

PublicationDate: 11-08-2001
PAGE: 08

PUBLICATION: BANGKOK POST
KEYWORD: concert, concert-Scorpions

HEADLINE: Singing and still stinging

SUBHEADLINE: For 35 years the Scorpions have been rocking, with no signs of slowing down

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Founded more than 35 years ago in Hanover, Germany in 1965, the Scorpions are alive and kicking and nowhere near retirement, at least judging by the stamina they displayed during their punchy ``Acoustica Live" concert in Bangkok recently.

``Scorpions are animals which love the heat and the sun _ Thailand is a perfect place for them," joked Klaus Meine, the band's lead singer, during a press conference a few hours before the start of their one-and-only performance in Thailand.

The concert which followed at the Queen Sirikit Convention Centre (presented by LG Flatron Plasma and attended by HSH Princess Siriwanwaree Mahidol) proved him right. The Scorpions were at home in the Asian tropics and the heat seemed to bring out the band's power.

In front of a screaming crowd of more than 4,000 people, the heavy rock monsters delivered a top-notch performance, getting deep into the guts of the matter with ear-splitting enthusiasm right from the opening with Loving Your Sunday Morning till the finish with Blackout and the energetic encores of smash hits such as Still Loving You and Wind of Change.

Twelve musicians altogether, the core of the band performed with guest musicians such as Christian Kolonovits on keyboards, Mario Argandona on percussion, Romanian Ariane Arcu on cello, among others.

True to their style of ultra-hard rock combined with catchy melodies, the German hard rockers took the audience for a trip down memory lane, alternating between old songs turned into international rock anthems and newer releases _ ``surprises" Meine said _ like When Love Kills Love. They also alternated between hard rock hits like Bad Boys Running Wild, The Zoo, Big City Nights, Dynamite and powerful ballads such as You and I, Holiday, and Kansas' Dust in the Wind.

Another tactic used throughout the concert also proved terrific: electric guitar versus acoustic guitar-based songs. At regular intervals, one would see Rudolph Schenker and Matthias Jabs swapping their electric guitars for acoustic ones, ``unplugging" and thus offering a respite to the audience's knocked-about eardrums.

``A combination of the two styles is always more fun," Matthias Jabs said earlier.

The acoustic element was dominant during the concert _ although both opening and final songs were performed with electric sounds _ and it was the outcome of the Scorpions' latest release Acoustica, recorded in Lisbon's Convento do Beato, Portugal last February.

``We have had strong demand especially from Asia to play on acoustic guitars. So following our project with the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra (a joint venture under the direction of crossover producer, composer, conductor and arranger Austria's Christian Kolonovits, which culminated with the release of the CD Moment of Glory in 2000), we recorded an acoustic album in Lisbon. We gave three shows there and decided to have a few shows around the

world as well before going on to our next rock project. We are glad that our fans in Thailand could share this experience with us," commented Klaus Meine, wearing as usual a black beret jammed down hard on his head.

Rudolf Schenker, guitarist, continued: ``We asked Christian Kolonovits to work with us on the album *Acoustica*, as he knew our music very well and he was someone we all wanted to work with. Coming up with this album was somehow very easy _ he gave us inspiration, we put our pulses together and ultimately came up with this concept.

``Yet acoustic guitars produce different kinds of vibes. While on electric guitars the chords go on forever, you need a different arrangement for an acoustic guitar. But after many years of rock music, it was very exciting to do this unplugged album."

Actually acoustic guitars have been a part of their performance for many years, at least since the early '80s.

``In fact it is not so new for us. If you remember, since 1979 and the release of *Holiday* (on *Lovedrive*, a Gold Disc in the US), we kept an acoustic bit in our show during which we played unplugged," commented Schenker, who started the group in 1965 and was joined by Klaus Meine in the early '70s.

Even during their earlier performances here in 1982, the German band's passion was unleashed with an acoustic twist.

``We have so many great memories of Asia and other regions of the world. We never feel like strangers as we are connected through music," Meine said.

Schenker added: ``After we gave our first show in Bangkok (back in 1982), we went downtown and saw a big crowd gathered in front of a shopping mall. People were actually already watching a broadcast of our concert! Since then we have really loved to play here."

Confirming what he nevertheless called a ``rumour" about him wishing to buy a house in Phuket, the band's tall and ash-blond guitarist commented: ``I was in Phuket some two-and-a-half years ago, at the Amapuri resort, and that was fantastic. I would love to buy a house but I know that, as a foreigner, you only can buy property here if a Thai national is a partner. So that makes it very difficult for us."

As relentlessly energetic as usual _ with tambourines and drumsticks flying across the stage _ American drummer James Kottak treated the audience to an impressive solo.

They haven't aged, even though their faces and hairy chests may have. A malicious gossip _ who obviously hasn't seen their present show _ wondered recently if they were still fit ``or playing in wheelchairs".

After all, these are the guys whom *Rolling Stone* called ``the heroes of heavy metal", the ones admitted to that exclusive club of the world's 30 greatest rock groups, whose *Wind of Change* provided the soundtrack to the opening of the Iron Curtain in 1989, who were received by Michael Gorbachev at the Kremlin in 1991 ...

Their motto fits well: ``Don't stop at the top."