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# Rock Guitar Daily with Tony Conley

Thoughts, recitations and meditations on the world of rock and roll guitar

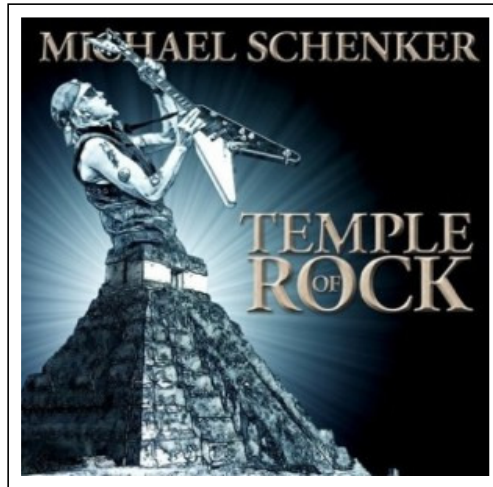
Saturday, October 29, 2011

## On Meeting Michael Schenker and The Temple of Rock

"With *Temple of Rock*, I am entering a new stage of my life, a new level of existence - enjoying life more than ever, reaping the joy of all sorts of developments from the past." Michael Schenker.

"Just remember to be in Heaven before the Devil knows you're dead. Let's face it - we all sold our souls for rock and roll at some point." Doogie White.

I remember the first time I met Michael Schenker. Strolling down Lankershim Boulevard in North Hollywood one evening, I look up and saw a very familiar face coming towards me. I had heard that the McAuley/Schenker Group were recording in Los Angeles, but I hadn't expected to see the legendary German guitarist walking down my street after midnight. Realizing who it was, I stretched out my hand and told him that he had long been one of my favorite players, and thanked him for all his great work. He smiled politely, said thank you, and headed back into the night.



A month or so later, and as I was walking through the music store I'm managing in Sherman Oaks, and I notice one of my salesmen was having a rather animated discussion with a

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### Classic Rock Guitar News

Highly opinionated news, reviews, interviews, and editorials from the world of

what was up. It seems the Englishman was wanting to rent a four track recorder - something we didn't do. The salesman was very courteously explaining this when I decided to ask the rather well-to-do looking chap why he didn't just buy one. He claimed to only need it for a night or two, and it wasn't even for him, but rather his employer. That piqued my curiosity, so I asked, "who is your employer?" I'll never forget how he said it, "A certain Michael Schenker."

I arranged for the store to memo loan him the recorder, and told a certain Mr. Treadwell that if there was anything at all we could do for him, or his employer, to not hesitate to ask.



Two weeks later, being a man of his word, he promptly returned the recorder, and asked to speak to me personally. I ventured down to the front counter to see what he wanted. He asked me if perhaps I might know someone who would be interested in joining

the band's entourage as a guitar technician. I asked him what the job would entail, and what I could tell someone it paid. After he revealed the details, I responded that, in fact, I knew just the man for the job. Treadwell asked if a meeting could be arranged - I told him it already had, and that I was his man. We talked a bit further, and I accepted the job. I arranged for a leave of absence the next day.

My first day on the job, I was instructed to meet the band at the Santa Monica Civic - they were performing a brief set at a benefit show, but I was to speak with no one except the band, and I was instructed to simply meet all the fellows, and to not talk about exactly why I was there.

When I arrived I parked my car and started looking around for a familiar face. Sure enough, Michael himself pulled up and

rock guitar. Visit me at <http://www.myspace.com/tonyconleymusic> or at my facebook page Rock Guitar Daily with Tony Conley.

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that Mick Treadwell had told me to come meet the band. I asked him if he would like me to carry some of his gear, and he looked at me very suspiciously, when suddenly someone spun me around, picked me up, and gave me a huge bear hug.

"Motherfucker, how the Hell are you doin'?" Ted Nugent was never a subtle man, but he is always extremely friendly, and not a shy person. "Michael," he said, "You know this motherfucker? He's a good man!"

Honestly, I had only met Nugent several times - he was formerly the employer of a guitar tech named Bobby Oberdorsten, and through Bobby, I had done the Nuge a minor favor, or two. Still, he never forgot a face, or a good deed done, and he was always graciously appreciative.

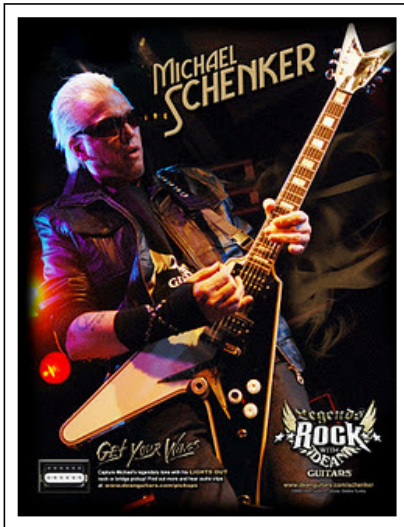
However, this was enough to relieve Mr. Schenker of any apprehensions about the stranger who had just barged into his space. We made our way into the arena, and we both got past the guard who took Ted's word when he said, "They're with me!" Ted's band, Damn Yankees, were the evening's headliner.

Once inside, I met the band, and rather uncomfortably avoided the topic of just who the hell I was, and what I was doing there. There are two funny details I remember, however,



about the end of the night when the band had left the stage. When the band came off, they were pretty ecstatic - they had played a killer set, and left to a huge roar from the crowd. Schenker, however, seemed a bit miffed. First, he somewhat disgustedly said that he had missed four notes. Mind you, he had hit another several thousand dead on, but he wasn't happy about the four he had noticed missing. The other thing was that he looked at his guitar tech and growled that he had told him not to change the brand of batteries in his Cry Baby wah pedal. The tech demurred, but Michael insisted that a change had indeed been made, he could clearly hear the difference.

The next day, I appeared at the band's Burbank rehearsal studio only to be told to wait in a broom closet while the battery changing guitar tech was discharged of his duties. Several days later, I was relegated to looking after everyone onstage except Michael - his management had decided that the guitarist's stature was such that they hired Zeke Clark to look after Michael. Zeke Clark, of course, was Eddie Van Halen's tech for many years, and also worked for Prince during the Purple Rain years. A guitar tech superstar - my feelings were not damaged, as the fact still remained that no one touched Michael's Flying V besides Michael, he even changed his own strings. Actually, he didn't even have a back up guitar - he only had his long time black and white companion, until Clark arranged the loan of a back up Flying V from Quiet Riot guitarist Carlos Cavazo.



So you may be wondering why a suit and tie music store manager would up and leave a job that paid scandalously well to basically join the circus?

Because I was a fan. Michael Schenker's amazing musicianship had captured me at the age of 16, back in 1975, when I discovered an album called *Force It*, by a group named UFO. His melodic, incendiary way of playing lead

guitar was something I had never experienced, and I was instantly enthralled. By the time I was 18, I could play the entire UFO catalog, and played in a cover band that featured a good handful of nuggets from the band that later went on to become poor via making Columbia rich.

The opportunity of having the pleasure of hearing my guitar hero play every night was too much to resist. There would always be music stores to manage, but this was a once in a lifetime offer. My favorite part of every day on that tour would undoubtedly be sitting on the tour bus, and listening to Michael play for a few hours each morning.

soloist to ever walk the planet. I also know that this is very subjective, and simply a matter of taste and one's own views.

Michael has dedicated his life to the art of the solo - the lead guitar breaks in many Schenker songs are generally very strong compositions of their own, and quite often uniquely different from the body of the tune. His solos are incredibly melodic, and filled with musical passion, prodigious technique, and fiery chops. He has been revered by a huge variety of rock guitarists over the last 30 years, many who claim him as a major influence. One of his signature guitar fueled anthems is a classic UFO cut off of their *Phenomenon* album, entitled *Rock Bottom*. *Rock Bottom* is a one of a kind treasure, much like Schenker himself. The wicked ricochet of a riff that services the intro and the verses is unlike any in the pantheon of heavy rock. When it's time to solo, the German whiz unleashes a thrilling roller coaster ride that remains a sonic signature to this day. Throughout his years with UFO, Schenker and the band's live shows became legendary, and eventually resulted in the recording of their seminal live album, *Strangers In The Night*. After leaving UFO, the guitarist became a high charting, festival favorite around the world with his own band, the Michael Schenker Group.

There is, of course, another side to the legend of Michael Schenker - it reads like a supermarket tabloid, filled with debauchery, drunkenness, unreliability, and train wrecks. Unfortunately, to varying degrees they are all true. I don't feel a need to re-hash or revisit this, as it is well known and it remains part of the story, but not so much the story I'm writing. We're here to talk about music, and music making.

Michael is a very fascinating character. He is easily misunderstood, simply because he is much less complicated than you'd gather from the stories. He is above anything else, a guitar player - he has little, if any interest in discussing the past, or even the future for that matter. Schenker is an artist, he is given to his art and lives very much in the moment.

I recently caught up with Michael, and I can't much argue with the claim made by a friend, who happens to be one of the country's best known guitar journalists, that Schenker is the worst interview in rock. What may be more important, however,

may well be true. The interview is a part of show business - not a part of creating, not a part of being an artist. It is a sales tool used for purposes of business. This



process is of little to

no interest to the guitarist. Think of it like this - Rembrandt would have been a lousy interview - the man was an artist, not a public relations person.



Unfortunately, Michael Schenker's handlers have often been much more aligned to what Michael could do for them as opposed to what they could do for his career. I vividly remember hearing the tale of UFO returning home after a typically long drawn out tour of the United States, only to find that when they were dropped off at their homes by the limos that their houses had been sold, and there were new

families having dinner at tables once belonging to the band members. Same thing with their all of their cars, vehicles, and possessions. Or the tour of America set up for MSG that had to be canceled when it turned out that their manager had failed to obtain the proper work documents for the band to enter America.

I asked Michael about the trials, tribulations, the missteps, and the consequences.

"I think that happens to all of us. We need hurdles in life, for exercise and development. I think it is easier when you believe, and realize this. Recently, out of the blue, I suddenly started to enjoy playing live shows. I have no idea why, after all these years. I guess it is my development! I also started to understand that metabolism slows down as you get older, so I eat what I

Keyboardist and guitar player Wayne Findlay has been working with Michael Schenker for over 13 years - I asked Wayne to comment on the ups and downs over the years:

Wayne

Findlay, "Yeah, there have been some ups and downs over the years. I always try to stay calm and to defuse any situations, as they occur. I'm pretty laid back, so that really helps.



Michael is a perfectionist, and so am I, so I can absolutely relate to him. It has given me great inspiration, both as a musician and as a person. It has enabled me to make many of my dreams come true - such as traveling the world, and playing in front of huge audiences. There is so much that Michael has given me on deeper levels, it is really hard to express in words. We have the same birthday, so we are similar in some respects. He is a great person, and is sometimes misunderstood. He also has a great sense of humor!

"Plus, I don't try to out step my boundaries. I never forget who's the boss. Which is really easy not to do - I'm playing on stage with Michael Schenker! A true legend, and my biggest mentor!"



Michael Schenker now appears to be in the best shape of his life. He is thin, clear eyed, and is actually smiling on stage, something that rarely happened in the past. For many years he dealt with a

combination of stage fright, career pressures, chemical dependency and the frustrations of reproducing an accurate depiction of the sounds he hears in his head within the

many discussions between Michael, and sound engineer Davey Kirkwood, regarding Michael's desire to hear the sound he captured on record, and the very different sound he was hearing on stage in large theaters. His sole concern was being able to play what he felt without being disturbed by added ambience, anomalies, and noise.

*Temple of Rock* is Michael's first album of new material since 2008. He is joined on the record by an all star cast that includes his brother Rudolf, Leslie West, Doogie White, Robin McAuley, Herman Rarebell, Carmine Appice, Elliott Rubinson, and singer/producer Michael Voss. The record contains some of the sharpest riffing, heaviest guitars, and sizzling solos to grace a Schenker album in many years. Once again, Michael has refused to rely on old formulas and is pushing himself into new territory as a player.

For the recording of the album, Schenker was also reunited with one of rock and roll's truest stars, bassist Pete Way. Way also joined Schenker's band on stages across Europe this past summer, sharing the bass playing duties with Elliott Rubinson. Years of overindulgence in the rock and roll



lifestyle of drink and drugs have wreaked havoc on the man many consider to be one of the best bassists and songwriters in the history of hard rock. I asked both Michael and producer/singer Michael Voss about Pete, and how he is doing these days:

Michael Schenker, "Pete is an amazing spirit, with a very pure expression. It shows in his playing and performing when he is clear. I very much hope that someday he will be able to find enough peace in his life to shine once again. He has been taken advantage of a lot, due to his generous personality, but I think



Michael Voss had this to add about Way, "Yeah, when Pete hits it, he hits it! He is a wonderful person, and he has loads of ideas and great hook lines - it is nearly like he is singing with his bass. It was amazing to have him join us on the album. What a sweetheart."

Voss has joined the Schenker entourage in a big way, by producing *Temple of Rock* alongside the guitarist, writing most of the album's lyrics, and singing the lion's share of the vocals on the record.



"Well, I've known Michael for a few years now." Voss stated, "It all started with the acoustic album, *Gypsy Lady* (a Schenker/Barden Acoustic Project record from 2009).

We stayed in touch, then he asked me to book some time in my studio for recording new demos for a project with Herman Rarebell, and Pete Way. We started recording, and I offered to sing Michael's vocal ideas. He liked it, so we kept the ball rolling!"

I asked Voss how it was to wear hats as both the producer, and vocalist.

Voss said, "Mikey produced me and my vocals, and I took care of his performances. After that, we concentrated on the mixing and mastering. Recording Michael's guitars was a great pleasure! We searched a long time to find a good guitar sound that suited Michael, and then we collected and recorded guitar solos -



and composed by the master himself. It all went pretty easy!"

*Temple of Rock* is an interesting album. It may be the heaviest and most complex album that Schenker has ever recorded. Every tune is filled with interesting twists and turns, and the maestro is simply on fire. That being said, it is not that immediate - it took me several listening sessions to acclimate myself to some new territory and surroundings. Voss's production is excellent, and captures a vast amount of players, singers, and sounds in a very coherent fashion - something occasionally missing on projects with multiple cameos, and rhythm sections.

The record also has the guitarist joining forces with several vocalists, including long time band-mate and business partner Robin McAuley, on the track, *Lover's Sinfony*, and ex-Rainbow belter Doogie White, on what may be the album's standout cut, *Before the Devil Knows You're Dead*.

Doogie White is one of the best and busiest hard rock singers in Europe, and graciously took my call to answer some very last minute questions, which goes to show you why he gets the calls to work with so many acts - he is a pro's pro, and a classic voice:



"Chris Glenn (Ex-MSG bassist) is a mate of mine, so he and Micheal asked if I would sing with MSG in London. I did Doctor Doctor, and that was that. Then Michael's management asked if I would be interested in

writing and singing a song on the new album.

White said, "Michael Schenker, on a train ride, wrote the music for *Before The Devil Knows You're Dead*," as he wanted me to be on the album. I just really felt the music and wrote the song in 25 minutes. Both Schenker and Voss thought that it worked very well, and that is the tale of the song!

"Michael Voss sent me the backing, and I added my vocals and

producer with very cool ideas, and he gets great sounds! The song itself just came out. Sometimes it just happens like that. The vocals on the song were done with a Shure SM58 hand held microphone, with me dancing around my vocal studio in London. I later re-did them on an over-priced mic, but they went with my original take, and I sang my backgrounds around that one. Michael has pulled amazing performances from everyone on the record, and put it all together - plus, he sings very well!"

I asked the veteran about the interesting lyrics to the song:

"Well, I never believe in giving an explanation of lyrics. Different day, different meaning. Take what one will from them. Just remember to be in Heaven before the Devil knows you're dead. Let's face it - we all sold our souls at some point for rock and roll."

*Before the Devil Knows You're Dead* is one of the album's best cuts, featuring some epic keyboard work by Wayne Findlay, and a brutally good rhythm track provided by bassist Elliott Rubinson and Whitesnake drummer Brian Tichy, but it's White's vocals and Schenker's careening guitars that sell the track so effectively.

Herman Rarebell plays a very key role throughout the record - the ex-Scorpions timekeeper is featured on half of the tracks, and his instantly recognizable style gels wonderfully



with Schenker's lockstep rhythms. Maybe it's all those years of working with the Schenker bloodline, but these guys sound very good together. I asked Herman about the record, and I'll simply print exactly what he said:

"We met in Brighton, and decided to do a band with Pete Way, and Michael Voss - out of this came one song, called *Saturday Night*, and we were going to call the band Strangers In The Night."

Raraebell said, "It was great fun with Pete. We are old friends, and that's how it felt, like two friends getting together once again."

I asked the drummer several other questions, and here is how Herman summed it up:

"In regards to playing with Uli, Matthias, Rudolf, or Michael? It depends on what I get offered on a song, and I play to that. Really, I just had fun playing - I think they are all great songs." I asked how working with Michael was different than it may have been twenty years ago:

Herman, "Well, right now he is completely straight, and that is the first time I have seen him like that, and he is playing better than ever!"



Producer Voss did an excellent job fitting some excellent keyboard tracks into the songs, and it's great to hear Schenker reunited with such great players as Don Airey, and UFO/MSG band-mate Paul Raymond. Wayne Findlay does his usual great job on

the four tracks that feature his ivory touch.

So....what can I tell you?

For close to 40 years, I have been a huge fan of Michael Schenker. So much so that I once left an amazing job, just to have the opportunity to listen to him play every day and night. I have taken the whole ride, as all of Michael Schenker's fans have done.

*Temple of Rock* is a very good record that may require a few

very worthwhile. Schenker is playing extremely well, and continues to expand his considerable horizons. After 40 years of recording, he is still developing as a player and a writer.

Everyone who worked on this record is very anxious to talk about it. Why? Because they feel that they have done good work (and they have!), and they want to support this musical genius who has given us all so much pleasure. So should you.

Michael himself sums it up very well:

"The *Temple of Rock* is within me where I create since I was introduced to the amazing invention of the distorted Guitar which is for me the most enjoyable and the best possible way



to express myself. The Rock Guitar Sound that I fell in love with, mostly expressed as Lead break, is what I have nurtured and treasured all of my life. Combined with the infinite spring from within and the amazing musicians around me I keep expressing an ongoing development of my Art(Being). With *Temple of Rock* I am entering a new stage of my life, a new level of existence enjoying life more than ever, reaping the joy of all sorts of developments from the past.

Also, it seems to me that collectively, with true expressive makers of Rock Music, we have been building the external *Temple Of Rock* for many years and have now come to the point of putting on the roofing and celebrating the almost completion of the Temple. All generations of this period are meeting all over the world on one stage it seems celebrating an Era of 'Hand Made Rock' which will never be the same again due to invention of new technology but of course *New Temples* and *New Wonders* will arise to enjoy expressions in new ways."

I would like to thank Michael Schenker, Herman Rarebell, Michael Voss, Doogie White, Wayne Findlay, everyone at Inakustik records, and Clint Weiler at MVD Entertainment Group

thank Libby Sokolowski for her expert editing, as always.  
Nobody does it better - she makes me readable. What a love.

Posted by Tony Conley at 7:44 AM



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