

# Concerto Interview with David Rosenthal

10/28/97

## 1. How did you get to participate in this Concerto project? How did it happen?

"Yngwie invited me down to Miami to play on a couple of songs on his Inspiration album. We had a great time working on the record and we really clicked musically. It was just in passing that he started talking about this idea he had to do the concerto. He said he wanted to do a full blown piece with an orchestra and that he was just at the very early stages of the idea. I knew that he didn't read or write music so I asked him if he had someone to do the orchestration. We began to talk in more detail and I instantly understood what he was looking to do. We connected right from the very beginning. Even though I was very interested in the project, when I got back home I never really expected to hear from him again because so many people talk about these big grandiose ideas and never follow up on them. But sure enough a few weeks later I got a call from Jim Lewis (his manager) to discuss it further, and a few weeks after that we got started."

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## 2. What was the first impression of this project when you heard about it?

"My first impression of the project was - 'I've gotta get involved in this!' Yngwie's got great ideas and comes up with some great melodies, and I knew right from the beginning that we would make a really good team. Working on a full-scale orchestral piece is something that I've wanted to do for a long time, and this was the perfect opportunity to do it."

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## 3. What did you think of Yngwie before working with him in this project? And in this sense, how did you feel when you actually worked with him?

"Yngwie has a bit of a reputation in the business, shall we say, as being a little tough to work with at times and a perhaps a little wild. But he's a perfectionist. And I'm a perfectionist. We immediately found that we had that in common. And when we got in a room by ourselves with just a guitar and a keyboard, we totally clicked. I didn't really come across any of the things that other people have said they've come across when working with him. We have a tremendous mutual respect for each other and I think this translated into a very positive working relationship. I really had a great time working with him."

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## 4. What was the most difficult part when you wrote the score? And how long did it take to finish?

"One of the challenges of writing the score was dealing with the way Yngwie tunes his guitar. He tunes a half step flat, which means his open strings are Eb, Ab, Db, Gb, Bb and Eb. When he strums an E chord, it sounds like an Eb chord. So while he's playing away in E minor throughout the concerto, the rest of the world has to play in Eb minor which has 6 flats! One of the movements ended up in Ab minor which has 7 flats!

Needless to say, sight reading in these key signatures is very difficult. I figured that the orchestra would have very little time to rehearse, and that they'd probably have to sight read the whole thing. So I suggested to Yngwie very early on that he should consider tuning to concert pitch, in the interest of

**making life easier for the orchestra. He said "No way - this is the way I play and this is my sound. The orchestra will have to deal with it."**

**On one hand, I respected his decision for standing his ground and staying true to his unique style and sound. On the other hand, he really made it tough for the whole orchestra. And I had to deal with millions of flats in the score! It was flats and flats and flats and flats! After a while, I just got used to it. But when other musicians look at it for the first time they are a little intimidated by the key signatures. And then they get used to it."**

**"It took 7 months to complete the first draft of the score, and this included making demos. Since Yngwie doesn't read or write music, I couldn't show him the score and say, "Hey, what do you think?" The only way to present my orchestration to him was to make a demo of it. So I assembled the 'Rosenthal Philharmonic' using 7 Kurzweil modules and then played every one of the parts in the entire score. This way Yngwie could play over it and make sure that he was comfortable with the arrangement. This was incredibly time consuming but we ended up with a pretty good idea of what it was going to sound like.**

**Then came the massive task of proofreading my [307 page score](#). During this time I was also creating the parts - which also had to be proofread. I ended up with about 1500 pages of individual parts that all had to be put together, sorted and collated, and it all had to be right! If everything wasn't accurately proofread right down to the note, it wouldn't have mattered how good my orchestration was. So I really took my time to proofread everything properly. In total, creating the parts and proofreading took about 2 months. So the whole project from start to finish took about 9 months."**

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## **5. What directions (instructions) did you give to the orchestra during the recording in Prague?**

**"I didn't have any direct discussions with the orchestra, since that was the conductor's job. I explained to him what I was looking for, and after that I had to trust him to communicate it to the orchestra. However, the language barrier was a tough thing. Most of the musicians in the orchestra spoke Czech. Fortunately the conductor spoke some German which the orchestra understood a little bit more of than English. So between that and the universal language of musical terminology, they managed to communicate."**

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## **6. What was the most important part in recording the orchestra?**

**"The most important part in recording the orchestra was making sure that we had the flexibility to mix it properly after Yngwie put his guitars on. Each of the sections of the orchestra were individually miked and recorded onto separate tracks. These tracks could later be used in the mix to enhance the overall stereo blend of the orchestra. This gave us the control we needed to compensate for changes in the orchestral blend that would occur after the guitar was added.**

**We also needed to have complete isolation on Yngwie's guitar tracks, so we decided it would be best for him to overdub his parts. This would also allow him to perform his guitar parts in the privacy of his own studio, in his own time and space, and not have to worry about all the other musicians and everything else that was going on during the orchestral recording sessions.**

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## **7. What was the most memorable thing in the orchestral recording?**

**"The whole thing was a memorable experience. I can't isolate one event. It was an amazing feeling to**

sit there and listen to a 90 piece orchestra and a 40 piece choir play something that I had orchestrated for them. As I mentioned earlier, most ideas like this never come to fruition. But there we were, in Prague, in front of the orchestra, and the piece was actually being performed and recorded. It was very exciting!"

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#### **8. What was the most important point when you mixed the album in Miami?**

"Unfortunately I wasn't able to be there for the mix, but I wish I could have been."

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#### **9. What kinds of things did you talk about with Yngwie, Chris Tsangaridos and Tomo Ezaki and how did you communicate with them while working on this project?**

"Mostly with Yngwie, we talked about cars, women and partying...(just kidding!!). Yngwie and I worked very closely throughout the creation of the whole project. We shared a vision of it. The recording team that was assembled was there to make sure that the end result carried out what the initial vision was. Chris is Yngwie's producer and is also an engineer. He's been working with Yngwie for years and is very familiar with how he plays and what his sound is. His job was to oversee the entire recording process and insure that the guitar was recorded properly. Tomo is a classical engineer who specializes in orchestral recording. He was there to make sure that the orchestra was properly recorded. I was there to make sure that the score was being played correctly, and the conductor was there to make sure that the orchestra kind of stayed together.

On a technical level we talked about the recording process and some of the complications that would come up as a result of mixing a loud distorted guitar with an orchestra. Because it's not commonly done, we wanted to be prepared for as many possibilities as we could so that the recording sessions would run smoothly. The initial plan was to digitally record the orchestra to multi-track, and then have Yngwie overdub his guitars on analog tape while watching a video tape of the conductor during the orchestral recording sessions. Even though we planned all this in advance with Tomo and Chris, at the sessions it never happened that way. I guess the language barrier played a role here as well.

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#### **10. What part did you feel most challenging and exciting in this project?**

"Orchestrating a classical style piece for a musician who doesn't read music was very challenging. Yngwie was forced to memorize the whole thing, yet he's a very free player who's accustomed to playing in a band where he's the leader and the band always follows him. But an orchestra will not follow him. They can't add an extra time around the solo section if you feel like playing a longer solo, and they definitely can't jam! They play what's on the page and that's that. I explained this to Yngwie repeatedly because he kept saying things like, "Let's do it this way... or maybe we'll do it that way..." And I would say, "We can do it any way you want, but you've gotta pick one, and then you've gotta lock into it. The orchestra will play whatever we want them to, but once it's on paper that's what they're going to do and you'll have to memorize it and be comfortable with it." So we ended up with certain parts where the melodies are set, and other parts where he is free to solo. Even though he'll never play the piece the same way twice, he'll basically stay within the framework of this structure.

The guy's got a remarkable memory to have memorized the whole thing, but it did come out pretty different from the original demo. But who's too say which is right or which is wrong - it's just two different versions of it, and the public will probably never hear the demo."

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## **11. Finally, what do you think and how do you feel after accomplishing this project?**

**This project has been a real milestone in my musical career. I got to use a lot of the techniques that I had studied many years ago at Berklee and never really had the chance to employ on a professional basis. Being able to hear an orchestra play something that I spent so much time working on was a tremendous experience. The fact that it actually went from idea to completion and now the public will get to hear it is also very exciting. I see this concerto as my first big orchestral project. I plan to do many, many more.**