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[Interview] Exclusive interview with Kimmo Pörsti

By [Jacopo Viguzzi](#)
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We have the honor and the pleasure of interviewing one of the main Prog artists of recent years, Kimmo Pörsti, in this article. With numerous albums and several projects including Samurai Of Prog, Guildmaster as well as a solo career.

> **Hi Kimmo how are you?**

Hi! I am fine, thanks.

> **Where did your passion for prog music and drum come from?**

When I was about 12- 13, I was a fan of Deep Purple (as my brother used to listen to it). Progressive music was partly introduced to me by Ian Gillan and Roger Glover as they started to move towards progressive rock in their solo projects at that time (Clear Air Turbulence and Elements). I also listened to some ambitious Hard Rock bands like Three Man Army, which helped to lead the way. Soon it was time to take my couple LP's to a second hand store and exchange them for ELP. One big moment was when I went to my first Rock Festival (Ruisrock) at the age 14 and saw Wigwam there. After that I bought their classic album "Being". It was definitely not easy stuff, but I listened to it so many times that I started to get a grip on it 😊

About drums: After 5 years of not so successful piano lessons my parents finally allowed

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me to switch to drums. There was an old Yamaha drum-set in my school and when I got my hands on it, the choice was clear.

> In your long career you have given life to several projects always at the top of the Prog, how do they differ and in which one do you recognize yourself most?

Oh, that is an interesting question 😊 I just name a few here – shortly.

Mist Season was a band with a lot of talent. It had its own distinctive sound as half of the musicians were jazz-oriented and the other half were more towards prog. Almost all the music was instrumental.

Paidarion was formed in 2009; Jan-Olof Strandberg and myself being the permanent members. *Paidarion*'s music has been more vocal-oriented than *Mist Season*'s – although we have done instrumentals as well. I guess the biggest difference compared to other bands is that quite a big number of songs have been by me.

As for *The Samurai of Prog*, I could say that our third album “*The Imperial Hotel*” was important in developing our own style and sound. However, the basic idea of TSOP has been the same since beginning: The core of the band being Marco Bernard, Steve Unruh and myself – and we invite a great number of talented guests to each album.

The music of Bernard and Pörsti does not necessarily differ very much from *The Samurai of Prog* as there have been the same composers and the music making policy has also been quite the same. So, the biggest difference has been that Marco Bernard and I have been responsible for those (as Steve has concentrated on his other groups and projects at the time). Well, we did something new with *La Tierra* – as it was sung entirely in Spanish.

The Guildmaster was born in the following way: I was happy about the work that Rafael Pacha did for my album “*Wayfarer*”. There are also some folk-oriented songs in his solo albums that I like very much. So, I asked him if he would like to do an entire album of folk-oriented prog (or prog-oriented folk:). Marco Bernard joined soon afterwards and he came up with the name *The Guildmaster*. For me it has been a rewarding experience to do something different.

I was a member of *Progression* for a few years. It was clearly more of a instrumental fusion band than a prog band.

I guess I should also mention my solo-projects. *Past and Present* was my third solo album. Naturally I have had more freedom with those and probably also a possibility to put more myself in there. There are similarities in my albums to TSOP's music as my music is principally symphonic progressive rock as well. However, I have taken more freedom of styles in my albums. Besides prog, there are elements of fusion, (celtic) folk and even of some blues.

> In 2021 you worked on several fronts and several albums were released, how would you describe these releases?

The Samurai of Prog: Lady and The Lion and The White Snake:

Originally our intention was to make an album based on the stories of C.S. Lewis' Narnia. However, it was not possible to make such an album. When I contacted The CS



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Lewis Company Ltd (telling that we were planning on making on making such album), we were told that the music and music publishing rights To The Chronicles of Narnia are licenced exclusively to Netflix and therefore we are not able to create and produce an album based on The Chronicles of Narnia.

So, we decided to make an album based on the stories of the Grimm brothers instead. As we eventually had so much material, we decided to split the project in two: The Lady and The Lion being the first part and The White Snake being the follow-up slightly after. Again, we had a great bunch of very talented friends joining us, like Alessandro Di Benedetti, Oliviero Lacagnina, Octavio Stampalia, Marco Grieco, Mimmo Ferri, Luca Scherani, Jaime Rosas, Ton Scherpenzeel and many others.

The Samurai of Prog: Omnibus 2 – The Middle Years:

We released “Omnibus – The Early Years” box-set 3 years ago and it was well received. As many albums have been sold out for some time, it was time to release Omnibus 2 now. It includes the albums On We Sail, Archiviarum, Toki No Kaze and Beyond The Wardrobe. There are also 5 new and unreleased bonus tracks.

Bernard and Pörsti: Robinson Crusoe:

An album based on Daniel Defoe’s classic novel Robinson Crusoe, will be released in a couple of weeks. It features songs by Octavio Stampalia, Oliviero Lacagnina, Alessandro Di Benedetti, Marco Grieco, Luca Scherani and Andrea Pavoni. Besides our old friends, there are also some “new” guests like Steve Bingham, Adam Diderrich and Steve Hackett.

> In addition to the records with the aforementioned bands your solo album was released, what can you tell us about the album?

I released my first solo album in 1997. It took 23 years to make the next one, “Wayfarer”, which came out in 2020. We have many great composers for TSOP albums, so I thought that making a solo album might be a proper way for my own music. It was also fun to play some guitars, bass and keyboards in addition to drums.

After Wayfarer it took “only” a year for my third album, Past and Present, which came out 3 months ago. The title comes from the fact that there are 5 songs from the past which have been released on different occasions between 2004-2012 and which I wanted to re-work. There are also 6 new songs as well. Rafael Pacha was in a big role in the album as he co-composed and co-arranged some songs with me.

> Your partnership with Marco Bernard has lasted for years, what binds you apart from music?

I must say I had no idea what would follow when I accepted Marco’s invitation to do a cover of Assasin’ to an Italian Marillion tribute album in 2009... 16 releases together so far.

Maybe it is mutual respect. We have developed quite a clear division of labor between us two during these years. I guess you could say that it is quite effective – although it requires a lot of work from both of us:) Marco has a great ability to find great musicians for each track. He is also far better in PR than me.

My job is to put the whole musical project together and do the final production with mixing and mastering.

Marco is also an endless idea bank, he constantly thinks and comes up with new topics and projects. After we agree about a new project, it is mostly Marco who contacts the different composers and musicians – I do it only occasionally. After we receive demos, it is usually quite easy to agree with him on how to proceed with them; almost all the time our tastes are very similar. In fact, if you think about how much I have worked together with him during these years, we do argue surprisingly little.

> In your works you make use of many guests, how does the creative process take place and how do these artists contribute?

As said, Marco is very good at finding and inviting new collaborators and arranging things with different composers and musicians. Musically the collaborators are quite free to take it to the direction they want. If we have a theme or concept for the album, we naturally want to point that out to be taken into consideration.

When we start to put the album together, the process may vary from song to song. Some of the compositions (as well as arrangements) that we receive are almost complete, so we just have to think how to do our parts and if the song needs some finalization. Sometimes the composition is more or less ready, but we suggest some changes for example to the arrangement or the structure of the song. We have also received some compositions that are more or less sketches – sometimes far from ready. Steve Unruh has a remarkable talent of finishing up those sketches.

Usually we record drums and bass first. After that it is time for other instruments and vocals. As our guests are from around the world, we can't really work face by face. So, our guests send their material one by one and I am the one who imports them to the project and puts it together. Finally, when we have it all, it is time for me to do the mixing and mastering.

> As said before you have released several albums in 2021 with multiple projects and also as a soloist, which of these will you bring live?

With some bands mentioned before (like Mist Season, Paidarion and Progression) we used to play live every now and then.

TSOP is mainly concentrating on recording, not playing live. Marco is not so thrilled about playing live, his last performing concert was in 1979 in Rome, Italy with his Punk band "Elektroshock", therefore I do understand him. Also the fact that Steve lives on the other side of the Atlantic does not make it easier. Well, I must say that I have been playing with the idea of having a live project playing music related to TSOP as well as my own music. Although I must say that it has already been a couple years since I played my last gig that was a concert with Michael Manring and Jan-Olof Strandberg. We'll see....

> These were tough times because of the pandemic, how did it affect your work?

As said, I have not done many live gigs during the last few years. As I have concentrated mostly on recording and mixing, it has not affected me as much as it has affected many others. You could even say it had the opposite effect as these have been busy years for our family-owned small record company Seacrest Oy: We released 6 albums in 2020 and five albums in 2021, which is more than usual.