet another track would become the band's most referenced, most revered recording: There isn't an electric guitarist alive who didn't cut his or her teeth on the key chords of "Smoke on the Water." Says Morello: "Only Beethoven's *Fifth Symphony* gives it a run for the money as far as recognizability and badassed-ness."

The song's lyrics became legendary for telling the story behind the album's creation. Originally, Purple planned to record *Machine Head* at the Montreux Casino, "by the Lake Geneva shoreline." But when "some stupid with a flare gun/burned the place to the ground," they had to cut it in a corridor at the nearby Grand Hotel. The adversity intensified their creativity, making the album a commercial colossus upon its 1972 release, spending 118 weeks on the *Billboard* chart and going Number One internationally.

Perhaps no work could properly follow that, but the



Live in 2011, back in Montreux, where “Smoke on the Water” was born

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group did manage some high points on *Who Do We Think We Are* (1973), especially the catchy single, “Woman From Tokyo.” More exciting was a live album, *Made in Japan*, cut in 1972 in Osaka and Tokyo, which showed both the potency of the band in concert and its improvisational skill, evident in a nineteen-plus minute take on “Space Truckin’.”

Despite their creative high, exhaustion from touring and internal tensions caused a potentially ruinous split: Both Gillan and Glover ditched the band in 1973. The defection of the signature singer proved so challenging that the remaining members wound up hiring two vocalists to replace him – the unknown David Coverdale, and ex-Trapeze player Glenn Hughes, who doubled on bass. In 1974 the recast band released *Burn*, with a title track that ably underscored its trademark balance of speed and skill. While the album and its followup went gold, the band faced another potentially deadly blow when Blackmore ankled

in 1975. They tried to rally by hiring the fleet, jazz-tinged American guitarist Tommy Bolin. But the drug-hampered musician lasted just one album, the funk-influenced *Come Taste the Band*. Clearly, the spirit had gone out of the group. They finally called it quits in March 1976. Nine months later, Bolin died of an overdose.

It seemed a sad end to a great legacy, but after a nine-year Purple diaspora, its peak lineup reunited in 1984 for the platinum-selling *Perfect Strangers*. Blackmore would bow out again a decade later, but the remaining core of Gillan, Paice, Lord, and Glover soldiered on with dexterous guitarist Steve Morse and, following the retirement of Lord in 2002, organist Don Airey. In 2012, at 71, Lord died of pancreatic cancer. Still, Purple continues to tour and record, with Gillan’s peacocking voice, Paice’s barreling drums, and Glover’s pumping bass extending a sound that will always epitomize a singular expression of rock’s power.