

Hannes Schmid

THE CELEBRATED SWISS ART PHOTOGRAPHER REVEALS HIS ASTOUNDING STASH OF SEVENTIES AND EIGHTIES ROCK STAR IMAGES.

HANNES SCHMID IS A MAN WITH A SECRET. THE HIGHLY

respected Swiss photographer is perhaps best known for his international fashion work, iconic Marlboro Cowboy images and UNESCO-sponsored project, *For Gods Only*. But he also spent the late Seventies and early Eighties criss-crossing the globe and hanging out with some of the most famous and infamous names in rock - backstage, in hotels, at home, even on holiday. And he has the pictures to prove it.

Those images, 70,000 in total, have lain untouched for a quarter of a century in Schmid's archives. Most had never been seen before - not even at the time of their creation. Until, that is, late last year, when he published 130 of them in the magnificently and meticulously produced book, *Rockstars*.

For anyone in their youth during the era in question, the book will almost certainly inspire a mixture of nostalgia and embarrassing memories of shared crimes against fashion and *coiffure*. But for viewers of any age, perhaps the most striking feature of the shots is their sense of innocence. Taken in a time before artists became self-consciously media savvy or were zealously protected by PR gurus, they are unique in their unadorned intimacy and will probably remain so.

Some of the images, at first glance, are what you might expect from rock photography. Alice Cooper confronts the camera with a bayonet clamped between his teeth. Bryan Ferry adopts a typically louche pose, his blue satin jacket and floppy fringe perfectly arranged.

Most, however, are not. A member of Barclay James Harvest stands on a rocky shore in ghastly swimming trunks, forlornly clutching a beach ball while the rest of the band sails away. A teenage German pop idol sits in the most ordinary of kitchens, sharing a cigarette with his dad. >



ABOVE Blondie, Debbie Harry, date unknown.

RIGHT Uriah Heep, Mick Box, date unknown.

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TOP LEFT Barclay James Harvest, Les Holroyd, 1980.

BOTTOM FAR LEFT Motörhead, 1980.

BOTTOM CENTRE Teens, Jörg Treptow, 1979.

BOTTOM NEAR LEFT Genesis, 1979.

TOP RIGHT Smokie, 1978.

Even the more conventional portraits have a spontaneity and unstudied simplicity about them – usually a straight-to-camera non-pose, against the plainest of backgrounds – that minimises the distance between viewer and subject. These are not remote figures of fantasy. They are close up and all too human.

"Record companies didn't really like me," Schmid told CPN magazine, "and very little of my work was published. I didn't have glamorous pictures; the people didn't look like stars... Debbie Harry looks like she just got out of bed. But I wasn't interested in glamour. When I went into fashion, I wasn't interested in fashion or models. I was only interested in doing my vision, my interpretation, my way."

This, perhaps, is the key to the strength and appeal of the work. Schmid stumbled into rock photography entirely by accident (a chance introduction to Status Quo) after returning to Switzerland from living and shooting among tribes in Africa and Asia. "Status Quo were nervous about me hanging around at first, but I said I'd been photographing cannibals and they suddenly got interested," he recalls.

By his own admission, he had – and has – no interest in music. "I came out of the jungle and this was just another jungle. It was a world I didn't want to join, but wanted to report on, for myself. What I was interested in, from the beginning, was the society and analysing that society. What was going on here, what was different? The contrasts were so great. On stage, the bands had this power – you could feel it vibrating. And then, the next day, you'd be at their little house in the country and they were washing their cars in their >



rubber boots and carrying the kids around... incredible changes and you had both worlds. This fascinated me."

One essential ingredient of Schmid's approach was closeness to the bands. "You have to earn this trust," he notes. "I have pictures that could have blown many marriages... but I never published any of them or gave away any of them. I had a name that usually went ahead of me before I came to a band. They knew I was OK, that I was cool. When I went on the tours, I was on the bus, I had dinner with the band or I sat with the roadies. I also helped the roadies or worked in the kitchen. I was part of the band."

The other ingredient was patience. "Sometimes I would go a week without taking a picture, because first I wanted to observe and see what was going on. I wanted to look at the guys, see how they behaved and what they did... I had the luxury of being able to wait until I thought I had a picture."

Schmid's naming of a definitive study of synthpop pioneers Kraftwerk as a particular favourite shows how this unhurried approach co-existed with the minutely detailed awareness of allusions and connections that informs all his work.

"The father of Florian Schneider (Kraftwerk's leader) was a famous architect, who was the first in the world to use corrugated steel for architecture. At a concert in Budapest I saw this wall just as they were about to go on stage. I said: 'This is fantastic, we must do this picture'. It was a bit away from the stage and they were getting nervous. They liked to be very precise; if they were supposed to start at 8.10, they had to start at 8.10. I said: 'Don't look at me, look away - you are robots'. I got one frame." One was clearly enough. >

PREVIOUS PAGES, LEFT ABBA, 1978.

PREVIOUS PAGES, RIGHT Barclay James Harvest, John Lees, 1981.

ABOVE Kraftwerk, 1981.

TOP RIGHT Marianne Faithfull, 1981.

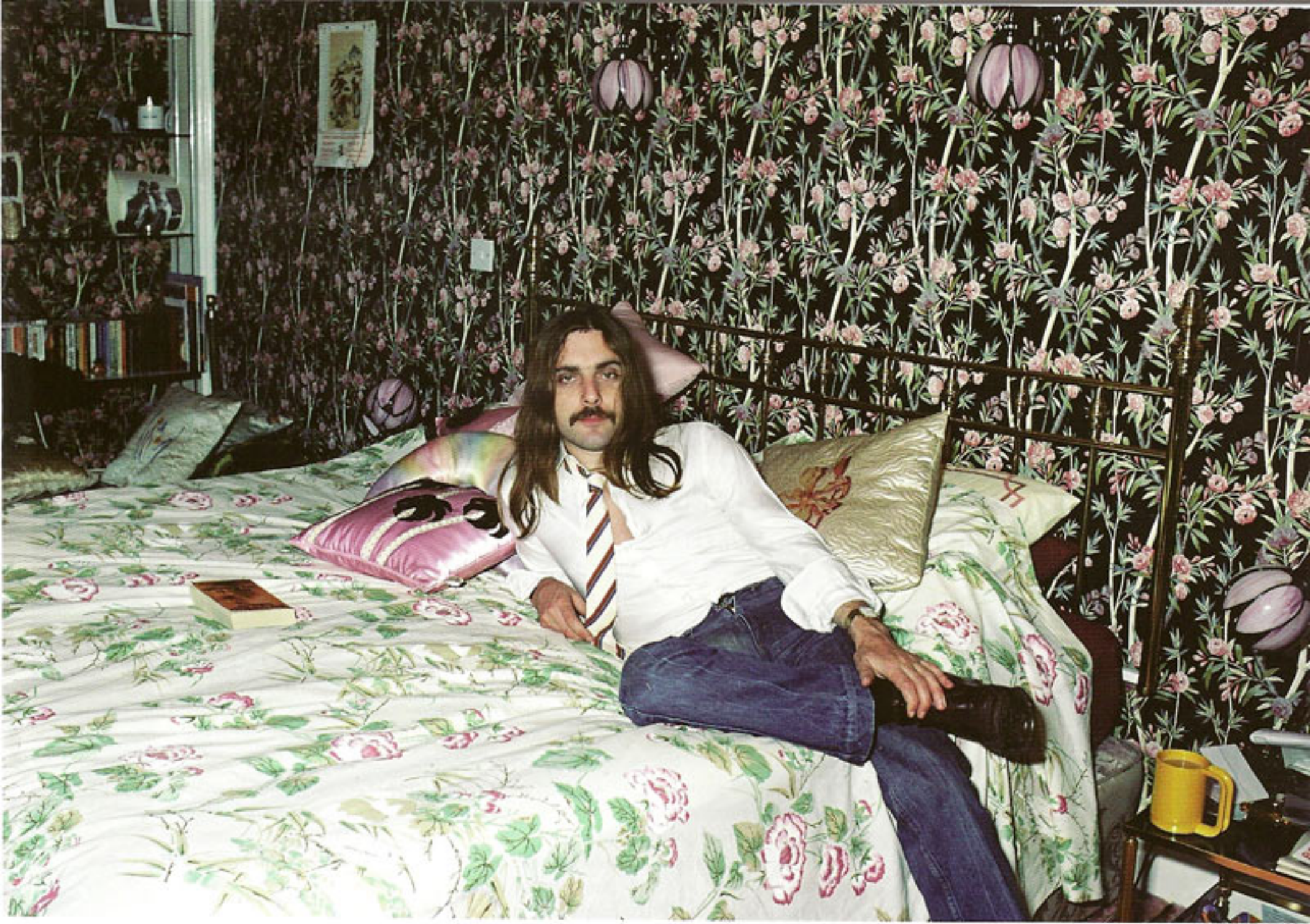
BOTTOM FAR RIGHT Ph.D., 1981.

BOTTOM CENTRE Depeche Mode, 1981.

BOTTOM NEAR RIGHT Voyager, John Marter and Paul Hirsh, 1979.







TOP LEFT Tom Robinson Band, 1979.

BOTTOM FAR LEFT Barclay James Harvest, Les Holroyd, 1979.

BOTTOM CENTRE Boney M, 1978.

BOTTOM NEAR LEFT Status Quo, Rick Parfitt, 1980.

TOP RIGHT Status Quo, John Coghlan, 1980.

In Schmid's rock period, the days of taking 25 cameras and a posse of assistants on Marlboro jobs were still a way off. Virtually all these shots were done very simply, with a Canon F1-n ("very reliable"), chrome film and - eventually - a motor drive and a Norman strobe, an American flash "which had this arm you could bend so it stood straight on top of the lens".

He says he wasn't very interested in the images after they were taken, but has taken great pains to preserve the distinctive character and quality of the originals. The images have been retouched only where absolutely necessary, to remove scratches and blemishes on the slides, while the paper for the book was chosen after a lengthy process of trial and error.

The contents of the book have a democratic feel that's entirely consistent with Schmid's disregard for status and love of a picture for its own sake. The legendary (ABBA, Paul McCartney) sit alongside the "Where are they now?" (Nazareth, Boney M) and the "Who the hell are they?" (New England), with no attempt at prioritisation or emphasis.

Bob Marley and Mick Jagger are just two of the subjects who remain, for now, in the archive. Given the success of the book - the first print run almost sold out before the actual publication date, magazines and TV stations were clamouring for interviews, while museums and galleries queued up to exhibit the work - it seems unlikely that we'll have to wait another 30 years to see them. • PAUL KENDALL

Hannes Schmid's Canon kit:
Cameras: Canon F1n and Canon New F-1.
Lenses: FD35mm f/2, FD50mm f/1.4 and FD100mm f/2.8.
www.hanneschmid.ch

