



**Readers of this magazine should certainly be familiar with one of the best voices in the business, Jeff Scott Soto. Whether it is with Yngwie Malmsteen, Talisman, Axel Rudi Pell, Soul Sirkus, his solo releases, W.E.T., fronting Journey or performing with the Trans-Siberian Orchestra, he is a singer who always delivers the goods. Now he has his own band, SOTO, a vehicle for him to get back to his Metal roots. James Gaden was asking the questions.**

**The debut SOTO album, 'Inside The Vertigo', is much heavier than your last few releases.**

Yeah, as I was finding a home for it I was explaining to people what was on the agenda. I'm sure we'll discuss why I made that change and why I'm on a different label, but I kind of manifested the idea before the album was released to make sure people weren't expecting another W.E.T. sounding album!

**First and foremost, SOTO is a band, this isn't a solo record, correct?**

Absolutely – just to clarify, I don't want people thinking this is a project or an experiment. It did start as a solo album but it started getting heavier. I wanted to go in a heavier vein, even when I was doing 'Damage Control', but I was a little stifled by Frontiers, because they wanted to keep me firmly in the Melodic Rock field. That's great, but I felt I had enough of that in my life, from my involvement with Journey to my previous solo albums and W.E.T. I kinda wanted to get back to my roots, people do know me as a Heavy Metal singer, but the Frontiers plan was to have me as a Melodic Rock and AOR type of singer. That's fine, there's a lot of great music in that genre, it has great fans but I kind of missed the more powerful direction I left behind so many years ago. Without going directly back to that, I wanted to sort of reinvent it and acknowledge that I do have a heavier past, and this fit the bill.

**Was that your primary reason for switching to earMusic?**

It wasn't really about switching, it was

more 'supply and demand'. I've done two great albums with W.E.T. in the Melodic Rock direction, where does that leave me to go? If I go and make an album that sounds like Talisman, that's beating a dead horse as well. I'm just repeating myself. I wanted to go to a heavier direction but in a more modern way, so it's not a throwback and I'm not repeating myself from twenty five years ago. It didn't sound like a solo album, it sounded like a band, so it's easier to brand it as a band than lump it in with my solo career. First and foremost, I asked the guys in my solo band if they wanted to be part of it. They've been with me now for five years and I wanted to offer them first the chance to come with me into the next stage of my career. They all agreed.

**It's a fantastic band, I was really impressed with them on the 'One Night In Madrid' DVD. I told you last time we spoke that I absolutely loved 'Beautiful Mess' which a lot of your fans didn't connect with and I loved hearing these guys play those songs live.**

I do remember you saying that, and that was one of the reasons I put this line up together, because they were more versatile than my original line up, and that's not taking anything away from Howie Simon, Gary Schutt or any of the guys who played with me before. They were more suited to a Hard Rock direction and I needed a band who could cover all the ground in a way that was believable. That's why I put this line up together and moving forward, I wanted to bring them into the next stage of my career.

**Did they help with the writing, or did you bring them songs and have them put their feel on it?**

Pretty much – I had them collaborate on this album more than 'Damage Control'. Before I decided to make it a band venture, I had already gone off and found people to co-write with. It's one of those things I do when I'm writing with a guitar player – I think it feels better if the guitarist I wrote it with is on the track themselves, rather than just being the co-writer. If I co-write a song with Gus G, he sends me his tracks with what he's thinking and how it's supposed to sound. If a song starts as a collaboration, I prefer to have the collaborator's involvement on the record, rather than just have the band re-record it. The band played on the majority of the album anyway.

**With you putting the band together to tour things like 'Beautiful Mess' and 'Damage Control', did you know that they were capable of writing and performing in this much heavier style?**

Absolutely. It's a testament to their level of skills, what they bring to the table. They are all from different musical backgrounds. Everyone in the band, they listen to everything from Manowar and Motörhead to Hall & Oates! (laughs) It's a massive collection of influences and I know I can bring anything to them and they can pull it off. Most importantly, they are really into it. There's so many bands out there who are good and can pull things off, but they might not necessarily be into the material they're playing. That's why I gave these guys first dibs to be involved. Musically, I know we all stick together, even though we're kind of misfits. If you looked at it on paper, we have so many things we can draw on, so many influences, it's a big mish-mash, motley assortment of genres. In the end, we all shared the same vision and that's very important if it's going to be a band.

**That description is pretty much how I'd describe you – you can do all kinds of stuff, from Melodic Rock to Metal to Pop to Disco – and it's not just that you're good at a variety of them, you're into all of it.**

It's one way of saying I get bored easily! (Laughs) To be honest, it's one of the reasons why Queen were such a huge influence on me. They were one of the only bands who could take every genre they tapped into and master it. They weren't a band who said "Let's try this, no that doesn't work, let's try that, oh yeah, that's alright..." Everything they did, from piano ballads for Hard Rock to Pop to Opera to synth laden Disco, they mastered it and could convince people that it wasn't just an experiment, it was something they were into, as oppose to people saying "Oh Jesus, what are they trying to do now?" (Laughs)

**What did you think of Queen's performance at New Year with Adam Lambert?**

I have mixed feelings. First off I love Lambert, I love his voice, I love a lot of his songs from his solo stuff. I love that he sings Queen songs with such ease and seems so comfortable with it. What I miss is the energy, the level of excitement. He's vocally capable of pulling it off, but Freddie Mercury was larger than life in every way imaginable and as a frontman he could make someone at the back of Wembley Stadium, with 80,000 people, feel the same excitement as someone in the front row. I can't say I feel that excitement with the current line up, it feels a little bit safe. Regardless of that, they are still one of the greatest bands in the world and Brian and Roger have become dear friends of mine, so I've nothing negative to say about them. I support them fully because I love them and Queen so much.

**I'm with you there, I'm a huge Queen fan and Adam Lambert, after my initial doubts, has started to impress me. I know not everyone is convinced but I'd rather see them out there still putting on good shows than packing it in altogether.**

Exactly! I'd rather them be out playing the songs – even if they were totally half-assing it, that would still be much better than them not doing anything at all!

**When you did 'Damage Control', you told me you had to piece it together from recordings done all over the world. Was it the same this time, or did you and your band get some time to spend together?**

No, it's still done that way because my band are from all over the world, so we have two in Brazil, one in Spain, one in New York City and I'm in L.A. It's tough to get together, I'm all over the map with my touring and appearances so it's virtually impossible for us to spend a month and a half together to make an album all in one place. As it is, I have

experience of working this way from my days with Talisman and Axel Rudi Pell, and we did it back then without the technology of today, like Pro-Tools and the internet. It's so much easier nowadays when you take advantage of technology and can communicate through things like Skype to get things done.

**You handled the production yourself, didn't you?**

Yes, I did. Once again, because it started as a solo album, as a solo artist I've always demanded artistic control to do what I wanted to do. I did bring my drummer, Edu Cominato, in for his influence in both the music and the production. I used his ears to get his input, along with one of my co-writers, Connor Engstrom. I really leaned on these guys for their youthfulness, the stuff that they are currently listening to which I might not necessarily have heard, to keep the album in the right direction.

**When you began work on the album, was there a particular track that acted like a benchmark that helped you decide to go in a band direction?**

No, I was just working with the vision that I wanted it to be heavy, I wanted it drop-tuned, rather than standard tuning, I wanted those deep, rich earthy tones. I then wanted to add grooves and different aspects to complement that. I wanted it heavy but not all sounding the same. We mixed it up.

**Right – you've got some pretty heavy stuff but then you have 'When I'm Older' and the chorus on that one is really uplifting and catchy.**

Thanks, I appreciate that and I'm glad you noticed. I had to be really careful with that one because that could have easily fallen into the standard Melodic Rock style. That one was a track which Edu helped keep on course. We wanted to make it sound more like a song Shinedown or Alter Bridge might cover, rather than something Winger or Whitesnake might cover! We paid close attention to that, we didn't want to fall into a Classic Rock style, we wanted it to be current Modern Rock.

**'End Of Days' is nine minutes long – did you plan on including an epic track?**

(Laughs) Enter Connor Engstrom for that song! His personal style is mostly instrumental music, his stuff is very much like a soundtrack. I sent him a hatful of notes saying "I want it to sound like it could be in a Bond movie, kind of a modern day 'Live And Let Die', but it needs to have an up-tempo, Iron Maiden section with Queen background vocals, a little Pink Floyd and some 'Braveheart' thrown in. Now go!" (laughs) He sent me the music, literally what you hear on the record came back to me, complete from beginning to end, just awaiting my lyrics and vocals. I thought "And what am I to do with this?" (laughs). It was one of the most challenging, demanding things of my life, to guide where that was going lyrically, melodically, it was truly one of the hardest things I've ever done.

**There's an array of great guests on the album too.**

Oh yeah – Joel Hoekstra is on two tracks but they haven't made the release you're listening to unfortunately. We had too many songs and the label had to make some cuts. I'm hoping the album might be successful enough that we release a deluxe edition and we can include them on there. Mike Orlando from Adrenaline Mob is on the opening track 'Final Say'. I think that could have been an Adrenaline Mob track, it's quite heavy and drop-tuned which is the way Mike writes. Gus G appears on 'Wrath' and I think that carries a Firewind-like sound because of that. You can hear the influences from the guests – Jason Bieler plays on 'Karma's Kiss' and I think that gives a real Saigon Kick vibe to it.

**Do you prefer being part of a band as oppose to a solo artist?**

With this, it's the best of both worlds. It's like an extension of my solo career and I called it SOTO in the same way bands were named Dio, Dokken or Van Halen. They were bands named after the key element of why that band sounded the way it did. SOTO is an extension of me, of what I want to do, so therefore I can share the experience of being the artistic ring-leader while having a band I feel comfortable with and want to bring forward with me. When a band is a democracy, you can have concerns when people bring stuff in you might not be into, or you feel doesn't fit the mould. It can cause issues and I'd prefer to follow the example where Ronnie James Dio was in charge of his band, he called it Dio and it was a band, nobody saw it as a solo project. I do miss that element of all for one, one for all but I do think there needs to be a visionary to get you there. In SOTO I drew the influences and songs from everyone but I also have the final say in what's happening, and in the end, we all enjoy what we're doing together.

**Have you had any chance to get together to see how these songs will sound live for touring?**

Absolutely not. (laughs) No, it's been a work in progress getting this done from beginning to end. The next stage is to put it out there and see if it sticks. I'd love to tour but I'm not going to force it. That's one of the things I'm telling management and the promoters, this is not going to be a cavalcade of Jeff Scott Soto songs, this is SOTO the band. The same way if W.E.T. tours, we don't play five or six Eclipse songs and a bunch of Talisman songs, it'll be W.E.T. material. So this won't be a bunch of stuff I did with Yngwie and things like that – maybe I'll include a couple of JSS songs which might fit this mould, but I'm certainly not going to be doing Talisman, Yngwie and Axel Rudi Pell songs with a couple of SOTO songs thrown in. That sends the wrong message, this is a proper band I'm committed to. I'm going to see how it's received and if people want to see it live - I really hope people fall for this stuff!