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pic. Greg Olma

by Mark Kadzielawa

Schenker - Barden Project or MSG if you please is a very unique combination of talent. Michael Schenker needs no introduction. His guitar playing speaks for itself, and influenced countless of players. Gary Barden is the original voice of MSG. It is great to see Barden working with Schenker again. The combination of those two players was always very special and unique.

It is great to hear some good news from Michael Schenker. The last few years were filled with some very confusing reports about the guitar player. Some were difficult to believe in. It is great to see Schenker was able to get through his personal traumas and focus on music. Personally, Schenker regained a lot of his youthful stature, and appears to be in very creative spirits.

In the *Midst of Beauty* and *acoustic Gipsy Lady* are the two recent releases from Schenker-Barden Project. It is clearly a return to form. They were able to regain the classic MSG sound and spirit that made the band so vital in the early 80s. In doing so, the project never lost any integrity and maintained to be very current sounding as well.

Michael Schenker explains the making of the Schenker-Barden Project, and tries to analyze the magic behind it.

**Why don't you tell me how your reunion with Gary Barden came about?**

**Michael Schenker:** First time we did something together was back in 1997 on the G3 tour in Europe. We toured with Joe Satriani and Uli Jon Roth. I did *Tales of Rock'n'Roll* album and Gary was singing a song on it, so it was a logical next step to do more.

**How are you getting along these days? I mean both of you are older and wiser.**

Yeah, that's basically it. The dynamics are great. It's like you just said.

**In the *Midst of Beauty* is an incredibly focused album. The music just speaks volumes to me. How was it approached?**

Well, it was time to write a new record, and I was just writing songs like I always do. I was in the process of looking for who I wanted to do it with. Then I was like wait a minute. I'm living in London at the moment, and Gary is here too. Let's ask him, and see what happens. He was interested, so I carried on writing. Then we just met in Germany. I introduced the new songs to him. We started writing, and that was it.

**Did you write with Gary's vocal range in mind?**

When I started with a couple of songs I was not even thinking of who the singer will be. Then I told myself I'd better start thinking who the singer will be. Once I knew who the singer will be my approach to writing changed a little.

**When I listen to that record I just can't imagine anyone else singing this material, even though it is possible. What is it about the two of you that makes it so magical?**

You know Gary is Gary, and I am myself too. When you put two and two together you get this special mix. I think people get used of certain era of MSG. Some people liked Robin McAuley as their favorite MSG singer. I think different people react differently to all the stages of MSG. It depends on when you got hit with the music. Whoever was singing at the time was probably your favorite. There's always gonna be somebody who will prefer someone else on vocals. When Gary was in the band we enjoyed most popularity because I just left UFO. And most people were still connected to what I did with UFO, and what I continued with MSG. It's like when you watch the audience during the show. When I play *Rock Bottom*, and I get the best response of the evening. Then I play some early MSG material, and that gets the second best response. The newer the songs the less response I get. You see people grew out of rock'n'roll, and they didn't listen to the music anymore. They grew up and moved onto other things. Many of our fans had kids, and now they are coming out of the woodworks to see us again. They want to re-experience what they knew. We had the biggest

audience when Gary Barden was in the band, so it's the most requested period. It's very hard to get the people to like another combination. It has to do with a lot of things. It has to do with what you were doing at the time. What was the scene like at the moment? All of these elements will have an impact on how you will respond to the music. If my first record was with Gary instead of the Scorpions or UFO; then maybe that would've been much more popular than anything else. When you are a teenager that's when most things happen. I mean I don't know any new songs by Deep Purple because I don't listen to it, but I know they still make records. It really all depends on what leaves that first impression, and that's what you fall in love with.

**What kind of response did In The Midst of Beauty generate? After all it was your first record with Barden in 20 years.**

It was great. It was definitely a very good reunion album. When people love something they have a reason why they love it. Is it because of the whole band or certain performers in the group? Sometimes it's because that one particular performer. It is difficult to predict what people will like about a band.

**You followed the reunion album with an acoustic project. Whose idea was it?**

I have done several Thank You albums which were acoustic, so it was nothing new to me. I was always curious about what it would sound like with vocals on it. So, I approached Gary about doing it together, and he did an excellent job on it.

**As surprising of a move as it was the album it came out sounding very nicely. And another great thing about the songs is they could easily translate into an electric setting.**

It's not really that big of a change from what we do. There are all sorts of things on this record. It's all because it is born from my acoustic material. It's written on acoustic guitar, and played mostly on acoustic too. And there are many things that we put on top of that too. People who are my fans know that when I do an acoustic album it's not something I'm gonna stick with for the rest of my life. It's not the only thing I'm gonna be doing in time to come. I love playing the acoustic stuff as well as I love playing electric. So, there is the electric Schenker-Barden, and acoustic Schenker-Barden.



**Do you find many new fans are attracted to the acoustic sound?**

That might be because the acoustic sound has a very different vibe to it. It's not the usual MSG style music. Well, you win some and you lose some when it comes to fans. I would imagine that old fans still like it because it is still high quality performance. It doesn't have the distortion but it has the feel and the expression. It is nice to have additional element to listen to.

**I think you have a great momentum with the two above mentioned records. What will come next?**

It will be an electric album, then possibly another acoustic record. We had a lot of fun doing both.

**Speaking to you now you appear to be in a very creative spirit. After four decades on stage do you ever run out of ideas musically?**

I have always been myself. If you are yourself you don't have to work very hard on it. For me music is always about an individual expression. There is no need to express for anybody else. I let the other people do that as well. All I need to do it just work on my own expressions so I can add color to them.

**Are you planning anymore instrumental records?**

I don't know. At this time I'm not really thinking about all the things that I could do or want to do. I just want to have fun doing what I'm doing now. But whatever new comes up it comes up. It's kind of like food. You never know what you are going to eat tomorrow, but the closer you get to it you kind of know what you want to eat.

**If I could go back to the very beginning of MSG, how did you find Gary Barden to begin with?**

It was just a demo tape. I found his voice to be soulful, especially the lower range. Sometimes he sang little bit too high. His voice is not at its best when you push it too much. That's why I made sure he was using more of the middle range on the last two records. Gary's middle range is the strongest. I love his vibrato. It's very good, smooth, warm and natural. His voice has a lot of feel, and there certain quality to it.

**When you look at your musical journey what comes to mind?**

My whole musical journey has been a series of incredible experiences. One experience leads to the next. It's like a picture book. It's one big part. You can detail it if you want. Each part is important in my development. I remember when I made my first record with Scorpions. And making your first record is always something very special. For my next record I was in an English band, so I kept developing. Every record and every period of my time adds new experiences. There was always something to be excited about.

**Many of your early UFO and MSG records are recently reissued with bonus tracks, and nice liner notes. Are you involved in the process in any way?**

I actually don't know anything about it. I only find out about it when I sign a record and somebody

starts speaking about it. So fans are my only way of finding out about these reissues. I have no input or control over any of these releases. I'm happy they are available, and if they sound good that's even better.

**Links:**

<http://www.michaelschenkerhimself.com/home.php>

