

The Loss of a Legend: Lemmy Kilmister

By Andy Glover

Just days after his 70th birthday, and after a long and arduous battle for his health over the past year the Bass Guitarist Ian “Lemmy” Kilmister passed away on the 28th of December of cancer. To most people he was the gruff voiced, alcohol swilling maniac of the hard rock band Motorhead, whose trademark Rickenbacker Bass guitar growled away behind some of the most hated, and loved, of all heavy rock music. The actual man in interview propagated this image of a no holds barred hard head with no quarter given to anyone, and yet the truth of the man was very different. I had the pleasure of meeting him briefly twice after gigs and he was the calmest, most pleasant rock star you would ever want to meet. He may not have been the sort you would take home to your mum but he was kind, interested in your comments, lovely to share a joke with and was always concerned that you enjoyed the show. Unlike so many who tried to copy this style and didn’t care about their fans, many that I could name but won’t.



Lemmy Kilmister

I first came across his bass style and unusual vocal style back in early 1970’s when one of my favourite groups, Hawkwind, had the hit single “Silver Machine”. He was their new bassist at the time.

https://youtu.be/yao_T2adl14

Apparently all the members of the band had had a go at singing the track and reluctantly they gave a chance to their then new bassist Ian Kilmister who somehow managed to sing what is generally a hard track to perform correctly. It catapulted the underground Psychedelic warlords into the mainstream, for a short while, and Lemmy into the spotlight as a great bass player and an unusual vocalist.

His unique chordal based style of playing the bass guitar was in complete contrast with the likes of Jack Bruce, Chris Squire and John Paul Jones and the standard way of playing the instrument at the time.

It did not take long before he fell foul of even Hawkwind's predilection for illegal substances and in 1975 Lemmy was arrested at the Canada/US border, on drug possession charges; he spent five days in jail but was released without charge. Nonetheless he was fired from Hawkwind by being ditched on the side of the highway while taking a call of nature at a roadside pull in in the States three days after catching up with them. He was the only member of this ever changing band to have ever been fired due to drugs.

After this he took some of the material he had written while in Hawkwind and began recording it under the name of Motorhead. Motorhead had been a track that he had written for one of the Hawkwind LP's. He finalised the bands line-up as Phil "Philthy Animal" Taylor on drums and "Fast" Eddie Clarke on guitar and himself on vocals and bass guitar. It was during these early sessions that his true talent began to show as a leading bass guitarist of his generation. The chordal technique that he had used in Hawkwind now became the driving force of the band along with the manically fast guitar solos of Clarke. The music was faster than anything around at the time. The rhythmic power and harsh growled vocals gave the band an edge that no other band had then, or for many years to come.

<https://youtu.be/ueeEEXE7Po8>

Motorhead Overkill live

They were punk in their attitude to society a year before any punk music existed, and yet throughout this destructive era for a lot of rock bands Motorhead grew in status due to their energetic live shows and unrelenting rhythmic onslaught on such classic LP's as "Motorhead", "Bomber", "Overkill" and their biggest selling album "Ace of Spades" from 1980 with the title

track hitting the top ten of the singles charts like a sledgehammer and announcing the rise of the New Wave of British Heavy Metal in a way only Motorhead could have done.

<https://youtu.be/DXkmFIKvht4>

Motorhead "Ace of Spades" live

The driving heavily distorted bass work gave the band an edge that very few were ever able to emulate. As with most bands internal frictions split the original, and the best, line-up. This did not deter Kilmister as he recruited new members and again reached the top of his game with LP's such as "Orgasmatron" and "Rock and Roll". These along with the older trio's line-up LP's became classics of the hard rock genre.

As a group they never eschewed any of the trappings of the rock and roll genre and actually played to the images of them as seen by the mainstream press and society. They always had their tongues firmly in their cheeks and in some cases invented some of the tales and images so as to promote their hard rocking image and attitude. Very few bands are able to do this successfully without looking or acting totally like idiots. Motorhead as an image worked and survived all attempts to destroy it by music press, and the band themselves.

As the years rolled on Kilmister became almost a parody of himself and through his own self-deprecating way he held onto his mantle as the chief lunatic and hard living alcoholic of hard rock alongside another midland born rock star Ozzy Osborne (Kilmister was born in Stoke on Trent). He appeared in cameo roles in films, dueted with other rock artists and continued with various line-ups of Motorhead to produce some of the foremost rock of the era. Most rock bands and musicians always have a soft spot for the music of this uniquely British rock band, and especially for the style and drive of Kilmister as a musician and as a man. Hard living and yet humanly fragile too.

In an interview last year although very ill he could still see the funny side of things and stated that:

"I have today announced that due to my doctor's orders, and for my own health I have given up drinking Vodka.....I am now drinking Whisky instead."

Unfortunately it was not the excessive alcohol or cigarettes and drugs that got this legend of hard rock but the big C that took this most wonderful personality from us.

<https://youtu.be/VdegjWkZW4Q>

Motorhead "Orgasmatron"

Love the band or not, love the music or not, they were unique and Lemmy's bass guitar sound and style will be very sorely missed by all rock and metal fans.



Motorhead original line-up 1976-1982