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Interview with DAVE KILMINSTER – Part 1

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*To many, Dave Kilminster came to prominence rather recently, when he became a lead guitarist in Roger Waters' band and started to solo atop *The Wall*. To this scribe, though, he became an artist to marvel at way back in the '90s, so there was a good reason and a pleasure to watch Dave play when the "Dark Side Of The Moon" show came to town.*

Before that, Kilminster's six-string colored music by such rock luminaries as [John Wetton](#), [Keith Emerson](#) and [Ken Hensley](#). More so, he released a solo album, "[Scarlet](#)", a few years ago, a new version of which emerged in 2012 and provided a nice excuse for a chat with the maestro who, just back from the gym and fairly tired, was in good spirits to be talking at length.

- So, Dave, "Scarlet". Why have you decided to re-cut it? What was wrong with it the first time around?

There were several problems with it. [It was] mainly to do with me rushing to finish the album. Roger [Waters] said that I could sell it on tour, and so I thought, "If I can finish it before we go away then that'll be great". We were going to Australia and New Zealand, and South America, and this could be really good for me. So I ended up working pretty much every day on it: I was in the studio on Boxing Day, I was in there on New Year's Eve, I was in here on a New Year's Day, just trying to finish it. And sometimes if you work so long and hard on something, you just get sick of hearing it. So I began to hate it, the whole album. I hated everything! (*Laughs.*) When I went back to it and had a listen, I'd heard some technical problems – mainly to do with the way that I recorded the guitar, and also we couldn't make the drum sound right and ended up with some drum samples, which I was never happy about. So I took it to a friend of mine, we got rid of the drum samples, we made the original drums sound how they should have sounded in the beginning, we took away some extra mics that had been on the cabinets – I recorded all the guitar parts with three mics on the cabinets and that was creating some kind of phasing problems. It didn't sound right. You know music is a listening thing: you want to put it on and let it wrap around your ears and be a pleasing sound, and the original version [of "Scarlet"] just wasn't right for me. So it's just my perfectionist nature that meant I had to go back and fix it. And now it sounds like it should have done before.

- With it being called "Scarlet", and now "Director's Cut", and "scarlet" close to "purple" and "cut" close to "murder"...

Oh, I see! I hadn't thought of that! I like that! (*Laughs.*)

- And then there's this cover picture: an enigmatic negative one where there was a portrait of a young buck before.

(*Even more laughter.*) Yes. I finished remixing it but I didn't have the artwork ready, and again, I was going away on

tour with this girl singer I was working with, and my friend Heather said, “You should do some white-label versions”, meaning that you have a CD with a plain cover. But actually I just had this instant vision of it being a kind of negative of a picture, which is what I ended up using. I didn’t mean to be enigmatic, I just wanted something different, really.

- Don’t you think some people may say that you re-release the album because of you’re recent exposure as Roger Waters’ guitarist?

No. No, it’s nothing to do with anybody or anything, it’s just me. I wanted to start recording a new album, but I just felt like I hadn’t done the first one properly. I just couldn’t leave it – it was driving me nuts. If you have a child, you want them to have the best start in life...

- You tell me! My kid’s in the other room now.

Then you know exactly what it’s like! (*Laughs.*) I don’t have children, but I have albums, and you want the best for them, you want them to be the best they can possibly be before they go out into the wide world. I’ve made the mistake once of releasing something that wasn’t quite right, and I won’t do that again. But saying that, I’m recording my next album next month, so I’m really looking forward to that.

- Let me quote my review of “Scarlet”: “it’s a showcase of his skills not so much as player, rather as a composer”. You always talk about the recording side of things – studio, sound – but what do you think of yourself as a writer?

OK. I think of myself more as a musician than a guitarist. When I was growing up and I listened to the radio, it was songs. I wouldn’t just listen to the guitar solo – I would listen to the vocals, listen to the lyrics, listen to the harmony vocals, listen to what the bass did, what the drums did: I liked the whole picture. And that’s what I do when I listen to music. Even if it’s classical music, I like to see all the different layers. So when I wanted to do an album, I wanted it to be interesting not just from a guitar point of view but from... I wanted normal people to like it, not just guitarists! (*Laughs.*)

- You mentioned layers, and your album has many of these, it’s destined to be peeled slowly to be seen and heard. Every time I listen to it, I find something new in it.

That’s wonderful. That’s exactly how I used to feel when I used to buy albums. My favorite albums ever are things like “A Night In The Opera” by QUEEN: I’ve listened to that countless times, but even now every time I play it I’m like, “Well, I didn’t hear that before!” I love that! I don’t like to hear an album once and feel like I heard everything. (*Laughs.*)

- But did you construct “Scarlet” with this goal in mind? For it to be deciphered, not only listened to?

(*Sighs.*) I wanted it to be an enjoyable listening experience, definitely. And I guess everyone is influenced by the things they grew up listening to. And if it’s reminiscent of other tracks that have extra layers or extra parts in them, then I’m very happy. I think it’s partly because I listen to a lot of classical music as well. It’s not like someone bashing away on one chord and a vocal: you have the strings doing one thing, you have the horns doing something else, the cellos doing a counter-melody – it’s all this stuff happening. And I love that, I love to hear music that creates an amazing atmosphere but also to analyze how the different parts fit together. I was very happy with the chorus in [the “Scarlet” song] “Angel”, ’cause there’s a lot of things going on there (*laughs*): there’s the guitar part, there’s the vocal, there’s the electric guitar, there’s a little slide guitar part, there’s some string part, there’s a piano little phrase that kind of answers the vocals. It was fun fitting all those things together to make it interesting.

- When I heard “Scarlet” for the first time – and it was not the “Director’s Cut” but its original version – what surprised me was that it was a vocal album, as I knew you, from “The Alchemists” album and so on, as a maestro instrumentalist. How do you rate yourself as a singer, then?

(Laughs.) That's a good question! "Scarlet" was the first time I ever tried to sing vocals, first time ever, first time I tried to record lead vocals. And I was quite pleased with it at the time but I know that now, four or five years later, my voice is a lot better, so I think the vocals on the next album will be more of how I wanted to sing. I didn't think I'm bad – I wouldn't sing if I didn't think there was something there – I think I get the emotion across, I get the point across. And also there's a lot of terrible singers out there in famous rock bands. *(Giggles.)*

- Harking back to "The Alchemists", you could be associated with shredding. Personally, I don't like shredders as, to me, a zillion notes per minute is intellectual as opposed to emotional. How do you find this balance?

I don't listen to guitar instrumental albums 'cause I get bored: it's too much, as you say, it's just too much even for me... I can listen to it and I can understand it but it doesn't move me emotionally. I want to play music for people – that's the most important thing to me – I want to play music that anybody can appreciate on whatever level. I don't just want to play for guitarists. I mean there's lots of famous guitarists who do – someone like...

- ...Yngwie.

Yeah, Yngwie, I guess. *(Laughs.)* It's just a little tasteless, which is a shame, because he's actually a great player. But someone like Allan Holdsworth: [he's an] incredible guitarist, but I think most of the people at an Allan Holdsworth gig are people who play guitar.

- The same about John McLaughlin, right?

Yeah, maybe the same, actually. I prefer when he plays acoustic, 'cause that seems to be more emotional to me.

- With Paco De Lucia.

Yes. I want to get some emotion across: that's the thing that I miss through a lot of guitar instrumental albums. There's very, very few guitar instrumental albums that I would say, "Yeah, I really like that".

- Does this balance of emotional and technical come with age?

Um, maybe, maybe. I did use to write instrumental music, I did an album on classical guitar called "Playing With Fire", which is all instrumental, but there just seemed to be something about the classical guitar that was more emotional and you could get more feelings across. But I think in the end of the day I just wanted to play songs again. You know all my favorite music when I was growing up was QUEEN, 10CC, THE EAGLES, Joni Mitchell, and it was just songs, things that actually affected people on an emotional level. I don't hear a lot of guitar instrumental stuff that affects me like that.

- Even Link Wray?

Oh! Interesting! *(Laughs.)* I know just one of his tunes, actually.

- Most people do so!

Yes. I think Jeff Beck is possibly the best of them, in my opinion. He has this vocal style on the guitar that's not too fast, that's not too flashy. It's a great sound, it speaks to you.

- Talking of age... Even though I've been listening to your records for so long, I was quite shocked to know you're 50. I used to think you're a little older than a teenager. And you still look the part.

(Laughs.) I think music keeps you young. I think playing music keeps you young.

- And how do you react to the people's perception of you as a sidekick to the



stars?

(More laughter.) That's an interesting one! Uh, I guess that's how I've made my living for the past few years. That got me out of teaching, so I really don't mind, because I just love to play music. To me, it's the performing in front of people; it doesn't matter whether it's twenty people or twenty thousand, or two billion like [it was] when we did the Concert For Hurricane Sandy in December. And I've been very lucky to play with some quite famous people, which has put me on the big stage. But I played two concerts last November in a museum, in Rome: two little acoustic shows, and they were two of my favorite shows ever. [There were] maybe two hundred people, but it was just playing music. Playing music in its purist form is a wonderful thing.



- So we cannot say that “Scarlet” is an attempt on your side to prove yourself as an artist in your own right?

I don't feel the need to prove myself as much as... I just have music in my head. Ever since I'd picked up an instrument I've been writing, and I think now is the time for me to record it so that the other people could hear it before I get too old. *(Laughs.)*

Over to Part 2: Dave as a guitar foil and more...

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May 17, 2013 at 5:26 pm

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