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GOD

At least that's what rock fans in the '70s went around shouting. But the German guitarist wasn't comfortable with such hero worship. What he wanted to do was focus on the music, wanting to find out "what I had to say that was inside me." So he left UFO in 1978, formed the **Michael Schenker Group** and is still on his quest for musical nirvana. *Howard Johnson* speaks to Michael to find out if he's getting close...

A HUGE NUMBER OF rock fans worldwide still consider Michael Schenker the ultimate guitar hero. He may well be 65 years old now, but there's still good reason for agreeing with this point of view. Schenker's enduring ability to summon up blazing rock music that is also deeply tender and full of feeling is what sets him apart from the herd of hard rock guitarists.

And here's the good news. After any number of well-documented ups and downs during a career spanning a frankly unbelievable 50 years, the Michael Schenker Fest project that he first unveiled in 2016 now sees him happy, healthy, emotionally engaged and, above all, playing great guitar. Bringing together a collection of musicians from his halcyon MSG days of the '80s and '90s – including vocalists Graham Bonnet, Gary Barden and Robin McAuley – the man from Sarstedt released a double live album from Tokyo's International Forum in 2017, and followed it up with two studio albums of new material, 2018's 'Resurrection' and 2019's 'Revelation'. Things are looking good for the former Scorpions and UFO man in what he calls "the third stage of my life."

Schenker may have been born in Germany, but these days he lives in London, the city where he first worked with UFO back in 1973. "I like the surrounding vibrations," he explains. "Maybe England connects with me because it was where my development as a guitar player really started when I was writing the 'Phenomenon' album with UFO. I'm more English than German these days, really," he says. "I like that English looseness. I'm comfortable here."

Despite this, Michael is insistent that he will be keeping his distance from his old British chums in UFO as they enter the final phase of their 'Last Orders' tour, where the band insist they will be wrapping up their own 50-year career. "I won't participate," says Michael succinctly.

Nevertheless, UFO was the launching pad for a career where Schenker has consistently won accolades for being one of hard rock's most important guitar players. But MSG was the first time that Michael took charge of his own career, and his work in the period between 1980 and 1992 when Barden, Bonnet and McAuley were at different times fronting the group is worthy of investigation, especially as it's an era that has remained somewhat ignored. In true *Rock Candy Mag* style, where we like to explore the road less travelled, that's where we wanted to focus our interview with this true guitar legend...

MICHAEL, WITH THE BENEFIT OF HINDSIGHT CAN YOU TELL US WHY YOU LEFT UFO IN 1978 WHEN THE BAND WAS AT THE HEIGHT OF ITS POPULARITY, AND WHY YOU ENDED UP STARTING MSG?

"Well, the whole purpose behind starting the Michael Schenker Group at the beginning of the '80s was to disconnect. I'd started out just having fun playing music and I never thought too much about the impact I would end up having in UFO. I never realised that I did so much and got such a reputation in the music world, because it all happened unconsciously. I couldn't really understand all the fuss about me to be honest. Around the time of the 'Lights Out' and 'Obsession' albums with UFO [in 1977 and 1978 respectively] people started following me around shouting, 'Schenker is God! Schenker is God!' I didn't feel comfortable with that at all and very quickly I'd had enough of hearing it. I got worn out with the attention and I had to get out of that mental place.

"MSG was created so I could do things *when* I wanted to do them and *how* I wanted to do them, to have more freedom of expression and not have to chase a trend to get a piece of the pie. I was 23 years old and had

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