

## **Ton Scherpenzeel Interview**

### ***Who, what or when is Ton Scherpenzeel?***

Quite the existential question to begin with...

I was born in 1952 in the Dutch town of Hilversum. My father was a journalist specializing in what they called Third World countries back then. My mother came from a musical family but never made it her profession. I have two younger brothers.

### ***Who or what first got you interested in music and what were your inspirations during this period?***

We had a piano at home when I was young. My parents noticed my eagerness to play, so they thought it would be a good idea for me to have piano lessons, which my aunt started giving me when I was about six years old. But I have always been (and still am) a half-hearted pupil when it comes to real studying and practise- even when I started studying classic double bass at the Hilversum Music Academy when I was 17. This remarkable move was more like an excuse to escape secondary school than a serious effort to end up playing in a classical orchestra.

My focus was on improvising and creating my own music rather than learning the notes someone else wrote. I can read and write music, but it is still an effort. I create music in a very intuitive way.

My first great musical inspiration, that really started to control my life were the Beatles and the pop music from around 1964, up to the point that I made my own weekly charts, based upon what I heard on pirate stations like Radio London and Radio Caroline. In 1967 I even managed to have a top 100 every week that I typed out. At the end of the year, I calculated the most successful songs on my own hit parade. Favourite acts that always did well on my personal charts were of course The Beatles, but also Jimi Hendrix, the Kinks, the Move, Manfred Mann, the Beach Boys, the Young Rascals, the Who and... well, too many to mention.

Needless to say, my homework suffered badly because of this 'hobby'. I doubled almost every class and basically had no idea what on earth I was doing at school. I wasn't a rebel; I was just a dreamer and didn't take school very seriously.

In 1967 I played bass guitar in my first real (neighborhood) band, along with drummer Pim Koopman with whom I later started Kayak. Our setlist mainly consisted of music by Hendrix and Cream. Funny thing is that though keyboard/piano is my main instrument, I favor guitar and bass. I am very much a bass man. But as a composer I am heavily depending on keys to enable me to make melody, harmony and bass all at the same time. And be my own orchestra if you like. Some would say drums as well, knowing my 'toucher' on the instrument. And only when nobody else could play the keyboard parts to my songs, I switched to keyboards. I still, occasionally, play bass on my own albums, or even some Kayak albums (when we're in between bass players).

### ***What led to the formation of Kayak, and what were you trying to achieve with the music?***

In the late 60s I started to write my own songs. Together with Pim we recorded lots of music on his father's "sound on sound" Sony tape recorder. Those recordings unveiled the outlines of what in

1972 would eventually become Kayak. We did not want to achieve anything concrete yet, and it was by no means professional. One thing was clear though: we were creative and complemented and inspired each other.

In the meantime, we both studied at the Music Academy (Pim did classical percussion). I did learn to appreciate the old composers there and then, with a preference for music between 1400 and 1750. It influenced my way of composing too. I can't say that the music academy really shaped my writing, but it allowed me to take from it what I felt I needed or considered interesting. It certainly resulted into my first solo album 'Le Carnaval des Animaux', and ultimately in 'The Lion's Dream' and now 'Velvet Armour'.

When Kayak started, we suddenly got catapulted onto national fame (EMI launched us as a new supergroup, though we were all barely 20 years old, had little experience and had never even played outside Holland). What we wanted to achieve then was, quite simply, that people would listen to and love what we did. To connect. Little did we know then that to succeed in this business you need much more than a bit of raw talent. But we'd find out soon enough, as of course a band that's being launched like that can expect not only attention but also criticism, especially when the commercial results do not meet the expectations raised by the company.

***What stands out in your mind from those days?***

From 1967 to 1973, the youthful feeling that everything was possible, in a creative sense. Rock and pop music was still in its growing up phase then, experiments were usually applauded- often regardless of their quality- and in our own naive way we were following in the footsteps of our musical heroes, while slowly discovering our own musical voice. And then came Kayak and suddenly my hobby had become my profession.