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BEHIND THE CHAINS with Scott Rockenfield of Queensrÿche!

By: Brian Heaton

After 24 years behind a drum kit, Scott Rockenfield of Queensrÿche continues to be a major force in the music industry. With Queensrÿche recently signing a new multi-album record deal with Sanctuary Records, his two side project groups (Rockenfield/Speer and Slave to the System) getting rave reviews, and SRock's outside work developing musical score, the 38 year old is just getting started.

Taking a few moments away from his musical and family commitments, The Breakdown Room visited with Scott to reminisce about the past, celebrate the present, and take a peek into the future...

SUITE ONE – Most of this is memory now...

BH: When did you first start playing the drums, and who/what were your major influences that you patterned yourself after in the early days?

SR: I first began when I was 14. Self taught , I found myself listening and then trying to figure out what drummers in bands like Rush, Yes Pink Floyd, etc, were doing. I was never much for taking lessons...

BH: For the fans that aren't aware of how you came into Queensrÿche, can you talk a little bit about the formation of "The Mob," how you met up with the guys, and the evolution of that into what became Queensrÿche?

SR: I formed QR back when I was still 17. Chris Degarmo (our former guitarist) and I had knew each other since the 6th grade. We reconnected and decided that we should start to play together. Through mutual friends, we hooked up with Eddie, Michael and Geoff. For a short while we played a few gigs doing cover tunes and quickly decided that we were destined to write our own material. I suppose the rest is history...

BH: What were some of the tunes from back in the late 70's/early 80's that you loved to play, and why?

SR: I liked to listen and play an assortment of many different bands. I never really focused on one specific band or song...

BH: Looking back over your career, what songs by Queensrÿche that you helped write and formulate stand out as some of your best work as a songwriter and/or drummer/percussionist, and why?

SR: Promised Land. I was very involved with the writing and making of that record. It helped me learn so much about my music and my technical knowledge of recording. It stays with me the most. That album and tour were a very important part of my life. I had a significant role in the writing and performing of that project.

BH: What is the most difficult song for you to play, and from a technical standpoint, why?

SR: I find that other bands material is the most difficult to play. I don't have any problems with my own compositions because they come from my head and not someone else's.

BH: Not being a serious musician, from an observational standpoint, it seems the kit you perform on has shrunk considerably over the years. What is the reason for that (besides it being a pain to haul around the country)?

SR: I found that I was using most of that extra stuff for the show of it. What I am using now is all that I really feel I need to play.

BH: Speaking of your kit, can you describe to the musicians out there what equipment and assorted gear you use, the standard set-up when you're playing live, and how that set-up has evolved over time?

SR: All drums are Pearl Master series. 22" Kick drum, 8"-10"-12" toms, 16" floor tom, 5x14" maple snare, 13" brass piccolo snare. All cymbals are Paiste. 2-18" china types, 13" med hats, 20" dry ride, 16"-17"-18" power crashes, 8" and 10" splashes. My setup has really not changed much except for the fact that I removed one kick drum and one tom-tom.

SUITE TWO – Queensrÿche, Rockenfield/Speer, Slave to the System

BH: From a Queensrÿche fan's perspective, it was a treat to hear you guys perform some ancient material at S2k1 in early June, and again at the shows played in late July for the recording of QR's recently released double live album and DVD, LIVE EVOLUTION. Did you enjoy re-learning some of those old tunes, and is the band leaning towards playing some of the obscure stuff live on a consistent basis?

SR: Yes, it was fun to have to go back and re-learn some of the old stuff. It has been many, many years since I have even listened to some of that material. I do not listen to our music on a regular basis. And yes, we will be leaning towards the older material in the future tours.

BH: Queensrÿche are now signed to a record deal with the Sanctuary Records Group. What are your feelings on the new partnership, and why did the band choose to leave Atlantic?

SR: The music business is a constant roller coaster of decisions and changes. We felt that Sanctuary would be a good choice for us to make.

BH: Enough about Queensrÿche for a bit. Lets go into your assorted projects, starting with the partnership between yourself and Paul Speer. How did that come about?

SR: I met Paul at a Tangerine Dream concert in Seattle in 1993. We realized then and there that we had mutual tastes in music and soon after decided to work together. Paul was making a record with his longtime partner David Lanz and they asked me to play on three tracks. Then in 1996, Miramar Records in Seattle asked Paul and I if we would be interested in composing the music for a computer animated movie entitled Televoid. We eagerly accepted, and spent nine months writing and recording what was to become our first Grammy nomination (1998-"Best Long Form Music Video"). We have been promoting our second release, "Hells Canyon," since July 2000, and it has gained critical acclaim around the globe.

BH: With Televoid being nominated for a Grammy, and Hells Canyon receiving rave reviews from music lovers world-wide, it seems that the chemistry between you and Paul is just beginning. What lies ahead for the tandem of Rockenfield/Speer?

SR: We have been talking about our next project together, trying to come up with an idea and direction that we would want to go. We have also been tossing around the idea of putting together a live show to take on the road. It really comes down to a scheduling process for the two of us to be free enough from our other duties. Paul recently acquired a commercial recording facility in Seattle, Rainstorm Studios, and has been busy getting that off of the ground.

BH: Another project of yours I have had the privilege to hear in its entirety is SLAVE TO THE SYSTEM, which consists of yourself on the skins, Kelly (Gray) on guitar, Scotty Heard on vocals and guitar, and then Damon Johnson (vocals/guitar) and Roman Glick (bass), which many remember from BROTHER CANE. Where does the album stand in terms of being released?

SR: We should be releasing the record very soon. I do not have a definitive date as of yet, but we will try and keep everyone posted...it's some very cool stuff!

BH: It is good to hear the Slave to the System album may be released soon. You guys really seem to have a good vibe with the sound. One person that contributes significantly to that sound is Scotty Heard...and on a national level,

he is probably the least-known out of the group. What are your thoughts on Scotty and his talent as a guitarist/singer & songwriter? How did this guy stay hidden up until now? *laughing*

SR: Scotty Heard is a very accomplished writer and musician. He has a very unique grasp on his guitar playing and I thoroughly enjoy his lyric/singing capabilities. It has been a pleasure to work along side him and the others. The five of us have an amazing chemistry together and are very excited about the release of our first album together. We are in the midst of signing a major recording deal and will keep everyone posted as to the release date!!!

BH: Touring for Slave to the System is good news indeed. Where you all will find the time is another question. Do you have an idea on a block of time in the future where we can expect you all on the road for this, and if so, do you plan on headlining smaller clubs on your own in the beginning, or opening up for more established acts?

SR: The world will be our oyster!!!!!!!!!! *laughing*

BH: Can you share the names of the songs on the album, and which of the songs do you find the most sonically interesting?

SR: As of right now we would like to keep things quiet until its release, but I will say that the response from some that have listened to it has been astounding!!!!

BH: The album will obviously have a bit of the Queensrÿche and Brother Cane elements, given the history of the group's members. How does the sound differ from both bands, and in what way is it similar?

SR: I suppose that there will always be elements of things that people have been involved with from the past, but I think that the chemistry between the five of us has been very exciting. I am going to let the music speak for itself.

BH: Being in bands and making music collectively has been something you've done for years. However, making albums isn't the only musical venture you partake in is it?

SR: I have also been scoring music for multiple film, television and video projects for some time now...I have made relationships with a few of the biggest video game manufactures. I recently have been composing a three-minute "trailer" for Activision. They approached me to see if I would be interested in doing something specific for them to see and hear. I have also been spending a lot of my time building relationships with some very powerful Music Supervisors and Film Producers.

SUITE THREE – The Future...

BH: Geoff was recently quoted as saying the band wants to make the next Queensrÿche studio album the most intense, heavy album since Operation: Mindcrime. Are you all pretty set on a vibe for the new recording sessions after the holidays and looking forward to putting something uniquely heavy and intense out?

SR: We never know what we are going to do until the time comes. Intense could be good though!!!

BH: Keeping with the topic of the new QR studio effort, Michael relayed at the S2k1 Digevent chat (the one he and Geoff did when Digevent did the re-broadcast in July) that his influences for the new album were the sounds of TOOL, U2, and either DISTURBED or STAINED (I forget which). What have you been listening to lately, and would you consider it an influence to what your writing will be once in the studio?

SR: Believe it or not I listen to mostly film score music. I am extremely interested in doing music for film and I also find them to be a huge influence on what I am able to offer to QR. The score from "Gladiator" has been running rampant around here lately...

BH: What would you personally like to accomplish with the eventual new Queensrÿche album's sound? Is there any direction that you'd like to see the music slant towards?

SR: I have no idea what we are going to do (or end up with) until we are actually doing it. I like to surprise myself! *laughing*

BH: Kelly has been in Queensryche now for a little less than four years. With the second studio effort as a part of Queensryche coming up, what impresses you most about Kelly in Queensryche, and what are some of the differences between his musical contributions and the ones when Chris was with the band?

SR: Kelly has been a valuable addition to what we do in QR. He is very focused when it comes to song writing. He also has done an amazing job at filling the shoes for the old material...

BH: With all members of the band doing other projects in addition to Queensryche, some fans have expressed worry that the band won't be as productive as a creative unit anymore. Do you feel this is, or might become the case as side projects develop and become successful, or will Queensryche always be the mainstay?

SR: I think that our other musical ventures create new and inspiring things for us to do in Queensrÿche...