



Photo: Alex Solca

THE SURVIVOR

Steve Lukather is **Toto's** only original member who's still fully active in the band. The good news is that his new solo album, 'Bridges', unashamedly harks back to the band's '80s heyday. *Howard Johnson* talks to the guitar maestro about his incredible career. "Man, what happened?" says Luke...

"I'M ABOUT SIX MONTHS into this whole white hair thing," Steve Lukather laughs. "I've been dyeing my hair since I was 30, but I stopped on my last birthday. I'd always said to my kids, 'When I get old and start looking stupid with jet black hair let me know.' My oldest son, Trev, said, 'Pop, it's time. Come on. Look at Brian May. Look at Jimmy Page. Let it go!' But I was afraid. I didn't know what was *underneath* it, you know? And then when I finally did it I was in the car driving. I look in the rear-view mirror and see this white hair. I'm like, 'Who is this guy?' And then I realise it's *me!* But I'm lucky I've got f*cking hair. I'll take it, especially because my old man was convinced I was going to be bald by the time I was 21. I'm going to be 66 in October! Do you think I'm worried about my *looks?* Is that what my whole career is about? I don't think so. I don't care about the way I look at all in the sense

of, 'Do I look like a rock star today?' Now I roll out of bed, and this is what it's like – and it's so much easier."

So his hair may be white, but Steve Lukather is fairly bouncing with energy this morning when he checks in for his Zoom call with me. It's only eight o'clock in the morning in Hollywood but that hasn't slowed the California native down any. "Coffee is a powerful drug," he laughs. "Three cups of coffee and I'll paint your house!" Lukather exudes bonhomie in a way that I hadn't counted on. I'd heard tell that the Toto guitarist could be a prickly so and so in an interview situation. That much seemed to be confirmed when word came through from his PR before our hook-up that he "wants to focus as much as possible on the new album." Well don't they all? But here at *Rock Candy Mag* we're all about the history, the deep dive, the context. If it was only going to be about 'Bridges', Lukather's ninth studio album, then we'd simply pass. In the end I needn't have worried. The only problem I had with the guitarist was how to get a word in edgeways as he discussed his long and extraordinary musical life with both candour and humour.

"My dad was a behind-the-scenes guy in the Hollywood film industry," he tells me. "When I was nine years old I was already playing in my first bands with older kids. I was kind of freakish. My dad asked me what I was going to do for a living. I said I wanted to be a musician like The Beatles. Dad told me I had like a billion-to-one chance, but I said I'd be that one guy. Well, he patted me on the head and told me that I'd better make sure I had a back-up plan. I never did get one..."

LUKE HAS hardly needed a Plan B though. Having befriended muso brothers Jeff, Steve, and Mike Porcaro at his local high school, before he was even out of his teens Lukather's prodigious talent had seen him break into the Los Angeles session scene. Jeff Porcaro had been drumming with top drawer jazz rock musicians Steely Dan

since 1973 and acted as something of a mentor to Steve.

"Back then they taught music in schools," he tells me. "I was studying harmony theory, sight reading, and orchestration while also studying guitar privately. Between the ages of 15 and 18 I crammed about 10 years of schooling into three. Then I started doing demos for people, then minor league sessions, and soon I got brought up to the majors."

Playing in the hyper-pressurised world of sessions was no place for the faint-hearted, especially when you're still a teenager.

"Oh, I was doing 25 sessions a week," Lukather laughs. "That's like maybe 40 songs where you'd have to come up with your own parts. I wasn't sitting there reading dots like a robot. That's for television and film. What I was doing was blank paper. No rehearsal, no demos – and you'd better come up with something. That's not an easy job and we did that every week. But I loved those days. They were the greatest days of my life."

When fellow session player, keyboardist, and singer David Paich started chewing over the idea of maybe

"IF GOD TOOK ME OUT TODAY, I COULDN'T BE MAD. I'VE HAD AN EXTRAORDINARY LIFE. THERE HAVE BEEN 15 VERSIONS OF TOTO AND I'M THE ONLY GUY WHO'S BEEN IN ALL OF THEM, PLUS I DID ALL THAT AMAZING SESSION WORK."