

IN THE STUDIO WITH JASON SLATER

Mindcrime II Producer Connects with Queensrÿche

By BRIAN J. HEATON

For almost 25 years, Queensrÿche has earned a reputation as a band that isn't afraid to take risks. The Seattle-based progressive rockers have changed their style on every album they've recorded, looking to keep the music fresh and inspiring for both fans and themselves.

But when it was announced that Queensrÿche was writing a sequel to its heralded concept album, *Operation: Mindcrime (Mindcrime I)*, it was natural to assume that the band would look at how they recorded the original, to capitalize on its success.

Think again.

Once more, Queensrÿche will move forward and experiment with its sound – something Jason Slater, the producer of *Operation: Mindcrime II (Mindcrime II)*, feels will split the band's fan base.

"People will be divided about this record," he admitted.

"Some people spend their time looking forward, and some people spend their lives looking back. We are all looking forward. *Mindcrime I* can be revered and respected, but it cannot be recreated."

The producer revealed that the band is staying loyal to the original in terms of making a concept record on a "grand scale," but stressed that times have changed, and so has Queensrÿche.

"It's years later, and the guys' tastes and styles have changed," Jason explained. "[Queensrÿche] could have made *Empire* over and over again and raked in cash, but that is never what the band has been about, and you have to respect that. They have taken musical chance after musical chance and have never rested on their previous successes."





If the members of Queensrÿche were looking for a producer as musically diverse as they are, they've clearly got the right man for the job. Slater's influences run the gamut of the musical spectrum, covering everything from the thrash metal of Exodus and power metal of Iron Maiden, to the country songs of Willie Nelson and raps of The Son of Bazerk.

The result of those influences can be seen in Jason's own band, Snake River Conspiracy (SRC). Currently fronted by former Drain S.T.H. drummer Martina Axen, SRC showcases songs that fall into a wide range of genres, including hard rock, alternative, pop, and electronica.

It was Snake River Conspiracy's first album, *Sonic Jihad*, which Slater hangs his hat on as a producer, and is most proud of.

"For the time, it really pushed the limits of technology and what the public was willing to accept in a record that was marketed as a pop album," he recalled. "Nothing to do with metal, just great songs and great recordings."

In addition to his work on the next Queensrÿche release, Jason has produced Earshot's debut, *Letting Go*, which was originally written in part by himself and members of A Perfect Circle. For a brief time, Slater was also in a band with former Nine Inch Nails keyboard player Charlie Clouser called Revenge of the Triads, and he is about to start mixing an album from ex-Megadeth bassist David Ellefson's new band, Temple of Brutality.

The producer keeps a hectic schedule, and has been working on *Mindcrime II* for quite awhile. Elaborating on the current recording process with Queensrÿche, Jason revealed he's confident and excited about the work being done by the entire band, and is particularly enamored by the efforts of lead vocalist Geoff Tate.

"People will be impressed by [Geoff's] writing and performance on this record," Slater said. "A lot of people tend to forget that a singer is a slave to the music he is writing over [and] I think the material Geoff has to work on doesn't inhibit his abilities like it has on previous records."

Slater also expressed his views on the band's history, addressing fan concerns that the guitars weren't highlighted enough on recent albums.

"I'll be honest with you, and I am probably going to catch shit from somebody in the camp for saying this, but the last few Queensrÿche records haven't been good," Slater confessed. "But it has nothing to do with the guitars and everything to do with the songs and the production. If the songs aren't there, it doesn't matter how much guitar you slather on the track, it's still a shitty song."

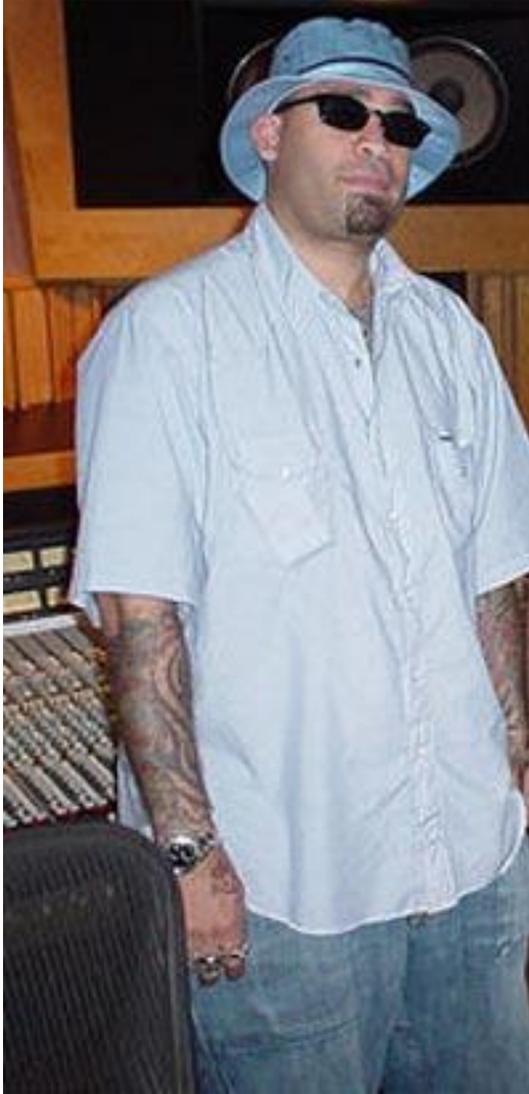
When asked about the departure of former guitarist Chris DeGarmo, and how his leaving may have affected the band's songwriting, Slater maintained that he hasn't gotten caught up in the fan debates over the issue. Instead, like the other members of Queensrÿche, he's moved on.

"I don't buy into the whole 'DeGarmo Guitar God' bit that gets spouted on the forums," the producer said, referring to the band's fan club message board. "DeGarmo doesn't put out heavy riff-laden records on his own. The guy had a moment, and he was brilliant in that moment, but that moment is over."

In addition to DeGarmo, Slater had some strong opinions regarding the production work of Peter Collins on *Mindcrime I* and *Empire*, believing Collins and other past producers were more like "glorified babysitters" rather than the creative geniuses many fans have portrayed them to be.

"Collins made some good shit, but ... in my opinion, he didn't produce those Queensrÿche records, the band did and he was involved," Jason stated. "It seems like he was an organizer or scheduler. Jimbo Barton (engineer on various Queensrÿche albums) had a lot more to do with the sounds of those records than Collins."





In contrast, Slater views himself as much more connected with the band, having lived the rock and roll lifestyle as both a touring musician and a fan of heavy metal.

"Those guys were disconnected; they never caught an elbow to the nose in the pit at an Anthrax show and they never sat down and wrote a song," he said. "I'm much more committed ... [and] I'm balls deep in every aspect, from plugging in the first amp to cleaning up after I mix it."

Slater's relationship with Queensrÿche began on the road early last year when the band was supporting its latest releases, *Tribe* (2003) and *Art of Live* (2004). SRC opened for Queensrÿche for a few shows, and Jason hit it off with the members of Queensrÿche so well, he was asked to produce their next record.

But after it was announced that a sequel to *Mindcrime I* was being recorded, stories surfaced about the release date being pushed back. Those rumors caused some fans to wonder if band chemistry might be a problem in the studio.

"People from the outside have a romantic view of 'the process,'" he explained. "Life gets in the way and slows down the process more than musical ideas or playing. There is a lot of speculation about the way this band works together, but in all honesty it isn't much different than the way anybody else makes records."

"Everyone in the band has been extremely supportive of one another, outside of the normal "headaches" of making a record," the producer added.

Although fans will likely have to wait until early 2006 to hear the finished product, Slater feels the wait will be well worth it.

"I think the band is being more loyal to [itself] than to creating a record that sounds like it was made in the 1980s," he maintained. "We are pushing the format, and this record will sound massive."

For more information on Jason Slater, visit the Snake River Conspiracy web site at <http://www.snakeriverconspiracy.com>.