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INTRODUCTION

Over the years, Deep Purple has evolved into a veritable hard rock institution, launching multiple careers from its ever-changing lineup. Once credited in the Guinness Book of World Records as the world's loudest band, the group has evolved from rock/pop cover-songs in its embryonic days to classical experimentation, heavy metal mayhem, and progressive hard rock. The one constant factor marked throughout has been a philosophy of taking things to the very limit—and breaking the rules. As guitarist Ritchie Blackmore once said, "The whole point of Deep Purple, what made it tick, was that we refused to bow down to anybody. Musically or personality-wise. We would just say, 'Fuck it.' And we meant it, and that bothered some people. But it's what gave us an edge." This edge, combined with their virtuosic musicianship and trademark improvisational forays, would come to produce some of the most powerful, evocative, and momentous rock music ever recorded. Deep Purple has undoubtedly earned a unique place in music history and influenced a generation.

The Beginning

The story of the band begins in Hertford, England, in February 1968. Chris Curtis, former drummer for the Searchers (a band whose popularity once rivaled the Beatles in early-1960s Britain), sensed change was afoot amid the psychedelic explosion of the Beatles' *Sgt. Pepper's* album and the emerging harder-edged bands such as Cream, the Jeff Beck Group, and The Jimi Hendrix Experience. He formed a loose-knit new group—which he dubbed "Roundabout"—with classically trained keyboardist Jon Lord and an exceptional young guitarist named Ritchie Blackmore. Although Curtis would exit quickly, the dual talents of Lord and Blackmore would come to define much of the evolving sound that would become Deep Purple.

Guitarist Richard Hugh Blackmore was born April 14, 1945 in Weston, England. At the age of 10, his father had bought him a guitar and paid for classical lessons. While still in school, Blackmore picked up the electric guitar and excelled by all accounts. Coincidentally, he also happened to live on the same street as "Big Jim" Sullivan (guitarist for Tom Jones). As the story goes, a young Ritchie often came knocking with guitar in hand. "[Sullivan] was just about the best guitarist in England," says Blackmore, "He taught me a lot of tricks." By age 17, Ritchie was cutting records and thereafter began to hone his trademark, stony "Man in Black" image while touring with The Outlaws—backing up stars such as Jerry Lee Lewis and, in the process, developing a reputation for rampant destruction. (Blackmore says they were rarely asked back after gigs!) When the invitation to join Roundabout was extended to him, he was living in Hamburg, Germany. Tired of playing other artists' music, he was ready for a change and a more forward-leaning sound.

Roundabout, however, proved "looser" than anyone had imagined—the group's creator promptly left a month after founding it! Bassist Nick Semper and keyboardist Jon Lord then recruited vocalist Rod Evans to replace him, and drummer Ian Paice came along as well. Together with Blackmore, they embarked on a brief tour of Denmark, playing their first gig on April 20, 1968. The band soon felt their name didn't benefit them. Blackmore suggested "Deep Purple," and although it wasn't agreed to immediately, it stuck. Deep Purple Mark I (as this lineup would eventually be labeled by fans) released three albums. These chronicled the new band's search to define itself. The first, *Shades of Deep Purple* (July, 1968), was mostly cover songs. One of those covers, "Hush," was released as a single. Ignored in the U.K., it scored a surprise Top 5 hit in the U.S. Their second album, *The Book of Taliesyn* (October, 1968), slipped in more original material—including some classical stylings in the form of synthesized strings. The third album, simply titled *Deep Purple* (1969), was the harbinger of things to come—the first that really hinted toward the heavier direction that would follow.