

Jonathan Cain, Journey

June 14, 2005

I recently had a chance to catch up with Jonathan Cain, the keyboard player for the legendary Journey. The band has sold 60 million albums with a string of top ten singles accounting for over two decades of music played on the radio. As a songwriter, he's had songs recorded by Michael Bolton, Sammy Hagar, Kenny Rogers, the band "Heart", Greg Allman, Conway Twitty, The Oak Ridge Boys, Colin Raye, Lorrie Morgan, Maria Carey, Australian singer Jimmy Barnes and Peter Frampton. Cain has been a prolific composer and performer. In addition to Journey, he also previously recorded and toured with The Babys and Bad English and has written and recorded six full-length solo albums. This was a great opportunity for me to speak with someone who has been to the top and been able to stay there.

First off, I just wanna ask you how much rehearsal it will take to pull together the upcoming tour?

A couple weeks.

A couple weeks. You guys go everyday like your normal work day-8 hours a day to go through all the tunes?

We run, ya know we don't do 8 hours, but we certainly, ya know, manage 3-4 hours a day at least.

There's a lot of old material being brought out of the archives for the tour.

Yeah.

So what tunes are you most excited about playing?

Well, you know, um, I don't think some of these songs have ever seen the light of day, so...

Yeah, right, right.

...great songs-I didn't have a lot to do with them, I had nothing to do with them, so I'm just trying to faithfully reproduce them, with other records, so it's fun in the sense that we're kind of reinventing them to some degree, you know, but certainly to play "Kohoutek" and "Of a Lifetime," songs like that, and "Mystery Mountain"-it's pretty cool. "City of Angels" has never gotten played; "Daydream" off *Infinity*, another song that never really got played. These songs have finally seen a little exposure, and certainly we've played almost everything else in our catalogue.

Has the record company stepped up its marketing for your 30th Anniversary Tour ?

Oh we're the record company now...there is no record company.

I see, so do you feel that you're getting proper marketing for the tour? Because I know you expressed some dissatisfaction with the amount of marketing effort put into you previously.

Oh the amount of money that you're taking per unit was pretty not so... yeah... but I think the fans are first and foremost in our minds-they're getting the music first. So, what can you say-its awesome and they're gonna get a brand new CD when they come to the show, and you can't get it anywhere else, so that's how we're playing this one. And also have a Journeyville, (*Journeyville is a festive area located near the front entrance at most of the venues. Fans will be treated to continuous video playback on large outdoor screens showing various moments throughout Journey's history such as classic music videos, behind-the-scenes clips and much more*) it's sort of an interesting retrospective to look back over 30 years of what the band has been up to. It's a very retro kind of feeling, we got a brand new motorcycle, a Ness bike, that we're going to auction off for the St. Jude's hospital.

That's got the custom paint job-

It's got a custom Journey paint job, so that's pretty special, and all-in-all it's a pretty cool little set-up.

So with your piano set-up itself-are you bringing the whole set-up, the Whale?

The Whale is coming out, yeah.

Right, so are you bringing the Hammond organ with the actual Leslie amp?

I got the actual Leslies, yeah, and the Hammond. It's not the old giant B3, but it's a Hammond-made product that has the Leslies, so it sounds pretty authentic, yeah.

Now does that have the actual rotating speakers?

Oh yeah.

Oh, that's beautiful. Now you always have sort of the duality of the analog and the digital-are there any new advances in your set-up that you're using that are making that easier? Do you have the midi stuff on the piano I take it?

Yeah there's the midi on the piano; it's a pretty basic stock set-up. I've got a lot of the samples-it's the same rig I've used for a lot of years. I've added a couple pieces here and there.

But it's basically the same. Okay, so can you explain a little bit about how you came up with your travel café recipes? What was the inspiration behind that?

The travel café piece? I'm not familiar with that.

Well you had some recipes posted.

Oh yeah, well I like to cook, ya know, and when I'm home with my wife and family-it was just one of those things. I was doing the jazz records, and they said why don't you cook for this guy, and we did, and next thing you know I was on television cooking. It's something I like to do just to relax, you know, it's fun.

Yeah, it looked like some spicy recipes, too.

Oh yeah there's good stuff. I like Cajun food. I'm kind of a food buff, and I like wine. It's fun for me, like making a great song.

A way to relax.

Yeah.

So what charitable organizations are you currently working with? I see that you have some information with the Bright Star Foundation, are there other charitable organizations?

Yeah, we've done stuff for Make a Wish-we just auctioned off a few guitars for them and made a bunch of money. We've done stuff for Toys for Tots, with the Marines, and TJ Martel in the past; the Cystic Fibrosis Foundation-stuff like that.

Are you involved at all with music education, or foundations for the arts?

Actually I do a lot of stuff in my own community with music with the kids. I help at the elementary school at Christmas time, and I help them with their talent shows.

Oh wow, at the real local level - all the mothers in the audience must love that!

I guess so-I'm right there hands-on with them; we do a Christmas show every year for them.

What music education do you have-how did you first learn to play, what musicians got you-

I've been to college and everything, I did the whole thing-scoop to nuts. I was in the Conservatory of Chicago, played in jazz bands and soul bands. I took about three and a half years of music in college, and of course piano lessons for years that I studied, so I was taking probably for ten years at the least.

What are the challenges and difficulties of balancing family life with the demands of your career? Has that been a difficult role?

You know it is; it's something that the kids and my wife just have to understand and go with it, and when it's time to be with my son and my daughters I'm just with them and I try not to bring my work home with me too much.

Reduce the interruptions and all that.

Yeah, my son every once in a while wants me to play ball and do this and do that and I can't and he gets kind of disappointed, so yeah, you gotta make up for it by taking him on some special things. This summer he's going to go see the St. Louis Cardinals, and get a personal tour with Tony Larussa, a friend of mine, so that kind of stuff. He got to go to Wrigley Field last summer and do the number at the Cubs game while Journey played the National Anthem. And then he walked out and helped me throw the first pitch.

Oh that's exciting for him.

Yeah, so you know, I try to make up in other ways.

Right; I see that you have a studio set up at your house-does that help quite a bit with keeping your work closer to your home?

It does, it helps a lot. I can do a lot of my pre-production, and I did a couple of solos off this last record right at the house.

How do you spend your time away from music? Like you said, when you are away from it and you are spending time-are there certain hobbies that you like to have or-

Yeah, I'm a golfer, and I ski a lot.

Snow-ski?

Snow-ski, yeah. And then I'm constantly hiking with my wife. We hike all over the place. So we get out and do it.

Good. And what new projects do you have on the horizon?

Right now it's just Journey. I'm due for a solo album at some point, and I started a bunch of new songs, so I'll try to finish those on the road and come home and try to get it together.

Right. I need to admit that I'm also a Babys fan of all things; has there been any talk of a reunion with John Waite or anything like that?

Mmm...no. John has issues with the whole thing.

Is that right?

He's an angry poet...I don't know what his deal is.

Oh that's no good. I'm a fan of some of those tunes.

Yeah, he can't get over himself. He's his own worst enemy sometimes.

Well you guys have a huge family tree of musicians and projects that Journey as a whole-if you take all the side projects that each of the members has done, it's a huge influence. What work are you most proud of also?

Well besides Journey it's being with my kids and my family. That's my work, really. Music-wise I've done a lot of things that haven't really gotten much attention, but yet they're very near and dear to my heart, so I don't judge myself on my work. I just do it out of the joy and the passion for what I have. The success is great; Journey pays the bills and it's fun for me.

Well if I could ask just one last question, and this is more broader ranged - Has the ecstasy of the applause and all the admiration been worth the demands of life on the road? Has it been worth it?

It's a give and take; when you go out there and you get that feedback, it makes it rewarding. That's why you do it. And so the fans, it's a responsibility to them to a large degree, and they pay us, we have the money for doing something we love doing, so I think it's a pretty fair tradeoff.

We have a statement on your charitable page where you state that it's a privilege to be able to do that, and I really commend that attitude, and all of your charitable work.

Well we're not going to stop doing that; if we have an opportunity to do some good in this world, we're going to do it. Besides make a living-you don't just want to take all the time; it's wonderful to be able to give back a little.

Well thank you for your time; it's really been a privilege speaking with you. I'm an enormous fan of all your work.

Well we're looking forward to a fun summer and a retrospective look into a band that's been around for a long time

Well you know I'll be in the audience.

Derek Lauer

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