

KAYAK

## INTERVIEW WITH TON SCHERPENZEEL

First of all, congratulations for your very long career! I guess it has not been always easy to keep recording and touring with this kind of music...

Thank you.

-The band was formed in 1972 and a year later appeared your first (and one of your best) album, "See See the Sun". Who were your main influences (bands and keyboard players)? In fact your sound is a real mix of prog-rock and pure pop music.

-How did it feel to have done this kind of music outside UK (the homeland of prog-rock) or USA? Where has been your music more accepted?

I am not sure what you mean. Music has no boundaries. But of course, Holland is a small country so it was much more difficult to get our music heard in countries like UK or the USA. We had a single in the USA top-50 once (Want You To Be Mine, 1978). But Holland has always stayed our strongest base. That is what makes it hard, financially. If we had the same % of fans in the US, things would be easier.

-In 1978 in happened one of the most bizarre things in the history of r'n'r: Your lead singer, Max Werner, decided to become the drummer! In fact, the exact opposite of what happened with Phil Collins. How did you (and the Kayak fans) react to this situation?

We have had many line up changes in the past. Before Max decided he wanted to drum instead of sing, it happened 4 or 5 times. But when a singer leaves, that is vital to a band because the sound changes. Yes, we lost fans and we won fans. That's what happens in life, you marry, you divorce. You move in a house, and you move out when you find another one. The same goes for bands- most bands change, especially when they are around for decades.

And you can not please everybody. There are two kind of fans: those that like certain persons in the band, and the other kind: that love the music as it is, no matter who sings it. Those are the loyal fans.

-In 1981 you released “Merlin”, one of your most celebrated albums, but I think it was not a good moment for concept albums...

-The band ended in 1983, what was the main reason?

1981, to be precise. Three reasons: musical, personal and financial. We had huge success with the album Phantom of the Night and the single Ruthless Queen. After that it went downhill, commercially. So then the problems came, and also personal and musical differences made it hard to stay together.

-How was the experience to work with Andy Latimer (Camel) for the albums “Stationary Traveller”, “Dust & Dreams” (one of my favourites from them) and “Rajaz”? Any funny story from those days?

Playing in Camel has been a fantastic experience, especially touring with that band that I did until 2015. Andy is one of the best guitar players in the world, and a very nice man. I also liked the fact that for once I wasn't responsible for the band- I was just the keyboard player, enjoying the music, without all the worries that a band leader has.

I can not think of a real funny story, but a very special one was when we toured Spain in 2013, I became sick in Malaga. Next stop was Madrid, so we travelled overnight in the tourbus. Everyone thought it was something I ate just before we left, but it wasn't because the next day more people got sick, and after three days almost everybody in the bus was sick. I remember that Denis, the drummer, had a bucket next to him while he was playing on the stage, cause he felt like he had to vomit. So the first week of the tour we all had this terrible fl.

-What else did you do until Kayak was back again, in 1999?

I have written lots of music for theater, like musicals, ballet and so on. I made a solo album in 1984 (Heart of the Universe).

-From then, the band has released 9 more albums. Isn't it a real challenge to keep the band going in these days of downloadings and less people buying records? And if you add these covid times that make difficult to tour...

It is difficult. CD's and LP's do not generate a good income anymore. And now it has become even harder because of Covid, because the bands can not play. How can musicians still have an income?

-The new album has, again, a lot of variety. For instance, it begins with “Out of this World”, and it’s surprising because it’s almost progressive-metal. Do you like any band of this genre? I guess with songs like these you might reach a new and younger audience...

I have stopped thinking we could reach a younger audience. We are an old band although the average age in the band is only 50+ because of all the changes in line up. I just write and the album has the best collection of songs from the last two years. I don’t care if it’s prog metal or an acoustic guitar song. To me it is all music.

-In fact, your new bass player is Kristoffer Gildenlow, brother of Daniel Gildenlow, leader from Pain of Salvation. How did you contact him?

I was looking for a bass player when we started in 2016, 2017, and through some acquaintances his name came up, so I checked him out on Youtube and he was amazing. We were already in the process of recording Seventeen so I asked if he would like to try and play one song (Cracks). He is a fantastic bass player and all round musician, because he also writes and records his own solo albums.

-Then it has pure pop-rock songs, such as “Waiting”, with a very catchy melody (and some hints of David Bowie in the voice!), and “Mystery”, (with a hint of ELO!) but in fact the pop melodies is one of the main trademarks of Kayak since the beginnings. Even in 1977 you had a hit with “Want you to be mine”, with a good disco sound!

-Can you talk about the worst and the best moments in your career?

One of the positive highlights of course is the first album and the first single. When you’re 21 and everything is new, full of promises, it feels like a dream come true. You have no idea how hard it becomes later on. The worst moment was probably the death of my friend, colleague, rival, drummer and composer Pim Koopman in 2009, one day after we did a concert.

-What kind of music do you listen nowadays?

Mostly classical, renaissance, baroque. I am easily bored with rock and pop, also progressive, I have heard it all before. Some stuff is very technical, and the musicianship is impressive, but it does not touch my heart. And that is what music is all about.

-What would you be if you hadn’t been a musician?

No idea. I would still be creative in a way. Drawing, or writing. maybe.

-Any advice for a young musician who is starting now?

Follow your dreams. Be informed (contracts, managers, etcetera) and only do it when you really want it. If you do, let nobody stop you.

-By the way, why the name Kayak?

It was just one of the names we had, and we found it in a dictionary. We could not decide, but when we recorded a demo, we really had to choose. It sounded good, and it can be spelled backwards. After 48 years it has gotten an extra meaning: a kayak will always resurface, and until now that is what happened with the band, no matter how deep it sank, sometimes.

Thank you and good luck with your new album!

Thank you!

Jordi Planas, Ruta 66 magazine, Barcelona