

ACCEPT - True Metal Hearts

A 25-Year History of Germany's Very Own Metal Gods

by Gaby Hoffmann

Life - so the saying goes - starts with a birthday doesn't it? But in ACCEPT's case an exact birthday is hard to pinpoint. There had been a band named ACCEPT in existence since the early 1970's. Founded by Udo Dirkschneider, they had been playing on an amateur level in and around their hometown of Solingen, Germany. Although they had professional ambitions, things moved along slowly. Members came and went as they tried to find their identity and write their own songs.

It wasn't until 1976 that the pace began to pick up. They were finally recognized by a major record company at one of Germany's very first Rock Festivals - the legendary ROCK AM

ACCEPT - Fall 1976

RHEIN. A stunned audience of a few thousand rock fans witnessed the beginning of a new musical style which, at that point, had not even been named "Heavy Metal." The line up then was: Udo Dirkschneider, voc., Wolf Hoffmann, guit., Peter Baltes, bass, Gerhard Wahl, guit. (replaced in 1978 by Jörg Fischer), and on the drums, Frank Friedrich.

Life would never be the same again for this young and outstanding bunch of wild and obnoxious boys from Solingen, a small town in Germany's industrial melting pot. They were signed right away and, at this early point, none of them really had any idea about the workings of the music industry. A few month later they found themselves in a studio - yes, a genuine, professional recording studio - to produce their first album 'ACCEPT.' The result tapped unknown waters. Udo's vocals, embedded in a war of electrical instruments - loud, aggressive and brutal - instantly helped to establish the trademark ACCEPT sound. There was no comparison. Never before had sounds like this assaulted the human ear - or perhaps, the gut. From day one it was the enormous power that swept the fans away.

Interestingly enough, bass player Peter Baltes was featured singing two of the songs on this debut album, 'Sounds of War' and 'Seawinds.' This seemed unusual in this kind of band setting, but it would be repeated on later albums. Their musical style was not as defined as it would become on following albums, but their craftsmanship and ability to compose outstanding music was already showing.

After the recording of the first album, drummer Frank Friedrich decided not to join the others in their journey towards a professional music career and he handed over the sticks to STEFAN KAUFMANN. The seeds were planted. Their second album, 1980's 'I'M A REBEL.' could not describe the band any better. When 'I'M A REBEL' started to lurk around the charts, the band received offers to play their first TV shows and they got their first glimpse of popularity.

The band's image, especially their live shows, sent a clear message: No mercy for the wicked - if one wanted to survive this - they'd better be prepared for an earthquake. Udo's voice, the brutality of the guitar attacks and the driving power of drums and bass made this band a cornerstone for a new musical style that was defined by a term sweeping over from Great Britain: Heavy Metal.

Then, in 1981, came the third album, 'BREAKER' (mixed by MICHAEL WAGENER, who later became an international big wig as THE Hard Rock Producer in LA). This was also the year they signed a management deal with German manager Gaby Hauke - a relationship that would last throughout ACCEPT's lifespan. The stage was then set, and from that moment on they kicked into high gear supporting the mighty JUDAS PRIEST all over Europe. This would open the doors for their own worldwide popularity over the next decade. The band worked relentlessly. The only "break" for ACCEPT was the in the title of their latest album, BREAKER.

In 1982 the first signs of stress mandated an internal change. Jörg Fischer would depart the band just before the recording their next album 'RESTLESS & WILD,' produced by MICHAEL WAGENER. In the studio all guitar work was done by Wolf.

In many ways this album was a milestone in ACCEPT's career. With the thundering double bass drum attack of the song 'FAST AS A SHARK,' they helped to spark a genre which would soon be called "Speed Metal."

It was not until many years later that the impact of ACCEPT on Heavy Metal and Speed Metal was mentioned by major rock acts as being influential, inspiring and definitively historical. The riffs on 'RESTLESS & WILD' will be used by thousands of young guitarists for generations to come. No Hard Rock History can be written without mentioning ACCEPT. 'RESTLESS & WILD'

also featured the popular 'PRINCESS OF THE DAWN,' an anthem for every ACCEPT fan. It is during this period that ACCEPT precisely defined their unique identity on stage. Their destiny as a hardcore mega-power was manifested. Merciless rehearsals enabled the band to present a show unlike anything ever seen before; precise as a machine with twin guitar duels and, of course, Udo's killer voice. A brand name was established and has not been forgotten to this day. For their extensive touring they hire German guitarist HERMAN FRANK.

ACCEPT were driven by passion, and their music was in constant overflow. Before the year's end they had written and produced their masterpiece, 'BALLS TO THE WALL' (mixed by Michael Wagener). The self-produced album contained a number of surprises.

With lyricist DEAFFY, they created a concept album that dared to discuss the most delicate and controversial themes previously unheard of in Heavy Metal. Topics included: politics, love, sexuality, church, consciousness, responsibility, and anti-addiction of any kind. Themes that had never been explored before were presented in a way that inspired many to discuss different viewpoints. ACCEPT's own personal beliefs became an issue that has divided people's opinions about ACCEPT until this very day because of the controversial context. Nevertheless, ACCEPT received undisputed respect for their responsibility in music. That is what they have stood for in the past and that's what they will represent forever.

The identity of DEAFFY would be a mystery and conversation point for many years until it was finally revealed that this individual was no other than manager, Gaby Hauke. In fact, it was she who wouldwrite the lyrics for all ACCEPT albums from `BALLS TO THE WALL' on. However, she simply wanted all of the attention to go to the band, not to her.

Gaby, a person of total privacy, had always been coaching ACCEPT's career from behind the scenes but never more than a heartbeat away. Her professional work has made her one of the few female managers who are accepted and respected to this day. It is she who opened the gates to the world for this young, German band along with the help and support of partners such as: Breeze Music in Germany, BMG International, SONY New York, JVC Japan as well as booking agencies like ITB, ICM, Mr.UDO and many others who have stayed loyal to Gaby and ACCEPT for 20 years. This very impressive partnership sold millions of records and made ACCEPT one of the biggest players in this musical genre.

Time passed quickly for the band during this period. In 1983, at a Christmas show in their hometown, they ran into Jörg Fischer. Then and there they decided to give him another try upon the insistence of manager Gaby Hauke. Once again, Jörg Fischer was the new/old other half of the infamous double Flying V force.

America, Asia, Europe... ACCEPT had conquered the world! And when the band returned home in 1984, they finished the tour with a spectacular performance at the legendary MONSTERS OF ROCK festival show. Germany goes crazy for their new heroes and ACCEPT are in heaven.

Shortly thereafter, ACCEPT teamed up with producer DIETER DIERKS (who had previously found fame with the German rock band SCORPIONS) to record their next release, 'METAL HEART.'

This album is a vision of the future predicting, in the title song, that in 1999 people with computerized metal hearts would run the world. The cover was a custom-made Metal Heart with its inner workings - a meticulously constructed computer - visible through a glass door. And, strangely enough, like many ACCEPT lyrics, the vision of cold-hearted mankind in 1999 is - surely today - not so difficult to believe anymore. If one goes through the lyrics, it is amazing how - then and now - the controversies are still alive and how clear the vision was.

Again, with `METAL HEART' they proved that their talent and fame was not short-lived. ACCEPT could be found in international charts and their stage show was presented around the globe. Legions of die-hard fans, gold albums, sold out shows - they had it all.

In 1985, two more albums were released - 'KAIZOKU BAN' and 'RUSSIAN ROULETTE' (mixed again by MICHAEL WAGENER). They had established themselves in the highest ranks of rock bands and they took this responsibility very seriously. Never failing, they always gave their 100% best on stage and off. The pressure to deliver another outstanding album forced the band to work even harder.

Unfortunately, as is often the case in life, not everybody can withstand extreme challenges. The band was constantly travelling and had to adapt to a lifestyle of forced environments such as hotels, tour busses, etc. - all with little or no privacy. Over the long run, this took its toll on each

member. Despite the fact that they were able to handle all of their differences in a very civilized manner, the fact remained that the individuals who comprised ACCEPT were maturing into adulthood. This meant a growing divergence of opinions, interests and priorities in life.

Since their tours in 1984, Peter Baltès, Wolf Hoffmann and Gaby Hauke all fell in love with America. More and more time is spent in their new homeland, soaking up new influences, exploring new grounds. This also meant being away from Udo, Stefan and Jörg, who did not share this passion. The distance in miles fueled a distance in minds.

Also, the "boys" were now men, each of whom wanted to control his own life, leaving less room for ACCEPT. However, a mutual agreement to treat each other with respect saved them from unpleasant experiences. A break was agreed to and everybody welcomed the idea that Udo would try a solo project.

Peter, Wolf, Jörg and Stefan offered to write a complete album for Udo, which they did in their own Studio in New England. The result was 'ANIMAL HOUSE' which, to this day, has been the most successful album of Udo's solo career. Gaby Hauke then worked hard to launch Udo's solo project and she succeeded by arranging a tour for U.D.O. throughout Europe and America.

In the meantime, Peter, Wolf and Stefan (Jörg had once again left the band) were working on songs in a broader musical scope. Dieter Dierks was very excited when he received the first demos and he agrees to produce the new album. They found a new singer in American DAVID REECE. The result was 'EAT THE HEAT,' an album with great commercial potential. A new life seemed to start - without Udo.

A first tour was then booked to support the new album. The band's line-up for this American tour was DAVID REECE, WOLF HOFFMANN, PETER BALTÈS, STEFAN KAUFMANN, and a second guitar player, JIM STACEY of Britain. The shows went extremely well and the band developed a different dimension. Record companies and critics were in sync that this was "going to be very big."

But life is hard to predict. After 3/4 of one of the most stressful of ACCEPT's tours, drummer STEFAN KAUFMANN had succumb to a serious back problem and was forced to leave for Germany and immediate medical attention. HOUSE OF LORDS drummer, KEN MARY, helped out and made the loss nearly unrecognizable.

But ACCEPT had yet more problems to deal with. DAVID REECE couldn't be handled on tour. It quickly became clear that he was his own worst enemy. At that point, the remaining members, WOLF HOFFMANN and PETER BALTÈS, and manager GABY HAUKE decided to throw in the towel. It was a tough but necessary decision to save what was left of ACCEPT out of respect for the fans. It was time to go home, regroup and recharge their batteries.

But being separated did not mean being detached.

When 'STAYING A LIFE' - a double album - is released in 1990, a worldwide demand for a reunited ACCEPT grows louder and louder. Soon, Wolf returned to Germany for a visit with

Stefan and Udo where they all (including Peter) agreed that there was no other way - they decided to give it another try.

While creating the new songs, they decided to work as a four-piece band from this point - without a second guitar player. Wolf was then responsible for all guitar parts in the studio as well as on the road. The result was 'OBJECTION OVERRULED' released in 1993.

To the delight of their fans and all business partners involved - Gaby had kept the lines open - the magic of the band was still there. And, with their trademark controversial and current lyrical themes, they proved once again that ACCEPT ruled! The world tour that followed received an open-armed welcome from the fans. Everyone agreed, the reunion was a smashing success. And because of this overwhelming response, the band members held on to their dream that ACCEPT would go on forever.

But many things had changed; the music scene had grown and a new generation of fans had widened the gap between 'old' and 'new' music. In 1994, the next album, 'DEATH ROW,' demonstrated this constant fight to reach the next level - the wider horizon. When STEFAN KAUFMANN's back problem once again forced him to stop playing drums in the middle of the recording sessions for 'DEATH ROW,' they stumbled but nevertheless decided to continue with STEFAN SCHWARZMANN as a temporary replacement.

Seemingly before anybody realized it, they were back in the touring-recording-touring pattern which began to take its toll on everybody's ability to cope. The wild, young bunch from Solingen were now living in different parts of the world, developing different interests in life. Most were married and family life created issues to be dealt with. But they still shared the common bond that had kept them going from day one in Solingen until today - their love for music, performing in front of their fans and creating new songs together. But it got harder and harder to keep the machinery going.

They knew they couldn't keep it up forever, but once again, they decided to get together and go for another round. The possibility that this might be the end of a long career together was already in the back of some of their minds when they agreed to meet in Nashville in the summer of 1995 to record 'PREDATOR' (produced again by Michael Wagener).

A new drummer, American hot shot MICHAEL CARTELLONE (Ted Nugent/Damn Yankees), was hired and Peter once again was featured as the vocalist on some of the songs. This added fuel to the already smoldering fire within the band.

A final tour of North and South America, Asia and Europe wrote the final chapter as over 20 years of Heavy Metal came to an end. In June of 1996 they bowed to their fans for the last time in Tokyo, Japan. It was time to leave... The Metal legends ACCEPT are resting - this chapter is closed, but not lost and their music will live forever.

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