

DENNIS DEYOUNG

PERPETUAL MUSIC MACHINE

Dennis DeYoung is best known as the former frontman and principal hitmaker for 1970s and '80s arena-rockers Styx, the first band ever to score four consecutive multi-platinum records. DeYoung and his former bandmates have long since parted ways, but Dennis's dramatic vocals and distinctive keyboard playing remain much in demand.

On the heels of the Canadian platinum success of his double live CD, *The Music of Styx Live with Symphony Orchestra*, DeYoung has released a new solo record, *One Hundred Years from Now*, whose title track recently hit number one on the Canadian pop, rock, and adult contemporary charts. Meanwhile, he's working with theatrical producer David Zaks to stage his musical, *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*, which opens in Chicago in May 2008. Dennis's fans can keep up with the latest news on his website, www.dennisdeyoung.com.

You still perform a great deal.

Yes, I do about 50 to 60 dates a year. Wherever they want to hire a middle-aged white guy to sing high, I raise my hand! I'm a weekend warrior—I don't actually go out on tour, but I play most Friday and Saturday nights. I get on an airplane, show up at a town near you, and then go back home. For me, it's manageable.

You helped define how synthesizers were used in the '70s. How did you develop your style?

Sadly, I have to admit that my style came about because I'm originally an accordion player. If you notice, there are a lot of trills in my playing, which is indicative of accordion playing. So if people like it for whatever reason, I'd have to say, well, you're probably a latent accordion fan!

These days you play a Yamaha Motif XS.

Yes—I have the original Motif, and the ES8, and a rackmount ES8, and the new one, the Motif XS8. Those are my primary instruments in the studio, all proudly sitting looking at each other.

Of all my keyboards, the Motifs are far and away the best of the bunch. And they keep getting better! Everything is improved on this new model—especially the sounds, and the ability to manipulate them. With the touch screen, it doesn't take a genius to work it, and the weighted keyboard is great for piano playing. And using the arpeggiator feature on the new Motif with the guitar sounds is scary! The acoustic guitars and electric guitars are stunning. Those samples plus the arpeggiator allow me to think like a guitarist. It's an incredible writing tool.

You also have an ebony finish Yamaha Conservatory Collection Grand Piano.

Yes, I can admire my handsome profile in its glasslike surface! [Laughs.] Actually my favorite piano ever is the white satin finish 6' Yamaha that I bought in 1980. Some of the songs I wrote on it are "The Best of Times," "Mr. Roboto," "Show Me the Way," "Desert Moon," and most of the score for *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*.

What's changed about the music business since your Styx days?

To me, the music business is the opposite of the TV business—with TV it gets bigger and bolder, but with music, everything's getting smaller and crappier. Music has become more disposable in our culture. When I was selling all those records with Styx, music was more of a focal point in our culture, and in people's lives. There weren't as many other distractions competing for attention. These days, I start to think that we're entertaining ourselves to death!

What do you think is the key to musical success?

There is no substitute for persistence. No doubt about it, there are a lot of talented people out there. So you have to have some talent. Then you have to be willing to do whatever it takes and not give up, work harder than everybody else. And finally, once in a while the universe has got to line up for you. You can call it luck, or serendipity, or karma—I don't know what it is. But if you don't hang in there, it isn't going to happen.

How do you stay inspired musically after all these years?

It's just who I am and what I do. What else am I going to do? I can't fix your car, and I'm not going to do a root canal on you! Luckily for me, my audience is pretty sure of who I am and what they're going to get. But for new people, I think it's going to be more difficult to have real musical careers in the same way that I have—one that's lasted 30-something years? I don't know—I can't even count anymore. I have Rockzeimer's! [Laughs.]



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