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Michael Schenker: Return of the mad axe man



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By Steve Haines

It would be fair to say that Michael Schenker was something of a self-taught guitar prodigy since he played his first gig at 11 and joined The Scorpions at 15, before several years with UFO in the late 1970s. While he may not have had lasting commercial success, he has built up a strong following with fans and musicians alike.

Schenker also auditioned for the Rolling Stones and Aerosmith, and was one of Ozzy Osbourne's preferred choices following the tragic death of Randy Rhoads.



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Despite well documented issues with alcohol, Schenker remains an icon of the lead guitar, influencing the likes of James Hetfield, Dave Mustaine and Slash.

While his love of music is as strong as ever, the 58-year-old feels his career is in its third and final, as he calls it, "celebration" phase.



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"In the first part of my career I was in love with rock and roll and the rock guitar and the distortion of the guitar which gave huge opportunities to express myself," he begins.

"So I was focussing on self-expression and excellence right up to the end of my time with UFO.

"Then when I started to do my own thing (with the Michael Schenker Group), it was more about exploring and developing different sounds.

"Now, I feel the era of hand-made rock is coming to a close, so I want to celebrate it and spend the rest of my career enjoying it, because music will never be the same again."

So, is he disappointed at the state of rock music today?

"Not at all, it's just going in a different direction," he insists.

"Every moment is a moment that cannot be repeated. It's like when people used to ride on wagons and everyone did it the same way until something new came along to replace it.

"It's just a period of time; an era that started with Led Zeppelin and Black Sabbath. There was a magic that was a product of these particular circumstances is ending because methods and circumstances have changed. New great things will come along, but I think a certain period in rock is ending."

Schenker recently released a new album, Temple of Rock, but there's also a live Temple of Rock package which encapsulates his whole career; or "roofing" as he calls it.

"If you see this age of rock as a temple, we're now at the roof. My father was an architect and they would always have a celebration when they put the roof on!"

As someone who has seen the evolution of rock over five decades, what does he think constitutes a great rock song?

"It's hard to say as it's a question of taste. I always say: 'Nothing is right, nothing is wrong, just do your thing and stay strong!'. It's all about self-expression. I see it as everyone having a colour of their own that no-one else knows about and only if you express it do other people get to see it or feel it. That's the beauty of art – there's no competition, no right or wrong, it is what it is. I don't really focus on songs, I see albums as a journey with every solo an adventure and then I look to see if a collection of songs has a good balance and how they come across. I pay attention to which songs people seem to like. So in terms of songs like Rock Bottom and Doctor Doctor, they are the ones that most people seem to like so other people pick my best songs for me!"

As well as a classic rock style, Schenker has always been associated with the iconic Gibson Flying V guitar and despite it's look, for Schenker it has always been a case of substance over style: "Is it coincidence or something that was just meant to be? Either way, I bumped into the Flying V by accident. My brother was already playing the Flying V and we were on stage and I broke a string but needed to play a lead break so we swapped guitars and that Flying V connected to a 50 watt Marshall amp sounded more like the sound I was looking for, so I stuck with it based on sound and not shape. I've stuck with it since, because if it's not broken, why fix it?"

Michael Schenker plays Rock City on Saturday, April 20. Tickets are £22.50, call 0845 413 4444 or go to www.rock-city.co.uk.

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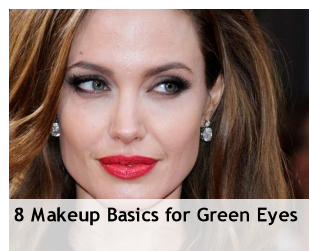
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