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THE BIGFOOT DIARIES

Tuesday, October 11, 2011

Five Questions With: Michael Schenker



When I was in junior high in the early '80s, all the kids were listening to pretty much the same rock albums.

Ozzy Osbourne, Molly Hatchet, Black Sabbath, Judas Priest, The Scorpions, Lynyrd Skynyrd, Alice Cooper, Quiet Riot, Rush, Def Leppard and Triumph could be found in virtually anybody's tape case or record collection.

There were a few of us however, who dug even deeper into the vein, and had albums by the likes of **T.Rex, Dio, Iron Maiden, Deep Purple, Yngwie Malmsteen, Rainbow** and **UFO**.

I was a huge UFO fan while in junior high and high school. When I was 15, I picked up a used vinyl copy of UFO's *Flying* for a couple of bucks at the old **Archives Records** store in **Des Moines**. To this day, it remains one of my favorite rock and roll albums.

Like many teens of that era when I fell in love with a band, I was prone to taking my weekly paycheck and buying as many albums from that artist that I could find. I would always buy from the used record bin, as the selection was always decent, the quality was good, and the albums were about half the price of the unused copies. The problem with finding UFO albums, at least at Archives, was that there weren't many available in the used record section.

Then one day I got lucky. There in the used record bin was a copy of UFO's third album, *Phenomenon*. I bought it and eagerly took it home and placed it on my turntable. It sounded nothing like the spacey and psychedelic *Flying*. It had a much sharper edge to it and the songs were structured, not loose and trippy. The comparison was night to day. While *Flying* was a sonic acid trip, *Phenomenon* was more of a rock and roll album, and one of my first introductions to British heavy metal. As I read the liner notes on the back of the record, I realized that there was a new guitarist/song writer in the group... His name was **Michael Schenker**.



T.Church



Turtle Boy



Cveckian



UFO Phenomenon (released 1974 Chrysalis Records)

I was amazed that one person could have so much talent and influence that they could change the entire sound of a band. Of course I became an instant fan. I sought after anything I could get my hands on from Michael Schenker including records from the Scorpions and UFO. I also became a huge fan of the **Michael Schenker Group**, a band formed in 1979 after he left UFO. Very guitar oriented, MSG was perfect in the eyes of a young impressionable rock and roll fan such as myself who was overflowing with teenage angst. His guitar riffs were unlike anything I had ever heard before.

Michael is considered by many to be a living legend, and the list of people and bands he has influenced over the years is long. A few people on this list are **Kirk Hammett** and **James Hetfield (Metallica)**, **Slash (Guns and Roses)**, **Adrian Smith (Iron Maiden)**, **Michael Wilton (Queensryche)**, **Dave Mustaine (Megadeth)**, **Paul Gilbert (Mr. Big)**, **Andy LaRocque (King Diamond)**, and **Eric Peterson (Testament)**. There are many more.

In 2008 he earned a spot on *Guitar World* magazine's **100 Greatest Heavy Metal Guitarists**. It's a high honor to have him be a part of the **Bigfoot Diaries**.



Five Questions with Michael Schenker

1. Reportedly, you were 11 when you played your first live gig with The Scorpions. What memories do you have of that night?

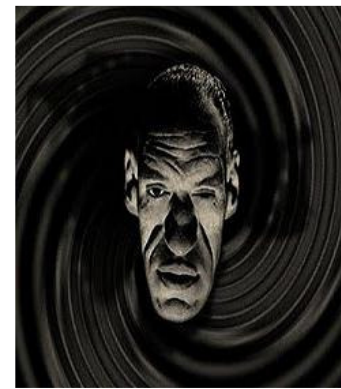
Yes, I was about 11 and had already developed quite a bit. I think the Scorpions were only one year old at the time. My parents wanted to go to see them play and took me with them. I was asked if I wanted to play one song with them. I think it was a Shadow song (instrumental). I think it went ok.

2. Who were your major guitar influences when you were a kid?

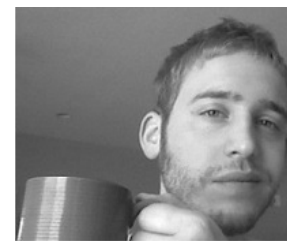
From nine 'til 13 it was anything on the radio from **Shadows** to the **Beatles** to the **Stones** etc. When I was 14 and I heard the first real distorted guitar solos that's when I got really into it. My favourite guitarists were people like **Jimmy Page**, **Jeff Beck**, **Eric Clapton**, **Leslie West** and many bands with distorted sounds. I liked **Rory Gallagher**, **Wishbone Ash**, **Johnny Winter**, **Deep Purple**, **Black Sabbath**, **Led Zepplin** and on and on.



Shep



Grant's Tomb



The Apemen



3. Your tenure with UFO has been described as "turbulent," despite you being the main song writer of the band during that time. What would you say caused this turbulence, and what was the final straw that made you leave the band after "Strangers in the Night" came out?

There was not much turbulence as far as I remember. I was never hanging out with anyone. I was there to do music and that's all I focused on. I only remember **Phil (Mogg)** fighting other people a lot and one day I told him if he would ever hit me I would leave. He hit me (I guess he wanted to find out) and I left.



Pete Way and Michael Schenker of UFO in 1976

4. You are the younger brother of Scorpions guitarist, Rudolf Schenker. What was it like growing up in a household that produced two of the greatest guitar players in the world?

My parents were very supportive. My brother kept them on track. All in all we were all very much music lovers but Rudolf being six and a half years older, I did not really get to see much of him until we played together in the Scorpions for two years. Then I moved to England. So all in all we are kind of strangers to each other.

5. What can you tell me about when you auditioned for Aerosmith in 1979 after Joe Perry split, and then for Ozzy Osbourne's group after the death of Randy Rhoads? What were the reasons for you not taking those jobs?

In '79 I believe it was **Peter Mensch** who asked me if I would want to jam with **Arrowsmith [sic]** to see if I liked joining them. I went to New York but everything was pretty much out of order. So we never got to play but later when **Steven (Tyler)** got sick I rehearsed with **Joe Kramer** and **Tom Hamilton** for my solo album.

In around '81 **Ozzy Osbourne** called me up in the middle of the night telling me that Randy had just died and asked if I could help out. I was in the middle of pre-production with **Cozy Powell** and **Graham Bonnet**. It was bad timing but on the other hand, Arrowsmith, Ozzy Osbourne or any other band with history was not good for me. It would always mean that I would have to learn other guitarist's riffs. And that was not what I wanted. I was born to create and invent.



From the southern region of the Netherlands comes our Official House Band: **The Apemen**.

The Apemen's infectious grooves and unmistakable rhythms place you right on the surfboard... And take you on a melodic journey through the pipelines of your mind. The best thing to come out of the Nether Regions since the Dutch Letter, The Apemen aren't just monkeying around. They mean what they say, and what they are saying is **Pogo-A-Go-Go!**

Can ya dig?

The Believers Say...

Loved your piece on that piece of crap Kings of Leon..." - **Jeroen Van de Sande (Lead guitarist - The Apemen)**

"You have a cool thing going on! Great job!!!!" - **Zebra (Bass player/vocalist - Hot Damn!)**

"Troy I must say that your version of my life story is the best I've ever seen. And there have been many over the years. You are, indeed, a fine writer! It was a pleasure working with you."
- **Bill Fries Aka CW McCall**

"Great job Troy! I hope you can continue this blog. Informative and fun..." - **Greg Tenac Waldrop (Dangerous Music inc.)**

"I've never met anybody who likes to piss outside as much as you do!"
CVEckian

"I like the blog. You coming out Saturday???" - **Albie Ichelson (Record scratcher/mix master - SID)**

"Troy is a world class blogger, writer, and all around great guy. I highly recommend reading his Bigfoot Diaries on a regular basis if you want to laugh, cry, and increase your sex drive by 100 %... Your partners too." - **Mike Berhow (Rock and Roll Guru)**

"Really great site, some fine interviews! Great Job!" **Sarge Adam (from such legendary bands as Fearless Leader and Crawlspace)**

"Troy, thankyavermush!" **Tortelvis, front man for Dread Zeppelin**

"Jesus Troy... Your neck is bigger than Corey Taylor's!" **Richard Way (Drummer for Aquamarine Dream Machine)**

Rudolf and Michael Schenker

(Bonus Question): You will be playing the Hoyt Sherman Theater in Des Moines, Iowa on October 28th with Leslie West and Uli Roth. What can we expect at that show?

This is one of it's kind. Leslie, my guitar hero and Uli who replaced me when I left the **Scorpions** and did five albums with them, all together on one stage touring together after all these years is something very special. I will be promoting my new album **Temple of Rock** and I will be playing all my highlights from the Scorpions, UFO, and MSG. We all play out individual set and at the end, Uli, Leslie, and I will play together. Should be a great event.

Editor's note: Just a few hours after this interview was finished, the show at Hoyt Sherman got postponed, though there isn't any word on when it will be rescheduled. It's been reported that there are some issues with the health of Leslie West, though this couldn't be confirmed.

When emailed about the tour, Michael responded almost immediately. "The tour as been postponed. What will I be doing now that the tour has been postponed? I am trying to figure it out right now."

UPDATE from the Michael Schenker News and Tour

Information Blog: Los Angeles --- Michael Schenker, Uli Jon Roth and Leslie West have been forced to postpone the 3 Guitar Heroes tour that was set to commence on October 6 in Norfolk, CT, due to insurmountable travel issues. When faced with securing a viable path for West's travel while still confined to a wheelchair, the search for a vehicle went on for months, and it has been called off. Last week, West was fitted with a prosthetic leg, but it will take months before he is able to live a normal life with the appendage, and there is no way to tour at this time without the security of the wheelchair he has been confined to post-amputation.

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Posted by T.Church at 2:38 AM

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




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