

MICHAEL ERNST

with **ALAN PARSONS & CHRIS THOMPSON**

EXCALIBUR

ALAN PARSONS co-produced, played and sang passages on the album. Besides **MICHAEL ERNST**, the lead vocals were also sang by world renowned **CHRIS THOMPSON** (Manfred Mann's Earthband).



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The story of EXCALIBUR

Michael ERNST

Once upon a time there was ... This is how we ought to start the story of this project and how it developed, because already in 1983, singer and composer Michael ERNST had the idea for the project for the first time. Actually Michael wanted to pack a couple of songs, which he had written up to this time, into a concept dealing with the story of the sword Excalibur, King Arthur and the magician Merlin. These were songs hitherto meant to show Michael's career as an artist (The title "People Shall Be Free" was written by Michael at the age of twelve). But things turned out differently, and it would take longer for Michael to realize this dream. The first demos were actually recorded in a little Viennese recording studio at the beginning of 1984 (among others the title "Time To Change"). But Michael had dreamed of recording with an orchestra ever since. For this reason the financial means necessary for this project could not be provided at once. Meanwhile, however, the story was developing: with his partner at that time, Rudolf Simmer, Michael compiled the songs, the basic concept and ideas for a possible musical. These ideas resulted in a first stage adaptation. In 1988, the first title of the compilation of that time was released and soared immediately to number 4 on the Austrian Charts. Nevertheless the recording company was not willing to finance this project in the end.

Andreja ERNST

About the same time Andreja took over Michael's management. After several unsuccessful attempts to get a contract with any of the other recording companies, Michael and Andreja decided to do something of serious consequence: they financed the production of the album themselves hoping the money necessary to fund it would flow back through sale from the production later on. Top musicians from Germany and

Austria (such as Bernd Cohn, Dave King, and Robbie Musenbichler, conducted by Günter Baumgartner) were hired to start the production at the beginning of 1990.

Richard SUTCLIFFE

Also the lyrics that have been based on Michael's ideas to this day were adapted for the first time. Together with Richard Sutcliffe, an English author, Michael rewrote almost all the lyrics of what was later to become the Excalibur album.

Alan PARSONS

In April, 1990 - the production was almost completed - the finishing touches to the songs had to be done. For this reason Andreja simply called Alan in his studio one night and invited him to take part in the production. Though Alan was obviously very busy with his own projects, he came to Vienna and on this occasion he met Michael and Andreja for the first time. But let me tell you - first he had cancelled his participation in the production for the time being... The day he finally arrived was a day none of them would ever forget! At first there was the recording studio "Hörnix" in Gettsdorf, Lower Austria. People there had not really expected the visit from one of the world's most famous producers and sound engineers. After realizing Alan's potential visit, the workers got busy cleaning the studio until it gleamed. A photographer was hired to document the legendary visit. The tapes of the production were ready to be listened to. Afterwards Andreja and Michael and their VIP-guest went back to Vienna to have lunch at a typically Viennese "Gasthaus". (A "Gasthaus" is an Austrian kind of restaurant where you get plain cooking of the region and few national dishes like "Wiener Schnitzel" at low or average prices - translator's note). Michael remembered a nice "Gasthaus" where he had been as a child with his parents. They decided to go there. Strange enough to see, there was a lot of personnel standing at the entrance to welcome them... They chose a table and the menu was brought to them. It was at this point that it dawned on Michael and Andreja that this "Gasthaus" was now very exclusive. It was now called "Steirereck" and was one of the most-known and most exquisite gourmet-restaurants in Austria. The prices were accordingly... They were enjoying a top grade menu. Alan, being the connoisseur of wine made his recommendation. The lunch in itself was an adventure - especially when the bill was received... Of course Michael wanted to invite his guest, but the restaurant did not accept credit cards. As a result, Michael apologized and left the restaurant to obtain the cash needed. In view of the financial situation - the production-budget was

totally consumed - a risky undertaking. Would the cash dispenser spit out what was needed, and would it spit out the card, as well?! It got rather thrilling, when Michael placed his card into the cash dispenser. But the sound of "counting banknotes" in the automat calmed Michael. Consequently, he was able to pay the bill. This was to be the first of many meetings (in England and in Austria) between Andreja, Michael and Alan. At their second meeting at "The Grange" - Alan's recording studio in Kent (where among other things "Gaudi" was produced), Alan held out a prospect of producing the song "A Long Long Time Ago". As an example he played another song to Michael to show him how he could imagine the arrangement of "A Long Long Time Ago". But Michael, in his uncompromising way did not make use of the offer for the time being. In 1996, after further meetings and discussions, Alan promised his contribution to "Excalibur" as a co-producer for the entire album. This was now definite! Hard years would however follow, because none of the sought after recording companies and publishers were willing to publish the work in its original fashion. At least at the time, Michael and Andreja were doing privately well. In October, 1990, they got married and Andreja moved over to Michael's with her four children. Their daughter Virginia was born in the beginning of 1991.

Chris THOMPSON

In 1993, Andreja and Michael met Chris THOMPSON at an Alan PARSONS concert in Munich for the first time. Before this, Chris had been in contact with Andreja and so the after-show party was the ideal place to get acquainted with each other. They had a conversation in which Michael (in jest) said that he would like to write a song for Chris. Chris gave a smile and then retorted "I write my own songs." This he had proven very well with the John Farnham-song "You're The Voice." He did not need a song or further more a songwriter, or did he?! When leaving, he turned around and said "But who knows, never say never." and off he went.

WELTMUSIK

In the end of 1994, for the first time a publisher in Vienna (Weltmusik) was willing to invest in the project. The vocals were redone and a new rough-mix was made. This improved mix was handed over to Chris by Andreja during a Manfred Mann-concert. She asked him, if he could imagine singing one or two songs as a guest-singer. After a couple of weeks Chris answered and said yes. He would like to sing the titles "Time To Change" and "Goodbye", but he wanted to rewrite the lyrics. What followed then was that Chris rewrote almost all of the songs and sang half the titles on the album.

In 1996, there was another important meeting, namely with

Ronnie SEUNIG

By an old friend Michael's attention was drawn to "Excalibur City" sit-

uated at the Austrian-Czech border. The owner, Ronnie Seunig, had earned a fortune in the duty-free business and was obviously investing in things that had to do with the Arthur Legend. This Michael would later find out. At first Andreja sent a fax to Ronnie's company without any expectation. There was no response! After a couple of weeks she phoned them as a matter of routine and asked them, if they had received the fax at all. Finally, one of Ronnie's staff members made an appointment for Ronnie and Michael. When Michael came to "Excalibur City" for the first time, he was stricken to see a huge limousine - a quite unusual type of car in our part of the world - that stood beside a shed full of old timers, sports cars and classy cars. With a big question mark in his mind, Michael went to the appointment. Ronnie being very sceptical was already awaiting him. Michael then presented his concept to Ronnie. The atmosphere that had been somewhat overwrought at first had gotten better as time passed. Ronnie's expectation was that Michael was someone who only wanted to make money very quickly. He was also afraid of a lawsuit concerning the copyright of the solicited project (Excalibur). He thought this might happen due to Michael's visit. This was all based on the fact that Ronnie had commissioned another composer to write a musical with the same title (Excalibur) a couple of months earlier. But when he heard how long Michael had been working on this idea and that Michael's main interest was on the album and not on the musical, the ice broke! Ronnie made the first move by investing in the project. He subsequently bore the total costs of the entire album-production. The production was now underway.

Christian KOLONOVITS

Before the appointment with Ronnie, it was Christian who had promised to complete the album, but - things did not turn out as expected. One evening, in April 1997, Michael and Andreja's car was packed and they had just left for another trip to England. The appointment for the production-meeting with Alan and Chris in London was fixed for the following week. Christian's ticket for the flight to London was booked. However, for weeks, Michael was unable to contact Christian. When they were at the exit from Vienna, Christian phoned saying that he had a problem with the appointment in London. Michael turned the car and a half an hour later he met Christian at the studio in Vienna. In short: Christian told him that he had to forego on his commitment to the project. He recommended his long-standing partner Johnny Bertl.

Johnny BERTL

Still on the same evening, on their way to the appointment in London, Michael and Johnny met each other for the first time. Michael spontaneously decided to entrust Johnny with the music production. This was the most artistic part of the produc-

tion with the greatest amount of responsibility. Michael then invited him to visit England. After a successful meeting with Alan and Chris, Johnny introduced Manfred SCHWENG and Albin JANOSKA (who were programmers and arrangers) to Michael. It was out of the question for Johnny to use the old tapes of 1990 to carry on with, so he prepared a completely new recording. The estimated time for recording was a couple of months however; due to Johnny and Michael's artistic accuracy it resulted in a production time of an additional two years.

The PRODUCTION

At first the title "Dreams Can Come True" was worked out. From this song the general guidelines for the entire production was to be outlined. (Only from this song one might take three completely different mixes, because it has got such a lot of sounds and tonal differences). During this phase, Chris was in Vienna from time to time and as such a friendship developed within the team. After two nights in a hotel, Chris decided to move into Michael's studio. The studio was situated directly above Andreja and Michael's apartment. This created a better working atmosphere by day and it also gave room for those philosophical talks by night. As already mentioned, Chris was rewriting almost all of the lyrics and he sang half of the titles on the album. Due to the fact that Chris is one of the world's best rock-singers, Michael was able to profit a lot by doing the vocal work with him for hours on end. Chris was a vocal coach of special class. But also Alan took part more than expected. For instance, he spontaneously played a tambourine and a cymbal to the song "Goodbye", again providing his never ending abilities. Originally it was planned that he should only do the end-mixes, but eventually he recorded Michael's voice with the titles "On The Run" and "Dreams Can Come True." He also did some special sound effects (for example, the word "Excalibur" in the end of the chorus, spoken in a deep voice). With "Stop" he sang the choir section of the chorus and he was present at all orchestra-recordings and end-mixes. Over and above that he wrote the introductory words in the title "King Of Swords" and closely supervised the production with his long-standing expertise. But this was only a handful of examples of his involvement. Well, you scarcely can imagine a better adviser than him. Also Johnny and especially Manfred Schweng were responsible for special sound effects that were out of the ordinary. The title "Time To Change", for instance, was recorded without drums. The complete rhythm was programmed by Manfred with specially sampled sounds. Instead of using the kick-drum Manfred sampled a punch against an old cardboard box and the opening of a beer bottle. He recorded the sound of the bottle cap which can be heard popping off in this title every few bars and therefore is perpetuated now.

Instead of beating the snare, he simply hit two stones against each other. In order to arrange the beginning of the titles properly, the water-butt from Manfred's garden was simply turned upside down and played. For the sound "forging the sword" with the title "King Of Swords" iron girders were lugged into the studio and hammered on until the proper sound was obtained. The sound of "hardening the sword" was also produced and recorded on the spot, in the studio. For this purpose hot water was poured into a bucket (with cold water the sizzling went far too fast during the process of hardening) and the iron that had been made to glow was then immersed into the water. For the title "Magic" he had thought up something special: he cracked a nut and the crumbling off of the shell pieces followed the cracking. This can be heard in the verses by attentive listeners. On the other hand the title "Goodbye" was recorded completely conventionally. Chris came into the studio, Christian Kolonovits sat down at the piano and they got going! After a few hours the song was finished. Johnny was alternately working with the two arrangers Manfred and Albin. He was carefully supervising all the musicians in order to guarantee the highest quality of production. Also guitarist Andi Cutic and the great Joni Madden with her rock-voice experienced Johnny's accuracy. He conducted the recording with a great deal of sensitivity. He made them repeat each take as long as it took until it was (nearly) perfect. Each member who was involved was pushed to almost exceed the bounds of his/her capability. Each detail was weighed and rendered as precisely as possible. The same goes for the orchestra arrangements that were all written by Johnny himself. He spared no pain in order to achieve perfection. Again and again he would work the whole night through and would turn up to the second the next morning to conduct the orchestra, and was always in high spirits! But also Albin, the second arranger, was fantastic. At the age of 23 at that time, he was playing his parts with so much sensitivity that Alan even asked him during the recording of "A Part Of Me, A Part Of You", if he would like to go on tour with him in the future. By the way, also this title was played by all musicians at the time. On the other hand programming was on the forefront along with some of the other titles. For example, the "groove" with "Excalibur" was done by sounds of swords sampled for this purpose.

Martin BÖHM

During the last part of the production-time, Martin BÖHM joined the team. He was so to speak the last counterbalance. It was Martin's job to mix the titles together with Alan respectively to do the orchestra recordings. For the time being he did not know the songs or their arrangements and as such, he was able to differentiate incredibly well between the things that were essential to the production and the things that did not pertain to the mixing-process. At

once he grasped what every title was about and he made the arrangement accordingly. Even Alan was impressed with Martin's work.

Elmar OTTENTHAL

Finally, in the beginning of 1999, the production was almost completed. Ronnie, having always been provided with the last versions of the titles, one day had an appointment with the director (at the time) for the "Theater des Westens"/Berlin. Elmar Ottenthal. While they were meeting, the music of "Excalibur" could be heard in the background. Elmar asked Ronnie who the music was from. Ronnie played one title after another to him. Elmar was enthusiastic about what he had heard. He recognized at once that the titles were very suitable for a musical or a movie. It was music originating moods and pictures with the listener and that was exactly what he was looking for. A couple of weeks later he came to Vienna with his staff. There he met Michael, Johnny and Alan in the studio when the title "Every Dream Will Have It's Day" was getting mixed ready. Everything seemed perfect and consequently, the first-night of "Excalibur" at "Theater des Westens" was fixed. Of course, the album was not to be released yet, but was meant to be presented together with the musical. In a press conference of the "Theater des Westens" in April 1999, the musical concepts of "Excalibur" and other plays were presented to the German press. First planning led to the conclusion that the first performance would be in autumn, 2000, and thus the release of the album was postponed. The date was further postponed twice until 2002. In spring 2001 the castings started at "Theater des Westens". Michael's dream to present this project to the public (above all the CD) seemed to be nearing reality. But then something quite unexpected happened: The City of Berlin had to sell the "Theater des Westens" for financial reasons and thus the unforeseen occurred: In the beginning of 2002, two months before the presentation, the opening night was cancelled. Michael, who hardly had worked on the release of the concept album at the time decided to go back to his roots. After all he was a singer and composer and initially he had intended to release the album first and foremost. The musical would follow in any case, it did not matter when. Therefore, he did what he should have done in the first place. He again started looking for the proper partner for the album.

POINT MUSIC

In August 2002, the album landed on the desk of Point Music, an independent label with much experience in concept albums of this kind. But then it took almost one year until Michael learned of the avid interest of this company. Finally, in the middle of July 2003 there was the first meeting with Point Music. The informal atmosphere and the common interest in "Excalibur" rendered it feasible to come to an agreement fast and thus the necessary matters for a

release became sooner clear.

Ingo ERTL

Ingo ERTL, the graphic designer proposed by Point Music, who was entrusted with the project, got going. He made an artwork in the typical style of the big concept albums out of the photo-materials he had been given by Andreja and Michael. After having roughly discussed the cover at their first meeting, Michael and Ingo continued to work via phone day and night. Finally the result was a completed artwork in their hands! Obviously Ingo had gotten fully what Michael wanted and he was successful in impressively illustrating the stream of time that has been passed through by the sword Excalibur. It is only due to Ingo's great ideas that the artwork illustrates the content and the concept of the production. On one side - among other things - you will find parts of the legend in the booklet, on the other side information and photographs of the substantially involved individuals can be found.

Peter ROSZENICH

Peter ROSZENICH is the photographer who had been documenting the various steps throughout the entire production. Above all his pictures were used, as they were suitable for the Excalibur project. Peter had been spending many hours shooting the historical reproductions, such as the sword, the crystal ball of Merlin, different shields, armours and antique hour-glasses. All this had been collected by Ronnie for years. The reproduction of the "Round Table" portrays the central element of the artwork, since it does stand for community and friendship. But the last photographs were shot by Andreja directly on the scene where everything had taken place, namely on the English coast in Cornwall. "Tintagle" was the little legendary village where the original legends surrounding King Arthur arose. Andreja took great pictures of the landscape, especially one showing a rock shaped like a head with the features of a sleeper ("Sleeping Merlin"). This natural rock was immortalized in the booklet twice.

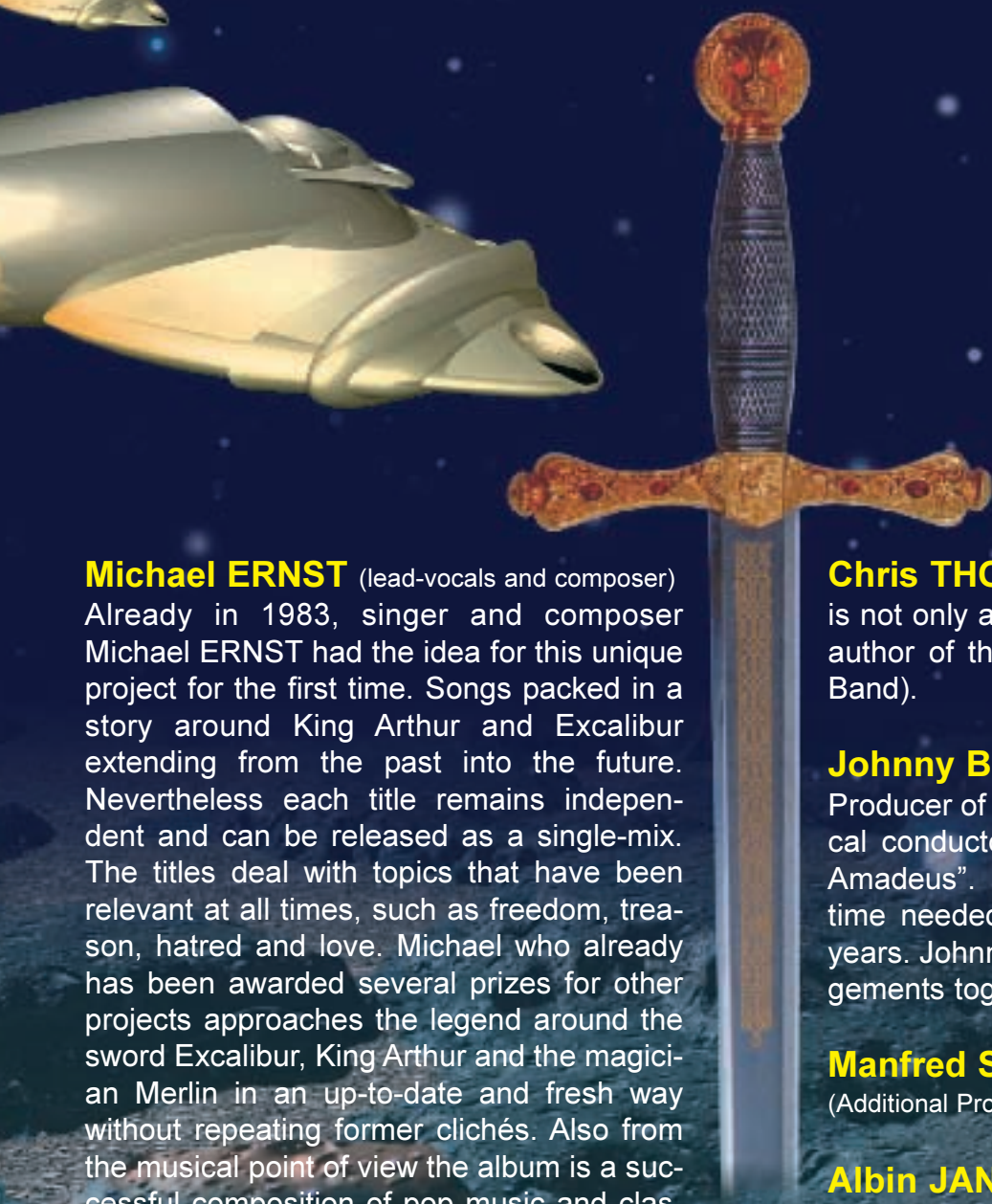
Thomas WOLLNER

Before even completing the "master-CD", it was Thomas Wollner's responsibility to put the finishing touches for the sound of each and every song! With rigorous attention to detail he polished up the sound by refining and perfecting it. At last, the final artistic chapter of Excalibur was completed.

Well, there are still some questions of importance left:

How will people react to the project? How will the songs be interpreted by the public? But so much is now certain: "The Excalibur Project" is unique, and will continue to be so, no matter what happens to it in the future....

EXCALIBUR



Michael ERNST (lead-vocals and composer)
Already in 1983, singer and composer Michael ERNST had the idea for this unique project for the first time. Songs packed in a story around King Arthur and Excalibur extending from the past into the future. Nevertheless each title remains independent and can be released as a single-mix. The titles deal with topics that have been relevant at all times, such as freedom, treason, hatred and love. Michael who already has been awarded several prizes for other projects approaches the legend around the sword Excalibur, King Arthur and the magician Merlin in an up-to-date and fresh way without repeating former clichés. Also from the musical point of view the album is a successful composition of pop music and classical elements.

Alan PARSONS (Consultant Producer)
involved himself and his long-standing experience as a producer in this project (Pink Floyd, The Alan Parsons Project...).

Chris THOMPSON (lead-vocals)
is not only a guest-singer, but he is also co-author of the titles (Manfred Mann's Earth Band).

Johnny BERTL (Producer)
Producer of VSOP, Ludwig Hirsch and musical conductor of the musical "Falco Meets Amadeus". He produced the album. The time needed to do so was more than two years. Johnny also wrote all orchestra arrangements together with his arrangers

Manfred SCHWENG
(Additional Producer & Arranger)

Albin JANOSKA
(Arranger)

Ronnie SEUNIG
(Executive Producer)