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MICHAEL SCHENKER TEMPLE OF ROCK



pic. Greg Olma

by Mark Kadzielawa

Michael Schenker returns with "Temple of Rock." The legendary guitar player gets an all-star cast to guest on the record, and hits the spotlight on his own this time. The album features many artists who played with Schenker in the past. Members of the Scorpions, UFO, and various MSG line ups, all make appearances on the record. As a result, "Temple of Rock" is a very multi-dimensional album, with Michael Schenker's guitar taking control in the driver's seat.

The album gives Michael Schenker many touring options. In the United States, he is touring with Robin McAuley as the main vocalist, whereas in Europe the job may belong to Doogie White. Both singers, are featured on the new album. Schenker enjoys keeping things fresh, and working with different line ups.

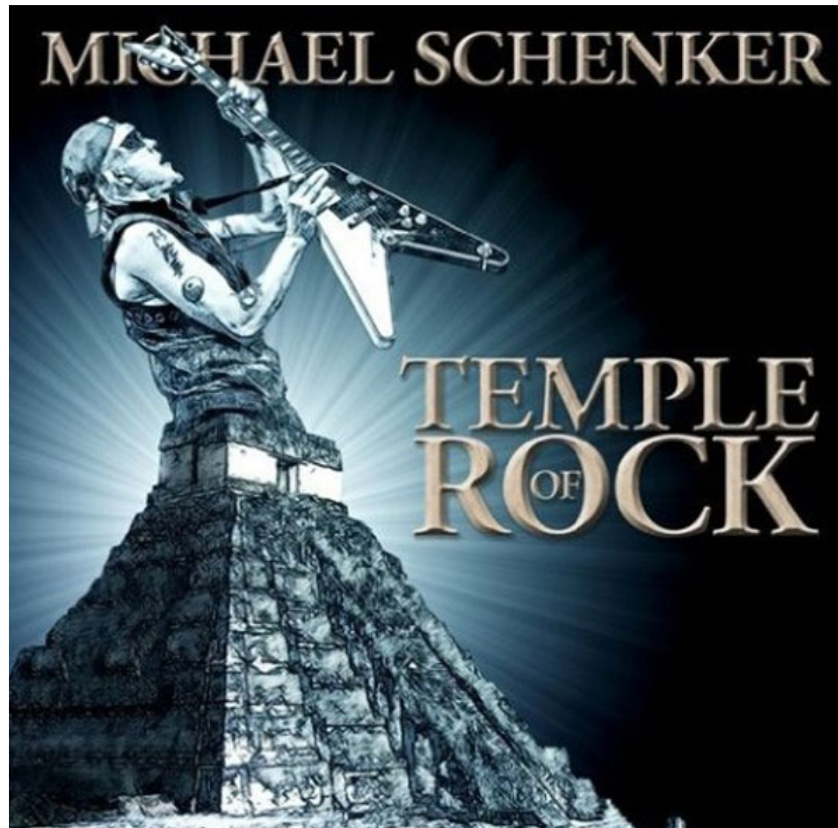
Michael Schenker began his career in the Scorpions, a band he co-founded with his brother Rudolf, back in his native Germany. Soon, he was spotted and stolen by the British rockers UFO. Schenker's stay with UFO was triumphant. He's made spectacular albums with UFO, and a name for himself, but left the band and formed his own Michael Schenker Group. Over the years, he's experienced a lot of ups and downs in his career. But, it was his playing which remained flawless, and very creative. Today, Michael Schenker is considered a guitar icon. He continues to tour and record regularly. Also, Michael Schenker appears to be reconciled with his past, and is looking forward towards the future. He is still dedicated to his craft, and sees no signs of slowing down.

Michael Schenker explains how the new album was put together, and shares his thoughts on strange ways in which the universe works.

The new album, "The Temple Of Rock," is released under your own name. What sets it apart from MSG records?

Michael Schenker: It's a good question...let me think about it. MSG originally is with Gary Barden on vocals, and of course I've done many records without Gary. I think the whole concept is because I am focusing on the whole past. So, it's like a Michael Schenker effort, not so much like I

am focusing on a particular band with a particular line up. It's like I'm playing Scorpions, UFO, and MSG live. All classics from my life, so it's similar to the way the album was developed. It was more focused on that in general, rather than particular line up you may know from the past.



Just as you were caught by surprise by the previous question, the audience was caught by surprise with this release. Especially considering the very successful reunion with Gary Barden in the very recent past.

Gary is away in Thailand. He has a personal situation, but for me it was a time to celebrate the "hand-made rock" again. I wanted to combine my whole efforts in such a way. You know, nothing was really planned. I started off very regularly. It was just a time to make a new album. Gary wasn't available anyway, he went out to Thailand. So, I've decided that now would be the time to do something that is more connected to the summit. Summit, like the sum of the past. I actually had no plan, really. I was actually working on a touring project with Pete Way and Herman Rarebell. I wanted to play "Strangers In The Night" (UFO) material because I hadn't played it for a long time. So, we got together in England, and we were living close to each other. I started rehearsing with Herman all the time, and then Pete showed up at some point. So, we did rehearse for a tour in mind, and while we were doing that I was also doing a demo at Michel Voss's studio. And I asked him to help me out with a guide vocals. And when he was singing, I was very impressed with how he sounded. I liked his vocals, and I've offered him to do the vocals on the next record. He's already expressed the interest to work with me in the past. So, I said, "here's your chance," and that wasn't planned either. But the universe is the driver, and I just kind of do my part. It just moves forward anyways. And then Herman and Pete heard the material, and they wanted to do it too. So, I had a rhythm section, which was kind of unique because of the Scorpions-UFO connection. And then as we were doing it, I was like, "let's invite some other musicians from the past." I've created a list, and you know, many of them were available, and so we did some recordings. And then, Michael Voss, did the intro using his voice, and it was amazing. I was like, "it would be great to get a big name actor with a distinguished voice to do that." At the same time, I was getting a request to play on William Shatner's album, and I was like, "wow, this is perfect, this is the guy." So, we've asked him if he would do the introduction, and he agreed. So, I've played on his album, and he did the spoken word introduction on my record.

You really did get plenty of great names on the new album, were there any challenges?

It was more like one thing that lead to another. Once you got all the details down, we were able to end up with the people who were available, and most of them were available. Between my lawyer, and Michel Voss, we just kind of got it all coordinated. Then my brother came, Paul Raymond, and so on. They all kind of ended up doing the right thing in the right songs. It was too smooth, and a little bit spooky, but it all worked out great.



pic. Greg Olma

Do you see yourself working with any of these people again in time to come?

Well, everyone has a buildup. Doogie White has a buildup, Robin (McAuley) has a buildup. Different people were already in and out. I don't know what's in the making, the universe knows, but something is happening. And in a few years from now, I might understand why it went that way.

You've already mentioned working on William Shatner's album, where you've played on "Empty Glass." Did you actually work with him in the studio?

No, I was sent the track to Michael's studio. I went in, and played on it there. Then the song was sent to Los Angeles, and that's the last I've heard of it.

So, you haven't heard the finished track yet?

No, I haven't heard it yet.

Were you personally a fan of Shatner's acting?

I watch him all the time. And he's still on the TV. Every single day, you can find something with William Shatner on TV. You go through the channels, and most likely you find two shows, like "Star Trek," and some comedy. He is actually a very good comedian. He's very funny that guy.

The current tour reunites you with Robin McAuley, who also makes an appearance on the new album. How did you decide that Robin will be the singer you'll use on the tour?

I didn't decide. What happened was, Michael Voss, signed up with some record company, and then he was busy doing other things. So, I was like, "what am I gonna do now?" But, Robin was on the album, and Doogie (White) was on the album. So, I put two and two together, and figured that one of these guys should work out since they were all on the album. And so, as we coordinated, I just somehow put together different line ups as to who was available, and in what continent. And that's how we've ended up putting it together basically. And with Robin over here, we're pushing "Lover's Sinfony" obviously as a song. And Doogie is on, "Before The Devil Knows You're Dead," and that's becoming a hit in England right now. And with Michael Voss, we're gonna be pushing "Hanging On." So, we have kind of three strong songs worldwide. And again, I don't know what the whole meaning is behind, but something's in the making and it just seems to be working kind of almost effortlessly.



pic. Greg Olma

After years of not actively working with Robin, do you see any changes in his performance?

He is getting better, and so is Herman Rarebell by the way. Herman Rarebell is getting really solid. Some people get better with age, you know.

Speaking of former Scorpions' members, you also had a stint with bassist, Francis

Bucholz, recently.

Francis is gonna play with us in Europe. That will be the Scorpions' rhythm section on tour with me. In Europe the lineup will be: Doogie White on vocals, Herman Rarebell on drums and Francis Bucholz on bass. Eventually, I can bring all the different line up on different continents. So, I can keep touring around the world, and always come up with something fresh.

After 40 years of performing and making records, are you still as passionate about making records and touring?

More! What happened was, I had a very fast beginning, for whatever reason. And the developing time began. All learning, focusing on developing as a person, and as a musician. Experimenting, doing all sorts of different things. That's why I put MSG together because it was not my assignment to be the part of rock machine that did what everybody did in the 80s. I did my part, and then my brother took over. I did my developing time. And now that we kind of coming to the finish line of the hand-made rock, I feel that we are celebrating now. And somehow, for some reason, all of a sudden I'm having a lot of fun being on stage again. I'm loving doing the things that I thought was never possible in the past. But as everything seems to be coming to the final stages, and I want to be part of it. So, it's like the train is moving forward, and I'm in it.

**Was there ever a time when you were not enjoying yourself on stage?**

I don't even understand what I did on stage in the beginning. I never liked being on stage, it wasn't my place, I was too shy to be on stage, and stuff like this, but I'm growing out of it all of a sudden. And these days, I feel developed into a different person.

How much practice time do you allow yourself these days?

I don't practice, I play the guitar. I don't time it, and it's all depending on how much time I have. I usually do it when I feel fresh in the morning. I like to play guitar then. I need to feel fresh and my mind needs to feel free too. That's when I enjoy it the most. In the evening, you've already had been through a lot in a day, and so. But that's when the most creative input comes in.

How does the development of the new technology affect your sound, if at all?

I'm not a technician, and I don't use any of that experimental stuff. I've grown up with everything being hand-made, and I'm still doing it the same way to this day. When it comes to recordings, the engineer will do it in any way it makes his life easier, however he does it, but I still do my stuff the way I've always done it.

So, your set up is pretty much identical to the way it was back in the 70s, right?

Yeah, I just plug into my amp and play. I'm not into the technology aspects that much. I'm into a good sound, and however that is being produced.

With the changing role of guitar in rock music, do you see any players you're impressed by?

I don't consume music, it drains me. I'm a creator, so I cannot allow myself to consume music because I'm gonna be drained, I'm gonna have no energy left. So, I stay away from other players. And I've always have done this, since I was 17 years old. I knew better to stay away. I told myself to stay away from other people's music, and since I loved playing and writing, it needed to be done in order for me to stay creative. Also, I had to do it in order to absorb things from the inside, rather than to pick up things from the external world. I wanted to contribute from the inside because this is the place people don't know about. And that's puts the fresh color into the light.

Do you have any plans as to what the next release will be?

I have no idea what I'll do next. It's just like the train is moving forward, and I just do my part. As I move on the daily basis, I'm living very much in the "now" these days. And so I focus on what I need to be doing now. There is not really lots of space for me, but it presents itself as I go along. In a way, it's really simple, and I feel no need to make up this incredible plan.

It seems like a lot of things came to you in cycles. UFO came back, MSG with Gary Barden came back, and now you're back with Robin McAuley.

It's how the universe works. And then 20 years from now, we understand what happened.

Not too long ago your brother, Rudolf, announced a retirement tour for the Scorpions, your very first band. Is retirement something you're considering in the near future?

I'm the B.B. King of rock 'n' roll.

Links:

www.michaelschenkerhimself.com

Read our feature with Michael Schenker from 2009:

http://www.69facesofrock.com/msg_barden_interview.html

