

THE EMPEROR YNG!

Over 40 years **Yngwie Malmsteen** has earned his reputation, not only as the boss of all shredders, but as a man who just can't help speaking his mind, even if it upsets people. *Jason Arnopp* enjoys a long, wide-ranging, and revealing conversation with the Swedish maestro. "I wasn't, shall we say, very *measured*," he admits...

"I **HONESTLY HOPE THIS** whole interview isn't going to be about all my old f*cking band members," snaps Yngwie Malmsteen. "Because I'm not going to be very happy about that. I'll be p*ssed off."

These days the overwhelming majority of rock musicians are so polished and media-friendly that when one of them gets prickly in the middle of an interview, it's quite a thrill. Nice to see that Malmsteen is old school in more ways than one.

You can't help feeling that the Swedish guitar maestro would have loved to write all the questions for our interview if given the chance. Having built his very own empire across 22 studio albums bearing his name, the first of which was released back in 1984, Malmsteen has grown accustomed to exerting absolute control, as he freely admits during our chat. His latest album, 'Parabellum', sees him performing every single part, including vocals. A roughly 60/40 split between dazzling instrumentals like 'Magic Bullet' and '(Si Vis Pacem) Parabellum', and sung monsters like 'Wolves At The Door' and 'Relentless Fury', this extraordinary piece of work was recorded during the pandemic. As we'll hear during our chat, Malmsteen really made the most of the

time that COVID-19 handed him, hunkering down in his Miami home studio to indulge in a year-long feast of creativity. He also managed to fire a Magnum gun during the recording, which you can hear on the album! But more about that later...

AFTER MORE than 40 years in rock, at the age of 58 Malmsteen clearly feels frustrated by having to explain the numerous decisions he's made. In particular, he has an aversion to raking through the long list of vocalists and musicians who've passed through his revolving doors over the decades. We're especially surprised by his reluctance to discuss his time with Joe Lynn Turner in any detail, given that the pair birthed 1988's wonderful 'Odyssey' record, which arguably marked the peak of Malmsteen's commercial songwriting. Thankfully, he's more forthright about his onstage fight with Graham Bonnet on his final night in 1984 with rockers Alcatraz, an infamous drunken aeroplane incident back in 1988, and the time he spent with Cozy Powell in the late '90s shortly before the drummer's passing.

Throughout our 86-minute-long chat Malmsteen is never less than energised, entertaining, and rather

amusingly self-aggrandising. But frankly, when you're interviewing a guitar god of this calibre who has so much to say, you don't mind the odd profane protest against your line of questioning...

HELLO YNGWIE! LET'S CAST AN EYE BACK OVER YOUR CAREER, STARTING WITH YOUR ORIGINAL INFLUENCES. RITCHIE BLACKMORE WAS A PRETTY BIG INSPIRATION FOR YOU, RIGHT, IN TERMS OF PLAYING AND THE WHOLE CLASSICAL/ROCK CROSSOVER THING?

"Can I clarify that a little bit, because this is important to remember? Way back in the last century I was a very, very young child – the youngest in my family. All around me all my aunts and uncles and brothers and sisters were violinists and pianists and flautists and opera singers. They wanted me to be a musician too, so they gave me a violin on my fourth birthday, and a guitar on my fifth birthday. In 1970, when I was seven years old, I saw Jimi Hendrix smash up a guitar on TV. I said, 'Wow, that looks cool.' So I took the guitar that I already owned off the wall and started playing.

"One year later, I got Deep Purple's 'Fireball' album.

Now, in Sweden back in 1971 or '72 there was no radio, no TV, nothing. So I didn't have any sort of gauge of rock'n'roll. I didn't know anything about anything. I was just a baby, really. When I heard that double bass drum intro on the title track I was going, 'What the f*ck is this?' Obviously I loved it. So when I earned some pennies for doing the dishes and stuff – you know, my allowance – I went to buy Deep Purple's 'In Rock' at the store. And that album obviously had a big impact on me.

"By the time I was 10 years old I could play every f*cking note of 'Made In Japan'. But around about that time I heard Genesis's 'Selling England By The Pound'. 'Wow, what the f*ck? I can't play *this*,' because they'd inverted chords; extended, diminished, all these different chord progressions that Deep Purple didn't do. So I became fascinated with that.

"I also realised my mother had like 200 Bach and Vivaldi records and I started listening to them. I'd fallen in love with the sound of hard rock, even though I didn't know exactly what it was, because I was just a little kid. But I knew the notes to the pentatonic blues scale were very limited. So I didn't get introduced to classical music through Deep Purple, but when I did my blues album ▶