

KILMISTER, IAN FRASER (Lemmy) (1945 - 2015), musician

Name: Ian Fraser Kilmister
Date of birth: 1945
Date of death: 2015
Child: Sean
Child: Paul Inder
Parent: Sidney Davy Albert Kilmister
Parent: Jessie Milda Willis (née Simpson)
Gender: Male
Occupation: musician
Area of activity: Music
Author: Gethin Matthews

Ian Fraser Kilmister was born on 24 December 1945 in Stoke-on-Trent, the son of Sidney Davy Albert Kilmister and his wife Jessie Milda, 'June' (née Simpson). His father, a former RAF chaplain, deserted the family when Ian was just three months old and he was raised by his mother and grandmother in a small Staffordshire town. When he was ten years old his mother married George Willis and the family moved to a farm in Benllech, Anglesey. He went to school at Ysgol Syr Thomas Jones in Amlwch, and as he later recalled his experiences there he said 'funnily enough, being the only English kid among 700 Welsh ones didn't make for the happiest time - but it was interesting from an anthropological point of view'. It was at this time that he received the nickname 'Lemmy'; although the widely circulated story is that this comes from his regular appeal to friends to 'Lend me a quid', he himself claimed that he did not remember the origin of the name.

He learned to play the guitar while living in Anglesey and also discovered the pleasures of spending time with girls who came to the island on holiday. After leaving school (according to his own account, he was expelled) he moved for a while to Conwy, and got his first experience of playing in a band in a Llandudno club. However, with his eagerness to immerse himself in the new culture of rock and roll, he was soon in north-west England. He claimed to have seen the Beatles performing in the Cavern Club when he was 16 years old, and he joined a Manchester band with the name The Rockin' Vickers. In 1967 he went to London, where he worked for a while as Jimi Hendrix's roadie before joining the band Hawkwind as a bassist in 1971. Lemmy sang on their most successful single, 'Silver Machine', which reached number 3 in the charts in 1972. Hawkwind was infamous for its excessive use of drugs, and it is rather ironic that Lemmy was expelled from the band in 1975 after his arrest for possession of drugs in Canada when the band was on tour there.

Out of this misfortune sprang the project which dominated the rest of his life: the band Motörhead. For the majority of its forty year span the band was a trio, with Lemmy as the singer and bassist, assisted by a guitarist and drummer to create very loud music. Although the majority of critics and fans called the band's music 'heavy metal', Lemmy insisted it was just rock'n'roll.

The band enjoyed a good deal of success in the later 1970s and early 80s. Their music was not appreciated by most radio stations but their singles still managed to reach respectable positions in the charts, with the band's most famous song, 'Ace of Spades', reaching number 15 in 1980. The trio were consummate performers on stage, and their live recording 'No Sleep 'til Hammersmith' reached the top spot in the album chart in 1981.

There were numerous changes in Motörhead's line-up over the next few years, with the band performing as a four-piece for a period before settling back as a trio once more in 1995, with the Welshman Phil Campbell (b. 1961) on guitar. This was the set-up until the band came to an end upon Lemmy's death.

With his instantly-recognisable appearance, and the mantle of being the definitive heavy rock musician, Lemmy was a popular guest for other bands and made a number of cameo appearances on television programmes. He gave lively and provocative interviews to journalists and reporters (unless they caught him incapable due to drug use), giving strong opinions on a range of matters. Among the songs he penned (and he was responsible for most of the lyrics on over twenty Motörhead albums) there are many with rather uninspired themes of sex, drugs, rock'n'roll and motorbikes, but also some with more thoughtful messages. '1916' is a quiet, contemplative ballad, with keyboards and cello accompanying Lemmy's voice as he mourned the loss of young soldiers in the Great War. On the other extreme, perhaps the band's heaviest song is 'Orgasmatron', where Lemmy pours scorn and wrath upon three things he hated: organised religion, deception by politicians and the adventures of warmongers.

Lemmy fathered two sons; the first, Sean, was given up for adoption, and the second, Paul Inder, became a guitarist and occasionally performed with his father.

It is a legitimate question whether Lemmy should be in the Dictionary of Welsh Biography at all. As is perfectly clear in his autobiography and the film made about him (*Lemmy*, 2010), he self-identified as English, not Welsh. His home for his final decades was West Hollywood, Los Angeles. However, we can see that his years as a youth in Anglesey did leave their mark upon him. In the film, he told a few tales about his time in Wales. When Motörhead played in Wales during the Phil Campbell years, Lemmy would declare 'Cymru am Byth' into the microphone. His most spectacular encounter with the Welsh public sphere came in 2005, when a Conservative AM invited him to the National Assembly for Wales to address a meeting on the misuse of heroin. He called for the drug to be legalised, as the current situation encouraged the malicious activities of drug-dealers.

Lemmy continued to play with his band until the end, despite his failing health. Motörhead's final concert was in Berlin on 11 December 2015. He was gravely ill when celebrating his 70th birthday at a party in a West Hollywood nightclub and he died four days after his birthday, on 28 December 2015. A memorial service was held in Forest Lawn Memorial Park, Hollywood Hills, on 9 January 2016.

Author

Gethin Matthews

Sources

Lemmy Kilmister (with Janiss Garza), *White line fever: the autobiography* (London 2002)

Mick Wall, *Lemmy: The Definitive Biography* (London 2016)

Nathan Bevan, 'Classic Interview: Lemmy', *Western Mail*, 28 March 2015

Lemmy: 49% ****. 51% son of a bitch (film directed by Greg Olliver and Wes Orshosk, 2010)

Further reading

Wikipedia Article: [Lemmy](#)

Additional Links

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