

# Whole Lotta Talk - Episode 13: Richard Z. Kruspe / Emigrate - Rammstein

*Interview transcript*

**Thomas Moser (M):** I can't remember where I've heard about it, but... you've already recorded the upcoming album *A Million Degrees* in the past... and then something went down the drain. Why, what happened?

**Richard Z. Kruspe (K):** I have a swimming pool above the studio and this pool got a leak somewhere. The problem was: at that time, I was on tour, so nobody noticed it. When we got back, I had to renew half of the studio. Luckily, my insurance covered it, but all the hard drives were gone forever. I had to rewrite all the songs from scratch and from what I remembered... That was already hard enough, what made it even harder was, that I had a burnout back in 2015; which was the year I already mixed the songs that got lost. Good thing was, because of the whole pool thing, I was inspired to write new material. I also compiled a new team. After all, I'm pretty happy about the way everything turned out to be.

**M:** Did you invite all the guest musicians again?

**K:** Yes but that never really was a big thing to redo in the first place. I did most of the album myself, except for the drums and the bass; meaning that we basically only had to re-record the drums and bass lines.

**M:** With Emigrate you recorded two albums within a time span, in which your main project didn't release a single record. How did that happen? Was that part of the plan after all? Or did you agree on that with your Rammstein bandmates?

**K:** Well, every band has to clear that sort of thing with every member first, but in that case, it just wasn't necessary. Everything turned out differently than originally planned. I actually wanted to release the Emigrate album in 2015 already. After I finished mixing the songs, I met with my Rammstein bandmates. But at that time, I wasn't ready to record a new album with them. What we did instead was to sit down, think, and figure out what to do and how to musically find common ground... and in the blink of an eye, three years went by – it was fun! I also took the time I needed to finish the Emigrate album... plus, I spent the last four years fulfilling my dream of building my own house.

**M:** Before we start talking about the actual songs, there is one thing I just have to know: now that you've released three albums with Emigrate, it seems impossible to me that you don't want to go out and play that stuff live?!

**K:** I've always said that, I have to keep the balance between Emigrate and Rammstein. As long as I'm not busy with Rammstein, I can put my creativity into other projects. That works perfectly well for me. But if I started to go on tour with Emigrate, that balance would fall apart... and God forbid, what if I'd actually like touring with Emigrate?! What if I liked it a lot more than playing with Rammstein?! I am a little scared of that, you know... Right now, I'm just not ready to give up that balance. I know it works for now.

**M:** Ok... but for now... the album... Emigrate... *A Million Degrees*. Why that title and not... I don't know... "a million liters of water?" (laughs)

**K:** (laughs) I got the idea for the album title after my burnout. A burnout actually feels like a million degrees of heat. Hot and cold. I tried to visualize that but I couldn't come up with songs that somehow illustrated "temperature." My graphic designer came up with the idea of interpreting it as "edgy"... highs and lows... a superlative: opening up as much as possible, coming up with as many musical styles as possible, collaborating as much as possible, doing the exact opposite of what Rammstein does. So *A Million Degrees* simply was the perfect name for it.

**M:** The album actually reminds me of the 90s industrial wave. Industrial with a lot of pop sounds – and I don't mean that in a bad way.

**K:** Oh I totally get it, because it's true. Pop music influenced me a lot when I was younger. I mean, I grew up in the 80s. A few days ago, I was at my hairdresser's and I knew every song they played on the radio. And there's nothing wrong with catchy hooks and melodies. Even Ministry did that – or Trent Reznor. Yes, my new record does sound like a pop record at times, but I'm fine with that. I also try to break free from norms and genres and especially that 90s stereotype – the 90s have influenced me a lot, of course with all the crossover bands mixing up different genres. Nowadays, you always hear people say that rock is dead. But instead of letting it die, I try to find new combinations to it. Sometimes I succeed, sometimes I don't.

**M:** How many songs didn't get on the album?

**K:** Four or five. Just the ones I couldn't remember, I guess (laughs). Since, as I said, I rewrote all the songs from my memory, some new things came up and after a while, we just felt like we had enough songs. So I thought to myself: "well, if I can remember those songs, they have to be good."

**M:** "1234" is the first single... it's actually "Eins, Zwo, Drei Vier", right? German, I mean. Because you also sing it in German...?

**K:** Damn right it is.

**M:** When you finished the song... was it then you realized: that's a song, the Billy Talent guys would fit right in?

**K:** Oh no, no at all. I have to admit, that the whole Billy Talent thing only came up, thanks to my management. To be honest, I'd never have thought about them. Usually, it goes like this: I write a song and ask myself... who could push it to another level? But with the song "1234", I actually thought it was perfect just the way it is, without any guest musicians. But [my manager] Sven suggested to ask the Billy Talent guys. He knows them very well and I met them at a festival once, so I said: "Yeah let's do this!" I've always been very impressed with Ian D'Sa's guitar skills and Ben's singing blew me away – that was exactly what brought the song to a whole new level. So after hearing their amazing additions to the song, I came up with the idea of making it a duet and I also wanted to make a video – a video in which we played live. I sat down and tried to think of a good live video producer in Germany but I couldn't come up with any – who wasn't way too expensive for the budget I have for Emigrate. So what I did was, looking through iTunes and I found one of Shinedown's live

videos and I loved the way it was shot, but I figured their video producer might be a little too expensive for Emigrate. But he actually said yes – so we shot the video in LA with Ben and Ian in a warehouse, no air conditioning, it was freakishly hot but they totally rocked the shit out and we had lots of fun together. That’s actually exactly why I love doing Emigrate, because I can work with people, I usually can’t work with.

**M:** Did you ask somebody to collaborate with you, who decided not to do it?

**K:** Well, that’s a sad story actually. There were three people I asked. They didn’t say no, they all died. David Bowie, Chris Cornell and Chester Bennington. They were all interested in working with me and they wanted to hear the songs... but unfortunately, that was the end of the story. I also asked Serj Tankian from System of a Down to be the singer to a song called “War.” I sent it to him and asked him whether he wanted to join in. But the next day, he called me and said: “I don’t know how to make the song any better.” Man, what a compliment. I also wanted to work with Iggy Pop for the song “Spitfire”, but he didn’t have time to work with me... he had to deal with a water damage in his house in Miami, just like me (laughs).

**M:** Which song was meant to be for Chris Cornell?

**K:** That’s one of the songs that didn’t make it on the album. The song’s called “Mother”.

**M:** “War” is the opening track of the album. Seriously, what a perfect opener, very oriental sounding...

**K:** I think that’s actually my first political song, a song that criticizes our current society. I don’t usually write political songs, but that one just came to me so naturally, I’ve had to let it flow out of me.

**M:** There’s also a song called: “You Are So Beautiful” – well, who is?

**K:** I asked myself the exact same question for a very long time. Sometimes you write songs and it’s only until much later that you realize what the song’s really about. It’s about my daughter. She’s seven years old now. When I realized the song is about her, I had to write the script for the video. It’s about a father-child relationship and we filmed it in LA. I can show it to you.

**M:** Well, yeah, cool – thanks! *(Sorry, up until then nobody got to see that video except for Tom and Richard... apparently, he drives a pretty cool car in it... and yes, we’re jealous, too)*

So that’s the second video you made for the album?

**K:** Yes, exactly. As I said, I wrote the story myself and the whole shooting was risky business, because my daughter Max was never actually in a video or anything, so I had to explain a lot to her about filming. But I wanted to share this with her. It’s about a father who loves his child very deeply, but sometimes you find yourself in situations in which you leave your originally intended path... which is pretty normal for me (laughs). But Max did a wonderful job, I’m very proud of her.

**M:** Ghost mastermind Tobias Forge is supposed to be on the album, too, right? But I didn’t hear him. Maybe I’m deaf...

**K:** Yeah you're definitely deaf, man. Let me show it to you...

*(Plays Tom the song "I'm Not Afraid")*

**M:** That's him?

**K:** Yes, that's his voice. It's actually a fun story how that whole collaboration came together... we didn't know each other but I was looking for producers for Rammstein and I knew that the producers we were interested in used to work with Ghost. Tobias was in town, I called him, we met for some coffee, and we got along perfectly, so I just had to ask him, if he was interested in collaborating with me. I just finished that one song that would match his voice perfectly. He actually said no, he doesn't do any collaborations, that's just not his thing... but then I played him the song – and he couldn't say no anymore (laughs). I'm glad he was so spontaneous and willing to change his mind.

**M:** How long did it take you two to record that song?

**K:** It didn't take a very long time. We initially wanted to record it here in Berlin, but due to some personal problems Tobias had, that producer we hired for Rammstein, recorded his parts in Sweden.

**M:** So far, you've released three albums with Emigrate and you always point out, that you need that balance between Rammstein and "everything else." But honestly, even on a fourth Emigrate album, I wouldn't expect you to make any different kind of music.

**K:** But that's exactly the door, I'd like to keep open for myself. Because I can totally see myself doing something completely new and different on the fourth album. For example, I'm actually considering making an electronic album. Or just having one singer for the whole album. I don't know yet. Maybe after spending the next two or three years with Rammstein, I'll change my mind and I do wanna write rock songs again. I possibly want to head for other directions though. As a musician and producer, I try to be as open as possible for new sounds. But there just isn't that much new stuff out there, you know? I like electronic music and of course I like rock, but I can't wrap my head around hip hop.

**M:** Me, neither. I really tried but I gave up and said: ok that just isn't the right thing for you. Sure, not everything is bad, but...

**K:** Yes, of course. Only yesterday, my bandmates showed me some tracks and I just didn't get it. I'd love to. But I can't. Hip hop is the biggest and most successful music genre of today. I know what hip hop is about. But there's a difference between American and German hip hop for example. I can totally relate to artists who go into the studio and work hard on their music and different sounds; but, to me, the hip hop culture in Germany has nothing to do with music but everything to do with a certain lifestyle. And that's just not my world – so to me it all just sounds soulless. That's my problem with hip hop.

**M:** Maybe you just have to play them some Big Black and wait for their reactions. (laughs)

**K:** I guess they wouldn't understand that sort of music (laughs). It was the first industrial band that got me into that whole industrial genre.

**M:** My first bands were Ministry and Helmet but Big Black came shortly afterwards (laughs).

Let us come back to that one statement of yours where you said that you'd like to do an album with only one singer. You do know that you're a good singer, too, right?

**K:** That's not the point though. It's about new colors, shapes and changes. I don't want to get bored with Emigrate. Now with the third album, I already had that feeling that I was getting close to boredom, but then that burnout and that water damage happened, so I had a new challenge to master and that's exactly what I needed; what I'll always need. And that's also the reason why I can't imagine a fourth Emigrate album to sound exactly like the last one. That has nothing to do with singing good or bad. I learned that your voice doesn't matter if you want to say something. The challenge is, to find a way to get your message to the people.

**M:** So, now that the album's finished... do you leave it at that or are you eager to see the results?

**K:** The music is only one part of an album. Another part is the visualization. For this record, I made four videos, which was big fun. I have enough experience in the music business to know how to release an album the right way. Talking to journalists is another part. The album is a success, if it gets on playlists. And you as the artist observe that process. For the second album, I made a video that was way too expensive at that time and the whole budget was just gone way too soon. This was a nice little lesson on keeping an eye on the visualization of the album, even after the music's finished. But every morning I wake up, thinking... okay, what's next?? Right now, I'm talking to you about the Emigrate project and I guess that whole Emigrate period will continue until Christmas. All throughout November, I'll be in LA for the mixing of the new Rammstein album and in preparation for the upcoming Rammstein tour that starts in January. I'm always busy.

**M:** You mix the Rammstein album yourself?

**K:** No, luckily, we found someone who's perfect for the job. Rich Costey – he worked with Muse a lot. Very talented young man. Together with our producer, we're going to work with him in his studio in LA.

**M:** Total change of subject... because I know, if I don't ask it now, I'll forget about it... On my way here, I tried to get familiar with your bio. And you seem to be a lone wolf...

**K:** A little bit, for sure. Not completely though. I like doing some things on my own, writing for example. I like working in a team, if I can tell the direction we're heading. That's fun because the ego is gone and the final product's in the focus. Rammstein is a lot of a lone wolf thing though, because it's always been some sort of self-therapy to me. True is though, that I'm fine with being alone for a week and I don't always need people around me. It's ok for a certain amount of time, but then I also need time to recover and to think about everything I saw and experienced. And for that I definitely don't need other people.

**M:** Is that easier to handle here in Berlin than in New York?

**K:** I was very happy with that crazy mix. A great balance that vanished, when my daughter was born in 2011. Then I had to admit: okay, it's not about me anymore, it's about her and her welfare. I wanted her to be born and raised in Berlin, because, to me, New York's not a good place to raise a child in. I made that decision for her and so I moved back to Berlin, which also fit my plans to build a house.

**M:** Did you look for a certain property or did you want it to be right here?

**K:** No, I wanted to build something myself. I bought the house years ago and I didn't like it that much, architecturally. One day, I got up to the roof and felt that beautiful energy up there. That was where I knew: "I'd love to build it my own way." So I sat down with an architect and we designed the house of my dreams, which was big fun... until we started building. That was the beginning of the disaster (laughs).

But all in all, I just think that people who work creatively have to reflect and think a lot and you can't do that when you're surrounded by people all the time. I'm also very sensitive to energy and vibes. It's about protection, too, because you need time to reflect on everything you soak up throughout the day. I absorb those vibes and if it's too much for me, I have to leave the room.

**M:** So, looking at it the other way round, do you think it's complicated for people to live with you?

**K:** I think it's very complicated. But I also think it depends on who you ask. My daughter would probably say: "No problem at all." But she's also the only person who makes me do things, I'd usually never do... like, having a proper conversation in the morning. The thing is, I'm very emotional and people take it way too personal way too often when I shut myself away. Obviously, I don't do that to hurt anyone, but it always leads to discussions. Yeah, when it comes to relationships, I think I wouldn't want to live with someone like me (laughs).

**M:** Fair enough. I just have to ask you some questions about Rammstein. In October, we celebrated the "Rammstein Rocktober" on ROCK ANTENNE because we raffled a New Year's Eve trip to Mexico where you're going to play with Rammstein. How did you come up with that idea?

**K:** There are two guys in the band that always want to do something on New Year's Eve: Till and me. I hate this day. So I asked the boys: "hey, why don't we just play a gig that night?" It took me years to convince them to do it. But this year, everyone finally agreed and so we asked our American agent to organize something, somewhere in the world – and he did. So yeah, the main reason for it to even take place is, so that Till and I don't have to attend any of those silly parties and can actually go on stage and play.

**M:** And you're super popular in Mexico.

**K:** Yeah, it makes sense to do crazy things like that, where it actually works out. I guess our manager just made one phone call and minutes later, the gig was a done deal (laughs). I love the idea of celebrating New Year's Eve at the beach though. It's different.

**M:** There's one thing I noticed before... Listening to you talk about Rammstein, it makes me wonder... might that be your last Rammstein album? I mean, *Liebe ist für alle da* was released in 2008 and it took you ten years to release a new one. Even Def Leppard are faster than you guys (laughs).

**K:** Absolutely right. We are very slow. At first, I wasn't really interested in making a new record and also in the whole "push and pull situation" within the band, the frustration, the anger, the highs, the lows... And I hadn't written anything for Rammstein either... but when we met at our drummer's house and jammed a little, I showed Till some ideas I came up with, which were actually never meant to be for Rammstein. Some I intended to use for Emigrate.



But Till loved them right away. I caught that fire I used to have in the early days of the band. And what's most important: The Rammstein vs. Richard-component dissolved a little. In the past, when I used to write stuff, I got the feeling that the others considered it as an attack. But this time, it was a very respectful cooperation. This time, they liked what I did and told me so. Especially our second guitarist. I mean, we're two completely different personalities. But now it felt like a union again. And then I said: "Hey, we shouldn't just write an album over the next four years. Let's work on it but also get on stage in the summer." And that's what we did. There were some interruptions because we all have families we want to take care of. But one thing was very important to me: I wanted to have Olsen Involtni, my friend and Emigrate co-producer, involved in the process. I thought, he was the key to the change, his involvement would make all the difference – and I was right. With him, everything felt so easy and his thinking aligns ours, and so we managed to make it a great album... I think.

**M:** For people outside of the band, it might be hard to understand but I can imagine that there's a very unique chemistry that develops between bandmates throughout the process of making an album.

**K:** Absolutely. There's actually an Emigrate song called "We Are Together"... as long as we stay... which is dedicated to the idea behind Rammstein and I think that chemistry within Rammstein can only work the way it does now. To me, that whole Rammstein chapter feels complete after the next three, four years. When you're about 50, you start to think about time and what you want to do with the rest of your life and I feel like, there are things I still want to achieve besides Rammstein. Maybe besides music in general. I don't know what. I think the rest of the band is totally content with what they achieved with Rammstein. They don't want to achieve even more... but I'm different. I feel like, we've had great years together and we've achieved a lot. But I need more in life. Everyone has a different approach to life – but me... no, I don't think I'll make another Rammstein record. The upcoming album felt like a return to the very beginning and I loved the harmony, the chemistry we shared making the record. But to me it feels like the end of the road.

**M:** Would Rammstein continue as a band with one of you missing?

**K:** I don't think so. It may work, of course, but it would be a different band, a different dynamics. It won't work if you expect it to be the same Rammstein. It would sound differently to what Rammstein sounds like right now – which only makes sense. But that wouldn't make it worse. I have no idea what they want to do after we finished the upcoming album cycle... We haven't even started the tour yet. The tour would take us around the world for four or five years and I think I would continue playing live but I don't think I'd do any more touring. That would just take too much of my time. I have many other important things I'll have to focus on. In the future, I just don't want to work four or five years on one album cycle – that's just too much time. I'm way too energized for that. I get that my bandmates love it the way it is right now though... but hey, who knows what's going to happen in four years, right?

**M:** I think I get it, but at the same time – I don't really. People who were never in a band and never experienced that whole band life, touring life might wonder... how can it NOT work? You earn so much money...

**K:** Yeah, the thing is: money is not our motivator. Never has been. I mean, yes, it has worked all those years and at one point in your life, you start a family and you're going to have children you'll be responsible for... money is needed for school, food, everything. Those

situations did make me nervous, especially in the beginning and there were times where I was like: “Guys, I don’t know if I can do this any longer,” but we made an agreement in the band, that if somebody decides to leave, he is still going to get parts of the royalties, and that’s great. I could leave the band now without ever having to worry about money – that’s a great feeling. I was co-responsible for our success over the last years, I wrote many songs but I’ve always divided the money we got from them by six. Till always divided his parts by six and that’s perfectly fair, I think. So money never was our motivator and neither was it for me personally. I also always had other jobs and deals and wrote my own music. It’s great that Rammstein is successful, but money never should be your ultimate goal. And, frankly speaking, after spending 20 years with the same people, everybody feels the need to head for a different direction. Till works on his solo stuff, Flake writes books, the others do sports, surfing and have their families, especially our drummer, he loves that family time very much. As I said, it’s not normal to hang out with the same guys for years and years. I mean, it’s hard enough to stay together with the same woman for 20 years or more, now imagine having to hang out with the same men for all that time (laughs).

**M:** Did the fact, that you’re a member of the biggest German rock band in the world – besides the Scorpions of course – ever make you nervous? Did that thought ever scare you?

**K:** No, not really.

**M:** And you never had the feeling that it just gets too much to handle?

**K:** No. The bigger the better. Maybe that’s because we had enough time to learn how to deal with success as we built up our popularity pretty slowly. Plus, the time we got big, was a very different one from today – life was much slower back then. Today, everything moves so fast. But no matter what, no, I was never scared of our success.

**M:** You seem so versatile to me, I’m actually afraid to drop a brick. Maybe you’ve got some sore point somewhere and I don’t want to hurt you.

**K:** Oh of course there is a sore point, everybody’s got one. But for me, life’s part of a learning process and luckily, I have the music to express myself. Who knows what could have happened to me instead, if it weren’t for my creative work? Sore points are important, they point out your problems to you and I think you have to keep an eye on them and work on and with them. I always try to be very self-reflexive; I’m always looking for opportunities to improve myself, my life but I do ask for help if I feel like I can’t handle life by myself anymore – I have no problem with therapy for example. Yes, having sore points is important for your being, because they lead you to the next sore point. (laughs)

**M:** There are a lot of books in which rockstars write about how they drive their children to school every day. About how “ordinary” they are. How ordinary are you?

**K:** I absolutely drive my daughter to school. I already did when I was 23. Today I’m about 30 years older... okay, 27... and I calmed down lot, found my peace and actually started to enjoy it. But yeah, I drive my daughter to school. What’s wrong with that?

**M:** Oh, I don’t know. Maybe it’s just because it’s so ordinary and people don’t expect you to be ordinary.



**K:** I think everybody's ordinary in his or her own individual way. Even Andy Warhol was some kind of ordinary. Back in the day, people just never got close enough to see how ordinary things were. There is one thing I've learned: If you're extreme on one end, there's another extreme on the other end. People who're that extraordinary, are also just as normal. Same with me – and I'm not afraid to admit that. I like being normal, doing normal things. My only problem is that I get bored really fast. I wish I had that “drinking gene” – from those old American movies, you know. Men who just casually hang out at bars and waste hours drinking. I can't do that. I don't drink alcohol and whenever I go to parties, I get bored after like an hour – everything's said and done, I want to go home. At the time people slowly start to get drunk and start babbling, I already left.

**M:** I feel you... I do love to drink a few beers at parties, but I totally get how shitty it is for everyone around you who stays sober (laughs). So when will we get to read your book?

**K:** Publishing a book is definitely on my bucket list. A few days ago, I talked to Al Jorgensen, who wrote the book about Ministry. He currently works on a book about Korn's Jonathan Davis. And we talked about his work, because I like it a lot.

**M:** I haven't read the Ministry book yet, but it sounds super funny and it's definitely on my list.

**K:** Oh you should definitely read it! It's awesome! I started with the autobiographies by Anthony Kiedis, then Slash and “The Dirt” and I thought that after reading those, pretty much everything had been said about the business. Then there was Al Jorgensen and he topped everything. We talked and I suggested we might work on a book together. I feel like so many things happened to me in my life, that I need somebody to help me remember half of the stuff... especially when it comes to all the crazy stuff that happened to me in the early days. I don't want to do an autobiography, all by myself – but I'd love to tell my story. A book is definitely going to happen, one way or the other, even if it's just for my children to read up on their crazy dad (laughs). I don't expect it to be super successful though, it's just something that I want to do; like building my house and I actually just planted two trees, too.

**M:** After some precious time talking to you, let's finish this interview with music... the interview is going to be aired in our “Rockstar Radio Show” on ROCK ANTENNE, a nice little special with you and your music. So do you actually have a special song you definitely want to have on the playlist? A song you have special memories with maybe?

**K:** When I was a child, I spent a lot of time at home... being grounded was a thing back then, you know. But there was one band that guided me through that time; and there's one singer that I consider my big idol when it comes to rock music: Bon Scott from AC/DC. Their song “Sin City” – that's a song that definitely has to be on the playlist in a show about my life.

**M:** I can totally arrange that (laughs). I think I have no more questions – damn, I don't even know how much time went by. Thank you so much, Richard!

*This interview was conducted by ROCK ANTENNE head of music Thomas Moser with Richard Z. Kruspe in Berlin in October 2018.*