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Rudolf Schenker with Lars Amend

**Rock Your Life**

The founder and guitarist of the Scorpions reveals his secret:  
Enjoying what you do is the key to happiness and success

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### **3. PAY ATTENTION TO WHAT YOUR SURROUNDINGS ARE TELLING YOU**

My path to the guitar took several detours, like so much in life. Love at first sting? Error message! I can still remember that car ride into Freibad, at the end of the fifties, when my father switched the radio on and I had my first thoughts about what was blasting out of both loudspeakers. I couldn't care less about the DJ's blathering, what I was interested in was the music!

Spellbound, I sat with my eyes wide open on the back seat of our car and was fascinated and astounded in equal measure. I could not for the life of me imagine what this was supposed to be, and above all how these sounds were being produced. So I asked mum, who was sitting in the passenger's seat, holding my little brother.

'Rudolf, pay attention: music is what happens when several people come together and play something together on different instruments,' she began her explanation. 'And in the end you have a song that gets played on the radio.'

In my father's case, that meant the most nauseating German and Italian pop music. But that was the mainstream taste of most Germans at the time. What was far more important for me back then was that my mother had awoken my interest with her explanation. I now knew where music came from. But, I thought, there must be something else other than this dire, melodramatic din. I couldn't get this thought out of my head. From now on I sniffed the air like a bloodhound following the scent. The adventure began.

#### **THE GATEWAY TO ANOTHER WORLD**

Once a week my father took my mother dancing. Either to the Tabu in Hannover or the Vier Linden in Hildesheim. I was feverish with excitement over this for days in advance, because for me it meant radiotime!

I fidgeted in my room until I finally heard the front door closing, like a starting pistol. Full of anticipation, I ran into the living room and flopped in front of my father's radio - my heart always pounding - as I channel-surfed through short and medium-wave frequencies. Back then, you still had to turn this little dial with a great deal of sensitivity, and you never knew what to expect, which was exactly the great thing about it.

My favourite stations were called Radio Luxemburg, Radio Monte Carlo and, of course,

Radio Caroline - the legendary pirate station that transmitted from a ship off the coast of England. Absolutely mental. The thing was that - in contrast to the German radio stations - they played rock n' roll from England and America: Chuck Berry, Little Richard, Jerry Lee Lewis! Even the names of the artists, and the energy that came across in their songs, had the sound of the big wide world. It was as if a giant hurricane were swirling through the ether. There was no comparison with the music that I was used to from my father. I got comfortable on the carpet, closed my eyes, flicked my switch to receive and soaked in everything there was to hear.

The radio was my gateway to a totally new world. A world that had nothing, really nothing at all, to do with the musty, small, suburban province that I came from. The hissing in this mysterious world didn't bother me a bit - on the contrary - it even generated its own particular atmosphere of mystery. The more songs I heard, the more it seemed to me that the guitar was an enigmatic instrument. That said, maybe it also had something to do with the fact that I was already a huge fan of Elvis Presley, who was at just that point doing his military service in Friedberg. Elvis, who evidently couldn't really play the guitar at all, allowed himself to be photographed with one so often that it became an emblematic slogan of a whole generation. Buddy Holly, Eddie Cochran - they all posed with a guitar, as if they wanted to say: 'Look here, you boring pen-pusher. This stands for freedom!' And that was exactly what I wanted - I wanted to be everything, just not a middle-class bore. Whenever I listened to the radio I felt connected to the whole world. An indescribable feeling, which is hard to imagine now, given the internet age. In those rare moments I saw myself as an elect member of a secret society that had discovered the frequency of an alien planet. Shortly before my parents came back from their evening of dancing, I went back to bed and imagined what it must be like there on the other side. Week after week. Month after month. Year after year.

#### **MOPED OR GUITAR?**

At the beginning of the sixties, mopeds were almost as important as rock n' roll. James Dean was already dead, of course, having died in 1955, but the images of him with a cigarette and leather jacket on his motorcycle were displayed everywhere all the same. At least in people's heads. Well, that's how I wanted to be as well, set apart from this decrepit society. I was actually only 13 or 14 years old, but this calcified existence wasn't for me.

One evening it came to a head. I hesitated for a single instant, and then mentioned quite casually over dinner that a moped would really be a cool thing to have. My 16th birthday and the accompanying driver's licence were still a long way away, but it couldn't hurt just to carefully test the waters on this question. 'No, no, lad,' my father answered casually, but firmly. 'That's out of the question. You want to die in a crash? Not with my help. That could really mess you up!'

Although he was actually a very tolerant man, the idea of a moped was a red rag to him. Nevertheless, a few months later, when he got wind of the fact that I was seriously interested in music, he took me to one side and said: 'Lad, your birthday is coming soon. What do you say I buy you a nice guitar?'

What a question! Of course I wanted one. And some! And yet, after the initial joy I came to realise quite quickly that playing the guitar was a lot harder than I had thought, and so it ended up in my cupboard after a few tries. Dammit! I had everything so beautifully imagined.

Me and the guitar! Love at first sight looked different every time. Somehow we still lacked the firestarter, the spark to let me really get to grips with this stupid guitar. The attraction really hadn't worked out, so I went back to playing football with my mates from the sports club.

### **THE BIG QUESTION: WHAT WOULD I BE?**

I was getting near to finishing school and we slowly but surely had to decide on a career. My mates became bricklayers, scaffolders, carpenters or tilers and were quite content with their choice, too, but somehow all that couldn't enthuse me. I wanted to experience something and bring some action to my everyday life. Training for a degree in life, as a globetrotter or adventurer - yeah, that would be something, but this? Pfff!

For a long time, my first choice was to be a hairdresser. Admittedly, I had a quite naïve and romantic notion of what was, in my eyes, an exceptionally artistic activity. Moreover, I spent hours as a teenager messing with my hair, which is something that hasn't changed to date, so in principle it was settled. At the front I had Elvis-locks and at the back the footballer-mullet-look. It hardly gets any worse, but almost 50 years ago this was hot shit. What held me back from snipping at other people's hair, though, was the fact that these hairdressers were all so greasy on top. Luckily, I woke up to the fact that it

wouldn't be possible to spend every day giving laid-back people cool hairstyles. The reality seemed to be, rather, one of spending hours properly blow-drying old ladies' perms, listening to conversations about Roy Black and getting a little pinch on the cheek as a tip. And that really had nothing at all to do with rock n' roll.

OK, by now I knew what I didn't want to do, but this realising didn't really bring me on any further. What did I enjoy doing? Not the slightest clue! I was quite good at Physics, so a career as a teleindicator assemblyman was the closest choice. All right then, I gave it a shot. I passed an aptitude test at Siemens and ploughed on ahead. Halleluja! And now what? A mate told me that at Hastra, Hanover-Brunswick Electricity PLC, you could get a fair amount of money, and that there were even vacancies there. My mother was getting impatient, so I thought to myself: to hell with it! If you don't know what you want to do anyway, why don't you just go to where the best money is? So I began training as a heavy current electrician. Woohoo!

Why I am telling you about this admittedly not very exciting episode? Simple! Because it was an exceptionally important lesson to me. For the first time in my life I was following the money. Instead of really taking care of myself and finding out what I really enjoyed doing, I allowed myself to be lulled and began some training or other just in order to make my surroundings, in this case my parents, happy. I had decided on a career which, in hindsight, was not totally pointless, but which did not in the least fulfil me on the inside. Well, in the early days of the Scorpions my technical knowledge did actually save us in one or two appearances, when I quickly soldered the membranes on the loudspeakers or was able to check the electrics on the equipment. But, as you know, that wasn't the point of it.

I spent the first year of study almost exclusively in the workshop and was bored to tears. In order to somehow distract myself from the daily grind I crafted myself a mini-guitar out of copper wires and put on a little rock n' roll show for my colleagues. I already had the right moves in my locker. Yeah! I didn't take this training at all seriously, because it meant nothing at all to me. I wanted to have a good time, nothing more. Sadly, I seemed to be quite alone in this attitude. My older colleagues in the company were OK really, but unbelievably grim. Sure, from time to time they had a laugh at the faces I pulled, but with an agonised facial expression rather than from deep within them. The idea that it was possible to have fun at work, and to develop further as a result of this energy, was

not part of their thought processes. You just have to graft, really grapple, eat shit and break your bones for your money! In their eyes, only that counted as honest work. By the sweat of your brow!

For me, this mentality was a clear sign of insecurity, and in order to conceal it they took themselves way too seriously and only had grim faces to show to themselves and their colleagues. They were convinced of what they were doing there to such an extent that what I did didn't alter their behaviour for a second. In their hearts they were unhappy. Not all of them, of course - for God's sake - but a comfortable majority all the same. That got me thinking. I didn't want to become that cold.

Every few months we had to take practical exams. I always sat in the back row, because from there you got the best view of the class. The instructor gave the signal to start and the race for the best grade was on. To start with I relaxed and observed how wildly the other trainees were filing their pieces of metal in order to be among the first. Shortly afterwards I heard curses from all over the room: 'God dammit!' - 'Oh no! Oh, no! What am I supposed to do now?' - 'Piece of shit!'

What had happened? They weren't concentrating on their work, their thoughts were already in the future, on when the grades would be given out. They already saw themselves as possible winners or losers, which led to them filing beyond their mark and having to begin all over again. It didn't make any sense to set off like a madman without actually knowing what you're doing. More haste, less speed!

I had a look at my file, at the small piece of metal on the workbench in front of me, and calmly pictured to myself what the result should look like. While the others were hectically pottering around, I said to myself: Rudolf, take it easy and, in the meantime, crack your jokes. As long as you stay relaxed and in a good mood and you finish your work in the time set, then everything will be hunky-dory. You don't have to be the best!

With this attitude I was always able to carry out my task excellently and, in the end, was even finished sooner than those going about their work sullenly and tensely. I know that starting anything is hard. Whether you are writing a book, composing a song or filing a piece of metal. Yet if you keep a cool head and don't lose faith in your own abilities, you automatically get into a healthy cycle in which nature will take care of things as if of its own accord. The work you would otherwise have spent half an eternity on will basically do itself. You'll see!

I'll let you in on something: I have just celebrated my 61st birthday, and I cannot remember the last time I worked hard. Yes, yes, I am fully aware that saying things like this will sound arrogant and conceited to some people, especially at a time of high unemployment. All the same, I say this because I think it's important. I have personally come to realise that I achieve nothing with hard work, so at some point or other I made the decision simply to steer clear of it. That said, in meetings with record labels or other business partners I have often had to act as though I were toiling away day and night like a workaholic just so as not to give them the impression of being a total loser. If you make substantially more than your fellow men while having a fabulous time to boot, then jealousy and resentment are not far off. That is basic. Keep your eyes peeled and look for something that you genuinely enjoy. Because if you only find your dream job, then work will no longer be a struggle for you, in fact it won't even seem like work any more. Do you see what I'm getting at?

In a recent survey by a large recruitment agency, 1385 employees in Germany, Austria and Switzerland were asked about their job. It emerged that one in two Germans are dissatisfied with his or her work and, in retrospect, would rather be pursuing a completely different career path. Half of all Germans therefore have to work hard every day in order to make ends meet. One in two is unhappy. Isn't that just great?

I can think of a story on this point. One morning I came tripping into the kitchen having once again badly overslept. Work started at the company at 7 am and so I had to get up early accordingly. My mother was already up and was making breakfast.

'Good morning, mum,' I greeted her as usual. 'Tell me, what is the point of life?'

I hadn't planned to ask this question, it just came out of me. My mother turned towards me, baffled, and then turned back to her slices of cheese. 'I mean, you get up every morning, curse the alarm clock and go to work. What sense is there to it all?' I asked further.

'Well, that's just how it is!' is the answer that I got. I stood in the doorway and waited for the explanation to continue, but nothing more came, except: 'Now hurry up. You are still running late, my boy.'

Frustrated, I got my stuff together and set out. That's just how it is! My mother's words did not leave my mind. That's just how it is! Why is that how it is? I couldn't figure it out. The days came and went and my colleagues' dreary faces didn't change.

## THE SHOP WINDOW OF MY DREAMS

It happened in the first week of April 1965. I arrived at college almost half an hour late to be met by an enraged teacher. Red-faced, he drenched me with his tirade about punctuality. I had been allowing my training to slip for a while anyway, my grades were getting worse and worse, too, and so he was perfectly within his rights to take the opportunity to read me the riot act.

I just stood there in the middle of the classroom. Everything was just as normal, and yet suddenly I felt like an outsider. I looked at my classmates, at how they were staring at me curiously, and at my teacher, at how he was wildly gesticulating, and I sensed an unusual feeling of freedom awaken in me. Freedom that had nothing in common with this classroom and the people in it. Now and again some snatches of speech got through to me, but that was already totally uninteresting for me, since, as I had realised for the first time 20 minutes beforehand, my life had to change drastically.

Every Wednesday I had to take the tram from Sarstedt to college in Hanover, 20 kilometres away. There in the morning, back in the early afternoon. It wasn't my idea of a laugh, but then, as my mother had already told me, 'That's just what life is like'. The best part of the day was the journey from the tram stop to college, because that took me past all the shops that seemed so much bigger and more exciting than those in my small town. On this Wednesday, I was running late. The clock was showing just before eight, and I really had to hurry if I wanted to be in school before the bell rang. But it all seemed so banal. It was early spring and the temperature was pleasantly mild, even this early in the morning. I shuffled unhurriedly down the streets of the town with the other people on their way to work, except I was moving slower than the general flow of suffering people. As though touched by an invisible hand, I came to an abrupt halt. I had already been past this one shop window countless times, had on odd occasions even glanced inside, but never before had I appreciated what I saw inside that day.

Back then there weren't yet any real record shops like we have now. If you were lucky, though, you could find a small selection of the latest records in the corner of your local electrical appliance shop. In every town these shops all had the same names: Electro-Brinkmann, HiFi-Müller or TV-Hallmann. And I was now standing in front of just such a shop. For the first time I saw the record covers in the corner of the shop window and couldn't shake off my astonishment. My reflection look back at me in amazement. I was wearing a brown leather jacket with Indian fringes and my long, brown hair came down to

my shoulders. Welcome to the wild sixties! The hippie movement was just starting and we all went around trying to look a bit like John Lennon. All the same, I wasn't wearing Jesus sandals or one of those awful batik shirts that were just becoming fashionable. No way! It was an interesting time. The soundtrack to the James Bond film Goldfinger was number one on the American Billboard Top 20, Malcolm X had been murdered two months earlier in New York City, the first American troops were landing in Vietnam and there were reasons enough to demonstrate for peace and love. Some wore flowers in their hair, others sang rock songs.

There I stood, and the small, coloured covers of the 7-inch singles worked their magic, drawing me closer. I couldn't do anything about it. I was totally hypnotised. The chart number one at the time, Downtown by Petula Clark, hung above it. Next to it were Viva Las Vegas by Elvis and House of the Rising Sun by the Animals. Directly underneath the LPs stood in a row: The Rolling Stones, the Stones' debut album, Another Side of Bob Dylan, his fourth album, Live at the Apollo by James Brown and, of course, the top record in the German album charts: Beatles For Sale by, you guessed it, Ringo, George, Paul and John.

That was all fantastic enough, but then my gaze settled on a concert placard for the Starclub in Hamburg, with a picture of a band called The Rattles on it. These guys came from Hamburg and were the hottest band in German rock at the time. They were touring England with Little Richard, the Everly Brothers and the Stones, playing at the legendary Cavern Club in Liverpool and were even being celebrated as the German Beatles in the motherland of rock music - as big as could be imagined for German musicians. I didn't know much - well, actually I didn't know anything at all - about the music industry, but the hype following this band still wasn't news to me. Most of all, I was fascinated by the fact that this group didn't come from far-flung England or the USA, but rather lived near to me.

Looking at the poster, I had a feeling of lightness like I had never had before. It was as if these guys, who were only a couple of years older than me, were living my dream, and I imagined how cool it would be to read my own name on the poster. In my mind, I had the picture right in front me, of me playing guitar on stage, of my name on the cover of my band's records and of how people from all over the whole world loved it.

Then, something quite incredible happened. The letters on the Rattles poster started moving and, for a moment, I could actually read my own name on the placard. I had ne-

ver experienced anything like that in my life before. It was as if I was electrified, I didn't know whether I was dreaming or awake and I felt a cold shiver go down my back. What was happening to me? Was I having a vision? Was it a sign from the universe? I didn't know, but this hallucination, which seemed so real to me, opened my eyes in a flash: 'Rudolf, that's it! Rock musician is the path for you!'

This moment was a key experience in my life. I have often wondered since at how blindly most people go through life. Happiness is right under their noses and yet they can't see it. All they have to do is reach out their arms and take it. If you have once set yourself in the right direction, then the world will reorder itself around you without you yourself having to contribute too much to it. You get an automatic lift and things happen that you would never have been able to imagine. All you have to do is gain total understanding of your surroundings with every pore of your body every day and every night. The guitar, the moped, my mother's words, the shop window, my work colleagues' faces, my dreams - all these different components suddenly came together in my head - and in the end a clear picture emerged from all the pieces of the jigsaw.

If you go through your day with open ears and open eyes and try to appreciate the many small nuances indicating your next step to you, then you too will find the right path for you. It's like a scavenger hunt. Pay attention to the chalk arrows on the street! The universe is constantly sending you signals, you just have to set your antenna to receive. You will do well to rely on your gut instincts, since that is your true being. Your head can lead you astray, but your gut only wants what's best for you. If your heart gives the OK, then what you do will automatically come from the right motives and so can only be right. As I said, the treasure is under your feet. All you have to do is dig it up and not be afraid of the responsibility that your new riches will bring you.

### **WHEN AXL ROSE HEARD THE SCORPIONS A LIGHT WENT ON!**

Axl Rose once told Klaus and me a crazy story when our paths crossed at the tribute concert for the recently deceased Freddie Mercury at the beginning of the nineties. At that time we were both at the high points of our careers. Get this! Axl told us that it was because of the Scorpions that he decided to become a singer. For real!

At the beginning of the eighties he was waiting at traffic lights in L.A. and heard loud music coming at him from all sides. At first he paid not attention, but then he listened closer and he realised that different Scorpions songs were blasting out of every one of the cars around him. He knew them all. Instead of just driving off, he interpreted this moment as a kind of sign, a signal from fate, and thought to himself: that's it, it's settled. I'll do what the Scorpions did and become a rock musician like them! The rest is history: he founded Guns N' Roses, one of the most successful rock bands to date, and sold nearly one hundred million records.

Axl was only able to achieve all that, though, because at the decisive moment he was alert to the signals that his surroundings were sending him. There are many examples of people who find themselves in similar situations and just don't notice, because their thoughts are not in the here and now. They sleep through life at every moment of their existence and wonder why it's always other people who have fun and luck and success. Take me Down To Paradise City? No, you're already there! Keep your eyes peeled!

I was still standing in front of the shop window with my mouth wide open, already planning my new future. What a moment! Then I leapt like a lunatic down the streets and could hardly wait. The crucial factor was not so much the music, nor was it playing guitar, but rather this longing to fly around the world with friends, a real gang, and to experience something together, just like my mother had explained it to me: 'Music is what happens when several people come together and play something together on different instruments, and in the end you have a song that gets played on the radio.' I saw myself in a line with the Rattles, the Stones and the Beatles, which is why the subsequent reprimand from my teacher was of no consequence to me. In my head I had been on stage at New York Madison Square Gardens or the Hammersmith Apollo in London for a while, and was accepting applause from my fans. I'm telling you, I had the best kind of goosebumps. Because on this day I had the most important realisation of my life: live your life your way, not in terms of what other people expect of you!

So, now the moment had come to take my guitar back out of the cupboard. The spark I had been waiting so long for had been lit. A few days later I discovered an advert in a music magazine with the heading: 'How can I learn to play guitar in a week?' Perfect, I thought to myself, and wrote a letter to the firm based in Holland, and received my instruction sheets in the post a few days later.

My guitar was my most faithful companion and I practised like a man possessed. When my mother called me to dinner, I didn't give a damn and just called 'Not hungry!' back. I wanted to spend every spare minute with my six-stringed girlfriend, study her ways and learn to understand her. My grandma was always taking me to one side because she was worried about me, since all of a sudden I no longer had any appetite for her home-made chocolate cakes and was getting thinner every day. There just wasn't any time for food and drink any more. I went through a complete change of personality. The puppy fat I had carried on me for years disappeared, and with it the pimples, and I felt as if I had been re-born - which pleased girls no end. Yeah!

When my mother told an acquaintance from church choir about my new hobby, it emerged that this person's son also played an instrument. Once a week he and some friends would practise in the church basement, and I decided to stroll round there with my guitar. We got on straight away and so now I was part of a real band. The longer we spent strumming away for ourselves, the more ambitious I got. While the other guys only wanted to fool around a bit, I had bigger plans.