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I went not to Hamburg where members were, but to London, because I was going to be made to listen to the new album of Helloween which was almost complete.

Christmas is coming, so streets are decorated with gaudy illuminations as usual and many people, being crowded out from pavements, are enjoying Christmas shopping.

I push my way through the crowd and go to the management office of Helloween (and of Iron Maiden and Jagged Edge), "Sanctuary".

The back room of the information desk with a Christmas tree decorated with gorgeously had the atmosphere that a lot of piled up things have to be done before holidays and the staff walked around in a hurry.

I met here the manager, Mr. Rod Smallwood and Mr. Harry Moan by appointment and went to the "Battery Studio" where they were mixing down.

I leave the car and get in the studio in a hurry to avoid the rain that finally began to fall, and Chris Tsangarides, the producer well known in Japan welcomes us.

"I've caught a cold.....", Chris said and while putting a piece of tissue to his nose he shook hands with me, "I am looking forward to recording of Anthem in February here" he said and smiled.

"Chris is not in a good condition, but he has a lot of things to have been done before Christmas," Mr. Moan says as he hands a cup of coffee to Chris.

In the meantime the tape seemed to be ready. Mr. Smallwood took the centre seat in front of the huge mixing board and gave me his sign.

When I sat down in this large chair which seemed to be Chris's regular seat, Chris lit a candle and darkened the room light.

I once again looked toward the title of the new album and the song list which Mr. Smallwood wrote some time ago.

Eleven analog songs are going to be recording, and four songs were made by Michale Kiske, three songs by Roland Grapow, one songs by Michael Weikath and each of three songs are credited by Graapow/Kiske, Weikath/Kiske, Markus Grosskopf/Kiske...

Even these reminds me the word, "change" with which they were expressing about this new album for a long time.

Sounds began to flow from huge speakers in front of me. This is a new heavy metal from Helloween by the name of "Pink Bubbles Go Ape"

...

"What do you think of this?" The room light brightens again Chris says to me. All I can say now is only one thing. This is a certain "new Helloween." A song in which the middle range of Michael Kiske's voice is emphasized, a magnificent heavy ballad with the intro of acoustic guitar, a fast song running powerfully, no one but a heavy metal song with complicated rhythms and developments...

Especially the roles of Michael Kiske and Roland Grapow as song writers for this album is great.

"Yes, you are right. Michi (Michael Kiske) came to write songs more than before, and Roland is a type of a guitarist who likes not only hard rock but also, for example, Steve Lukather from TOTO. It can be said that this is the album new Helloween-made."

Chris seems to be satisfied. The artwork of this album cover has reached to this studio. It is a picture of a lady and a fish, and a gentleman and a fried egg, which is hard to be explained and the inside of the spread sleeve is a collage of many soup bubbles and landscapes pictures.

"This is a design of Storm Thorgerson who was a member of Hypgnosis. Do you know about it? Hypgnosis designed album covers of Pink Floyd, Led Zeppelin and UFO, and etc.."

Mr. Smallwood says: If you recollect, for example, Pink Floyd's "Dark Side Of The Moon", the cover of the light passing through that prism, UFO's "Obsession", the cover of closed-up faces of two men whose eyes, mouths, and noses are covered over by silver balls, this Helloween's cover is said to be certainly like "Hypgnosis." In a word, "it is impossible to guess from the album cover what kind of music you have in it", it is a very strange cover. A "Change" is seen here.

It was a very common greeting. I had not noticed yet their "special feeling" was hidden in this greeting exchanged commonly...

Next Morning I flew from London to Hamburg. The sky of Hamburg which approached at Christmas one more day cleared up and it was filled with mild and warm light though it was winter. As the same sky as just half a year ago when I came to see them here.....

Mr. Harry Schmitt, who managed the Helloween office of Hamburg, came to the airport.

He is the person who has been concerned with Helloween from their early days and the reason why the band's first agent office was in Holland is that he lived there. "When I finish this interview, I will go back to Holland by car." Between London and Hamburg it takes one and a half hour by plane. Between Hamburg and Amsterdam it takes about five hours by car.

Christmas in Europe is also a season of a big racial migration.

As I am driving on the same road as before, I am thinking about Helloween in 1990..... thinking about Helloween in the last half a year.....

Since they are honest members, I used to be embarrassed by their talking about their member change and by the trifling clumsiness among members.....

However, music tells about everything. It's about their "now" and "future" that I ask to Michael Kiske and Ingo Schwichtenberg in this first interview that follows to the new album.

These are the words of Helloween that waits for the release of their new album after a stop of two years (actually after an interval of three years for them).

On the way to the office, we drop at Ingo's flat and pick him up. "I don't mind. As I haven't done a live performance for one and a half year, my body became blunt! It's better to do anything, even if a tiny thing.."

When I apologized him to make him work just before Christmas, Ingo said so while he was laughing:

"It was in June 1989 that we came back from Japan, is it? Since then I have not played a live. Ah, I want to play drums! I want to play live!"

I heard that he was going to play in a cover band of AC/DC with his neighbor friends at a club in Hamburg on the New Year's Eve.

"Look at this. This is the proof!" And he showed me his peeled thumb. While we talked, we arrived at Michael's flat. Here we pick him up and are going to go toward the office on that hill.

"Have you been in London? You listened to the album, did you?" As soon as Michael got in our car, he spoke fast, pulled out a cassette tape

from his pocket and said to the driver, Harry, to play it in the radio car.
Of course it plays some songs of "Pink Bubbles Go Ape" which they completed their final mix.
And the German conversation about this, that, and the other starts between Ingo.
Our car filled with loud sounds climbs up the hill in a zigzag and slides into the garden of the office.
A man in the space next to the office, who sells Christmas trees, waves his hand to them.
When I get off the car, the air is pleasantly cool. The blue of the sky, the green of grass, and the white wall of the house are the same as before.

We open the door and get inside.

Both Michael and Ingo anew turn their faces to me and extended their arms.

"Nice to see you!"

At first I came to have an interview with Ingo. During the interview, Michael has a photo session, confirms the credit of the new album, and has detailed jobs in the next room.

"Will you ask Michi about details of the album? He knows the finishing touches of the album," Ingo said and sat down in a sofa in a large living room, lit a candle with a leaf on the table and have a cigarette. Then I will leave the new album story later, so we start to talk about like this...

As a drummer, you have played in this band before Helloween named Helloween, have you? And a drummer is always in the standpoint of seeing the entire band from the back during a live, is it? Please tell about yourself this time. What is the chance to begin to play the drum?

Ingo Schwichtenberg: When I was thirteen or fourteen, I started to practice a clarinet with encouragement by a music teacher at school. That was my first encounter with a musical instrument.

At school we separated into some groups and played folk music. But there was no one to play clarinet... so I asked my parents to buy me a clarinet and I used to play it at home very often.

Many parents came to our school and we had a concert.

As the drummer in my group was very bad, I couldn't stand it at all, so I sat in front of the drumkit and played as I liked. That was the beginning to start playing drums. I think I was fifteen... I thought I wanted to play it seriously since then.

Right after that, I got to know Kai (Hansen) who lived on the same street where I lived.

In those days Kai played with a band called "Gentry", and he said: "We haven't got a drummer."

And then he said to me, "Won't you try to play drums with us?"

And the next day I was encouraged to go and play, but as I just started practicing, Kai played better than me (laughs).

I heard that Kai wanted to be a drummer too!

I: Yes! And the other guitarist, Piet Sielck could play drums too... But I just started to copy Judas Priest or something at that time...just loudly and noisily!

When did you get your own drum kit for the first time?

I: It was when we were going to make a mini album, "Helloween" in 1985.

I used the same kit during the tour in 1986. After that I endorsed with a instrumental maker, so I came to be able to use it.

My parents bought me the very first kit. Before getting it, there was a girl at school who had a drum set, and I became friend with her and I went to her house for playing.

After that my father bought me a new drum kit. My family was not rich or so, but my father always believed in my talent and bought me the drum kit with the money he earned by working so hard.

Even now I am grateful to him and even now things go very well between my father and I.

My mother already passed away... I wish I had made her see my figure now.

So did your parents scold you about the fact you started playing rock?

I: No, but when all was said and done, it was "Death Metal" in 1984 that we recorded for the first time. As the album cover displayed a disgusting man who was disemboweled, my father frowned: "...on this album?!?", and he was looking at it suspiciously (laughs).

But listening to "Metal Invaders" and "Oernst Of Life", he seemed to be pleased with the melody and said: "Keep going!".

My father likes our music. I think it is a rare family because both parents are very cooperative.

Which artists did you listen to well in those days?

I: Black Sabbath, Dio (Vinny Appice era), I liked Phil Rudd of AC/DC... Recently I like Simon Phillips's energy and power. I like the way he can play many different kinds of music styles and his accurate and fine playing.

The first band for you was the band with Kai, isn't it?

I: Yes, and Markus (Grosskopf) joined us about a half of a year later.

One day Kai said: "Today a bassist will come to join us," and so he did.

Until then we were three: me, Kai, and Piet, so Kai and Piet played a bass alternately.

And we met Markus at a station. As he played in a punk band, his fashion was like that...(laughs). Though we were a poor band and were unable to buy strings, Markus was a very nice guy and I thought we were going to play as a band joyfully. It was about 1981.

The band called "Gentry" at first changed its name into "Second Hell", and then changed into "Iron Fist" and then finally changed into "Helloween" before taking part in "Death Metal".

We also named "Glory" temporarily. Though we made leather jackets with logos, the band name changed in three months! (laughs)

I hear that you were in work for a time?

I: Yes, we can't work unless we are over sixteen years old legally, but I was working at a common office for two years from fifteen years old and then I was driving a lift carrying stuff in a huge market. Though it was a hard job starting from 6 o'clock in the morning, I learned a lot of things from it.

I think it was good for me to have done it. Now I can do what I want to do freely, and it has a very significant meaning for me now that I worked in those days. While working, I was playing drums. Eleven years passed... In those days there were few truly big bands like J. Priest, AC/DC, Black Sabbath except for us.

As I was doing such a thing, I was a rock'n roll roller with long hair and a leather jacket. (laughs). As other guys in the same age wore tidy clothes, I might have been seen very different from them, but there was no bad relationship with them.

Do you think there was a change in you before and after starting playing drums?

I: Well, let me see... As you said before, I am always sitting behind a drum kit and this is very different from being a guitarist. So I may be a

little bit different from other players.

As I was looking over from there, I came to know a various kinds of things little by little. I have been confident gradually, so I think it was really good to become a drummer. As I can't run around on the stage like a guitarist do, I used to think I wished I could stand on the front stage like that, but now I like to be a drummer who can see everything well.

I am so happy to play. But the responsibility is important. Because if I miss beating, all sounds

of the band get into confusion. A drummer always have to know what other members are doing. When the concert starts and I count first, I have to grasp all state of things after that.

A drummer does not have to rush whatever happens.

Was it good for you to choose a music career?

I: Yes, of course! I cannot think about other jobs now. Of course I had a bitter experience about business. Especially 1989. It was a terribly bad time for the band and for me. I had never experienced such hard days before. But many bad things always can be seen around us. We get to learn from them.

Besides hard times are common even if you work at an office or whatever you are doing, even if you don't play in a band, aren't they? The same thing can be said.

Do you think you grew up during that period?

I: I hope so. I think not only myself but every single member had his own hard time.

But I knew that if we cooperated, we could get over it. I knew that we would not break up at once but we could go forward from now on.

Does the relationship between the band members have the wonderful power?

I: We are all owners of extremely strong characters. (laughs) Everyone has a strong personality and has his own life style and for a while we were really broken separately. Even now we have many things to learn. There are things we do not know, either, and sometimes our opinions come into conflict.

But in that case I think it is farther better to collide and argue with each other rather than pretend to smile.

You and Markus are not only rhythm partners but also are friends for many years among members, aren't you? What does Markus mean for you?

I: He is a type of a person who is always pure and cannot do bad things.

Like me he is not the first to make a noise, he seems to wait for his surroundings working on him. Getting inspirations from surroundings, when everyone is in a cheerful atmosphere, I am also in a good mood with a burst of laughter. I think Markus is the same.

You have grown up as the band has grown up...

I: You are right, Yes. I think I have grown up pretty much. But the rapid growth of Roland (Grapow) is more amazing. Because before joining Helloween, he was a garage mechanic, even if he had been playing a guitar. Suddenly he had a call from Weiki (Michael Weikath): "Why don't we play together in Helloween?".

After joining the band, every day was very hard for him, I think, but he did his best and he played very good in this recording.

As there is no end for learning, both he and we are due to grow up from now on for a long time.

Rapid growth and after grasping a success...

One day suddenly he (Michael Kiske) changed. We are alright. I want to go on tour and play the new songs!"

After Michael Kiske joined, Helloween has become big at very top speed.

When he joined Helloween at the age of eighteen, what was your impression about him? Did you feel your younger brother came in?

I: He was more a baby rather than a brother. (laughs) Please don't say this to him. He is sure to get angry (laughs).

When he joined, he was eighteen years old, but I thought he was aware of being so talented and he knew well what he should have to do. But, for a while, he was apt to withdraw into his own world and he began to shut his doors tightly against other opinions. But he noticed it and since he started reflecting on his past conduct, he became another person.

It was a wonderful Christmas present for me. It happened probably two or three months ago: "Oh, I should not leave things as they are". He seemed to realize something and suddenly he became what he is now. Of course, now he is farther better than before!

Until then I had a fixed image that "his character was something like this" and he did not hear other opinions, he would make no concessions and he had a mood that "everything he is thinking is right" and he was very obstinate.

As Michael grasped a success in his youth, every day was tough for him, too...

I: Yes, after succeeding at the age of eighteen, it has been very hard not to indulge in it. He was quite capable of being in worse circumstances...

Do you think that the present success of Helloween was caused by the joining of Michael greatly?

I: Well, even if he had not joined, I think we would have succeeded sooner or later in our own way.

But the joining of Michael made us growing bigger as a band and made us think about a lot of things. He may sure have been "a key for success." He has a great voice and he has a sense of humor even on the stage. It is important.

Sometimes I feel nervous behind the drum kit: "Ahhh, he may not do such a thing..." (laughs).

But now as he thinks out his stage performance by himself and seems to know his limit, it's alright.

Helloween was foredoomed to have a special vocalist, was it?

I: Yes, since about 1986 Kai wanted to devote himself to be a guitarist. So sooner or later we needed a singer, a front man. When I watched the video of the stage shooted after Michael joined, Kai was running around the stage freely as he pleased. (laughs) He seemed to be very happy to have another singer.

Was the band activity after Michael's joining the same as what you were thinking?

I: No, I personally want to make tours more and more and want to be more active. I hate to loaf at home, and I am a kind of a person who is always doing something.

When we are on tour, I think it is the most fulfilling time for me. When I am in my house, unless I have a jogging or do something else of my own accord, my physical strength goes down and I become fat.

For example, even if I go to the swimming pool every day, in my case, as I cannot stick to do the same thing, I need a tour. (laughs)

Did you become nervous about the too high-speed success or did you feel it was a little bit different from what you were thinking?
Yes, I did. I feel both the surroundings and the band have changed too rapidly. So I was thinking that some trouble would occur one day or another and it came true. It was the hard time in 1989.
But now we are alright. It is important that each member has his own strong purpose and that we are unifying in a body. If we leave things to others too much, we will have a bitter experience later.

In the new album, "Pink Bubbles Go Ape," which part is a new attempt for you?

I: The groovy feeling in "Kids Of The Century" has not been seen before.
Things didn't go so well and while I tried to repeat a trial-and-error, an idea flashed across my mind.
I think it became a very groovy song.

I had the impression that drum sounds were recorded very sharply. Especially sounds of cymbals were clear...

I: Cymbals and the snare drum are recorded very clearly, aren't they?
Just before recording, as I was not satisfied with the cymbals which I had always used until then, I was getting my drum technician to find another one all over the place. And then "Paiste" sent me theirs which had exactly the same sound as I was imagining in my mind.
They make various kinds of tone colors depending on the way of beating. The sounds of the whole drums are very good and I think the production of Chris (Tsangarides) was very complete. But I think my drumming in a live will be sure more energetic than the album.
Ah, I want to play songs of our new album on a stage soon! (laughs)

There are some songs in which the rhythm and melody can be heard very clearly from Markus's bass...

I: "Mankind" and "Going Home" have phrases in which a little funky-like moving can be heard.
I wanted to play like this for a long time.
"Markus, how do you want to play?" "What? I have thought nothing, but what do you think of this?"
We were recording then and there, one by one like this.

Though it may be difficult to answer, which song do you like best in the new album?

I: All of them! I want to say so, but I dare to say, "Going Home" and "Someone's Crying" which is fast and boogie like an old Helloween.
"Mankind" is a song which we are challenging the way in which we have not played before as a band. This is straight and it must be fun to play in a live! (laughs).
This song has the same moving mood as "Keeper Of The Seven Keys" and "Halloween." It is a little bit long and I have to think about many things while playing... And "I'm doin' fine Crazy Man" is the song which we recorded at the studio in Hamburg and at first we were going to put it in the B side of a single, but we put it in the album. We completed it in two days and it is a simple song itself.
The sound is a little bit different from others.

Which song took the longest time to record?

I: "Number One", maybe. About other songs we were proceeding one song per day. We finished basic tracks for fourteen days. I think it is rather fast.

When I made an interview before, I heard that there was a song called "Happy Song"?

I: Ah, that song was rejected because we couldn't make out very well in recording.
We tried recording it in London again, but it became a completely different sound from other songs... it may be put in the B side of a single, but I don't know.

Is there anything you don't want to play as a drummer?

I: Well ... reggae (laughs). As the theme of reggae seems to be how to play least effectively, it is not interesting as a drummer.

What do you think to introduce electronics? Making machine beat goes too far...

I: As for me, I think I don't want to rely on electronics to play the whole drum set but I want to use it only for snare drum or I want to use it as an accent.

Then it comes to be a different style from other drummers. It may be so, but I worry about the fake sounds: even if you set three bass drums, only two of them have pedals and a player steps on a floor switch instead of drums. Or one step makes two sounds - "BANG-BANG"- and a player pretends to beat double bass drums so fast with it.

To be frank with you, I don't need such a trick! I like my present drum kit very much and I love it very much (laughs) ... Drum is a very natural and physical instrument and the sound changes depending on my mood of the day.

When I'm irritated, it doesn't make a good sound, and during a tour I play differently every day.

It is a rather free part.

If you are compared, what kind of drummer do you want to be compared to? Or are you happy to be appreciated to play good as a member of Helloween rather than to be appreciated as one drummer?

I: I will rely on the judgment of people that can tell how much skilled I am as a drummer.

As far as I'm concerned, first of all I am the drummer of Helloween and we are on a equal level with each other.

I remember that a few years ago when Chris, a producer was going to produce "After The War" of Gary Moore, he listened to the Helloween's tape and said that he was thinking "this drummer might be good for the drum part". I was pleased with it and I flattered myself that I would become a great man... (laughs)

I am often said why I don't make my personal project and I think I want to try many things if I get any offer. And I want to have a drum clinic.

It seems to be interesting that I could have about 100 people gathering in a place and keep on watching my hands. I really want to try once.

I want to make a solo album in the future and as I have already ideas, I want to make it come true.

I will promote Chris Thompson (ex. Manfred Mann's Earth Band) as a singer...If I will do it, I want to make a good quality album.

So, after finishing the album, are you going to make a tour you have been waiting for?

I: Yes! Before that we are going to make a video clip of "Kids Of The Century" in London.

I think it may include the playing scene and the scene which is concerned with the album cover.

And then we will start a tour from Portugal or France first. After that we will go to England, Germany and the rest of Europe.

And of course we will go to Japan. Maybe on July.



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