



Jazz metal fusion!

Lifelong Metallica fan **Jamie Cullum** (yes, really...) interviews one of his idols after discovering that **Lars Ulrich** is as inspired by Miles Davis as he is by Deep Purple

JC: Can I start by talking to you about your childhood because I know you came from not only a sporting family but a musical one.

LU: My dad was a professional tennis player but I think his heart and his whole reason for existing was music. He wrote about music for Danish newspapers and started off playing clarinet in jazz bands and then later went to the saxophone. Copenhagen in the '50s and '60s had a thriving, healthy music scene and a lot of American jazz performers came to Scandinavia, particularly Copenhagen, and found an audience for what they were doing. A lot of them ended up living in Denmark, and my dad, because of his passion for this music and also because Copenhagen is quite a small place, ended up befriending a lot of them and they started hanging around the house.

Which musicians were hanging around?

Dexter Gordon was actually my godfather. My father was very close with Dexter, who lived in Denmark for years. The other guys who were part of the inner circle were people like Sonny Rollins, Ben Webster, Don Cherry – he lived two streets over from us and I played with his [step]daughter Neneh, who as you know became a pop singer.

You came to London on family trips, do you remember seeing music here?

Yeah, my dad would play Wimbledon. We would spend the better part of June here every year and would usually have a house. The biggest music memory I have, in my little book my parents put together of my travels, is that we saw the Stones at Hyde Park in '69. I have pictures of myself in the audience.

Did your family encourage you to play music or was it something you moved towards because you were surrounded by so much music?

Music became my escape away from the discipline of tennis. The Ulrich family name was part of a Danish dynasty, my grandfather was a very well known tennis player, my dad, my uncle – at one point the Danish Davis Cup team was my dad as the captain and my uncle. In 1979 I landed in Sarasota, Florida, and I get thrown into the Nick Bollettieri tennis academy and it's six to eight hours of drilling every day, like being in military camp, hardly any freedoms, lights out at nine. For a kid growing up in a very bohemian, liberal, artsy upbringing in Copenhagen, it was a culture shock, so music really helped me in that year, with American Rock radio, AC/DC's 'Highway to Hell'.

Who got your first drum kit?

My grandmother got me my first drum kit in Denmark before we moved to America, in '76 or '77. I wanted to be Ian Paice from Deep Purple or John Coghlan from Status Quo or just sit there in my basement after tennis practice and play along with records.

Deep Purple were an important band for you, weren't they? You saw them live, I believe, and it really made you think about wanting to be a drummer...

Yeah, in February 1973 there was a tennis

tournament in Copenhagen at the KB Hallen [venue] – tennis tournaments always start on Monday and on that Sunday night Deep Purple played the same venue, so all the tennis players were given free tickets. My dad took me and I saw Ritchie Blackmore throw his guitar around and Ian Gillan scream, and Deep Purple were the first hard rock band that I became obsessed with.

In an alternate universe where you could try and get some hard rock fan into jazz, what would you play them?

Erm, what about the *Back in Black* of Jazz music? *Kind of Blue*, that's probably a great place to start. The hard rock world and the jazz world meet each other in a place that's really not as far away as a lot of hard rock fans would think.

I think you're right, it's amazing how often you can just come back to that record.

But it's the same with *Back in Black*. I've got a 12-year-old and a 10-year-old and they're just starting to get into Metallica, Guns N' Roses, Deep Purple and Black Sabbath. So we listen to a lot of the stuff on the car-ride to school – y'know "dad, play 'Back in Black', play 'Shoot to Thrill'" – and you listen to *Back in Black* and it sounds as great today as it did 31 years ago. It's the same thing with *Kind of Blue*, you put it on once or twice and it sounds as fresh, as relevant, as it did 50, 40-whatever years ago.

If you're not on the road, you are with your family?

I've got three kids at home so it's like "hanging with the kids, putting them to sleep, or going out". It's not quite what it was in the '90s, I'm sorry to say [laughs]. ●

Hear Cullum's full interview with Ulrich, on the Jamie Cullum Show, Radio 2, September 20 from 7pm to 8pm

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LARS ULRICH