

DENNIS DEYOUNG

Styx legend and solo performer Dennis DeYoung has a wonderful new DVD/CD out entitled a 'DDY And The Music Of Styx'. Ian Johnson talks with Dennis - a real fan boy moment - about the new release, his love for music, what drives him at the age of 67 to keep on Rocking and what the legacy of Styx means to him.

Dennis, can you tell us how the new DVD came about please?

The story is that AXS-TV came to me and asked if I would like to be part of an ongoing series called 'Live From The Grammy Museum'. That is artists coming to the museum to play their songs acoustically, so in essence they were offering me the opportunity to do my acoustic show for them. I thought about it for a while and said "Well, I've already done a non-Rock show, when I did the 'Music Of Styx' with the symphony orchestra", so I told them "Hell! What I want to do is Rock!" I said to them that as good as the band I have with me now are acoustically, what I really want to give the fans is a full blown Rock show, to let them see and hear the Styx songs as they should be heard. I wanted to play a greatest hits show because if you look at what I've done, or Styx have done over the years, it hasn't ever been a full on greatest hits concert. So I asked if there was any way we could do this electrically and they said yes and suggested we record it at the El Rey Theater, because it was set up for electric shows.

Then Frontiers Records, who were interested in releasing the acoustic show and doing the DVD of it, jumped at the chance for a full electric show and that's how it essentially happened. Everything just seemed to fall into place and in hindsight at 67 years old, if I'd known people like you and your magazine and the fans had wanted to hear this music done this way when I was 25, I'd have been a much more relaxed guy over the years.

The band you have assembled around you are on fire throughout the whole of the concert,

please tell us about them.

This all came about really when I realised that from 2001/02 onwards I was only ever singing the songs that I wrote myself in Styx. So the band I had in those early days, who were all very good friends of mine, helped when we did the Symphony shows and continued touring with me for many years. However, when the bass player wanted to leave and he was the guy who sang all the high harmony parts, I needed to think of getting something new together. So a little while after he'd left, my son phones me and says "Dad go downstairs and look on the internet", I said "What for? It's 1:30 in the morning!" He goes "Just go and look at this guy called August Zadra". So I did. And I saw this guy from a Styx cover band singing 'Blue Collar Man', 'Renegade' and 'Too Much Time...' and I said "Whoa who is this guy?" So I contacted August, invited him down to my place and we got on well, so right then and there I decided to put together a band with the specific job of performing the music of Styx with the same spirit and joy that those albums and tours of ours used to bring to the fans.

With August, it wasn't just his singing that impressed me but the fact he could nail the solos of either Tommy or JY note for note, which really sealed the deal for me. So I knew we just had to do this. We brought in Craig Carter on bass who helps with the high vocal harmonies, Jimmy Leahey who is just a wonderful all round guitar player, Tom Sharpe is our drummer who knocks it out of the park night

after night and John Blasucci who plays keyboards, which frees me up to come out to the front and be the lead singer. Oh and of course my beautiful wife Suzanne sings backing vocals for us as well.

You mentioned earlier and on the DVD that your 67 years old. So how have you kept your voice in such good shape? Personally I think you sound as good now as you ever did. What's your trick?

Thanks a lot for that, I'll give you my phone number and you can ring me up every morning and tell me that! (laughs) Well, what I do is wear underwear soaked in ice cold water that are three times too small for me before I go on stage. No, really what it is, and I'm not bragging or saying what I did was right and what somebody else did was wrong, but I never did drugs, I don't drink and I don't smoke. I was always very conscious, even in the very early Styx days, that your vocal cords are a muscle and an instrument and if you abuse it, you will

only get a finite amount of use from it. You have to respect your vocal cords, I mean don't get me wrong, because some people do buck that rule and those things I mentioned don't affect them, but nine times out of ten if you do abuse your voice it will be gone long before it should have.

I've watched the DVD quite a few times now and the passion and enthusiasm in your performance shines through in everything you do on stage. Also your interaction with the audience is warm and funny, are they part of the reason you still have this love for performing?

Yes, that's a big part of the reason I love playing live, the fans. In part it's you Brit's fault because it was you that sent the Beatles over to America in the 60s. That made me want to become a singer, performer, whatever you want to call it. I saw them on the Ed Sullivan Show and from that moment on I knew what I wanted to do with my life. My show though is a lot different from what you see on

the DVD because you only get a little bit of me interacting with the audience. Usually I talk to them because I fancy myself as a comedian, so I'll tell them jokes, usually about my age, about being labelled a 'Rock Star' and I'm a guy who can't take being called a 'Rock Star' at my age too seriously. So I'll answer your question this way, I don't really know what art is, what makes something art. I went to the Museum of Modern Art and saw a toilet seat in a frame and I thought to myself if that's 'art' I'll take a photograph of my ass and call it a Picasso! Though I do know that when the fans pony up their hard earned money to come and see me or buy one of my albums, that I have to, regardless of how I'm feeling, put on the very best show that I can possibly do. I know these people deserve my best effort, the best that I can do each and every single night that I perform, which is what I try to do.

So as a long time Styx and DDY fan I have to ask for everyone who reads this magazine. When can we see you over here on tour?

The trouble for me is this. When Styx came over and played the UK and European shows, they were part of a package deal. I'm not sure if people who remember Styx remember that Dennis DeYoung was the singer in that band. Only really dedicated fans would know that I was the singer in Styx. The other thing is I've never been asked. If a promoter over there said "Hey Dennis, how about playing Great Britain?" I'd be there in a shot. Also I've made it my life to promote the name of Styx, whether I'm in the band or not. So I'm not sure if people would get the DDY thing. If a promoter offered, we'd be there because about five years ago we were offered a slot at the German 'Night Of The Proms'. We went and played three songs for them which was wonderful to do. So please tell everyone that it's not because I don't want to come because I do, it's just that no one has asked me and when I say no one, I mean no-one. Yet!

As we touched on, with the DVD being a Styx greatest hits package, apart from 'Babe' which is obviously very personal to



you and your wife Suzanne, what song must always go into your set-list?

Well I suppose it would have to be 'Come Sail Away'. That song is the ultimate Styx song, at the time of its release it didn't get much recognition around the world but it has grown into the biggest song in the Styx/DDY catalogue. If someone had never heard of the band before and you wanted to introduce them to the music of Styx that would be the song you'd choose. It has the light beginning, the Proggy middle section and then the big anthemic chorus, which sums up the variety that we had within the songs of Styx. That's what I always loved about Styx, the variety in the songs we all brought to the table.

After the DVD/CD has been out for a while will you be thinking of sitting down and writing a new album with the band you've got now?

Actually Frontiers Records have been kind enough to offer me just such a thing, and I haven't jumped in straight away. I need to get this DVD/CD project off and running before I settle down to doing another solo album. Out of all my solos records 'One Hundred Years From Now' is the one I'm most proud of because I knew then that I could make a Rock album and could write songs like the ones I used to write when I was in Styx. My other solo albums are a bit all over the place with me trying different things because I

didn't want to intrude on what Styx were doing at that time. So I could write an album like that or a Styx sounding album. At the moment I have about seven or eight finished songs that are stylistically all very different so I'm not sure if or when I'll make a new album. I won't ever make an album unless I think I have something creative musically to offer the fans and with the wonderful help of Frontiers, yourself and the other writers I've spoken to recently, who have all said they'd like to hear some new music from me, the odds are in favour of me doing just that.

With all the songs you and Styx have written together and the lives you've touched with them, you must be happy with the musical legacy that you and the band have left, or are leaving, behind?

Here's what I'll say about our legacy because when I was, shall we say, removed from the band in 1999 and forget my feelings here, take me out of the equation - when I left, the fan base was split, which for me was the hardest part of the whole thing. You see I never in my whole life thought that our fans would ever be forced to choose a side. I hated that because that wasn't the point of what we did as a band, so as far as legacy goes, I don't think what happened helped any of us.

The fans have what I consider a magical connection with a band and when you mess with

that it's never the same. Anything that develops and tarnishes that connection just isn't right. So what I'd like to say to all Styx fans is that we were together as a band for a really long time and we all genuinely liked each other, for all that time we were really good friends and we made some beautiful records together. I'd be surprised if anyone in Styx now wouldn't say that what we did, the music we created, wasn't part of a whole band identity. All of us, Tommy, JY, Chuck and John all brought great things to each other's music and I honestly don't think it would have been the same with other players. The five of us made something special and it's a mystery as to why, why voices blend, why five people can come together and make music that sounds so great, why five people can make a band, it really is a mystery.

So finally Dennis, would you therefore be up for say a one off concert with Styx?

Wouldn't that be great thing to do? We had and probably still would have a special chemistry on stage. I believe we had something that you just can't manufacture or make up, something special happened when we played together. What we had was a perfect musical and personality balance especially on stage. Just watch our 'Back To Paradise' DVD and tell me I'm wrong. So it would be a nice thing to do for the fans, so I'll just use the words, maybe one day.