

# Styx is still rockin'

By Rachelle Nones

[wordsmith3@prodigy.net](mailto:wordsmith3@prodigy.net)

Styx had just landed the No. 2 sweet spot on Rolling Stone's list of the "hottest ten package summer tours," when all hell broke loose. The mega-platinum rock band's touring mate, Ted Nugent, already taking heat for inflammatory remarks about President Obama, had gone ballistic during an explosive "CBS This Morning" interview. Things are definitely heating up for the band best known for the classic rock hits "Come Sail Away," "Renegade," "The Grand Illusion," and "Lady" as well. The long-time rockers were recently featured on the CNN special, "Age Against The Machine," and just added additional shows to their "Midwest Rock 'N Roll Express" tour.



On the day of Nugent's meltdown, Styx's bass player, Ricky Phillips, called to discuss the summer tour and other band news.

DB: Ted Nugent is one of the acts on your current multiband tour. In view of recent events, how does Styx feel about touring with Ted? Are you concerned about a backlash from your fans?

RP: The tour was booked before he made the comments that he made. Ted has been political for years and years but we're all about the music and we're trying to make the focus about the music. Within Styx, we all have our political views but we don't choose to voice them. When you come to see a Styx show you are not going to get a political lecture. You're going to have a great night of fun and good music and that's the basis of this entire tour. There's a time and a place for everything.

Phillips told me that they were on the third day of their new tour. I'd been reading fan reviews on Styx's recent performances, so I asked him about the band's decisions on song selection for their arena tours. How do they avoid disappointing fans who come to the show expecting to hear a favorite song?

RP: You are never going to please everyone, especially when you are on a multiband bill and you only have 75 minutes to play. There are going to be major hits that aren't heard because there's not enough time. There are the people we call "multiple offenders" who keep coming back and want to see more. They're the ones we try to reach out to, as well as ourselves. We have to give them a little something different each time that we're out. Right now we're doing a few deep cuts, but we have to limit it to two because every song that we go to of the deep cuts, we're dropping something that is obviously a big hit. There's always a few people who are going to be disappointed. "Snowblind" is one of my favorite songs and we haven't even done that in over a year because we just haven't gotten around to it.

Styx tours 200 days a year, so I figured I'd find out a little bit more about life on the road.



DB: How does the band survive its hectic touring schedule?

RP: We've been doing this a long time so we're used to the road. I play golf on my days off and try to get out on some green grass. Everybody has their way of coping with it. None of us are alike. It's a crazy bunch but everyone is supportive. We see each other more than we see our own families. We realize it's a marriage of sorts and there's a lot of give and take. You have to know when to speak up and when to shut up and we've figured that out. A lot of bands haven't. I've been in bands that have never figured that out.

DB: You're one of the newer members of Styx and so is Lawrence Gowan. When you perform Styx's earlier songs do you ever feel the pressure of comparison with earlier original performances?

RP: James Young and Tommy Shaw are very meticulous in who is allowed in and there was a deep discussion with me before I came in. I met the

guys and I toured with them in '79 so I've known them for a lot of years. When they decided that I was the guy they wanted, that was just the beginning. They had to know that I was on board with the task at hand because even though I was known for my past work it isn't something anybody can just walk into. My task was to learn the entire catalog as it was recorded. I am not now reinventing the bass parts of something that has become classic music that's played on multiple playlists around the country every day and every hour. I had to learn exactly what Chuck Panozzo [who is still involved with Styx] did and then figure out a way to make it mine so that I was satisfied and happy as an artist. I'm not a cover artist but when you learn a classic piece of music you have to pay it its due respect. When we did the Regeneration CDs, I had to go in and learn inside and out everything that Chuck did and lean more in that direction than what I would do. That's out of respect to the music and to the fans. When you are recreating something you have to do it with kid gloves and with great reverence.

DB: What do you know now that you wish you'd known about the music business when you first started out?

RP: When you're younger you think you know everything. When you finally realize you don't and figure out that maybe some of the things you've been trying aren't working, hopefully, you get with a bunch of guys who know what they're doing. As far as Styx goes, everyone has got strong input but it's in different camps. We know which guy is going to have the best opinion on whatever the subject is. Your body creates new cells to stay alive when it's hit with a disease or sickness. I think it's very much similar within a band. If a band is gonna stay alive you have to get rid of the parts that aren't moving forward. That's happened with all kinds of bands. I've never seen two Yes tours with the same people in it and they're one of my favorite bands. Bands change because they have to change to survive.

On that note, I felt compelled to ask about Styx's present relationship with co-founder and former member Dennis DeYoung.

RP: The closure had been there long before I'd been there so it's not something that comes up.

DB: Are you saying that Styx's present relationship with DeYoung is a nonissue?

RP: We've come so far since then. He's a great talent who moved in a different direction from the band. He's doing great on his own. There's no negativity there. It is what it is. He was a strong early influence in the band, without a doubt.

I could not let Ricky walk away without asking him to tell me what it feels like to experience strong popularity and longevity in a business that is noted for chewing bands up and spitting them out.

RP: We're thrilled with what's going on. It's kind of corny when people say, "We want to thank the fans," but without the support we've been getting all of this would not be happening. People always ask me if I recognize people in the audience. We don't know the people. We don't know their names but we see a lot of faces that we've seen for years. It's cool to see.

Then, I asked him about the fans who most likely weren't even born when Styx first started touring.

RP: It's such a trip to see kids singing along and they know all of the lyrics to all of the songs. There's a great point that often comes up. It was presented to me and I thought it was very reflective and very accurate. At the time that music comes out, there's something going on in the world and a perception of the



band at the time that has to do with whatever other music is going on that makes it either cool, hip, corny, whatever. The fans who are discovering the music today don't have any of that to go on. They don't have any idea of what was going on with Punk that interfered or took airplay away from rock bands. They don't know anything about the disco era and how hard it was to get your hit to become a hit as a rock band through that era. They don't know any of that. They are just hearing the songs at face value and taking it as a yea or nay.

DB: How does it feel when Styx is referenced in television shows or in movies like "Big Daddy"?

RP: It's cool even when they're making fun of you, like on "South Park," every time we see it, we laugh. It's the best. Just to be included in any kind of social commentary in youth culture is pretty cool. Adam Sandler has been really good to the band. He came to a show a couple of years ago and I asked him to get up on stage and play "Renegade" with us. He chickened out but there's always an open invitation for him to play with us.

Ricky signed off. Hours later, Styx rocked the Anselmo Valencia Amphitheatre in Tucson, Arizona.

To learn more about Styx's latest tours and releases, access the following links: