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STEREOBOARD TALK TO GUITAR LEGEND MICHAEL SCHENKER ABOUT NEW 'TEMPLE OF ROCK' LIVE ALBUM/DVD

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Friday, 14 December 2012

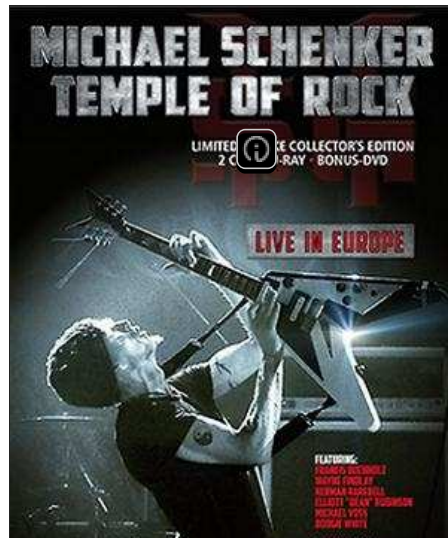
Written by Simon Ramsay



What do the late great Randy Rhoads, Metallica's Kirk Hammett, Adrian Smith of Iron Maiden and Slash all have in common? Aside from being iconic exponents of hard rock guitar playing they've all been inspired and influenced by the exceptional German guitarist Michael Schenker...

However, today Herr Schenker is clean, healthy and celebrating his widely lauded return to form with the release of a new live CD/DVD/Blu-Ray package that was filmed in Tilburg, The Netherlands earlier this year...

Hi Michael - congratulations on your new CD and DVD package, it's absolutely superb. Thanks!!



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**You've released a lot of live albums during your career, so what does it take to make a great one?**

Well, with this album it's a very unique line-up and I didn't want to miss capturing it on CD and DVD! But a great live album, or for me a great anything to do with music, is when I have lots of lucky moments when something happens that is spectacular or out of the ordinary. Every concert can have those moments, sometimes many of them, sometimes not so many. I always say that the best concerts for me are when I have a great sound on stage because it inspires me to play even better. That's what I enjoy.

**Some bands say when they know a concert is being filmed it stifles their playing as they inevitably get self conscious and that creates a stilted performance. How do you deal with that?**

It's a bit difficult and it really depends on how lucky you are, in terms of how self conscious you're feeling at the time when it happens as you only get one shot. Sometimes you deal with it better than at other times and you can only hope for the best, especially if the day before you played in Glasgow and it was great and you think 'Oh I wish we had recorded that show!' You just don't know what will happen and I'm sure everybody goes through that. But the good thing was that when we were toured Europe with Herman and Francis – the original Scorpion's rhythm section – I noticed people always seemed to be checking us out for the first three or four songs because it's such an unusual mix of musicians. It seemed like they were focussed on trying to absorb what was actually being created, rather than getting into it straight away. Then, after four or five songs everybody started going crazy! But that concentration from the audience prepared us for being on camera and at the end of the day it worked out great because in Tilburg people were really focussed on what we were doing on an intimate level, focussing on our playing and getting into the details. Then we had High Voltage, which was more about everybody going crazy and having a party. So we captured both aspects – the intimacy and the craziness - which makes it a unique balance.

**You've had such a long career with The Scorpions, UFO and MSG. How do you choose a set list with so much material to draw from?**

Well, because this time it's more like the best of Michael Schenker. I try not to repeat the same songs every time I tour, so I don't always play 'Cry For The Nations' and may play 'Sleeping Dogs Lie' instead. It's not just MSG though, it's the best of my recording career from the beginning until now so there's 'Strangers In The Night' material which I also love doing. Then, we added 'Rock You Like A Hurricane' and 'Blackout' to represent Herman and Francis work with the Scorpions and we played some 'Lovedrive' material, which was unique as we'd never performed that together before. So, y'know I've done about 50 albums, but if I use highlights from 'Strangers In The Night', MSG's 'Budokan', 'Lovedrive' and the stuff Herman and Francis have done together that's a pretty good set.

**Have you ever thought about doing a Bruce Springsteen and playing for 4 hours a night!**

(Laughs) No, no! I did that once for about two and half to three hours in Japan and I tell you - never again – it's too much! I played so many solos it was crazy!

**'Strangers In The Night' has been hailed as one of the greatest live albums of all time. Do you ever feel pressure to live up to that with subsequent live releases?**

To be honest I don't like music to be a competition, even with my own stuff. Every moment has different circumstances and is created differently, and I enjoy the creation of those unique moments. 'Strangers In The Night' was a special recording at a unique moment and cannot be created again. So I create other colours instead.

**The live reviews for the Temple Of Rock tour have been fantastic with lots of people saying you're playing better than ever. Would you agree and if so what is that down to?**

Well, I started off as a passionate lead guitarist focussing purely on lead guitar, and then in the second part of my life I was more interested in experimenting and developing musically and personally. But since 2008 I've returned to the loop of rock and roll. I'm back for the celebration of the roofing of the era of 'hand made rock', because everybody's getting older and the way rock music used to be made is ending.

**What do you mean by that?**

More and more music is being cut and pasted, and people who don't know how to play an instrument can make music on a computer. I'm not saying that in the future they won't create new, fascinating ways of doing things, but for me the era of 'hand made rock' started off with Led Zeppelin, Black Sabbath and Deep Purple. That is what I got excited about and those were the foundations of 'hand made rock'. Then bands like The Scorpions, AC/DC, Rush and UFO added the pillars of the building and the eighties bands added the bricks and the clay. Now we have reached the roofing of the temple of 'hand made' rock. That's where I come out and celebrate, much like my dad who used to be an architect. Every time he finished a house and the roof was put on he would party and that's what I'm doing. Also, it's great to see the audiences celebrating too because it can only last for so much longer with the people who originally did it – especially with those who built the foundations. Gary Moore is already dead, Ronnie James Dio is dead and there are a lot less people from that time. So I think at some point it will all just be a memory.

**Do you believe rock music has come to an end and there's nowhere left to go?**

No, it's different. What I'm saying is people have already adapted and they are already creating their new miracles. It's a different era and it involves different tools. The way it was done, literally by hand, is coming to an end and there won't be any 'hand made rock' left because younger people are doing it in their own way. It's a new era, it's a new temple, it's a new miracle and there are new fascinations. The music isn't made like it used to be.

**A lot of bands that form today try and sound like they're from that era though.**

Yes, but you have all the new technical tools and you cannot just ignore them! That would be as silly as being in the early 19th century when they had horses and wagons and then all of a sudden you have cars being built, and who wants to keep riding with the horse and the cart then? You're not going to be able to move forwards! But as to the people you were talking about, they



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are younger people who were born and grew up with computers. That is their era and they are doing totally different things with different combinations and different inspirations. So it's a different outcome. Nothing comes to an end – it's a transition.

**Going back to the new album, one thing that impressed me was Doogie White's ability to sing songs from all your eras. Sometimes it can be difficult listening to a vocalist performing someone else's material, but Doogie really made them his own. That must be pleasing for you?**

(Laughs) Yes, Doogie is a funny guy and he is definitely an entertainer. I did a lot of rehearsing where it was just Doogie and myself, because it's always nice to make sure it comes across the proper way. And when we were touring he started adding his own character to it with his own little twists and it's really unique to watch him doing that.

**It must have been great to tour with your former Scorpions Herman and Francis too?**

Yeah absolutely, and Francis was so happy to do it. Actually, it's like being able to complete the 'Lovedrive' tour from 79 /80. I started that tour with the Scorpions but I couldn't continue because it wasn't something I wanted to do. This was a chance to do a 'Lovedrive' reunion with Herman and Francis as I have finished my personal development - and it was a lot of fun!

**There were also some great collaborations at the High Voltage Festival with your brother Rudolph, Michael Voss and Jeff Scott Soto. What are your memories of that day?**

I remember it being very hectic as usual! You don't really get a soundcheck, you just get a line check. So, you get on stage and things are still not working (laughs) 'OH NO - come on, come on go!! And you end up playing without monitors, but we were lucky enough to have a great show anyway!

**There's been a lot of talk of you and Rudolph releasing an album together – what's the latest on that?**

That is the same. We're ready when we find a time we're both available, but that hasn't happened yet because we have to fulfil our commitments and are always making new commitments. I always say when the time is right it will happen.

**There have been rumours that The Scorpions are no longer retiring – what can you tell us on that front?**

Oh – I didn't hear that one yet – that's new!! I really don't know what they're doing because they are their own entity, their own core. They do what they do. I'm not really involved and don't know what they're planning, but that's a new one and I'll have to find out more about it!

**Other rumours have suggested that there's a chance of you reuniting with UFO and that you are open to it? Is that true?**

The doors are open to anything, y'know. As I said I am here to celebrate 'hand made rock' and anything that celebrates that and wants me to be involved with it, then I will be involved!

**In terms of Pete Way and his current medical condition would you rejoin UFO without him?**

I would check on the reality of the situation at that point and look at everything, but it's all hypothetical, y'know.

**Just going back to the UFO days, what are your memories of sharing a house in London with Paul Chapman and the rest of the guys in UFO during the mid 70's? Any amusing stories?**

Yes, I got stuck on a roof and Paul Chapman had to rescue me!! He was drunk and trying to rescue me coming off a roof.

**What were you doing on the roof?**

I think something fell over there and I climbed out of my window to try and get it back. Then I froze and I panicked! Everything moved – you know that feeling? I got claustrophobic! Paul was trying to convince me saying 'come on Michael you can do it, you can do it', but it was very dangerous because I was on top of a roof!

**I heard a story that you stole a neighbour's rabbit during that time!!**

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I found a story that you stole a neighbour's rabbit during that time!!

Oh, I didn't steal it – actually, I did maybe yeah! (Confused) How did you know about that?

**Someone I know is a big UFO fan and said to ask Michael about the rabbit incident!**

(Laughs) I came home early in the morning at about five o'clock and looked out the window and there was a white rabbit downstairs in a cage, and I said 'maybe they're going to eat this rabbit tomorrow'. So I decided to climb over the fence and rescue it! Then my girlfriend took the rabbit to work the next day and it was kind of a crazy thing to do - but I did it!

**What was it like touring with Paul Chapman in 74/75, the only time that UFO toured as a twin guitar band? Did you enjoy that dynamic?**

To be honest I don't really have much memory of it because it was only a small period of time. I think we only did one tour together and were trying to do a record, but Paul Chapman didn't make it. I think what happened was that we were looking for a keyboard player and guitarist because we already had some material with keyboards on. But those are details – why did it go from A to B? It's very vague in my memory and could have been a combination of things. It could have been that Phil Mogg decided he wanted someone else. I don't really know because I was so focussed on music, writing and developing as a guitarist that in those days I would just present my music to Phil and he would put his stuff to it. What was discussed about the record company and who was the producer, I had very little to do with.

**Pete Way has said that during your 70's stint with UFO he couldn't understand why you weren't mentioned in the same breath as Blackmore and Page. Why do you think you're not a household name like some of your peers from that time?**

That's not my focus. To be honest, I don't even know where I'm at. I don't compete with anybody and I don't look at anybody's status. I don't consume (Michael stopped listening to rock music in the 70's as he didn't want anyone's style to influence his own) and most of the time don't know what goes on out there. I just enjoy playing music and discovering, and what my status is isn't up to me. That's not even my department and it's not something I need to know. Maybe that is how Pete sees it as it's his observation, so he is the only one who can actually explain. What he is saying may be true for him but not necessarily true in general.

**The 3 Guitar Heroes Tour with Uli Jon Roth and Leslie West was postponed following Leslie's health problems. Now he's on the mend is that still likely to take place?**

The thing is, it was still going ahead even after he lost his leg. We were looking for a bus that had wheelchair access and there were only two of them around, but they were rented out. So the doctor told us not to do it unless we had a bus like that. They'd already put too much money into advertising and there was lots of money being lost. People were hoping that it would happen again but at the end of the day it's up to Leslie. Maybe he no longer has any interest in doing it? Plus, even if everybody wanted to do it who would pay for it? At this point it seems impossible unless, out of the blue, someone has an idea of how it can be done.

**You're touring the UK again in 2013, so who will be in your band and what kind of set will you be playing? Will it resemble the new live album or will there be some surprises?**

We are already working on a new album! It's me, Doogie, Francis, Hermann and Wayne. I've already got a concept for it and the title will probably be 'Bridge The Gap'. The live line-up for the UK tour will be the same as the Tilburg concert on the DVD and we might already be playing some material from the new album, which should be coming out by the end of 2013.

**Nowadays, many bands are playing whole albums in their entirety on tour. Do you have any plans to do that with any of your material?**

Maybe at some time in the future but I haven't had any reason to do it yet. I don't know why they're doing that, but I think band's who've been together for a long time do those kind of things. In my career I have done so many different things that I have a different momentum.

**What's been the happiest period of your career?**

I've had lots of happy moments at many, many different times. My whole journey has been lots of happiness, lots of work and lots of time going up and down. It's the full spectrum of life. When I started playing rock & roll I liked the look of it (laughs) and so I tried to stay with it for as long as possible. I think I've always enjoyed living and I love life. So I love to discover things, I love to develop and you never know what's going to happen next - but it's a fun journey!

**You've always had a very individual spirit – following your instincts and treading your own path. What have been the best and worst things about living like that?**

I cannot view it that way because when something really bad happens it's usually leads to something good happening. It's all about balance and going into areas where not many people go, and I take the risk of going into those areas because it gives me a much broader understanding of life. So when I have a problem I know something good will come out of it. I think a crisis is actually that which trains you to accomplish.

**Were you asked to audition for The Rolling Stones after Mick Taylor left?**

I was approached and I asked my brother what I should do as I was very nervous and didn't feel good about it. So I just ignored them. My brother didn't know what to say about it, so he told me it was my choice, and I was scared that I would end up dead because they didn't have a very good reputation at the time. It was a big step to join UFO when I did, but I think that would have been too much for me.

**If someone arrived from another planet and asked you what you did for a living, which album from your entire career would you give them to demonstrate your work?**

Well it's, er (laughs) kind of difficult because I like the acoustic approach too, because I have a very deep, fulfilled meaning to me and there's a lot of expression in that. It's not for some types of listeners as it's a very extreme opposite, just like my guitar - it's black and white. So I would probably give them an acoustic album like 'Thank You' as well as one electric album, and I would say to the person take your pick between 'Strangers In The Night' and 'One Night at Budokan', which seem to be the most liked albums by the people of this planet!

**Do you have any regrets about certain aspects of your career?**

No I don't think that way because everything leads to the next.

**Finally, what are your new years resolutions and what are you looking forward to in 2013?**

I am in celebration mode around the clock – second by second!

**Thanks for talking with me Michael. Good luck with your new album and I'm really looking forward to seeing you on tour next year.**

Thank you!

'Temple Of Rock - Live Over Europe' is out now. Michael Schenker returns to the UK for live dates in 2013.

**Michael Schenker UK & Ireland Tour Dates** are as follows:

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- Wed April 10th 2013 - Lemon Tree, Aberdeen
- Thu April 11th 2013 - HMV Picture House, Edinburgh
- Fri April 12th 2013 - O2 Academy Newcastle, Newcastle
- Sat April 13th 2013 - Picture Drome, Holmfirth, Holmfirth
- Sun April 14th 2013 - Pyramid and Parr Hall, Warrington
- Tue April 16th 2013 - Princess Pavilion, Falmouth
- Wed April 17th 2013 - O2 Academy Bristol, Bristol
- Thu April 18th 2013 - City Hall, Salisbury
- Fri April 19th 2013 - O2 Academy Oxford, Oxford
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