

The Scorpions line-up that recorded the new 'Rock Believer' album. L-R: Matthias Jabs (guitar), Mikkey Dee (drums), Klaus Meine (vocals), Pawel Maciwoda (bass), Rudolf Schenker (guitar)

# ROCK BELIEVERS!



It wasn't fashionable to be a rock band from Germany at the start of the '70s, but the **Scorpions** didn't care, powered as they were by an unshakeable belief in the righteousness of their musical cause. Fifty years after their debut release, and with a new album getting rave reviews, *Dave Everley* speaks to band stalwarts **Rudolf Schenker, Klaus Meine, and Matthias Jabs** about their long and winding rock road...

**FEW BANDS GOT TO** upstage Van Halen in their early-'80s prime, but the Scorpions were an exception. Then again, they did have the US Air Force on their side.

It was Sunday 29 May 1983, and the Germans were just below Pasadena's finest on day two of the US Festival, the huge open-air extravaganza launched the previous year by Apple Computer Inc. co-founder Steve Wozniak and heavyweight promoter Bill Graham.

A record-breaking 375,000 people had turned up for the festival's so-called Heavy Metal Day, featuring a line-up bolstered by Triumph, Judas Priest, Ozzy Osbourne, Mötley Crüe, and Quiet Riot. For the Scorpions it was a huge moment, rubber-stamping their ascent in the US from European curiosities to a global heavy metal phenomenon.

There was one snag, though. Inter-band politics meant

that only the headliners were allowed their full 'bells and whistles' stage set. The Scorpions could have a few pyros to open their show, but they were told there was no way they were going to be allowed to overshadow Van Halen. The Scorpions' Liverpool-born tour manager Bob Adcock had other ideas, though.

"There was an air force base nearby," recalls the band's guitarist Matthias Jabs. "Bob called them and said, 'Can we get five fighter jets to fly over the site at exactly six o'clock?' Today that would be totally unimaginable. But back then they said yes."

And so it was that a bunch of German heavy metal musicians found themselves standing on the side of the stage just before six pm, about to play to one of the biggest crowds in history, waiting for the US air force to arrive.

"Suddenly Bob Adcock came over," recalls Jabs. "'They're on their way,' he said. 'And those things are fast.' The next thing, someone is saying, 'All the way from Germany...,' and we run on as the bombs go off onstage. Then suddenly these five fighter jets fly over 375,000 people and disappear behind the mountains. We were so good that night that even Van Halen later admitted they stood no chance."

The appearance of those jets, and the Scorpions' subsequent stealing of the show from under the headliners' noses, are a metaphor for this band's entire career: it shouldn't have happened, but against the odds it did. And after all this time they show no signs of touching down just yet.

**2022 IS** set to be another banner year for the Scorpions. It marks the 50th anniversary of their debut album, 'Lonesome Crow', as well as the release of their first new studio album in seven years, 'Rock Believer'. The latter is an impressive achievement for a band that announced its impending retirement over a decade ago.

"The idea of doing a farewell tour made sense then," says singer Klaus Meine. "But going out and seeing the new generations in front of us, seeing a new audience on

Facebook... we thought, 'Why stop?' If this is retirement, I'd recommend it to everybody."

Meine, Jabs, and guitarist Rudolf Schenker are speaking to *Rock Candy Mag* via Zoom. The self-assured Meine is perched on a swivel chair in Peppermint Park Studios in the band's hometown of Hanover, dressed in the regulation rock star uniform of black jacket, black hat, and black shades, despite it being mid-afternoon on a Tuesday. Jabs, measured and friendly, appears to be in an office at home, a shelf of files and folders behind him.

And then there's Schenker, the man who founded the Scorpions as a teenager way back in 1965, and who's been both its constant steady hand and its Flying V-wielding wildman ever since. Meine calls him "my brother from another mother" as Jabs admits that the 73-year-old's drive has made the band what they are now.

Today, sitting in front of a wall of guitars in his house near Hanover, Schenker is in effervescent mood, punctuating with booming machine gun cackles his stentorian proclamations that make sense *most* of the time. "The Schenker family are crazy," says Meine fondly at one point. "HAHAHAHAHA!" responds Rudolf.

Schenker has reason to be upbeat. 'Rock Believer' is a great late-period Scorpions album, albeit one