

A Talk With Dennis DeYoung Part I

Styx' Maven Of Mellow Rock Is On His Own—Listen In And Find Out What He And Desert Moon Are All About!

RockLine! What's the status of Styx now, Dennis?

Dennis De Young: Three guys are married, two are single.

R! Are you together as a group?

D: Yes, we are. We're not together at the moment, but we are still together as a group.

R! There has been a great deal of talk, and not the usual kind of loose talk, about the group.

D: And who did it come from?

R! The industry.

D: And what name is always mentioned?

R! Tommy Shaw.

D: Then I suppose you should ask Tommy. As far as I know, the group is still together. Most of that stuff did emanate from him, not from the other four members of the band.

R! So, can we gather that there is some kind of problem between Tommy and the rest of the group?

D: Tommy wanted to do a solo album. That started in August of last year, that he really wanted to do a solo project. Styx had always been of the mind not to do solo projects, but he wanted to do one, so we decided to take some time off after the *Kilroy* project, and that's really how I got into doing a solo album myself is that there was going to be time off. So I went to A&M, and they were nice enough to offer me a nice three-record deal—make three albums by myself for them.

R! So then Tommy was the impetus for all of this?

D: I think so. Maybe it would have come anyway. I can't be 100% sure. But certainly his wanting to do the solo album was the reason I did the solo album, because it was almost like when the five of us would say, "Hey, we're gonna do Styx," and that was all there was to it. He felt he wanted to do a solo record, so I figured, hey, that's gonna take time. You just can't please some people. They're either too busy or they have too much time.

R! Is it of any significance that your album is coming out first?

D: I don't think so. I wish I could say, "Yeah, that's because . . ." But there is no reason other than that I finished and my schedule got on the A&M board first, 'cause I was done. It's as simple as that. You know, record companies have a release date and they like to stick to it. They have to plan in advance.

R! We've been hearing about a Tommy solo album for some time.

D: And haven't heard about me until about a week ago, right?

R! No, as a matter of fact, we've listened to it.

D: Do you know which side you listened to, soft or loud?

R! Softer. The duet—who is the girl?

D: Rosemary Butler. She's that girl you hear on a million records and don't know who she is. She's sung with Springsteen on *No Nukes* and Jackson Browne on "Stay." You know the girl on "Stay?" She did a duet with Boz Scaggs, she's the girl with Linda Ronstadt on "Get Closer." James Taylor. She's in the *No Nukes* film. Doobie Brothers. All those guys.

R! What do you think is going to happen in terms of the critics to a Dennis De Young solo album? You had a hard time when you were recording with Styx.

D: Gee, I don't know. I just hope that the album gets some radio airplay and people get a chance to hear it. I hope they like it. As far as the critics go, you certainly can't live your life wondering if the people are going to think about it from that point of view. It's an impossible task to answer criticism. How do you answer criticism? You can't answer it, because if you do answer it, even intelligently and articulately, it sounds like sour grapes. All you do is what you do and God bless you. Hopefully, somebody likes it. What can you do?

R! How do you respond to criticism?

D: Emotionally it's difficult. There's certainly a misconception that performers, artists, musicians, I don't care who they are, from Bob Dylan to Menudo, at the heart of the whole thing, I think that people are really giving it their all. I don't think performers and artists are trying to

hoodwink anybody. By and large, they're really giving it their best shot and going for it in the only way they know how. So when the criticism comes, the reason they respond that way is because they're saying to themselves, "I'm trying here. I'm really trying to do something." I've learned throughout the years, there's no way to answer it. Funny thing I found is that people who I would call "media favorites," and I'd meet them and I was surprised to hear them bitch about this interview, that article, this review. So even the ones who are perceived as having little or no problems really have. There's that insatiable insecurity within an artist.

R! Who do you think today has little or no problems with the critics?

D: I don't think it's interesting to know how I feel about that stuff. I don't really want to talk about who's favorite and who's not.

R! The press can be very nasty.

D: I don't think that's what it was. I see people who would rather be Ernest Hemingway or Edgar Allen Poe, Faulkner, Steinbeck, and are not.

R! Was Tommy upset with the very thematic last album you did? *Kilroy*? Was it too much Dennis DeYoung and not enough of the rest of the band that caused the need for solo exploration?

D: I don't really know, because in the beginning, Tommy thanked me for stretching him to do it, making him do things he never thought he was capable of doing. But on the other hand, there was a point in 1978, after *Pieces Of Eight*, where a couple of members of the band, Tommy and JY thought about doing solo albums then and we sat around and talked about it. It was nothing that was new. It was something that was probably in the back of Tommy's mind for a long time. He wanted to have his own form of self-expression.

R! Is it possible you're too polished for a rock group, in that you've a fine voice. You can really hold a note—there are very few people in this business who can. And you have a great deal of writing skill, you're excellent on stage, and we're wondering if maybe that's what the press holds against you.

D: I don't know. We're back to that

again, huh? By the way, the *Kilroy* show, in 25 percent of the reviews people actually said things like, "I've never seen a better show in my life." Writers actually wrote that in the newspaper. I mean, that was a long way from the tour before when people mostly said, "What do people see in these guys anyway? There may be 50,000 screaming people, but what is it that these guys have?" You know, that's a long way to go in one tour. From saying those kinds of things to saying, "This is maybe the best show I've ever seen in this city." So, I don't want people to get the idea that the entire rock press was against Styx—they're not all against Styx. You know, it's so easy just to regurgitate as a journalist in a town. You know, you go to a file and you see what's been written and you get the general vibe and you go there and maybe you have what I call the famous "mindset." A name will give you a mindset and sometimes you just say a name and it gets a kneejerk response. And I think a lot of the press has been like a kneejerk response to what they perceive us to be. I know, my manager right now, the guy who represents me . . . Danny Goldberg. The first time he ever saw Styx is from the *Paradise* tour. Now, he's from the pseudo-hip kind of establishment type, and I met this guy, a real sweetheart. He had never seen Styx. As much as he was in the rock scene—you know that mindset . . . He came out and loved it. He couldn't believe that anything that good could have escaped him. So, that's what I'm talking about. There was that public perception of who Styx was and the actual who Styx was as a group. I would say that sometimes the myth is larger than the man and sometimes the man is larger than the myth.



Sometimes it's luck how it all starts out. You get off on the right foot and then that snowball down the hill. There's a positive snowball and a negative one. It's just hard to stop either way.

R! Have you ever done show tunes or have you tried some other kind of music?

D: Well, *Kilroy* was supposed to be rock 'n roll on Broadway and of course I wanted to do that. We did a film, an eleven minute dramatic film at the beginning of the show. We did the dramatic film one and a half years before "Thriller" was ever made. So there was the idea germinating that that

would be an important thing to do and we did it. Yeah, *Kilroy* was an attempt to do a Broadway thing combining rock and theater.

R! But you have no thoughts of doing a two-hour Broadway . . .

D: Maybe at some point. I still like rock 'n roll music. With *Kilroy*, I went the whole ten yards. We did the theater, the movie, the dancing and jumping up and down. We did all that stuff. For my first album, I want it to be more of a reflection of my musical tastes in terms of songs.

R! Does *Desert Moon* have a theme at all or is it just a collection of songs?

D: It's a collection of songs.

R! When did you begin writing them?

D: August of last year. I just started when it became apparent that I was going to get a solo deal. I just started writing songs.

R! If we give you the song titles, can you give us two lines about each song and how it came about?

D: I guess.

R! "Don't Wait For Heroes."

D: I used to do a little speech in front of "Come Sail Away," a rap thing—and it was so well-received by people, they used to just come out after the show and if there was one thing they would mention about the show, it would be

that little, motivational talk I gave on our dreams and how to accomplish them. It was so popular that I said, "Whatever I'm saying here, I should probably try to find a way to put it into words." So I tried to do that with that song.

R! "Please."

D: That's two people just not getting along. They love each other, but they're trying to figure out how they can accept the differences in each other.

R! Is that based on personal experience?

D: Well, everything is based somewhat on personal experience, but if it's a blow-by-blow account, well, as Ray Bradbury would say, "You don't have to go to Mars to write *the Martian Chronicles*."

R! Then it's not based on a specific argument or incident?

D: No, it's not based on a specific incident, it's more on observation of human nature between male and female.

Tune in next month as Dennis talks about more of the solo numbers on *Desert Moon*, his new band, tour, his least favorite Styx LP, his family and more! All this in the January '84 issue of **RockLine!**, on sale November 13th!