

# DENNIS DeYOUNG "STYX" IT OUT ON HIS OWN

Dennis DeYoung will swear to you "on a stack of Bibles" that he never, not even secretly, planned on going solo. The singer, songwriter, keyboardist and main force behind Styx, says, "I always loved the Beatles and the rock'n'roll groups. But the single guys could just get the fuck out of here."

"That's how I saw Styx, a group, a team, camaraderie. I didn't have to express myself away from them. It wasn't like I had to go out and record my songs because the other guys didn't want to use them."

Had that been the case, Styx probably would have sold far fewer records than they did. With Dennis at the helm, the group sold 20 million discs. The

Chicago-bred songwriter was responsible for seven out of the band's eight top singles ("Lady", "Babe", "Come Sail Away", "Best of Times", "Mr. Roboto", "The Grand Illusion" and "Don't Let It End"), yet, eventually, something pounded away at his insides telling him to try it on his own. So now, with the group on a sabbatical, Dennis' LP *Desert Moon* is the first example of a solo effort by any Styx member (though Tommy Shaw will follow suit shortly). It is also the first time that Dennis has worked with any other band since he was 14 years old.

"All I wanted to do was illustrate my own musical tastes on record," he claims, "ideas that perhaps I wouldn't have done with Styx." On *Desert Moon*, DeYoung did all the writing, singing, arranging and producing. And contrary to the cynicism that many critics exhibited when Dennis announced his solo intentions, the album sounds just as good—and just as polished—as any of Styx' best.

Reacting to a comment that *Desert Moon*—with its chord changes and

layering of instrumentals—could easily be confused with an LP by the very group that Dennis helped make famous, he expresses mild surprise. "No one has ever told me that before, but I take it as a compliment. It's still my voice. I mean, when I go from Styx to my solo album, I don't necessarily become Bob Dylan."

Like always, Dennis presents himself on *Desert Moon* in a theatrical fashion. "I don't cop a plea on that. When people tell me I'm theatrical, all I can say is, 'Yes, that's who I am.' My mother told me a long time ago to be true to myself, not to be someone else."

The back-up musicians on the album are—with one exception—all Chicago locals: Tom Dziallo, guitars/bass; Tom Radtke, drums/percussion; Dennis Johnson, bass on "Don't Wait For Heroes" and "Suspicious"; Steve Eisen on saxophone and Gary Loizzo on backing vocals. The only out-of-towner is Rosemary Butler, dueting on "Please".

"Rosemary's like the famous character actor who you remember the face but you can't remember the name," Dennis says. "In her case, you remember the voice. She has worked with Jackson Browne, Bruce Springsteen, Boz Scaggs, the Doobie Brothers, Linda Ronstadt, James Taylor and others. 'Please' is a singer's song and I wanted somebody who was a real belter."

**"When I go from Styx to my solo album, I don't necessarily become Bob Dylan."**

The songs on the album span a variety of themes. "Desert Moon" is a remembrance of innocent times ("Those summer nights when we were

By Keith Elliot Greenberg

DEC 1984

FACES

The "megagroup" STYX is comprised of (l. to r.) Dennis DeYoung, John Panozzo, James (J.Y.) Young, Chuck Panozzo and Tommy Shaw.



"There's a point that you come to where you can recognize that you've written a good song. But then there's a point where you play the song and you've touched a nerve in yourself. You've taken this feeling out of your body and translated it into music. That's the greatest feeling."

Naturally, the best way to do this is by working alone, as opposed to the "pseudo-Democratic process" Dennis claims is practiced in Styx. "Like in America, we're Democratic in principle if not always in practice. Styx has diverse personalities in singing and songwriting. That's what accounts for our popularity. We have our ego clashes about what goes on the album, but we compromise."

As a solo artist, Dennis enjoys not having to compromise with anybody. He says he never compromises *himself* at anytime by indulging in drugs. "No drugs, no booze," he states about his personal philosophy of good living. "I have a glass of wine maybe once every two months. I don't think there's a correlation between creativity and a person who's a semi-tragic character with a drug or an alcohol problem. In some ways, the journalistic community attaches some glamor to it. But there's nothing glamorous about somebody with a severe drug problem.

"On the way to making millions, many artists make themselves miserable. Sometimes it's because of their expectations before they become famous; they thought that success would alleviate their problems. When it didn't, they took drugs to help them ease their pain.

"You can't look for happiness. It has to hit you sometimes. People with drug problems are sometimes so busy looking at the other guys and saying, 'That muthafucka looks so happy. How can I get it?'"

Dennis intends to do his best to help himself—and his fans—realize contentment. He plans to make a video in the near future, and, as of this writing, an American tour is planned. He says that he will play his solo material as well as Styx songs during his concerts. And he'll be looking to strike that special nerve in all his followers. "My satisfaction is playing for people and seeing *their* enthusiasm." □

young/We bragged of things we'd never done/We were dreamers, only dreamers/And in our haste to grow too soon/We left our innocence on Desert Moon"). "Don't Wait For Heroes" tells the listener not to expect saviours to change things, when you can change them yourself. "Please" is the traditional male/female confrontation with grandiose production values. "Boys Will Be Boys" is a chronicle of teen shenanigans ("everything in the song really happened to me when I was 17"). And "Fire" is a unique cover of the Jimi Hendrix classic.

"I'm known for writing rock ballads," Dennis states. "People forget

that I wrote 'Rocking to Paradise', 'Mr. Roboto' and 'The Grand Illusion'; I'm perceived in one direction. There are actually very few rock ballads on my new album. It might be unconscious, but that's where I was when I wrote the album."

At the risk of not seeming humble, Dennis makes his expectations for *Desert Moon* crystal clear. "I want it to be successful. When you do something that becomes very successful, people really like it. And, let's face it, the joy is not in writing and recording the music, it's seeing people's reaction to it later, the communication process. If you tell me you like what I did, it makes my life better.