



NOW PLAYING: JUST GO
BY: STAIND

Welcome to the LOUDEST DOT COM ON THE
PLANET!

KNAC.COM
PURE ROCK

LISTEN!

WATCH!

LOGIN

JOIN

MAGAZINE ON-AIR DOWNLOADS CHAT BOARDS CONTESTS STORE

FEATURES

INTERVIEWS AND ROCK N ROLL MAYHEM

Behind Blue Eyes: Up Close and Personal with Iconic Guitar God Michael Schenker

By [Shelly Harris](#), Chicago Contributor
Tuesday, July 28, 2009 @ 7:07 AM



MICHAEL SCHENKER

"If I would have joined [Ozzy Osbourne](#), I would have screwed up my life. I was almost about to do it, and something told me: DON'T!!"

ShareThis

Michael Schenker, virtuoso extraordinaire, is at ease, laid-back, and personable - even amiable - as he sits calmly on a couch in the back of his tour bus.

And his comfortable poise is disarming, partly in light of the fact that -- on a current U.S. tour with **Michael Schenker Group ("MSG")** featuring the return of vocalist **Gary Barden** -- he had, just minutes earlier, completed a thoroughly rousing and sensational gig in front of a jam-packed and frenzied audience at Chicago's House of Blues venue.

(No small task, even after nearly four decades on the big stage, though it must be remembered that he was essentially a "child prodigy" when he first joined brother **Rudolf's** band in the early **Scorpions** days.)

Still, I am a touch relieved at his welcoming demeanor. Schenker, though never a difficult interview, has long been renowned for his reticence regarding the offstage limelight. In short, he has never really courted publicity, good times or bad.

Even during some of the highest "peaks" of his career -- which certainly include the eras of some of his timeless and highly influential tour de forces such as "Rock Bottom," "Doctor, Doctor," "Coast to Coast," and many others -- he was notably extremely press-shy. (Though he

- advertisement -



[Buy CD's, DVD's, Games and Books from KNAC.COM! Click Here Now.](#)

Recent Features



MICHAEL SCHENKER

Behind Blue Eyes: Up Close and Personal with Iconic Guitar God **Michael Schenker**

Shedding Light on **Years in the Darkness**: 15 Minute with **Christian Olde Wolbers**

Gary Cherone and **Extreme** Come Full Circle

British Steel Revisited: A Talk with Judas Priest's Glenn Tipton

Warren DeMartini Talks About 20 Years of **Ratt N' Roll**

Scott Gorham of **Thin Lizzy**: The Boy: Are Back!

Slayer: About the Apocalypse. Interview with Drummer, **Dave Lombardo**

Real One Radio Pass FAQ

later explained that that was mostly due to the fact that, as a native German, he was not yet fluent in English during the earlier days of his career.)

To rewind further, as any "old school" hard rocker will certainly recall, Schenker's career first catapulted in the **Scorpions**, which then fortuitously led to his jumping ship in favor of the more rapidly rising, highly respected British band, UFO. (That band's most heralded vinyl coup being the still lauded and legendary [live album](#), Strangers In The Night - primarily recorded in Chicago's old Amphitheater - and which features celestial performances by Schenker that still generate goose bumps to this very day.)

Starting then, Schenker became both a confounding and fascinating musical enigma, due not only to his awe-inspiring talent, but also his personal and professional "disappearances" and idiosyncrasies.

This included his time during a short return to **Scorpions** (Lovedrive), his days with MSG (in various incarnations), his later on-again, off-again solo career, and various other collaborations, including a brief reprise with UFO. Oh, but - no exaggeration -- when the stars are/were aligned correctly, there is no one whose playing can/could surpass his in terms of melodicism, passion, dynamics, and technical perfection.

Inadvertently, all of the above are also part of Schenker's longstanding and compelling mystique ... which I very quickly recall as I struggle to visually penetrate the lenses of his omnipresent sunglasses! After all, I do want another "inner view" of the real man behind those pale blue eyes and the Flying V.

Not to worry, though. It becomes immediately clear that Schenker has no intention of being evasive, oblique, or short. He doesn't dodge, and, refreshingly, he has no PR agenda. But, while I am tempted to revisit some of the major issues that have troubled many of his fans from the early days of his career on to now, I resolve to remember that he's already sat on the hot seat - and delivered with honesty - on those puzzling events at other times in the past (with [other music](#) journals as well as myself).

For instance, in early '82, when he was touring, post-UFO, with MSG, he was earnest and candid when asked (post-gig in Chicago on the Built to Destroy tour) the "real" reason for his sudden and infamous "mysterious" departure from UFO in the late 70's, which at the time was viewed as tantamount to career suicide.

"I remember me sitting in a car in England," he'd explained, "and looking at Billboard, and seeing [the UFO album] Lights Out up 30, and saying to myself - like shaking - and going 'No Chance! I can't go back to America and tour six months on the road! That means drinking every day, 30 days a month times six! I can't do that! That's 180 nights of drinking in six months: I'm dead! I'm dead after the tour!' So I just packed my bags and sold everything and went. ... That's when everyone believed I joined the Moonies. But I was just afraid - I was scared - so I just went ... But whatever happened in the past, I think I had to go through, whether it was good or bad."

Yet, around 2003, after another series of career starts and stops, truncated tours, other intervening personal setbacks, including (but not limited to) an ugly divorce that had him auctioning off most of his iconic [guitars](#), and related legal issues (which eventually rendered him unable to tour America at one recent juncture), he clearly still retained a crucial philosophy and outlook strikingly similar to the one he had 20 years prior:

"Be grateful for the good and for the bad," he had emphasized then, "because the bad stuff is usually nothing else than a teacher, and without the bad stuff, we wouldn't learn anything. It is so inter-related, and so intelligently designed -- life experience and how life works in general. It's beyond comprehension, really. But it's like, even if somebody is doing something to you and manipulating you, in the end it is all interrelated, and it's all part of progress in combined consciousness, when it comes down to raising up the whole society. Whether it's wrong-doing or right-doing, it's basically like one step forward, two steps back, three steps forward, and step by step, we're all kind of moving forward."

Sports

Flat Stomach Rule: (obey)



before.

after.

I cut out 2 lbs of stomach fat per week by obeying 1 Golden Rule. **Learn More**

As Seen On

rachaelray

CBS NEWS abc

So, with Schenker sitting in front of me again, some 27 years after the first '82 interview, we mostly focus on "the now" - a Now that for him includes being visibly healthy, youth-like, and quite clearly re-energized, career-wise and otherwise. (Perhaps greatly aided by a fairly recent sojourn/return back home to Germany, where he was doubtless enveloped in the highly positive energy sphere of family, especially brother Rudolf, Michael also has just come off several joint projects/tours in Europe with **Scorpions**, **Uli Roth**, and others.)

In any case, it still clearly shines through - yes, even through those aforementioned sunglasses - that Maestro Schenker still remains every bit the philosophical and utterly exemplary artiste that he ever was:

KNAC.COM: I've seen you play this venue a couple of times before, and the audience was especially amazing tonight, and so was the show! But what did you think? You seemed really sparked.

SCHENKER: The audience was great, but it's always the sound on stage that makes it or breaks it for me. I can have a very, very bad concert, and the audience are excellent, and tell you it was great ... and I can't understand it! Because the stuff that I hear isn't necessarily what comes out over there. (laughs) So, I'm always fishing for sweet spots for a good sound. Because I get inspired by sound; if I hear a good sound, I play really good, but if I get a bad sound, it goes the opposite. (laughs)

KNAC.COM: Yeah, I know your perception of what it sounds like may be different than how it really does sound in the audience...

SCHENKER: Yeah, I don't even know what they're hearing out there, but I want to hear everything I do, obviously... I think when they're out there, they might only be hearing half of what I'm hearing.

KNAC.COM: You do have a history in Chicago going back to the old days with Strangers in the Night. Do you think you have a particularly good audience here? Because it has always seemed that way to me; there's always been a buzz about any **Michael Schenker** show coming here, too ...

SCHENKER: Actually, now, we have a lot of places where people sing all the [songs](#) and go totally crazy. I think it's all it's all coming from older people who fell in love with MSG and UFO, and now they're coming out again to experience the excitement, and that's happening I think, for many other bands, all over the world.

KNAC.COM: That's even been happening for your brother's band, too.

SCHENKER: Yeah, but for the **Scorpions** it's a little bit different because they have been consistently out there. So, with us ... I don't know; I think it happens with all the bands, more or less. But for us, it's just a little bit more noticeable. Also, it's because of the whole cycle ... And Gary's (Barden) back in the band, and so it happened just at the same time that people want to re-experience ... So, it's a timing thing, and it just fits together.

KNAC.COM: Yes, these cycle things do happen, and are happening, but it's not like anyone can really predict it. Like ten years ago, you could never know for sure.

SCHENKER: Yeah, yeah! Even though I knew something like this would happen -- It's very strange, really! I mean, I'm not calculating it, but in '89 I had an experience where I felt something - it was a little bit of a spiritual kind of experience - but I could feel, basically, something that was telling me "same way you came up, you're going to go back now." And then it happened: All of a sudden there was Uli Roth, and there was the **Scorpions**, there was UFO. It's just like fashion, you know? It's never exactly the same, but it comes back in some way, like [the style of] trousers. If it can come back the same way, it adds another twist to it! That's the way it goes with everything, I think.

KNAC.COM: Yeah, but you do have to actually live it before you can really see it!

SCHENKER: Absolutely!

KNAC.COM: The last time I talked to you was a few years ago, and you've had a lot of things happen since then. You've had some new releases, and you're also in Germany now aren't you?

SCHENKER: Germany and England.

KNAC.COM: So, you're based in Europe now. And I know this U.S. tour got a little delayed ...

SCHENKER: It got postponed because of the visa situation.

KNAC.COM: Well, I know that life has its peaks and valleys, and I know you have a certain philosophy regarding troubles in life.

SCHENKER: Well, there are two forces. One is: Whatever is meant to be is happening anyway, in its own time - like the cycle. And the other one is that maybe intuitively we pick up on it, and we create something, and we think it was us, but it wasn't. It just kind of happens automatically.

KNAC.COM: Which leads to asking how it happened that you've gotten back together with Gary Barden after all these years?

SCHENKER: We did a G3 tour in Europe in '97 where Gary was singing five songs, and then, in 2006, I did "Tales of Rock N Roll" with the original singers, and Gary was one of them. And then, a year later, I was sitting in England writing songs, and I thought, "Wait a minute, Gary lives here, just around the corner, let's call him up and see if he wants to do it," and that was it. We've been touring in Europe for a whole year already; festivals and stuff. And we played in Japan.

KNAC.COM: So, at this point, what is your inspiration - what gets you up in the morning, and what keeps you motivated to this day?

SCHENKER: Passion!

KNAC.COM: I'm not surprised to hear you say that! A passion for the music ...

SCHENKER: Yeah, yeah! You know, I never got paid until 1992. I played for free! (laughs)

KNAC.COM: You mean because of record company and publishing funny business?

SCHENKER: Well, I never got paid for any concerts. They always told me there was no money.

KNAC.COM: Really? Or so they said! (laughs)

SCHENKER: Yeah ... (laughs) ... But, anyway, you know music is something where I've always been able to be myself. I've always been able to do what I've wanted to do. That's why I created MSG, that's why didn't team up with the **Scorpions** and all the other people later - with **Ozzy Osbourne** and **Deep Purple**, and whatever. Because ... you know, I just didn't want to run into that trendy thing, where you have to do this, and you have to do that, and you have to "shine" or whatever. I just wanted to be myself and express myself. ... And my payoff is, it keeps me happy.

KNAC.COM: Well, I'm not surprised to hear you say that, because I know that all along - as the cliché goes - you have always marched to your own drummer, whatever the financial cost. You've always followed your heart, I think.

SCHENKER: Yeah, yeah. You know, there's nothing worse ... Well, I've had opportunities to screw up my life. If I would have joined **Ozzy Osbourne**, I would have screwed up my life. I was almost about to do it, and something told me: DON'T!!

KNAC.COM: Well, it's hard to be sure how it would have played out ...

SCHENKER: Well, the temptation was there, but intuitively I knew: Don't do it. But, with the **Scorpions** reunion in '79 - '80 [Lovedrive era, when Matthias Jabs had to replace him on some of the album and subsequent tour], I went a bit too far, and people got hurt because I had to pull out when people had already gotten too attached to it. So, I made a mistake. But I had to go, I said, "I cannot do this" - I had to do my own thing.

KNAC.COM: So I guess there's a touch of regret there? But you can't change who you were at the time.

SCHENKER: I think whatever I did was good for me because I'm happy today, with all the events that have happened. It doesn't mean that I've had the success that all these people had, but, with my personality, I'm just pretty much happy with the amount of attention I get. It's not like paparazzi attention, and it's not like nothing. It's right in the middle and I'm comfortable with that; I'm fine.

KNAC.COM: Well, I wouldn't even have to ask if you're happy, because I could already tell from your body language tonight that you are - it's pretty evident.

SCHENKER: I've become content. And also, you know, I never became attached to 20,000 seaters and stuff like that, so I don't have to be part of that big foe. Bands like **Scorpions**, **Whitesnake**, **Def Leppard** - they have to come up with big packages so they don't look stupid playing in front of empty houses and stuff like this. They have to fight with that; they have to fight really hard to survive in the bigger places. I don't have that problem. For me there's always been deck level, so there's no problem.

KNAC.COM: Well, a large part of your fan base has always been musicians or music connoisseurs, and I'm sure it must be nice to have the respect of the people that you respect too, right?

SCHENKER: We've got two choices, and it's the same for everybody in life. When you come out of school, you can either compete with your colleagues, or the people you went to school with, that have got the first big house, and the first big family, and work your ass off, and do something you don't enjoy just for the sake of being the first one up there. And then you're totally devastated, your marriage breaks apart, and everything falls apart, and you're totally stressed out, and you have fights - arguments - about everything, and you end up with nothing, and you wonder if it's even anything that you used to like! You don't remember that, anyway, because you're chasing something ... It's the chase! But, in the end, what happened? That's the problem. And, as a musician, you need to understand who you are yourself. If you like to copy things, and if you like to be in big bands and play other people's music, that's a good choice to make! For me, I would have cheated myself. I would have been in a band, maybe on an arena level, and I would gotten the money, and I would have 20,000 seaters out of it, but I would not have been happy. It's really about happiness ... and you have to know what really makes you happy. Either you're competing with somebody, or you just want to be first, or you just want to be content regardless of what's happening around you. That's the difference.

KNAC.COM: And what exactly is it that does satisfy you artistically?

SCHENKER: Just being myself. Being creative, and you obviously only create what you enjoy, and that's it.

KNAC.COM: Tell me what musical projects you have going on right now, so that people will know.

SCHENKER: In the *Midst of Beauty*, which is with Gary Barden, and it came out last year in April. And then, I have a few acoustic instrumentals, and I asked Gary to put some vocals to it, and it came out really good, and it's called *Schenker/Barden Acoustic Project: Gypsy Lady*, which is more an acoustic effort, but it's a very nice album. The guy from *Guitar World*, Joe Lalaina ...

KNAC.COM: Joe Lalaina? Yes, Oh my, I know Joe but haven't seen him in years!

SCHENKER: Yeah! Well, he came to New York, and he said (shouting), "Hey, Michael, I even bought this album!!!" (laughs) He says, "Now I can go to sleep, this is so beautiful." He likes it. But it's the other side, because *MSG* is electric. Anyway, we'll just be touring here, Japan, Europe, and so on ...

KNAC.COM: Do you see yourself doing this forever?

SCHENKER: I don't count days and years. (laughs) I just do it. Every moment inspires what you're going to do next; it's that kind of a thing.

KNAC.COM: It snowballs from there?

SCHENKER: Yes! It's basically like that. You don't know exactly where you're going, but you know where you're going the next two minutes. I know I'm going to my hotel in the next few minutes. (laughs) But, going to my hotel, I may experience something that will tell me something new!

Back to Top

READER RANTS

clanofthedildo - 7/28/2009 8:51:24 AM

Let's see...perhaps instead of drinking for a 180 days you could have been sober, made a lot of dough, had fun and salvaged a career instead of descending into drugged madness? Just a thought. What kind of lame article makes no mention of his stabbing Uli Jon Roth onstage in Dusseldorf? Why no mention of his wife's poisoning him with LSD-laced suppositories in an attempt to rob him blind during a bitter divorce featuring allegations of bestiality? Why no mention of his binding his testies in order to reduce his out of control sexual appetite and naked steroid aggression? Come on, the man's a fucking freak...fly that freak flag high! Where's scropssista? That bitch has to make an appearance and rant!

clanofthedildo - 7/28/2009 8:47:58 AM

I'm the first!

First Page | Previous Page | Next Page | Last Page

ADD YOUR RANT HERE:

If you don't have a username, [click here to create an account!](#)

Username:
Password:

Message:

Add this Rant!

Download Full Albums
Free & Unlimited Music Downloads! Full
Albums From All Major Artists.
[\) :erts In Philadelphia](#)

Ads by Google

[HOME](#) | [MAGAZINE](#) | [ON-AIR](#) | [DOWNLOADS](#) | [CHAT](#) | [BOARDS](#) | [CONTESTS](#) | [STORE](#) | [HELP](#)

©2009 KNAC.COM. All Rights Reserved. [Link to us](#) [Advertise with us](#) [Privacy policy](#)