SCORPIONS

SCORPIONS GUITARIST RUDOLF SCHENKER is looking dangerously well for a man who celebrated his 77th birthday in August. He's in a hotel room somewhere – he doesn't offer up any details – but nevertheless is full of bonhomie. When he laughs, which is often, it's like an explosion of joy that ripples through the cosmos. I think Rudolf believes bringing joy is part of his reason for being here, one of the first wave of German babies born after World War II.

"We were a new generation," he tells me with a proud look on his face. "We weren't coming with weapons and making war. We were coming with guitars selling peace, love, and rock'n'roll."

Of course, Scorpions have been bringing their own unique brand of peace, love, and rock'n'roll for fully 60 years now, which in and of itself is something any musician would be rightly proud of. But Scorpions is one of a tiny handful of bands – if not the *only* band – that can claim to have directly influenced the direction of political travel in the world. After Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev opted to follow a policy of political and cultural openness in the mid-'80s in an attempt to reform the Soviet Union, music became a symbol of hope for people in both the East and the West who believed they could and would put aside their differences to make a better world.

The Moscow Music Peace Festival that took place on 12 and 13 August 1989 featured seven acts and was designed to be a physical representation of this new spirit of friendship and cultural cooperation. Scorpions were on the bill alongside the likes of Ozzy Osbourne, Mötley Crüe, and Bon Jovi. But afterwards it was only the German band that had the foresight to recognise the enormous significance of the moment in a song. Vocalist Klaus Meine penned 'Wind Of Change' when he was in Moscow, and it appeared on the 1990 Scorpions album 'Crazy World'. Immediately, the song was adopted around the world as the musical accompaniment of choice to the eventual 1991 break-up of the Soviet Union.

Scorpions originally recorded a version of the song in English, but Rudolf knew that a Russian language version was vital "because they had to understand the whole thing over there as well. Klaus thought it would be too hard to do, but he tried and did a really great job. When I heard what he'd done I said to him, 'You watch. We're going to get an invitation from Gorbachev.' And after the Russian version did so well over there, we got a call saying Gorbachev wanted to meet us. Unbelievable! 'Wind Of Change' became the soundtrack to the most peaceful revolution on earth!"

It's been a long and crazy ride for Rudolf Schenker and his Scorpions bandmates. The guitarist and only ever-present member of the band has gone from his home in the small town of Sarstedt, 20 kilometres south of Hanover, to the world's biggest stadiums via direct involvement in one of the most seismic political changes of the 20th century.

"I'm happy when I look in the mirror," he laughs. "Truly happy."

RUDOLF, CONGRATULATIONS ON 60 YEARS OF SCORPIONS. WHAT A JOURNEY...

"Thank you. But I really have my father to thank for my career."

OH YES, WHY'S THAT?

"Because he bought me my first guitar – and he bought it out of fear; fear that I really wanted a motorbike. He said, 'I'll buy you a guitar because I really don't want you to have a motorbike and then go and kill yourself riding it!' So I got a guitar even though, to be honest, I was more interested in football at the time. I still liked music very much, though – Little Richard, Elvis Presley, Chuck Berry, people like that. So I started trying to learn the guitar until I eventually had a moment where I somehow got it into my head that playing guitar onstage by myself would be no fun. The idea of forming a group at that time was beyond me. So I put the guitar down and went back to football until the time came when I had to get a job and go to work. My mum asked me what I wanted to do, and I wasn't really sure. She said, 'Do me a favour and learn at least one real job.' My mum had always been really good to me, so I decided that I'd do as she asked. I searched around, and eventually decided to have a go at being an electrician working on transformers on telegraph poles, hanging cables, that sort of stuff. One day I was on a job in a place called Friedland, and I somehow managed to get some cable wrapped around my foot and injured myself. No football for three months. During that time I went off to camp in the north of Germany and met some people from Hamburg. They were all raving about these four British guys who were playing in Hamburg called The Beatles. They said they were unbelievable, so I was really keen to hear them. When I checked out their music I thought it was good, but honestly, not my cup of tea. But then a couple of months later the Rolling Stones came along, which was much more my thing. That was what got me back into playing guitar, and that was when I started to get serious about it. My dad saw how passionate I was about the instrument and was very encouraging. He said to me that if I dedicated myself to something that I really enjoyed, then the money would surely follow. I found a guitar school in the Netherlands where you could order lessons on paper that could be sent to you through the post, and started to learn the guitar properly. There was also a pub in Sarstedt called das Deutsche Haus where bands played every weekend. I'd be there all the time watching how the groups played their songs, writing down what I learned, going home and practising. That experience, as well as listening to the Stones and The Pretty Things, finally convinced me that the only way forward would be to get some other guys around me and form a band."

Very early band shots. Can you spot Rudolf?

AND HOW DID YOU GO ABOUT DOING THAT?

"It was thanks to my mum. She used to sing in the church every week, and one day she came home and said the son of someone else there was playing music in the basement of the church building with a few other guys. This guy had heard that I played a bit of guitar and wanted to know if I wanted to join in. So I went down there, and we started playing stuff like 'Hippy Hippy Shake' and began rehearsing once a week. Pretty soon I was saying to the guys, 'Why don't we rehearse *twice* a week and then we'll get good enough to maybe play between the sets of the main bands at the Deutsche Haus?' The others thought I was mad, but I knew that I could do it. That was when I started to work out which guys played music because they wanted to meet girls, and which guys played music for the *music*. So people came and people went, and eventually a proper band came together. Even at that early stage we had Wolfgang Dziony on drums [who would go on to play on the first Scorpions album 'Lonesome Crow', that was released in 1972]. He lived next door to where I was living with my parents actually."

WHAT DO YOU REMEMBER OF YOUR EARLY GIGS?

"We had a singer called Elvis because he looked like Elvis Presley. He was pretty go-getting and told us that he could put on a gig at the Central Theater in town. He managed to get lots of the best bands from Hanover to play, and we performed under the name Nameless. The place was packed, but things didn't go according to plan. Elvis was a really good singer, but he had trouble remembering lyrics. So what he would do was stick the lyrics inside this cap he had that he could take off and refer to. The problem was that some of the other bands saw the cap and decided to steal it before we went on. When we eventually played, Elvis had to sing the first thing that came into his head! We knew there was no future in that, so Elvis left, and Wolfgang and I started splitting vocal duties. In either November of December 1965 we changed the band name to the Scorpions. We knew that Nameless was a poor name, and I had this idea that we should find something that could work both in Germany and internationally. I had big ideas even back then! I thought the Scorpions would be good because all you had to do was change the 'k' in the German spelling for a 'c' in the English spelling and then you had an international name that everybody would understand."

> "I ALWAYS BELIEVED THAT IF YOU DREAMED BIG, IT COULD HAPPEN. ALL YOU HAD TO DO WAS NOT TAKE ADVICE FROM STUPID PEOPLE."

WHAT MADE YOU SO INTERESTED IN MUSICAL LIFE OUTSIDE OF GERMANY AT SUCH A YOUNG AGE?

"Back then I was always listening to international radio stations like Radio Caroline and Radio Monte Carlo because German schlager music [sappy and sentimental pop music that was big in the country at the time] was so terrible. Plus my parents liked to travel, and when we went to places like Spain and Africa I'd hear lots of different music. I was always curious about the big wide world, and my dream was always to play everywhere. I know this for certain because in the very early '70s I gave an interview to a German music industry magazine called *Riebes Fachblatt* where I stated that Scorpions was going to be one of the biggest worldwide rock bands of the decade! I always believed that if you dreamed big, then it could happen. All you had to do was not take advice from stupid people."

WHAT MADE YOU SO CERTAIN OF THAT?

"For me, an awful lot of it was down to meditation. When The Beatles went to see Maharishi Mahesh Yogi in India in 1968, I started to get interested in spirituality. My dad inspired me to get into yoga, and I also developed an interest in meditation. Meditation was key for me because meditation takes you directly to the motorway of life. You don't circle around little villages and lose your inspiration. You go directly to where you need to go to fulfil your dreams. Meditation gave me real focus, even to the point of madness. I remember when I had