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Smith & Myers use their bond to stay united and fight back against COVID-19

Interviewed by Gina Adams, Tony Contini | Written by Tony Contini



Brent Smith and Zach Myers planned to record a double album in late 2019 for their band Smith & Myers. The album features 10 “reimaginings” and 10 originals. They hit the studio hard in February 2020. Seventeen songs into the record, they started to feel the seriousness of COVID-19 revealing itself.

Myers said it was easy for the news to sound like fear-mongering in the beginning, but as the gravity of the situation fell on them, they kept their poise. Their unity and music kept them together. He calls the bond they share the best part of their bands. “We had each other,” Zach Myers, guitarist of Smith & Myers and Shinedown, said in an interview with Rock On Magazine.

“That’s always been our thing within our bands - We keep each other sane no matter what’s going on.”



Once they saw the shutdown happening, Brent Smith, vocalist of Smith & Myers and Shinedown, said the most important thing was getting Zach back to his family, then he began sheltering in place. “The reality for me was the first day waking up and looking at the ideology of ‘We aren’t asking you to go to war. We are asking you to stay at home with your family and binge watch Netflix.’”



Smith said he tried to take that advice. On the first Saturday he was 30 minutes into a binge when he got restless, and instead started to research the virus. He wanted to first solidify the definitions of pandemic, social distancing, coronavirus and COVID-19. "Long story short, that's how we partnered with Direct Relief," Smith said. Direct Relief, headquartered in Santa Barbara, California, is a bipartisan non-profit who's stated mission is to "improve the health and lives of people affected by poverty or emergency situations by mobilizing and providing essential medical resources needed for their care." Shinedown wrote "Atlas Falls", a passionate song Smith said they "pulled out of obscurity." They released a poignant lyric video on Youtube highlighting the efforts of first responders and medical professionals and created a t-shirt as a fundraiser for Direct Relief. Smith said they have since raised around \$520,000 from the "Shinedown nation" for COVID-19 relief. "We did not stick our heads in the sand," Smith said. "This is not the first time in human history a pandemic has occurred. This is not the first virus in human history. We tried to lead from the front."

Smith said Direct Relief will always have a presence at Shinedown shows going forward. Despite the pandemic, Smith & Myers were elated to have played 26 shows at drive-ins and a short tour with strict protocol and required approval from the mayor, chief of police, county officials, along with District Board of Health. No matter the hurdles, precautions and changes needed, they needed to perform. Myers says his pre-show pray always ends with "Please let me never take this for granted".



"It's not the way you want to do a show, but at least you get to play," Myers said. "It was a different vibe, but it was fun. Whether some of us admit it or not, I think we needed a break from the 'Big Machine.' Maybe the world needed a break from us, but we didn't know it was going to be this." Smith, Myers and Shinedown's successes are paramount. Along the road of creating six studio albums, they've sold over ten million copies worldwide, and have the most number one singles on the Billboard Mainstream Rock charts. One part of that success was a wonderful cover of Lynyrd Skynyrd's "Simple Man". Since, Myers has known there is a special power in Smith's vocals and a single guitar. Smith & Myers is the skeletal version of Shinedown, and it's powerful in a different way.

Both Smith and Myers are advocates for the American Foundation For Suicide Prevention and stressed the importance of talking about mental health. Smith said he's forged through hard times, including 2020, by communicating with his fellow band members "We take mental health very seriously," Smith said. "We [as a band] genuinely love each other and treat it like a marriage. Just like you're not supposed to go to bed angry, you're not supposed to go on stage angry." Smith brought up the Friedrich Nietzsche quote - "Without music life would be a mistake" "A song can be whatever you need it to be," Smith said. "You have to have a light to go towards."



Smith is both optimistic about the future and quick to get into action. "It might not be the timeline everybody wants, but we have to work together to survive together," Smith said. "We only have one boss, it just happens to be everyone in the audience. And what we are doing is fundamentally figuring out how we are going to return to the stage safely for our fans." Smith believes "The Media" has a heart and most outlets actually want to report the truth, but there are many news formats that become performance art and revel in the negativity for viewership. He feels it can be dangerous during a pandemic. "In a pandemic situation like this, how do you return to shows?" Smith posits. "You need your first day with no death in your country. And then your first week. Then your first month. Then you need the contagion rate to go down."

With the same tenacity he exudes onstage and in-studio, Smith is driven to end this pandemic and his research and passion are apparent. "If the data isn't there and we can't do it safely, we won't do it," Smith said. "Ultimately it's going to come down to vaccination." 2020 was a turbulent year, but Smith and Myers are optimistic about the future. Fans can expect Smith & Myers concerts, Shinedown concerts if the virus is contained, a new Shinedown album, and a film that accompanies their Attention album.

Parting Question from Rock On CEO Gina Adams - As you leave the stage, what are your parting words?

"We say the same thing every night. We don't say 'goodbye', we say 'until next time,'" Smith said.

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In The Greenhouse with Tommy Chong

Interview by Gina Adams, Ed Alexander
Written by Jay Luster

ROCKOn MAGAZINE

In 1970, the US Congress passed the law which created the DEA and declared marijuana to be more dangerous than cocaine, meth, oxy, and fentanyl. With a stroke of Richard Nixon's pen, the Controlled Substances Act was born, and along with it, millions of college and high-school students immediately became felons. Soon, the prisons began filling up with kids, and now, 50 years hence; we're only just beginning to clean up the mess made of people's lives, and the trillions of dollars of negative impact on the US economy. Into this fray, in 1971, waded two of the counter culture's most enduring social commentators, and comedic performers, Cheech and Chong.

We caught up with Tommy Chong on a socially distanced zoom call from the plant laden 30,000 sq ft grow room of Ed Alexander's SoL Cannabis. After coming on the screen, and a couple of brief moments of introduction, when Chong realized what he was looking at, he began laughing and said, "oh wow. I am impressed! Would you look at that?" Behind us were pot plants of every variety, including the famous Wedding Crasher, and several purple-flowered varieties. Speaking to us from his Los Angeles home, his voice still sounds very much like the comedic characters he portrayed in the early 70's. However, it was soon apparent, the businessman has only marijuana, and a certain "in the moment" presence about him in common with those personas.

**"IF MORE PEOPLE WERE STONED
THERE WOULD BE LESS VIOLENCE
IN THE WORLD."**

TOMMY CHONG

ROCKOn
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Beginning in 1971, Cheech and Chong's comedy spoofed the effects of the drug culture as it was being stereotyped by the establishment. His most famous character, The Man, was a nameless, drop out, who was fundamentally lazy, and continuously chasing his next high. The character never held a job for long, nor maintain relationships with family, or friends outside of Cheech. He was a really nice guy, who was fun to hang around with until the marijuana was gone, and then he'd drift away to the next party. However, he was also a jokester, and a philosopher, who seemed to understand the absurdity of the conservative norms of his time. Cheech's character was the mainstreams' pigeonholed Mexican-American. He owned a run down, yet still somehow exotic lowrider 1964 Chevy Impala SS. It was tricked out with a butterfly hood ornament, blue fuzzy carpet on the dash, tassels around the window frames, a custom chain link steering wheel, and the declarative license plate, "MUF DVR." The Love Machine sticker on the window, and its unmatched colored replacement driver's door, were the calling card for a guy continually on the prowl, and Cheech's frenetic character was the perfect partner for the weirdly Zen like Chong. Despite their characters wildly differing personalities, the comedian's meshed well, and the duo's records, movies, and nightclub comedy became touchstones for an entire generation of kids fed up with the war, the rules, and their lack of an effective voice within society. Bear in mind, kids were being drafted to Vietnam, where, as the Barry McGuire song, The Eve Of Destruction said, they were old enough to kill, but not to vote.



Chong said, "We were outliers, anomalies in the entertainment industry. Most comedy teams were individual performers who came together to form a team. For example, Dean Martin and Jerry Lewis, were both singers, but Jerry was so funny, he would interrupt Dino by acting crazy." With Cheech and Chong, it was a case of the sum of the parts being greater than either of the individuals. Tommy continued, "When we met, Cheech wasn't even an entertainer. He was a draft dodger up in Canada, who was taking any job he could get. He really was that guy starting at the bottom. And me, I owned a couple of nightclubs, which is what supported us when we came down to LA to try to make it. Those nightclubs afforded us the ability to go to open mic nights and things like that."

When asked what made the characters so popular, Chong said, "When Charlie Chaplin first started out, he was already an accomplished musician, a dancer, and he was almost like acting royalty, because he grew up in the theater. When he started doing movies, his instincts told him his characters had to appeal to the lowest common denominator." With his success coming during some of the poorest times in the world, it made sense Chaplin's Little Tramp appealed to the masses. Chong continued, "His comedy came out in the depression, and this is when, imagine this, people would work all day for a dime!" It's worth noting Tommy Chong was born in 1938, and the depression didn't end until 1939. "So when we first started out as Cheech and Chong, Cheech and I got together, we said let's do these characters, Pedro and The Man, and we'll follow Charlie Chaplin's rule, that the characters appeal to the lowest common denominator." With the popularity, and financial success, of their subversive comedy growing, their record producer Lou Adler, and the team, decided to do a movie. "So Up In Smoke was originally going to be called Cheech and Chong's greatest hits, that was what Lou Adler wanted to call it, but when Cheech and I got together, we realized we should do the characters we've always done, Pedro and The Man. That's when we followed the Chaplin rule, the characters appealed to the lowest common denominator." The movie was made for less than 2 million dollars, and upon release, was almost universally panned by critics. However, it grossed over 40 million dollars during its initial box office release. Since, then, that number has grown to more than 100 million, and pretty much single-handedly created the stoner film genre, which still remains popular.



Most recently, he's developing a character called The Pope of Dope, which when paired with Cheech's character, Sum Yung Guy, promises to be as socially aware, as it should be entertaining. When asked if the personas were a shot at the church's sex scandal, Chong laughed, and said, "That's exactly the whole point!" He continued, "Actually, it's just an excuse to sing country songs. I'm a country singer from way back. I evolved into rhythm and blues, and jazz, but at my root's is a country boy. I love old country songs, but I like learning new songs because it helps keep the

brain working. Continuing, he said, "So the new character, The Pope of Dope, me and Cheech will do an acoustic set, but not as Cheech and Chong. I would be the Pope of Dope and Cheech would be, and he hasn't signed off on it yet, Sum Yung Guy, and his character would be a Chinese guy, because he looks Chinese!"

**"COMEDY IS THE ULTIMATE TRUTH.
JAZZ IS HITTING THE NOTES THAT
NO ONE ELSE WOULD HIT, AND
COMEDY IS SAYING WORDS THAT
NO ONE ELSE WOULD SAY."**

TOMMY CHONG



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Asked about Covid19, he surprisingly said, "I was made for this lock-down. See, I'm at that age where you've got to stay home? No problem! The thing about old guy's, is there are perks. The secret to my success is, a funny partner, and Cheech was that funny partner. But when we broke up, my wife, Shelby, she stepped in. She's an artist. She's a painter. She's a great cook, and when she's doing her ballet and dancing, I get to watch!" While they did travel together as a comedic team for a long while, and he voiced his pride, and amazement at how she grew into a successful comedian in her own right, he said, "I get a lot of people asking how are you handling getting old. Most people resist it, but I love it. You can relax and enjoy it, or pretend you're something you'll never be again." With most people finding the social distancing requirements a burden, Tommy said, "It's funny, people will ask if I can't wait to go back to the way things were, but we'll never go back to the way things were. It's gone. Those days are gone. This is a new world we're living in, and I love the social distancing."



Though presenting themselves as anti-establishment stoners, there were deeper meanings to Cheech and Chong's seemingly simple comedy skits, and movies. Their era has led to today's green movement, the advancement of feminism, and the rising of egalitarianism across race and sexual lines within the majority of society. His personal contribution to it has been instrumental in the push to legalize marijuana, which has led to a movement to release prisoners convicted of nonviolent drug crimes. At 82, Tommy Chong, despite being a Covid 19 shut-in, is still thriving as a husband, father, entertainer, political advocate, and entrepreneur.



"TO BE IN A SITUATION WHERE YOU HAVE NO RIGHTS WHATSOEVER IS SOMETHING I WISH EVERYBODY COULD EXPERIENCE. PEOPLE'S ATTITUDES WOULD CHANGE. IT WOULD BE A BETTER PLACE."

TOMMY CHONG



TommyChong.com

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JERRY RICE

Still Motivated

By Gina Adams and Jay Luster

“My thing is, I have always been about motivating people.”

In 2010, NFL.com named San Francisco 49ers wide receiver, Jerry Rice, the greatest of all time (The GOAT). His records, which include the most receptions, most yards, and most touchdowns, are seemingly unbreakable. However, when asked if he believes he's the GOAT, he says, “Yeah, you know, when I hear that, I cringe just a little bit, because I never really felt like I was the greatest of all time.” A naturally good-humored guy, with a gift for storytelling, he explains, “I was not the most gifted athlete, but I had heart, and I was going to outwork you. I think that work ethic took me a long, long way.” Rice continues, “I think I got my work ethic from my parents. My father was a bricklayer and he would take me to work with him during the summer. It's very difficult work and I had responsibility, and if I didn't do what I was supposed to do? In Mississippi we got punished in a different way.” With a laugh, he adds, “I didn't really want to get punished that way, so I did what I had to do.”

In order to understand the type of NFL legacy Rice created, you need to look to other athletes who have played in the NFL. The very first requirement to setting all time records is time. NFL football is a notoriously brutal game where the average career length is just 40 games. Until this season, Rice had played in more games than anyone who wasn't a kicker in the history of the sport. Even QB Brett Favre, long considered the NFL's Ironman for having played 297 games in a row, and 302 overall, still comes up one game shy of Rice's 303. The only player with more games is QB Tom Brady. If he remains healthy, by the end of the 2021 regular season, he will have 318. While Rice's unusual longevity is not exactly a record, it does provide the context for Rice's amazing on field accomplishments. For example, his NFL records of 1549 receptions, 22,895 yards, and 208 TD's, averages out to a remarkable 77 receptions, 1145 yards, and 10.4 TD's per season. Many of today's most outstanding players will break that average for a season, or maybe even for an extended amount of time, perhaps even a decade. However, no wideout in NFL history has come close to that level of consistency over that length of time. The nearest player on the list is Arizona Cardinals future Hall of Famer, Larry Fitzgerald with 263. While Fitzgerald hasn't officially announced his retirement from the game, he did not return for an 18th season. Just to reach the pros, athletes must possess the talent, and the drive to get there. Staying there, well that's another thing. Rice says, “When guys are gifted, sometimes they have the tendency to get complacent a little bit.

I felt like I had never really arrived, and so I continued to work hard during practice. My thing is, I have always been about motivating people, so I set an example for my teammates. Once you've set that example, guys look for you to be productive on the football field, and to lead them." After earning his way into the Pro Bowl eleven times in his first 12 seasons, as well as being first team All-Pro for ten of those seasons, and Superbowl XXIII MVP, says, "I had teammates who would come to me, and they would say, hey Jerry, why are you still working so hard? You're the GOAT man; you don't have to do this anymore. But I felt like there was more that I needed to do, so I kept pushing myself. I never wanted to let the fans down, I never wanted to let the coaches down, and I never wanted to let my family down in Mississippi, so the fire just kept burning."wanted to let my family down in Mississippi, so the fire just kept burning."



Coming up next July for Rice, and Reno, will be the American Century Golf Championship at The Edgewood Tahoe Resort. Rice will once again hit the links with well known players from every sport, household name celebrities, and even politicians. He was even once paired with former President Donald Trump, he says, "that was his first time he (President Trump) ever played in American Century." He continues, "He wanted to play with me because he felt it would be more comfortable, so I had to lead him around the golf course, show him the in's and out's," With amusement he adds, "I never thought he would become President of the United States of America!"

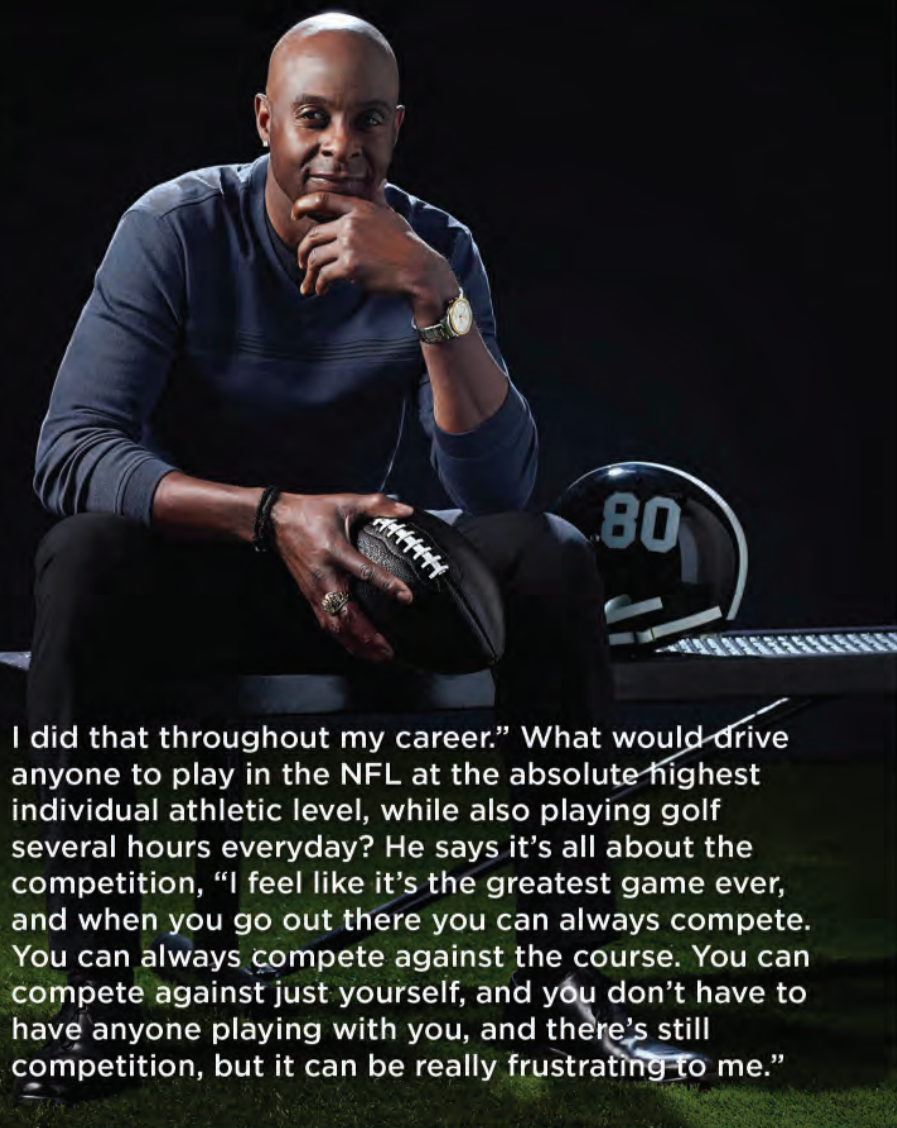
While Covid19 didn't cancel the 2020 tournament, Jerry says, "It was weird because there were no fans. (But now) Everyone is getting their shots, and we're starting to try and work our way out of this." Rice continues, "Lake Tahoe is owned by the fans; they came out, and really supported the tournament. This year, we had an opportunity where we could either sign something for them, or take pictures with them, and just give something back. But last year (2020), it was eery just a bit. One of the reasons he loves the tournament is because, "the fans come out and they support you, and it's almost like saying a thank you for all the support they've given me throughout my career." Considering how competitive he is, you have to wonder if he practices for the tournament? "You know, I'm trying, but golf is one of those games you can't master. You think you've got it; you might go low; you see what you've scored, and you think, you know what, I got this, this is easy now, but the next day it's like speaking a different language. It's the most frustrating game ever. Also, you've got to look at it like this, if I drop a pass from Montana, or Steve Young, I can say it was a bad pass. In golf, you can't blame anyone. You're just on your own."



"The fans come out and they support you, and it's almost like saying a thank you for all the support they've given me throughout my career."



Asked how he came to love golf, he replies, "I'm going to give you a little insight into what got me started. I was out training with my trainer one day, I think it was 1986, and we were getting ready to do some track work, then we were going to do some field work, you know, running routes, catching the ball and all of that. He brought a golf club and a couple of balls, and I don't know why he brought it out to that work out, but I tried to hit the golf ball, and I didn't hit it, and I'm thinking hey look, I'm supposed to be this elite athlete, and you're going to tell me I can't hit a stationary ball right there out in front of me? So that's how I got into it." Noted sports writer and author John Feinstein wrote a book about golf called, *A Good Walk Spoiled*. Among other things, he addresses how people become obsessed with the game. Jerry continues, "Once I got into it, I got addicted to it. Because my meeting (with the 49'ers coaching staff) would start in the morning around 8:30, I would head to the range around 5 something and practice my game. I'd go to my meeting; I'd practice football, and when football was all done by 4:30, I'd go back to the range, and work on my game.



I did that throughout my career." What would drive anyone to play in the NFL at the absolute highest individual athletic level, while also playing golf several hours everyday? He says it's all about the competition, "I feel like it's the greatest game ever, and when you go out there you can always compete. You can always compete against the course. You can compete against just yourself, and you don't have to have anyone playing with you, and there's still competition, but it can be really frustrating to me."

Rice's work ethic is the stuff of NFL legend, but at 58, Rice is still in remarkable shape. When he was in the league, regularly putting up hall of fame stats, along with his daily golf playing, and football practice, he would head to Edgewood Park near his home and run up an incline now known to locals as, Jerry Rice Hill. He says, "The hill is around two and half miles long, and the last eight hundred yard is straight up hill. A lot of guys (including New England Patriots future Hall of Famer Julian Edelman) would throw up on that last 800. That was part of my regimen three days, Monday, Wednesday, Friday, and it was more for endurance. I think that is the reason why, like in the 4th quarter, I was always at my best." His marathon-like endurance was something that not only motivated his teammates, but may have been something that intimidated his opponents? He replies, "Yeah. That's it. I'm bouncing around, and they're looking at me like I'm crazy. They're like, how can that guy still have all of that energy? But it was about the way I trained." Elaborating, he says, "Okay, this is how strange I was. If I went to the stadium, and I had a target weight of, say I was 189, that was my target weight, that's where I wanted to be when I stepped on the football field. If I went there and I was 192, and we had a game that day, I would go to the stadium early, weigh myself, and if I'm a couple of pounds over, I would work out before the actual game.



So when my teammates would get to the stadium, they would look at me and be like Jerry, what are you doing? I'm soaking wet; I'm sweating like crazy, but I just had to lose those extra pounds to get down to the weight I wanted to be at. Then I felt like I was ready to go. Then I'd go out there, and I'd play the entire game, and I'm not tired. So everything about me was about my conditioning, and I think that's why I was able to play football for over 20 years."

His famous work ethic, which drove him to NFL excellence, also helped him weather the Covid 19 pandemic. Things became real for many Americans, when the NBA canceled the 2020 basketball season. He says, "I remember looking at that, and they had some teams that were getting ready to play. They were warming up; they were getting ready, and then all of a sudden; it was over. They pulled them off the court and I was like oh my God; this thing is really, really serious." When the plague hit, Rice had just married his longtime girlfriend.

Latisha Pelayo. He says, "My wife and I, we had just gotten married, and so this was really gonna test us! If we're able to survive this, we're gonna be together for the rest of our lives." To remain in shape during the lockdown, Rice began working out on a Peloton. His wife is also known to be a workout warrior, and when asked if they fought over the exercise bike, Rice says, "No, you know what, you know what? How I dealt with that, I bought two. She has her own, and I got my own!" While Rice may cringe when someone asks him if he believes he's the GOAT, in 2010 NFL.com said he was. Today there's little doubt he's still as motivated and competitive as ever, but is he the greatest player of all time? Everyone has an opinion about that, but one thing's for sure, even in today's pass-happy NFL, it is unlikely anyone will eclipse the records, and reputation, of Jerry Rice.



"So everything about me was about my conditioning, and I think that's why I was able to play football for over 20 years."



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"It was almost like we couldn't help ourselves. It just flowed out of us. Then we realized that nobody had done it"
-Alice Cooper

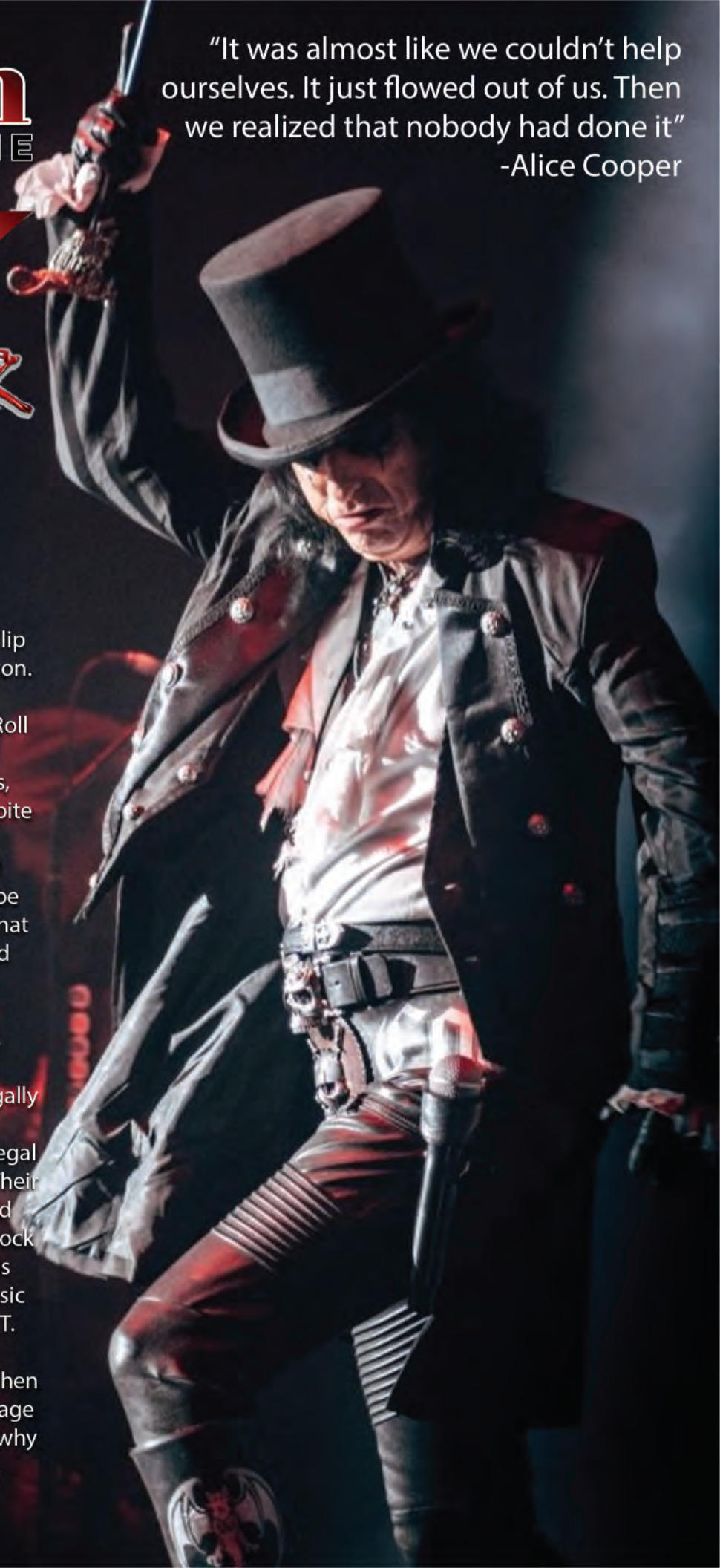
RENO APPEARANCE

ALICE COOPER

By Jay Luster

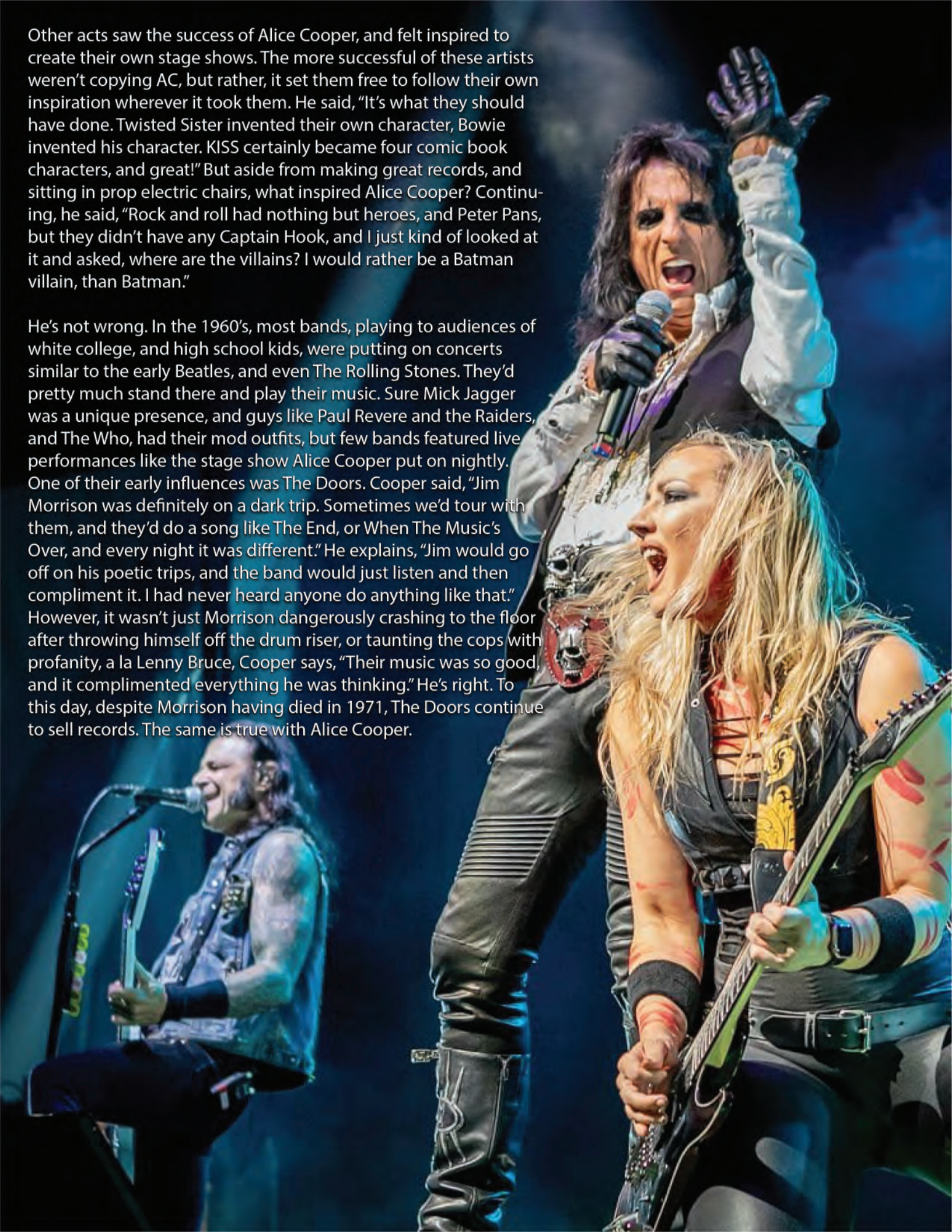
In the mid-1960's, a high school band calling themselves the Earwigs wanted to enter a Phoenix talent show. Basically, it was five guys lip synching, and lampooning the Beatles. They won. Forty-Seven years later, in 2011, three of that original band were elected into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame. Eventually, after a few different nicknames, and a couple of personnel changes, the band became known as Alice Cooper. Despite that innocuous sounding name, their shows became the must see event of the early to mid 1970's. Having invented what would go on to be called theater, or shock rock, they redefined what concerts looked like, and influenced music, and stage craft, in a way still going strong today.

The R&RHOF inductees were Dennis Dunaway, Gary Buxton, and Alice Cooper, nee Vincent Furnier. Furnier, originally from Detroit, had legally changed his name to Alice Cooper in 1975, to protect the name of the band. As a result, his legal name became synonymous with their music. Their first record, called Pretties For You, was released by Straight Records. The label was created by rock legend Frank Zappa, who wanted to find bands who fit his avant-garde vision of what rock music could be. Alice Cooper fit that description to a T. What attracted Zappa? Cooper said, "We were already a pretty good rock and roll band, and then we just allowed it (the theatricalities of their stage show) to go wherever it wanted to go. I mean why not? Why wouldn't we do that?" He continued, "We started a movement that worked, but honestly, we didn't have to force that."



Other acts saw the success of Alice Cooper, and felt inspired to create their own stage shows. The more successful of these artists weren't copying AC, but rather, it set them free to follow their own inspiration wherever it took them. He said, "It's what they should have done. Twisted Sister invented their own character, Bowie invented his character. KISS certainly became four comic book characters, and great!" But aside from making great records, and sitting in prop electric chairs, what inspired Alice Cooper? Continuing, he said, "Rock and roll had nothing but heroes, and Peter Pans, but they didn't have any Captain Hook, and I just kind of looked at it and asked, where are the villains? I would rather be a Batman villain, than Batman."

He's not wrong. In the 1960's, most bands, playing to audiences of white college, and high school kids, were putting on concerts similar to the early Beatles, and even The Rolling Stones. They'd pretty much stand there and play their music. Sure Mick Jagger was a unique presence, and guys like Paul Revere and the Raiders, and The Who, had their mod outfits, but few bands featured live performances like the stage show Alice Cooper put on nightly. One of their early influences was The Doors. Cooper said, "Jim Morrison was definitely on a dark trip. Sometimes we'd tour with them, and they'd do a song like The End, or When The Music's Over, and every night it was different." He explains, "Jim would go off on his poetic trips, and the band would just listen and then compliment it. I had never heard anyone do anything like that." However, it wasn't just Morrison dangerously crashing to the floor after throwing himself off the drum riser, or taunting the cops with profanity, a la Lenny Bruce, Cooper says, "Their music was so good, and it complimented everything he was thinking." He's right. To this day, despite Morrison having died in 1971, The Doors continue to sell records. The same is true with Alice Cooper.





Between 1971 and 1976, The Alice Cooper Band released seven albums that reached into Billboards top 40. Four of them entered the top 10, and in 1973, *Billion Dollar Babies* reached #1. The band that began as a Beatles parody, complete with wigs and suits, had become rock legends. Ironically, their album oriented rock, designed for their increasingly elaborate stage shows weren't driven by singles. Throughout Cooper's career, as a band, and solo artist, he's just had a handful of singles break into the top 40, and only a couple of them were top 10. It seems peculiar in an industry still largely driven by singles, Alice Cooper could have at least a dozen albums in the top 10, but have no #1 singles, and only a couple of songs still played on classic-rock stations.

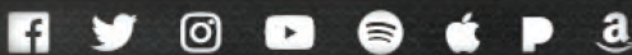
The dichotomy between huge album sales, driven by a noticeable lack of high-ranking singles seems mind blowing, until you realize the underlying secret of his success: concept albums. A concept album is essentially a collection of songs with an overarching theme, or simply tells a story. Early concept records would include The Beatles *Sergeant Peppers*, The Kinks *Are The Village Green Preservation Society*, and *The Odessey and Oracle* by The Zombies. Cooper said, "I think everything after *Love It To Death*, and *Killer*, became conceptual. *Schools Out* was a concept, *Billion Dollar Babies* was a concept, *Nightmare* of course, *Goes To Hell*, they all have story lines." Those storylines created the basis of his live act, which became the band's generally accepted claim to fame.

Some of those albums, at first blush, seemed dark, twisted, and dangerous. Songs like "I Love The Dead," and "Sick Things," fit the villainous image Cooper was carefully cultivating. However, when you look deeper into the music, what you find is irony, and humor. "Schools Out," one of the songs still receiving regular radio airplay included the lyric "well we've got no class, and we've got no principles, and we've got no intelligence. We can't even think up a word that rhymes," and later, on the song "Go To Hell," which opens the Alice Cooper Goes to Hell album, the chorus sings, "You'd poison a blind man's dog and steal his cane. You'd gift wrap a leper and mail him to your Aunt Jane. You'd even force feed a diabetic a candy-cane, you can go to hell." When asked about the rich, and dark humor, he said, "Thank you for noticing that! A lot of people don't get that. There's a ton of comedy that goes on in the lyrics of the songs" He continued, "I understand not everybody's going to get it, which is why you kind of have to put some kind of comedy inside of a song that people are just going to rock too. Even if they don't get the lyrics they're at least going to rock to the music. It's kind of a tricky tight-wire act. Making sure that the song rocks, and then putting the clever lyrics on it."

His latest album is called Detroit Stories, and it was written and recorded during the pandemic, and is his first #1 album since 1973's Billion Dollar Babies. He said, "We were shocked when the Detroit Stories album debuted at #1. We just went, are you kidding me? That was a total shock to the system." Why does he think the record scored so high? "I think, maybe, the world needed a good hard-rock record to cheer up a little bit (during the pandemic), and that's the one that came out at the right time." When asked to describe it, he said, "With this album, we said at the beginning let's just do twelve hard-rock songs. We had to decide (where to record it). LA isn't quite right for hard rock, and certainly not Nashville, or New York," Then he exclaimed, "DETROIT!" Continuing, he said, "Detroit is the home of hard-rock, and its hometown for me. So yeah, let's do Detroit. So we get to Detroit, and we go, why don't we write this song about Detroit?"



And then we were like, why don't we use all Detroit players? Ok, and suddenly we had a concept."The record is great, and should easily stand up to repeated playing. He said,"we can do hard rock, but if we're going to say Detroit, then we've got to include every kind of music in Detroit, so we did a punk song, "Go Man Go," we did a Motown song, "\$1000 High-Heeled Shoes," we did a blues song, "Drunk And In Love," and it all sort of fell into place. We didn't start out making a concept album, it just ended up being a concept album," because that's what Alice Cooper does. Cooper is still out there touring at a frenetic pace. The third leg of his tour, 26 shows in 38 days, brought him to The Grand Sierra Theater, in Reno, on April 22, 2022.





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Joe Satriani: Telling his stories, with and without words

By Bill Kopp



Joe Satriani is the most popular instrumental rock guitarist in the history of music. Though he has yet to win a Grammy Award for his work, Satriani is one of the most often-nominated artists (15 to date). His albums and live performances meet with near universal critical acclaim, and his total record sales to date exceed 10 million units.

In addition to his own thriving career – marked both by solo tours, his G3 concert tour series, his G4 Experience guitar camp and his 19th album, 2022's *Elephants of Mars* – Satriani has long been an in-demand musician, sought for his expertise playing live and/or in the studio with Blue Öyster Cult, Alice Cooper, Deep Purple, Mick Jagger, Spinal Tap, the Yardbirds and many others. In his spare time he's also guitarist for supergroup Chickenfoot.

While Satriani is a deeply technical player – in musician's parlance, a “shredder” – from the very beginning his work has been distinguished by a strong emphasis on melody and accessibility. And that's very much by design. “I try to keep a very strong melodic floor to even the craziest solo,” he says.

“When I sit down to turn some feeling – whether it's simple or very complex – into music, I'm trying to do two things,” Satriani explains. “One, I'm trying to get it right for myself. I'm trying to prove to myself that I'm translating this inspiration correctly into music.”

But that's only half of the equation. “I also want to see if I [communicate] get that story to my audience,” he says. And Satriani acknowledges that where instrumental music is concerned, much is left to the listener's imagination. “It has this great power of allowing the listener to reinterpret it,” he says. “And that goes back to a broader meaning of music.” Satriani believes that human beings need music.

“And when we put on a piece of music to help us celebrate or commiserate, we’re making the choice to use that music as we see fit,” he says And that might or might not line up with the composer’s original intent.

He provides an amusing example to illustrate his point. “I write a song about diving off a cliff into a beautiful mountain pool of crystal clear, freezing cold water. And someone may hear it and think, ‘This is the perfect song for when I need to write code for my software project!’” Satriani emphasizes that ultimately, the artist gives up control over the song’s meaning when it’s shared with the wider audience. “I write a love song, and they think it’s sad,” he says with a chuckle. “I write a sad song, and they use it as a love song!”

And Joe Satriani is okay with that. “That is the beauty of it,” he says. And that delightful disconnect is part of what separates instrumental music from songs with words. “If [a tune] has lyrics, of course, then you’re kind of forced to know what it was that the artist is trying to tell you,” he explains. “But when you hear ‘Moonlight Sonata,’ you can decide for yourself: ‘This song is about this, today.” And Satriani keeps this reality in mind when he writes music.

The acclaimed guitarist has a fertile mind when it comes to creating memorable melodic lines. One of his early breakthrough tunes was the soaring instrumental “Always With Me, Always With You,” an elegiac track from his second album, 1987’s *Surfing with the Alien*. The song combined lightning-fast fluid runs with a fetching, ballad-like melody. The track earned Satriani the first of those many Grammy nominations, in this case for Best Pop Instrumental Performance.

And though he’s written hundreds of songs since then, Satriani exercises strict quality control. Not everything he composes (or records) finds its way onto a Joe Satriani album. “I think every project has a couple of songs that leave you scratching your head,” he says. “Halfway through, you go, ‘I thought that was going to be great.’” In those cases, he puts the song off to the side and moves on to something else.

When he’s working on an album like *The Elephants of Mars*, Satriani says that he routinely brings a lot of material to the project. “I’ve always got 20-30 songs,” he says. “Sometimes 50.” As the project progresses, some inevitably fall by the wayside. Others are reworked, and the best ones make it to the finish line. And if the plan calls for the record to include ten tracks, he might decide to complete a few extras. “Some people on my team are saying, ‘Give 10; don’t give many more.’ And other people are saying, ‘You might as well work on 16, because you never know.’”



And in Satriani's case, you really don't know. "The last day in the studio, you might decide that four of them aren't quite ready yet," he admits. Satriani has a good sense of which among his songs are best suited for each album, but he listens to people he trusts, too. "Even the record company – filled with really talented people who do this all the time – can listen to an album and get surprised and say, 'You know that song we thought was [a deep album] track? I think it's the single!'"

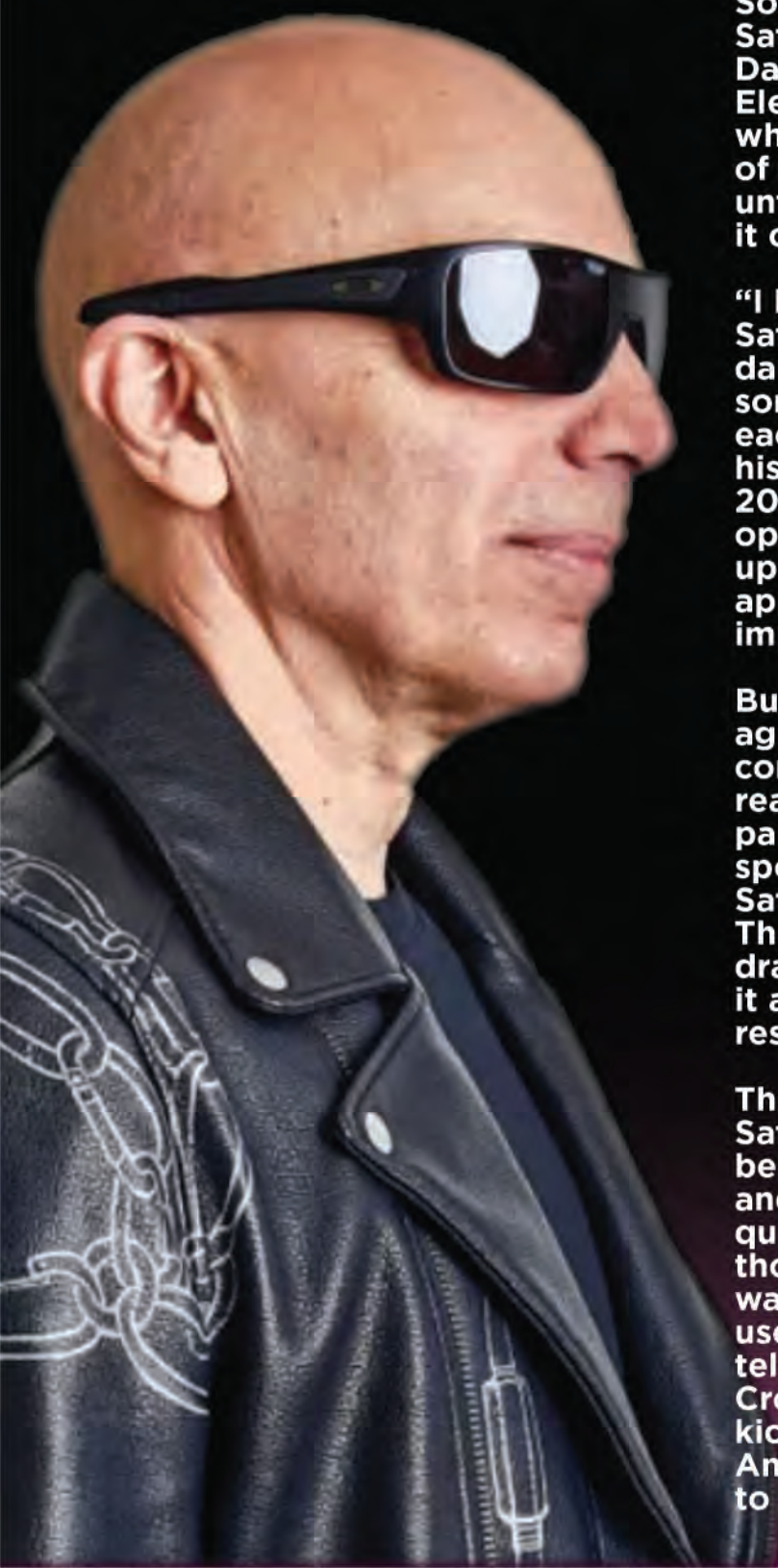
But even if a song ultimately doesn't make the cut, Satriani holds onto it. "I do a record just about every two years," he explains. "Sometimes I do a song, and I don't quite know how to finish it. And then two years later, 'Now, I get it. This is what I was trying to do, and I've gotten better, so I can finish it now.'"

Sometimes the timeline exceeds two years. Satriani mentions "Through a Mother's Day Darkly," a breathtaking highlight of *The Elephants of Mars*. He wrote the song in 1999, while working on what would become *Engines of Creation*, his eighth studio album. But the unfinished, keyboard-based track didn't make it onto that record.

"I kept trying to bring it into every album," Satriani says. "But it was always either too dark or moody or cinematic. There was something about it that never worked with each album's theme." Yet as he began work on his last record, Satriani returned to the 20-plus year old basic track. "It was kind of an open-ended session file," he says. So he cued up the track in ProTools [digital recording application], picked up a guitar and improvised over it.

But Satriani and his producer Eric Carieux agreed that the recording still wasn't complete; it needed something else. They reached out to the guitarist's songwriting partner Ned Everett and asked him to record a spoken-word voiceover, using dialogue from Satriani's *Crystal Planet* comic book series. That element added just the right amount of drama, and a bit of humor as well. "Suddenly it all came together," he says. He describes the result as "a soundtrack to an imaginary film."

There's certainly a filmic quality to Joe Satriani's music. In fact his songs have often been used in movies, television commercials and other visual media. Satriani is generally quite pleased when his music is chosen for those kinds of applications. He admits that he was "pretty shocked that the Olympics would use a number of my songs to close out their television broadcast." Director Cameron Crowe requested a Satriani tune for a kickboxing scene in his 1989 film *Say Anything*; the guitarist wrote "One Big Rush" to order.





Satriani also recalls an accidental success in the form of an early '90s Sony Walkman commercial. "We spent a lot of money on [music] videos - we had a really fun video for 'Summer Song' - and we just couldn't get MTV to play them," he explains. "So we got a call from Sony, and they said, 'We'd like to use your song to do these radio and TV commercials to support a product called the Walkman.'" Satriani agreed, but with two important stipulations. "We said, 'Well, yeah, but don't talk over the music. And put a chyron at the end like it's an MTV video.'"

Sony agreed, and the Walkman spot ran often on MTV, including during commercial breaks on the channel's annual awards show. "We wound up being on the MTV Awards more than if we had been on the MTV Awards," Satriani says with a hearty laugh. "Summer Song" went on to become the guitarist's biggest international radio hit to that point.

That whole idea of instrumental music being open to interpretation does have its hazards, though. There are the rare occasions when music is repurposed in a way that doesn't meet with the artist's approval. And that happened to Joe Satriani in the early 1990s.

At the time, former Chilean dictator Augusto Pinochet remained as that country's Commander in Chief. And without permission, his Air Force used Satriani's "Always With You, Always With Me" in its recruiting ads. "My first thought was, 'Why would they play that song? It's a love song!'" Satriani says. "If they would've asked us, we would have said no: 'We don't do foreign military endorsements.'"

He believes the commercial would have confused his South American fans, but admits that there wasn't a great deal he could do about it. "Artists really have very little control over their art," Satriani says. "You just never know what people are doing around the corner with your song. So, at some point, you throw your hands up in the air and say, 'Well, the only thing I can do is to put out my own message.'"

And Joe Satriani has been focused on doing just that. For example, his current track-by-track podcast series digs deep into the creation of The Elephants of Mars. And it's the latest in such endeavors from the guitarist, a practice that extends back to the release of his 2006 album Super Colossal, if not earlier.

"The Internet really helps," he says. "I can connect and bond with the audience all over the world, which is great!" He believes that the Internet's reach and immediacy make for an important tool to communicate and connect, not just for him and his audience, but for all artists. "From Bombay to Paris and New York to San Diego," Satriani says, "you can instantly tell your story."

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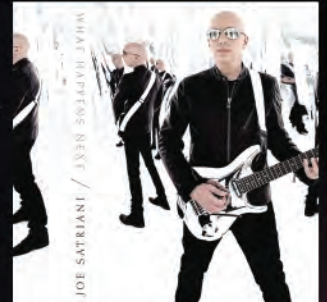


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VOLBEAT

Volbeat continues to build its fan base by defying expectations.
— by Bill Kopp —

For 20 years and running, Copenhagen, Denmark-based band Volbeat has had it both ways: the popular group has honed its brand of hard-rock (with elements of early, vintage rock 'n' roll) while appealing to an audience that extends well beyond rock fans. Few groups have been as successful at maintaining their musical integrity while continuing to grow their fan base decades into their careers. Volbeat kicks off its 2022 North American tour with a January 25 concert at the Reno Events Center, co-headlining with fellow European hard rockers Ghost.

Formed in 2001 by Michael Poulsen, Volbeat was conceived as a way for the guitarist-singer to pursue a style more creatively rewarding than the death metal he had been playing with his previous group. He enlisted the talents of other like-minded musicians including drummer Jon Larsen.

While carrying on with the power and energy of the music its members had made previously, Volbeat would also draw inspiration from more classic and timeless sources like blues, rockabilly and soul.

Larsen says that Volbeat's musical approach is a natural one for its members. "Michael grew up [listening to] all the great artists of the '50s: Elvis, Chuck Berry, Little Richard, Jerry Lee Lewis." Larsen's own formative years centered around the music of the following decade; he mentions four British bands – the Beatles, the Rolling Stones, the Who and the Kinks – as early inspirations.

From Volbeat's earliest days, the four-piece band focused on original material that conveyed the energy of modern-day hard rock and metal, but remained true to the spirit of early rock 'n' roll. But Larsen emphasizes that the group's mindset wasn't some kind of studied, clinical exercise in music-making. "We don't say, 'Oh, we've got to do a '50s-type of rock 'n' roll song.' It just happens, you know?" he says.

And Volbeat's inimitable style quickly won the attention of fans in their native Denmark. The group landed a record deal on the strength of their demo tape, and their major-label debut, 2005's *The Strength/The Sound/The Songs* sold well, going Double-platinum in Denmark and Gold in Germany. The record was named Best Album of 2005 by the Danish Metal Musik Awards.

Even though everyone in the group was a seasoned musician, Volbeat couldn't coast on the reputation of its members. The band had to pay its dues, "playing in 'toilets,'" Larsen says with a chuckle. But he says that Volbeat's bookings quickly progressed from small clubs to bigger clubs, and then to larger and larger concert venues. "There's a bit of luck in it," he admits. "But we've worked really, really hard."

Volbeat's success has grown steadily. The group became a popular fixture on the European festival circuit, and by 2009 Volbeat was a featured act at some of the continent's biggest outdoor festivals. Soon Volbeat was sharing stages with the biggest names in metal, including Anthrax, Megadeth, Metallica and Slayer.



Conquering America was next. Larsen credits the band's emphasis upon touring in the States as a key factor in building a fan base here. Volbeat landed in the U.S. in May 2009, supporting Nightwish on a tour of the East Coast. But what followed was even bigger. "There's no denying it," Larsen says. "Being on tour with Metallica helped. We went east, we went west, and we had shows in the middle as well. They are the biggest metal band of all time; wherever they go, it's a sold out show."

Opening acts sometimes get less love from audiences who have paid to see the headliner. But Volbeat won over those Metallica fans. And they didn't take the new audience for granted. "As soon as we could, we came back to a lot of those cities," Larsen notes.



"We played in clubs, and we kept on touring. We did it the good old fashioned way." The touring paid off in other ways, too: Volbeat's increased Stateside profile helped push several of the group's songs to the #1 spot on Sirius XM.

Former Anthrax guitarist Rob Caggiano started working with Volbeat as a producer during sessions in late 2012 and 2013. Caggiano had also planned to serve as "guest guitarist" on the sessions, adding some searing solos. But the experience went so well for all concerned that by the time the resulting album (2013's *Outlaw Gentlemen and Shady Ladies*) was released, Caggiano had joined the band as a full-time member.

Larsen says that the addition of Caggiano "opened a door" for Volbeat.



The group's original concept more or less prohibited guitar solos, a trademark of metal bands that didn't figure prominently in early rock 'n' roll. "We started out by saying, 'No guitar solos at all,'" he explains, "because most guitar solos are kind of boring!"

But after four or five albums, Volbeat was ready to relax that restriction. "It was like, 'Okay, maybe we should have a guitar solo here and there,'" Larsen recalls with a laugh. "And Rob's guitar style has really added to the band."

A more recent addition is bassist Kaspar Boye Larsen (no relation to Volbeat's drummer), who joined in 2016 and was first heard on record with the band on 2019's *Rewind, Replay, Rebound*.

With a background in both punk and metal – and previous experience as Volbeat’s touring bassist more than a decade ago – Kaspar colors the group’s sound in a new way as well. “Sometimes he plays with his fingers and not a pick,” says Jon Larsen. And as opposed to following the basic chordal structure of a song, Volbeat’s bassist comes up with other ideas that contrast and complement Caggiano’s guitar work.

Volbeat had a major tour scheduled for 2020. But when the global pandemic scotched those plans, the band wasn’t content to sit still. Larsen recalls the band’s thinking: “We can’t just sit at home with our feet in front of the fire! We have to keep working.” So they made another album. Released in December, *Servant of the Mind* is Volbeat’s eighth studio release, and the second with the current lineup.

Servant of the Mind is consistent in serving up the kind of rock the band’s fans have come to love, but at the same time it’s possibly the most stylistically varied album in the group’s catalog. One of many standout tracks is “Dagen Før,” a song featuring guest vocals from Stine Bramsen, former lead singer of massively popular Danish pop group Alpha-Beat.



“When Michael came up with the basic track for the song, he said, ‘I hear a female voice on this,’” Larsen recalls. They asked Bramsen; she agreed, coming to the studio and knocking out her superb vocal parts in less than three hours. In a sense, it’s a testament to Volbeat’s reputation that the band can feature a pop singer without raising the ire of hard rock fans.

Larsen dismisses the idea that having Bramsen guest on a Volbeat record is especially unusual. He suggests that his band has always defied expectations. “Back in the days when we had Barney [Greenway] from Napalm Death on a track, there were probably people wondering, ‘What are they doing?’” he says. “By now, I guess they’re kind of used to it!”

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By Jay Luster

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JEFF BECK JOHNNY DEPP

This past July, Jeff Beck released his 14th studio album entitled "18." While, it's mostly covers of songs first recorded by John Lennon, Marvin Gaye, The Miracles, and The Everly Brothers, as with all of Beck's music, the songs are as fresh and unique as the original productions. The album also features songs by Beck with his latest collaborator, Johnny Depp. If all you know about Depp is his star-making role as Captain Jack Sparrow, and his recent turn as a plaintiff during the celebrity trial of the century, then you are in for a treat. Having been one of the founders of The Hollywood Vampires, along with Alice Cooper and Joe Perry, Depp comes to the recording process and stage with some serious rock and roll cred.

The seemingly odd couple met at a Beck concert many years ago, and as Jeff came to respect Depp as a musician, he was soon invited to join the 60's guitar God onstage at The Royal Albert Hall. With that, a rock and roll partnership was born.

Still, why would someone believed by many to be the greatest guitar player of all time even consider collaborating with someone whose primary claim to fame is playing a drunken pirate on the big screen? As it happens, Beck, since his earliest beginnings, has always found inspiration in musicians with abilities that seem at odds with what is normally expected of a rock and roller. In this case, not only was it the music itself but both Beck and Depp have a love of restoring old cars. The actor and the musician bonded, not just in the recording studio and on stage, but also in the garage over gears and gasoline.

In the early 1960s, driven by the music of guys like Muddy Waters, and Bo Diddley, young British musicians became intensely interested in American blues, and R&B music. Bands like John Mayall's Blues Breakers, The Rolling Stones, and even the earliest iterations of Fleetwood Mac and Jethro Tull, all began as blues bands. Among them is a 1992 entrant into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame called The Yardbirds. Playing on their earliest records was an up-and-coming blues guitarist named Eric Clapton.

Their first recording called, "Five Live Yardbirds," included songs by Chuck Berry, and Howlin' Wolf. When their version of Wolf's "Smokestack Lightnin'," became a minor radio hit, it raised the band's profile, and expectations, with the London blues crowd. However, as the band began migrating towards a more commercial sound, Clapton decided to move on. Before he left, he recommended a young session guitarist named Jimmy Page as his replacement. Page, later of Led Zeppelin fame, reluctant to leave a steady paying studio gig, declined the invite. In his place, he recommended another young up-and-coming guitar player named Jeff Beck.

Beck, unsurprisingly passed the audition, and the band quickly began fulfilling the promise of their early success with hits like "For Your Love," and "Over Under Sideways Down." Beck steered the future Rock and Roll Hall of Fame band towards a more psychedelic sound. Along with George Harrison of the Beatles, Beck became interested in Sitar master Ravi Shankar's work. He soon, through the clever use of amplification and distortion effects, found a way to emulate the sitar sound, and The Yardbirds song "Heart Full of Soul " became a hit. Those three songs are still in regular rotation on oldies, and classic rock radio stations everywhere in the world.



Eventually, Beck, like Clapton before him, decided he wanted to take his music in a different direction and when he left, the band replaced him, ironically, with the guy who recommended him to begin with, Jimmy Page. By the end of the 1960s, both Clapton and Page reached international super stardom. Beck, the least well-known of the three at that time, emerged as the most respected. With his ability to play any style of music, he became known as a consummate blues man, a jazz fusion virtuoso, and one of the primary architects of psychedelia.

In general, the greatest guitarists are recognized because of their originality and mastery of a specific style. For example, Stevie Ray Vaughan is best known for his expertise in playing within a template recognized as the Texas blues. That does not mean he couldn't play other styles, he did, and he excelled at it. However, his core audience always clamored for "Pride and Joy," and he never stopped finding innovative ways to play within that mold.

Beck, on the other hand, has defied being defined by genre or style. His embrace of effects and his unique string-bending playing style have allowed him to continue innovating within whichever template he chooses. For example, his cover of The Beatles singular "A Day in the Life," is a mind-warping instrumental journey, which he himself reinterprets nightly.

In 1967, Beck joined forces with Ronnie Wood and Rod Stewart to form The Jeff Beck Group. The band had a few minor hits, including a song that pointed the way forward called "Beck's Bolero." Bolero was originally recorded in 1966 prior to Beck's newest band, with a studio supergroup that included Nicky Hopkins on Keyboards, John Paul Jones on bass, Keith Moon on drums, Jimmy Page on guitar, and Beck laying down what became a concert staple in a career which has now spanned 60 years. A bolero is a slow, and sexy, Latin dance beat, which wasn't a rock and roll staple back then, and still isn't today. That fact alone is enough to make it unique in the annals of rock and roll history. Outside of Dick Dale, Booker T. & The MG's, and a few Brian Wilson offerings, pure instrumental rock songs were atypical in the mid-1960s. It was released as the B side of the song "Hi Ho Silver Lining," which dented, but did not exactly break the music charts. However, within the music industry, Beck's Bolero opened eyes, ears, and minds. After that, young musicians like The Allman Brothers, Jimi Hendrix, and dozens of others frequently featured instrumentals both on record and on stage.

During the last decade, headlines were made, and tongues wagged, when Beck teamed up with Brian Wilson, the founder of the Beach Boys, for a concert tour. This pairing, on the surface, does seem odd. After all, what could the King of Surf Rock, and the guitar GOAT have in common? It turns out, a lot. In 1966, The Beach Boys released *Pet Sounds*, and like almost everyone else in the music industry, it blew Beck away.



STILL
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THE JEFF BECK STORY





He found Wilson's melodies intriguing, and his experimental approach in the studio liberating. With Bolero already in the can, it was just the encouragement Beck needed. Soon he began writing inventive, genre, and mind-bending songs in earnest, which would eventually garner him eight Grammys, and the respect from everyone in the music industry from pop music to prog rock. After each had their solo set, the two would combine forces for a few of Wilson's biggest hits. Beck would add fun leads to songs like Fun, Fun, Fun, and Surfin USA. However, it was his string-bending take on Beach Boy's classics like "Surf's Up," and "Don't Talk" which also appears on "18," that was every bit as intriguing as his cover of A Day in the Life. Ten years later, both songs are still nightly staples on Beck's setlist. Along with his love of old cars, Beach Boys car songs, like "Little Deuce Coupe" were another bonding point with Johnny Depp.

Jeff Beck: 24 June 1944 – 10 January 2023

Rock On Magazine was saddened to hear of the passing of 60's guitar legend Jeff Beck. He recently passed away peacefully from bacterial meningitis, and many of his musician friends were nearby when it happened, including his friend Johnny Depp.

ROCKOn MAGAZINE

Gina Adams and Jay Luster speak with



Keith Howland
Guitarist For The Classic-Rock Band, Chicago

In 1967, after The Beatles released Sgt. Peppers Lonely Hearts Club Band, groups all over the world began to see musical possibilities not considered before. Soon new genres like heavy metal, progressive, and punk, began joining the more familiar rockabilly, blues, soul and pop music scene, which had dominated early rock and roll. From within this soup of ideas, a seven-piece band emerged in Chicago. Initially called The Big Thing, they soon changed their name to The Chicago Transit Authority, and eventually it was shortened to just Chicago. While bands like The Beatles, and Moody Blues, and American composers like Phil Spector, had used orchestras, including horn sections, in the studio to bring their music to life on vinyl, there weren't many bands that began with the horn section as an integral part of their sound. Lee Loughnane on trumpet, James Pankow on trombone, Walter Parazaidar on woodwinds, along with Peter Cetera Robert Lamm, Danny Seraphine and the extraordinary guitar player, Terry Kath, created a band with a totally new, yet distinctly American sound, that would soon be pumping out hits at a rate not seen since the Beach Boys in the decade before them.



In 1978, tragedy struck, when Terry Kath passed away at the age of 31 from an accidental gunshot wound. The band contemplated retirement, but soon decided to continue. For the next 18 years, attempting to replace Kath, the band utilized a variety of guitar players before finally hiring Keith Howland in 1995. Howland says, "I was kicking around LA looking for a gig, and had basically called everyone I knew in the music industry trying to find one. Then, one morning, I got a phone call from a buddy of mine, Dave Friedman (Friedman Amplification), who said, hey man; Chicago is auditioning guitar players if you want to try to get in?" While Keith didn't know anyone in the Chicago organization, he decided to throw his equipment in his car and take a ride down to the tryout. Though he did not play that day, he did meet the bands' bass player. Howland continues, "I talked to Jason Scheff, and he talked the guys into adding an extra day to listen to me, and the rest is history!" However, it wasn't just a guitar gig; he had to sing as well. Though his speaking voice is in the lower tenor, baritone range, his vocals with the band tend to be in the higher tenor ranges. When this was pointed out, he laughed, and said, "Well, the older I get, the less that becomes the case, but that was the gig." Before that he had toured with Rick Springfield and never sang a note. In his college bands, he sang songs from guys like Billy Idol, and ironically, a cover of the Chicago hit, Beginnings. Still laughing, he adds, "But you know what? The job called for tenor, so I just, you know, pulled up my jock strap and went for it. The guy before me Dwayne Baily, had a really high, pure tenor, and they wanted to replace that. So whatever I had to do, falsetto, a pair of pliers, whatever they wanted!"



While not necessarily being known as a vocal heavy band like say, Queen, Chicago, nevertheless, does challenge the listener with a wide array of different, and interesting, styles and harmonies. In their early years, the band featured the voices of high end tenor, Peter Cetera (25 or 6 to 4), the more soulful Terry Kath (Colour My World), and Robert Lamm (Does Anybody Really Know What Time It Is). Agreeing, Howland says, "Oh absolutely. The stuff, especially during the David Foster era, and after Bill Champlin kind of got into the thing. If you listen to some of the backgrounds, like on You're The Inspiration, A Hard Habit To Break, or If She Would Have Been Faithful, that one has some really interesting background harmony stuff." Beyond the vocals, Chicago is probably best known for their sterling orchestration. You only need to listen to the classically influenced introduction to the bands first ever single, Questions 67 And 68, to realize there was something special happening in the windy city. That type of sound would eventually become associated with European progrock bands, but when it was released in July 1969, just one month before Woodstock, it was uniquely American.

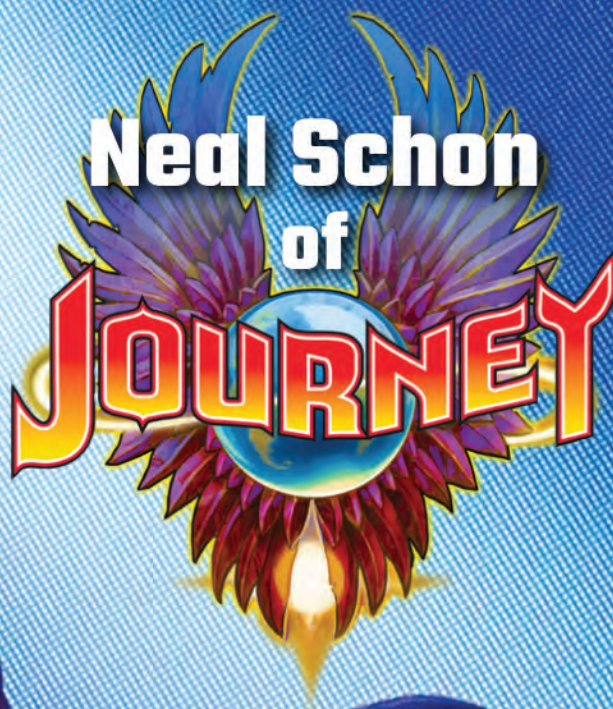
After hunkering down for the pandemic, and like most of us, watching a lot of Hulu, Howland is glad the band is finally back on the road. He says, "I've been touring for about 30 years, and that was definitely the longest I've ever been at home." While he may have lost his calluses waiting out Covid, the band kept busy working on new material. He says, "there is a new record in the works."

There are some tunes from 20 years ago, that guys sort of had laying around, never quite completed, and Robert Lamm wrote a bunch of new material with Jim Peterick from Ides Of March, and Survivor. So yeah, right now there are like 20 songs that are completed, or almost completed that's included on this thing." Continuing, he says, "I don't even know at this point if it's going to be an album, a double album, two albums. My guess is it'll be out sometime in the spring of 2022." About being back on tour again, he said, "After this pandemic shutdown, for the doors to fly back open and see, like our show in Atlanta, eight or nine thousand people returning to see the band, it's a very emotional experience for all of us." As an example, he added, "We were doing a song in the encore called Free, and the hook in the song is, I just want to be free, and the pandemic took that away from us. We were playing it, and I started actually getting a little choked up singing that line in front of the crowd, and seeing them react. So yeah, it's like they say, you don't know what you've got till it's gone. We're just happy to be able to do what we do for a living, and continue putting smiles on peoples faces."

Chicago's tour will bring them to the Venetian Theater in Las Vegas for three nights, September 15th, 17th, and 18th. Additionally, on the 18th, the band will be hosting their fan club, so if you want to meet Keith, or any of the other extraordinary musicians, get your tickets soon.

ROCKOn MAGAZINE

Journey: To Infinity and Beyond
by Bill Kopp



"Bands evolve."

That was Neal Schon's response to the opening question in a recent conversation with Rock On. He was reflecting on the career trajectory of Journey, the multi-platinum selling band he co-founded in San Francisco in 1973.

Between 1978 and 1987, Journey was on top of the pop and rock music world. The band's fourth album, *Infinity* propelled Journey to the top of the charts, and featured a pair of hit singles, "Wheel in the Sky" and "Lights." The latter, a prototypical power ballad co-composed by Perry and Schon, was a slow burn, initially peaking at #68 on the Billboard singles charts. But the tune's popularity grew, pulling the band along with it. Today it's widely considered a classic.

Previous Journey releases sounded quite different from these new songs. And Schon admits that he had reservations about the change when Perry first joined the group. "But when I finally got in a room with him, he and I knocked out our first song in about 20 minutes," he recalls. "And it was immediate chemistry."

And "Lights" paved the way – or opened the floodgates; choose your metaphor – for future Journey successes. Starting with *Infinity*, the Bay Area rockers entered a high profile arc that saw each of seven successive albums go Platinum – one million units sold – or better. In fact one went double-Platinum, three sold enough to earn the triple Platinum designation. And one, 1981's *Escape*, went Diamond. That's ten million copies sold.

But the Journey of those years bore little resemblance to the group that Schon and four other musicians put together in the early '70s. At its start, Journey was a musical hybrid, a grab-bag of hotshot musicians who had fled other bands in hope of making their mark with something new.

The Journey of those days – as heard on the group's self-titled 1975 debut, 1976's *Look into the Future* and *Next* from 1977 – was a progressive-fusion band. Early Journey showcased the instrumental and compositional prowess of its members, and while keyboardist Greg Rolie was nominally the lead singer, vocals were not a top priority.



Rolie, Schon and bassist Ross Valory provided the instrumental backbone of those days and beyond, with assorted other members coming and going. And by fall 1977, the band had added Steve Perry to its lineup. Then in his late 20s, Perry had a powerful tenor voice. He also brought with him an accessible songwriting style; eight of Infinity's ten songs would feature a Perry co-credit.

With Perry on board, Journey's progressive inclinations were set aside, and largely forgotten. The Steve Perry era defined what would become the group's signature sound. Today Schon acknowledges that "the younger audience is not aware of our earlier records."

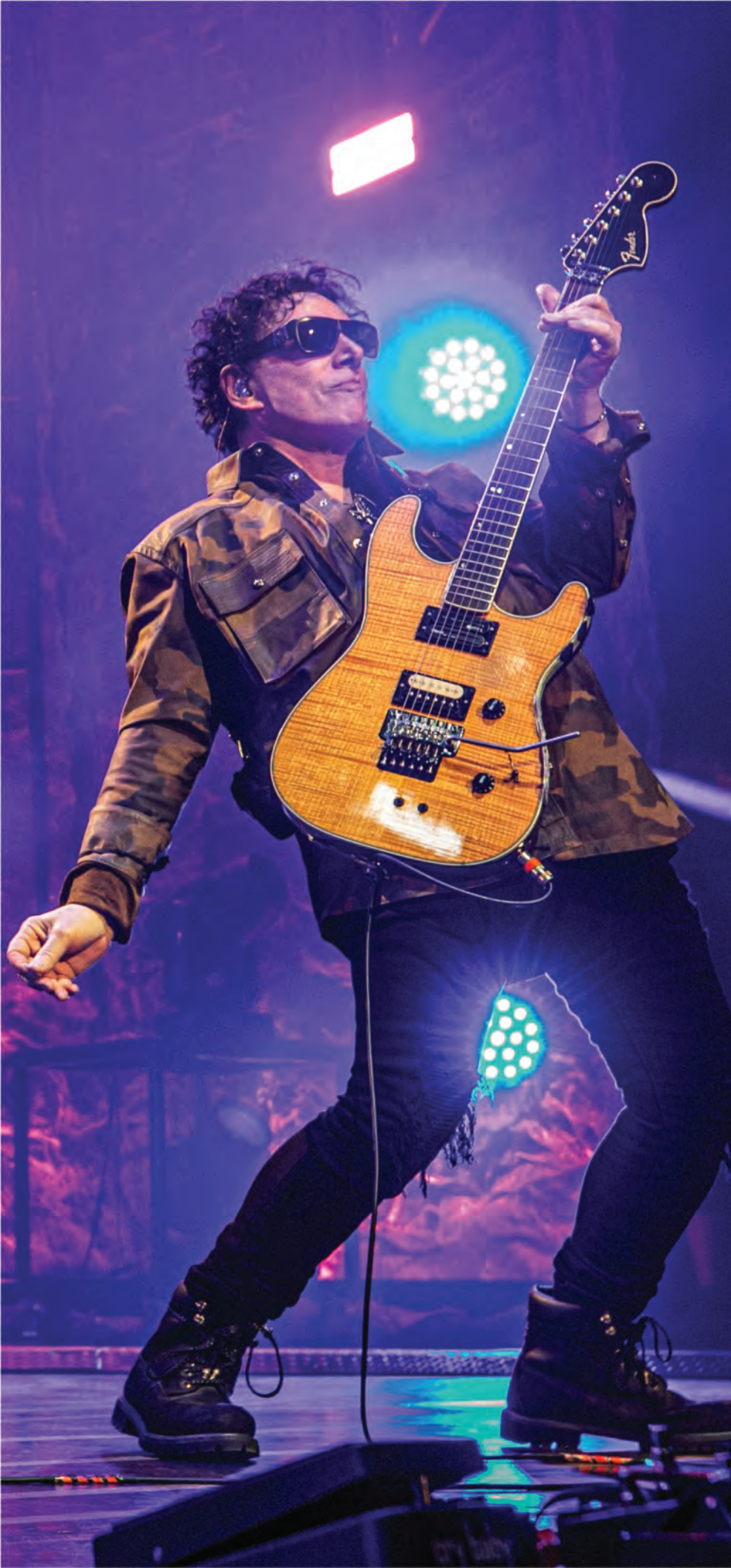
But there would be no denying the appeal of the "new" Journey. And it was on the singles charts where Journey would truly make their mark. After that initial modest success in 1978 with "Lights," the band took off for the outer limits.

A list of Journey singles from that era is sure to bring nods of recognition to anyone with even a passing familiarity with 1980s pop culture. "Lovin', Touchin', Squeezin'" (#15), "Any Way You Want It" (#21), "Who's Cryin' Now" (#3), "Don't Stop Believin'" (#8), "Open Arms" (#1) and "Separate Ways" (#9) are only a sampling of Journey's decade-long dominance on the singles chart.

Neal Schon gives much of the credit for those successes to lead singer Perry, a former drummer. "Steve was a master at manipulating time," Schon says. "He knew how make things sound faster, even though they weren't. I learned a lot from him."

But nothing lasts forever. By the time of 1987's *Raised on Radio*, longtime drummer Steve Smith and founding member Valory had been summarily fired by Perry. Rolie had left by 1980, replaced by Jonathan Cain, formerly of pop group The Babys. Though *Raised on Radio* spawned hit singles, on the whole it was less well-received critically. In the wake of that disappointment, and in the face of changing popular tastes, Journey went on hiatus for nearly eight years.





When the band regrouped, Perry was again its dominant force. But health problems eventually sidelined him. By 1998 Journey's most well-known member announced his exit from the group.

Many bands have folded in the wake of the departure of their lead singer. But Journey – now effectively co-led by Schon and Cain – kept on. The group brought in Steve Augeri, a relative unknown who had worked with Michael Schenker.

Augeri took an active role in songwriting and handled lead vocals on a pair of Journey albums: *Arrival* (2000), 2005's *Generations* and the band's only EP, *Red 13*. None sold in quantities remotely resembling the band's peak '80s period. And vocal problems necessitated Augeri's leaving the group in 2005.

His replacement didn't work out. Schon admires Jeff Scott Soto as a vocalist, but says that ultimately he wasn't a good fit, lacking "the tenor-alto-soprano voice you need to be able to cover the [Journey] catalog."

After Soto's departure, Neal Schon again sought a new lead singer for the band. In February 2008, Philippines-born Arnel Pineda became Journey's sixth lead singer. A powerful vocalist, Pineda helped Journey return to the charts. Self-released in 2008, the aptly-named *Revelation* sold more than one million units.

But that level of success would prove difficult to sustain. Pivoting, the resilient band turned its attention to live work, releasing a string of concert albums and DVDs. Journey would release no new studio material between 2012 and 2021.



Meanwhile, the lineup changes that had been a characteristic of the group's past would return, marked by frequent additions, dismissals and departures. Valory and Smith – both of whom were on hand when Journey was inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in 2017 – were fired in 2020; a flurry of lawsuits ensued. “The cool thing about the name Journey – and the brand Journey – is that the name means you’re always evolving,” Schon says. “It’s okay to make changes.”

The band’s long studio silence was broken with a 2021 album, *Freedom*. And 15 years into his tenure with the group, Pineda remains an effective ringer who can render faithful readings of the classic Journey tunes.

Neal Schon is as compelling and tuneful an axeman as he’s ever been. As Journey’s sole remaining original member, he represents the through-line that ties it all together. “To be frank about it,” Schon says, “it’s my guitar playing. I’ve still got the fire; I’ve still got the chops.”

He’s right. Though they’re subtle, echoes of the prog-fusion era band are in there on *Freedom*, if one listens closely and past the studio sheen. “You never quite leave things behind,” Schon admits.

And he’s looking toward the future. “Everything just keeps on going straight up,” Schon says, passion and determination in his voice. “We keep attaining younger audiences. I’ll look in the front row, and they’re singing every song at the top of their lungs.” Journey seems poised to return to the big time. “We went back into arenas shortly after Lollapalooza this year,” Schon says.

Journey should be celebrating its half-century of music in 2023. That might not happen, and the reason is actually good news. “We already have 2023 and ‘24 planned out,” says Schon. So a 50th anniversary celebration may have to wait a bit. “I think,” says the guitarist with a hearty laugh, “it’s going to take a couple more years.”

And nobody really knows what changes might be in store for Journey between now and then, let alone in the years to follow. It’s all okay, though, because as Neal Schon reminds us, “bands evolve.”

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