

# Karla Tallas

## HISTORY

WITH GOTTHARD IN JAPAN







GOTTLHARD  
NIC MAEDER  
VOCALS, GUITAR





GOTTHARD  
LEO LEONI  
GUITAR





GOTTLHARD

MARC LYNN

*BASS GUITAR*





GOTTHARD  
HENA HABEGGER  
*DRUMS*





GOTTHARD  
FREDDY SCHERER  
GUITAR





GOTTHARD  
ERNESTO GHEZZI  
KEYBOARDS



# ***WITH GOTTHARD IN JAPAN!***

## ***GOTTHARD ON TOUR WITH UNISONIC!***

### ***TOKYO • OSAKA • NAGOYA • HIROSHIMA***

The new GOTTHARD era got started in November of 2011 with the announcement of a new singer, Nic Maeder. Logically, another step had to be the release of a new album. And completing the process was the live introduction a new frontman – probably the most anticipated part by the fans and public. After the first gigs in South America and summer festivals all over the Europe, GOTTHARD followed their “Firebirth Tour” schedule and carried on for another adventure, this time to amaze audiences in Japan, which has always been one of the most important markets for rock artists.

For me, the first chance to see the band live with a new frontman happened at a summer festival in July 2012. It’s very hard to describe the impressions and feelings I had during the gig, but one thing was clear to me: even though there were lots of ideas spinning around in my head, I definitely wanted to find a way to do something exclusive with GOTTHARD. The most important thing for me was to convey something special to the fans. Seeing the tour dates in Japan, the beginning of the plan started formulating. I had always heard stories and impressions about Japan fans from different bands and always wished to see it one day in reality. This wish came true in the beginning of September 2012, when me and my photographer followed GOTTHARD and joined 5 unforgettable shows within a week.

Even though our main intention was to follow GOTTHARD on their tour, we wanted to concentrate on UNISONIC as well. Thanks to the band’s tough schedule, we didn’t manage to do all we had planned. We mainly concentrated on UNISONIC on the third day in Osaka.

The review is divided into a couple parts. First, I went through all the things that happened in every city without describing the shows. In Osaka, you can find my impression of UNISONIC and their performances. The end of the story closes with the most important part and the main reason for our trip to Japan – the GOTTHARD gigs.

Here’s the story with my memories and impressions, enriched with excellent photos and exclusive video footage.







# ***WITH GOTTHARD IN JAPAN!***

## ***TOKYO: September 5<sup>th</sup>, 2012***

### ***– September 7<sup>th</sup>, 2012***

We finally landed at Tokyo Naritu airport after a long and tiring flight, shortly before 9 a.m. Tired, but happy and full of expectations. A couple of minutes after our arrival, we had a chance to meet'n'greet the band for the first time. The first day is planned as the arrival and relaxing day without any bigger plans. Only a short meeting with the management and the band in the evening in the hotel to introduce ourselves and make some plans for our report.

At the same time, UNISONIC was arriving to the hotel with their crew. Both bands had already toured together in South America, appeared together in the same European festivals, they'll be continuing in Japan and the tour will go on to Russia, and then the whole European tour will follow before the end of the year. From the beginning it was clear the tour would happen without any bigger problems, because the atmosphere between the 2 bands is carried out in a friendly spirit and you can't feel any kind of animosity between them.

Even if both bands had different record labels, this package has some connections in between. First of all, they have the same management. Also, they both started a new era approximately at the same time. Kai Hansen joined UNISONIC in March 2011 and a couple of months later, in November, GOTTHARD announced the name of their new singer.

The first photo shoot is planned for the 6<sup>th</sup> at 1 p.m. in front of the hotel. The situation isn't easy for us, nor is it for the band. For us it's our first time in Japan and it's not easy to arrange the best place for a photo session. We all took it easy for the first time and walked around the hotel, with the Museum of Art nearby. The other thing was to get used to each other and find the best way forward for our collaboration. The most important thing for each of us was to capture the best in every moment. Of course, the most important thing for the band was absolutely the show, as they always emphasized.

This was also the day of the first show, when it's necessary to check how everything will work out. After half an hour of shooting photos, the band heads straight away for the soundcheck. The venue for the first 2 gigs is the same and it's called Shibuya-AX. Both of the bands have 1 hour for soundcheck before every show on the Japan tour. GOTTHARD is the first up, and UNISONIC was chosen by the Japanese promoter as the headliner. At first, I was quite surprised to find this out. GOTTHARD is a band with a long history and 10 albums. UNISONIC is a band with just 1 album. I asked myself why UNISONIC then? The answer was more than clear after the first show and writing 2 names is more than enough to explain it all: Michael Kiske and Kai Hansen. Two icons of rock music who are treated by Japanese fans





as real gods. I'm leaving UNISONIC at this point for now, and will continue on with more later on with their concert review.

You could feel everybody was more relaxed and satisfied after the first show. The stress and doubts were gone. Everything worked out in the best possible way for the bands as well as for the audience. It would be a real pity to be in Tokyo and come back without a couple of night shots. The GOTTHARD guys were in a great mood and we all went to the Hard Rock Cafe. On the way there, we did a small photo session around town and after we all enjoyed the time in Rock Cafe in a very relaxing atmosphere. You could notice a couple of faces from the audience, those die-hard fans who decided to follow the bands throughout the whole tour and who became our friends in a very short time as well. Music is always the biggest tool for connecting people of different nationalities and

cultures. When you talk about your favorite music, you speak the same language and you almost don't see any differences.

The plans for the last day in Tokyo are to do a photo session, then to follow the band for soundcheck and to enjoy the show. We met around 4:30 p.m. The place is called Meiji Shrine and it's located in Shibuya, Tokyo, very close to the venue. Meiji Shrine is the Shinto shrine, dedicated to the deified spirits of Emperor Meiji and his wife Empress Shōken. We have to respect the rules of Japanese culture which are a bit different for us Europeans. It's not possible to take photos everywhere we wish and we're also told not to get so close to some objects. Anyway, it's possible to do some very interesting shots even if there are a lot of tourists everywhere.

There's no party tonight because the trip to Osaka is planned for early in the morning.



















# ***WITH GOTTHARD IN JAPAN!***

## ***OSAKA:***

### ***September 8<sup>th</sup>, 2012***

We all are arriving to Osaka shortly after noon. The venue is just next to the hotel, which makes all the situation very easy and comfortable. Everybody seems to be tired today, I would say it's the impact of jetlag. No special plans for today except the show, and as I had mentioned before, we are also concentrating more on UNISONIC today. The Grand Cube venue has a couple of surprises for us. For the first time we have a chance to see a typical venue for Japan, which is very different comparing to European venues. First of all, the venue is a part of a big complex of buildings and shopping centers, not a separate place which is on the ground floor. The Grand Cube can be found on the fifth floor. Shibuya-AX in Tokyo was the only venue we saw in Japan which was its own separate hall. The Grand Cube had one more specific place. This venue is probably multifunctional and is used for shows as well as for theater performances. You have seats in the audience, exactly like you're in a theater. We were walking around, trying to absorb its atmosphere and thinking about the upcoming evening and the contrast between the venue and the rock music which is going to play the main role right here tonight. Compared to other shows, there's another difference. The show time for the first band GOTTHARD is at 5 pm – a really unusual time to start.

The Japanese fans are very disciplined, everybody takes a seat and you can't hear any noise before the show. When it's show time and the lights are going down, everybody is standing up, but not leaving their places. This is also a big difference compared to Europe. You

can't feel any pushing or fighting for a place during the shows. You can see the discipline of Japanese people not only during the shows, but everywhere you go, on the streets, at train stations.... What I liked the most is that these people really care. If you have a problem on the street to find your way, there's always somebody who notices you without asking. Even if they don't speak any other language, they're always trying to help somehow. Only one thing which was quite strange for us was the bad information service for tourists, especially in the subway, but we always solved everything without any bigger problems thanks to the help of the people around us.

The night after the show in Osaka was planned by a Japanese promoter and both bands were invited for a dinner and to spend some time with those who were responsible for the 5 great nights with GOTTHARD and UNISONIC.

While the guys were having dinner, we moved to the one of the most famous rock clubs in Japan, called Rock Rock. You can hardly find a band name who's performed in Japan and hasn't visited this place. A small, tiny place, but really great. If you can see the fans being very concentrated during the shows, coming to the place like this, you can see everybody dancing around and really enjoying the party. One hour later, the members of both bands were joining us in the club. They can finally enjoy the party a little bit more because the next day is a day off.



GOTTHARD





# ***UNISONIC: UNITED MUSICIANS FROM DIFFERENT BACKGROUNDS AND COUNTRIES!***

Getting back to the point where I left UNISONIC in Tokyo. Explaining the main reason for why UNISONIC was performing as a headliner on the Japan tour, I would like to enter into this thought a little bit more. Not only a combination of Michael Kiske and Kai Hansen in one band, but the entire UNISONIC line up was attractive for the fans there. Thanks to the wide musical experience of all the band members and especially thanks to the fact that they were all well-known from bands who had always been popular in Japan: Michael Kiske (HELLOWEEN, PLACE VENDOME), Kai Hansen (HELLOWEEN, GAMMA RAY), Mandy Meyer (ASIA, GOTTHARD, KROKUS), Dennis Ward (PINK CREAM 69, D.C. COOPER, PLACE VENDOME) and Kosta Zafiriou (PINK CREAM 69). As Mandy commented: "united musicians from different backgrounds and countries." These words perfectly fit to the lineup and music direction of UNISONIC. Some might say it's still not clear which music direction the band wants to go. I had a chance to see a couple of shows during the time when Kai Hansen wasn't already a band member. At the time I had the feeling that the band wanted to get into hard rock more. Since Kai was in the band and listening to the first UNISONIC album "Unisonic," I would say that you can logically feel his influence in the songwriting. It doesn't have to be only that the band is not sure about the direction of their music, but this combination of styles can be just their intention, or simply the result of mutual collaboration in the

songwriting process between the trio of Hansen-Ward-Meyer. Many times in the past, I heard fans discussing if it ever would be possible to see Michael Kiske and Kai Hansen on one stage. The positive answer for them came with AVANTASIA shows, when the European audience had a chance to see them together for the first time. Before the UNISONIC tour, Michael Kiske also appeared as a guest during a couple of GAMMA RAY shows. As it's said, the third time's the charm – now the 2 icons are in the same band and fans all over the world can enjoy their full-length shows, as we saw happen in Japan.

The first chance to join the UNISONIC soundcheck for us was in Osaka. The guys were rehearsing without Michael Kiske, who was fully concentrating on being in the best shape for the show. You would also never see him at any party, probably for the same reason. During the soundcheck Michael was replaced by Kai and Dennis who were enjoying singing and jamming with the rest of the band. Jamming is probably a better way to express it than rehearsing in this case.

Kai is very relaxed because he can mainly concentrate on his guitar and not on the vocals during the shows. The whole time you can enjoy the precise performing by all the musicians: the guitar exhibitions of 2 great guitar players, Kai Hansen and Mandy Meyer, and the well-coordinated



rhythm section by drummer Kosta Zafiriou and bass player Dennis Ward.

Since the beginning of the first show in Tokyo, UNISONIC could be absolutely sure about their position. They were accepted by the fans incredibly well and the reactions and ovations during the shows were just amazing. The main attention goes as expected to Michael Kiske, who's returning to Japan after almost 20 years, something he likes to remind the audience of every night. He doesn't forget to joke about how different he looked back then when he still had lots of hair and didn't have such a big belly. Since the moment Michael appeared on stage, you could understand that the fans never forgot him and have always been waiting for the moment of his return. Noticing the reactions and talking to some fans, I have to say that Japanese people are probably more open in the way they respect musicians from



an artistic point of view. They don't have such strict tendencies to categorize and to rebuke somebody because of different music directions. Of course, Michael Kiske became the most famous for his time in HELLOWEEN, but the fans here respect his solo career as well and understood his need to do something different. I saw a couple of fans









who had the complete collection from the beginning of his career till today. As one of them told me: "the music is only good or bad. Michael has always been making good music in my opinion." You could really feel how everybody was enjoying the fact they just have a chance to see him again and enjoy his presence. Michael also has his own way of talking to the audience, with an absolutely detached view, using his special method of cold humor and making jokes even about himself. For the intro UNISONIC choose "Ride of The Valkyries," the term for the beginning of Act III of "Die Walkure," the second of four operas by the German composer Richard Wagner. There are no changes in the setlist which is the same for all 5 shows. UNISONIC's main intention is to present their self-titled debut album "Unisonic" and to satisfy the fans with a couple of old HELLOWEEN tracks. The setlist contains all the songs from the album "Unisonic" with the exception of the European bonus track "Over The Rainbow" and the Japanese bonus track "The Morning After." The show opens with the 2 fast, catchy songs "Unisonic" and "Never Too Late," followed by another 2 with a mid-level tempo called "Renegade" and "King For A Day," which is in my opinion one of the highlights on the album. The show continues with the more personal "I've Tried," written by Dennis Ward. One more piece from the debut album called "My Sanctuary." Approximately in the middle of the set, the time has come for the first surprise in the form of the

old HELLOWEEN classic "March Of Time" with an overwhelming reaction from the audience who are carried away by the way the original singer performs the hit after such a long time. Everybody's full of emotion, which means it's the best time to slow down and have a great moment for the powerful ballad "No One Ever Sees Me," which is a very personal one for Michael Kiske and the only one on the album he put down the lyrics for. The Japanese fans are very immersed in the moments while the band is performing such an emotional song and properly appreciate the musicians with a big round of applause before UNISONIC goes on in the setlist with "Star Rider" and "Souls Alive," the first song they ever wrote together. To complete the album, "We Rise" and "Never Change Me" are still missing and have a place in the set before the band leaves the stage for the first time. UNISONIC come back after a short break and it's clear they have to give more of the old classics to the audience. The last 2 songs, "Future World" and "I Want Out," are along with "March Of Time" from the "Keeper Of The Seven Keys Pt. 1 and 2" from the HELLOWEEN days. Even if the audience is very disciplined and concentrating all the time, during the last 2 songs they're especially dancing, partying and singing. The 80 minutes for UNISONIC are over. What else to say? With the shows in Japan UNISONIC have just confirmed the borders are open for them from their very first album and they have a very strong fan base here as well.



















# ***WITH GOTTHARD IN JAPAN!***

## ***NAGOYA: September 9<sup>th</sup> – 10<sup>th</sup>***

The departure is planned after noon and we arrive at Nagoya station around 1:30 p.m. We all need to rest in the hotel. The plan for me is to do an interview with Nic in the evening and afterwards we're invited by GOTTHARD for dinner. A great opportunity to finally get to know each other

a bit better and a breakthrough moment in our collaboration. Since this time, everything just gets better and better for both sides. The party carries on after dinner as we visit another Japanese rock club called Red Rock.

Nagoya looks very different compared to Tokyo and Osaka, and of course we want to use the opportunity on the second day here for another photo session with GOTTHARD. We're advised to visit the Nagoya Castle. I welcome this opportunity with open arms because history is another hobby of mine and I never had a chance to see the castles in a country like Japan. Not only me, but the band is also very interested to see it. Nagoya Castle was the center of one of the most important castle towns in Japan during the Edo period (the period between 1603 – 1868 in Japanese history, characterized by economic growth). Compared to our European castles, the architecture of this one is very atypical and very different for us. It's a beautiful place with a big park and I have to say, now we have one of the best photos from all the trip. Unfortunately, there's not so much time to enjoy it together with the guys because they have to hurry up for soundcheck at the venue for tonight, the Club Diamond Hall.

This is the last chance to party with both of the bands tonight, so we again spent some time at the Red Rock club after the show.







GOTTLHARD

















GOTTHARD



# ***WITH GOTTHARD IN JAPAN!***

## ***HIROSHIMA: September 11<sup>th</sup>***



Hiroshima is the last stop on the Japan tour. We met the band at the venue at the Quatro Club in the afternoon and walking together to the site for our last photo session with GOTTHARD, except for drummer Hena Habegger, who has some other plans.

Hiroshima is the largest city of western Honshu, the largest island of Japan, and is best known as the first city in history to be destroyed by a nuclear weapon when the United States Air Force dropped an atomic bomb on the city on August 6<sup>th</sup>, 1945, near the end of World War II. Our steps take us through Hiroshima Peace Memorial Park to the Atomic Bomb Dome. Our thoughts go to the tremendous tragedy when around 70,000 people died and another 70,000 were fatally injured from the radiation. We are also thinking about visiting this place on the same day as another tragedy happened at New York's World Trade Center 11 years ago. Straight after we are heading to the Bell of Peace near the Children's Peace Monument. Visitors can ring the bell for world peace. Pity that the band is not complete because from the 2 mentioned places we definitely got the best shots here.

Returning back for soundcheck and enjoying the last show and the last moments with the 2 bands. Unfortunately, tonight after the GOTTHARD show we can see only the beginning of UNISONIC because we're leaving for Hakata, which is close to the airport as GOTTHARD and us have flights early next morning.















# ***WITH GOTTHARD IN JAPAN!***

## ***THE SHOW IS ALWAYS THE MOST IMPORTANT!***

Not only that the show is the most important, but also as it's said: save the best for last. That's why I left the impressions about GOTTHARD and their gigs in Japan for the end of this report. The shows of my favorite bands are very important in my life and the most fulfilling thing for me is when I feel the attitude of the musicians is as honest towards the music as to their fans. This is exactly what I always felt with GOTTHARD, not only from their live shows, but from their music and albums as well. Some people can argue that GOTTHARD is not the most original hard rock band in the world, which is in my opinion mostly influenced by the fact they were formed in the beginning of 90s and not in the time of rock'n'roll's biggest fame. GOTTHARD started their career in the time when the power of hard rock music and rock music in general was failing due to the onset of modern trends on the scene, but fortunately they never succumbed to them. They also confirmed this assertion with their studio album "Firebirth," released in 2012, with which the band went back to their roots.

With a history of more than 20 years now and with 10 albums in their discography, it's definitely hard to create a playlist to satisfy every single fan and to play all the great songs GOTTHARD has written during one show. There's definitely no song from the "Need To Believe" album because it was the last one with Steve, as the band members explained. Actually, it's not the only album missing in the

playlist. There are no songs from "Open" (1999) and "Homerun" (2001) as well, and if I don't count the cover "Hush," there's also no original song from the debut album "Gotthard" (1992). Now, the most important is of course to promote the new release "Firebirth" and to introduce a new singer to Japanese audiences. The fans could enjoy the stable GOTTHARD line-up throughout the years until that tragic accident happened to claim frontman Steve Lee as the victim, who was in the band from the beginning. Finding another singer was the biggest change in the line-up in the band's history so far. GOTTHARD is a band with officially 5 members: Leo Leoni – guitar and Marc Lynn – bass guitar, who formed the band together, Hena Habegger – drums, who played on the debut album as a sessional drummer and officially became a band member after the second album "Dial hard" (1994), Freddy Scherer – guitar, who first appeared on the third GOTTHARD album "G" (1996), afterwards he was replaced by Mandy Meyer, who joined the band again on "Human Zoo" (2003), and Nic Maeder – vocals and guitar, who has been a band member since 2011. The unofficial sixth member is Ernesto Ghezzi – keyboards, who supports live shows.

As I had a chance to notice, all the band members are very focused before each show to perform as best as possible. Every single show is very important for the band. What I really appreciate about GOTTHARD is they are very famous in their





home country of Switzerland and can fill venues with a capacity of 20,000 people or even more, but they don't underestimate any show. It doesn't matter if there's 20,000 or 1,000 people, their attitude is the same – to give the best to anybody who's supporting the band and who's coming for a show. From the beginning of their shows, you can feel everybody on stage is just enjoying his part and GOTTHARD shows are more in the party spirit.

There's only one change during the Japanese tour in the setlist. For the first 2 shows in Tokyo, GOTTHARD have 5 minutes less on stage, which means 1 song less to play than the rest of the tour. I would call the first night in Tokyo as the checking night. From the reactions of the audience it's clear they already know the songs from the new album "Firebirth," but they needed to check out how the band sounds and how it works out live with a new singer. The fans are listening very carefully to every line Nic is singing and they also pay a big amount of attention when he's talking in between the songs. Since the beginning of the first show they're looking at the band with much respect, but they really need a little time to be sure and to get used to a new situation. I would call Japan the land of the strings

because they really admire the guitar players a lot. You could hear the fans screaming the name of Leo Leoni very often every night in the audience. The second show in Tokyo was probably the best show on the tour in every way, and also as I heard from the drummer Hena, one of the best shows the band has ever played together. You could really feel a special vibe that night, the great chemistry in the band and overwhelming reactions from the audience. The fans accepted Nic incredibly well and he got lots of amazing reactions immediately after the first show. After the second breakthrough show in Tokyo, the reactions of the audience were the same for the rest of the Japan tour.

The party can start and "Dream On" is a great choice to open the show and put the audience right at GOTTHARD'S ease. To keep the tempo and let the great atmosphere just go on, the band continues with the catchy "Gone Too Far" which is from one of the best GOTTHARD albums "Domino Effect" and is also the only song from the album in the set. The time has come to introduce "Firebirth." The first piece which is also the second video clip called "Starlight" and it's the first time in the show Nic also plays the guitar. The following







# GOTTHARD

is one of GOTTHARD's biggest classics, "Top of The World," and afterwards there's a place for another new track "Remember It's Me." As Nic announces it's the first one they wrote together. This is the special song which started the new GOTTHARD era. The next 2 songs are probably my favorites in the set. "Sister Moon" is one of my all-time favorite GOTTHARD songs which reminds me of early WHITESNAKE and the whole band is performing this one incredibly live, and "Fight" is in my opinion one of the highlights of the new album. The Joe South cover "Hush" can't be missed at any GOTTHARD show and offers the chance for the audience to sing along with the band. An old friend and GOTTHARD ex-guitar player Mandy Meyer is joining the band to jam together for "Hush" in Hiroshima. The audience can enjoy the exhibition and improvisation of the 3 guitar players and go back in time in their thoughts to when Mandy was a band member. Some really great diversity for the last night. The most emotional moments are coming after with the ballad "One Life, One Soul" which is dedicated to the great singer Steve Lee, who is not with us anymore. The band is leaving the stage and now it's time for keyboardist Ernesto Ghezzi and singer Nic Maeder. During this song everybody is struggling hard to keep the tears out of their eyes. All the audience is silent, singing along with Nic only a little and very quietly, enjoying these special moments their own way, dedicating their thoughts and memories to a very

unique person and singer like Steve Lee whose spirit will always be with the band and their fans. The audience is also fully concentrating on the way Nic is performing this song, who deservedly gets great applause for the incredible potential this singer has without a doubt. The second ballad in the set and the song I mentioned that the band played on all the shows except for Tokyo is the beautiful "Shine" which is a new one as well as the following "The Story Is Over." The great finale starts with the undying GOTTHARD classic and another one which will probably never leave the setlist, "Mountain Mama," leading into "Right On" to the last one from the new album "Firebirth." The end of "Mountain Mama" and the break between these 2 songs is the time for guitarist and showman Leo Leoni, who attracts the attention of the audience by his special addition using a vocal-instrumental-unisono effect: Leo's voice is distorted by a hose attached to his microphone and mixed with the sound of the guitar. Only the 2 last songs are missing and the show concludes with the big hits "Lift "U" Up" and "Anytime Anywhere."

It was a big honor for me to get a chance to get closer to a band as great as GOTTHARD. The members of the band completely fit each other, and it's working perfectly in every way, but they are also one of the most cultivated bands I have ever met. It was definitely an unusual experience to be a part of the tour in the land of the rising sun.



















































# Karla Tallas

www.karlatallas.com



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