

# Tommy Shaw Says...Part II

## Tommy Talks Tour, Fans, Critics, Videos, Secrets — And More About The Making Of *Girls With Guns*!

**RockLine!** Tommy, you were saying how you had to get away for three weeks after your work on *Girls With Guns* to get some distance from it. Were you able to accept the sound of it after it was mixed by your producer?

**Tommy Shaw:** Yes, then I started accepting it like, "It's out of my hands, so I might as well just start accepting it. Well, I loved Mike Stone's drums on Journey and Asia, and drums are one of the most difficult things to mix and I wanted someone to take the production out of my hands and just let me be the artist and I knew I could, if I had to, do everything else, but I wanted a great drum sound. And as it turned out, Mike just did everything and it turned out better than I've ever done.

**R!** How much of the production were you involved in when you were with Styx?

**Tommy:** We always produced our own tracks. And we would watch each other and help each other out producing each other's thing.

**R!** So this was a bit different. You're going on the road with this?

**Tommy:** Yeah, but rather than being a major headline act, I'm a new artist, which means I'm going to go out as an opening act.

**R!** How do you feel about that?

**Tommy:** It feels great. It's just got me feeling like I felt when I first joined Styx. Every day is like a new surprise, there's nothing at all predictable about it. I'm just going to be able to pack my bags and go rehearse for a couple of days and then go tour. It's kind of exciting, because I've been on both sides of it before. I've been the opening act and I've been a headliner. You never get signed checks and you get treated like ----

as an opening act. But at the same time, you learn how to go out there, how to go out there and kick ass. You've got a given space and it's always too little small.

**R!** It's also someone else's space and it's a challenge.

**Tommy:** It's all these people who didn't necessarily come to see you.

**R!** But you've got a pretty good chance of being accepted—Tommy Shaw's a really class name. Judging from our mail, one gets the feeling that you really do try to keep that contact with the fans.

**Tommy:** Yeah, I do.

**R!** We get letters from kids that say, "I wrote to Tommy, he answered back and sent me a picture," or "I met him."

**Tommy:** I have someone that comes to my house every day and we sort through the mail, and for a while, I was answering every single letter myself. Now that I'm gone, in order to answer them, I just write a letter and give Eileen all the information. If there's any questions she can't answer from that, she calls me on the phone, so she does my letters for me, but I keep it right here in front of me. And I know a lot of them by name and for me, it's a great way to get feedback. I always used to get complaints about the fan club. Now I see I've got a lot of real nice fans out there and some of them that have been supporting me for years.

**R!** Are you going to be an opening act all the way through!? Or just at the beginning?

**Tommy:** I think I'd like to just go and play out there and get in touch again.

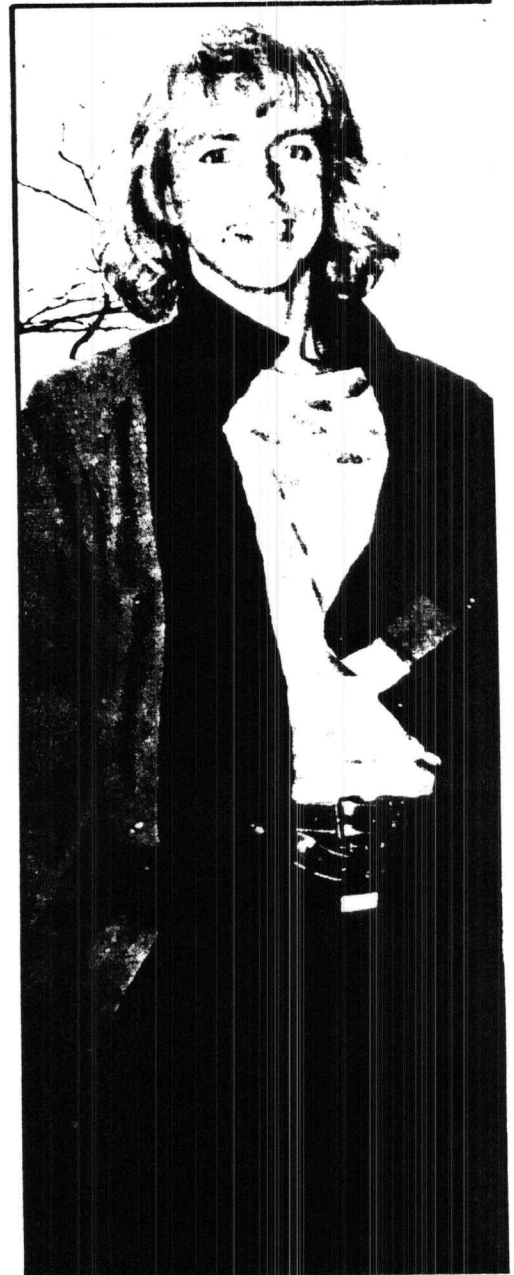
**R!** For about how long?

**Tommy:** I think for the length of this record unless something else comes up.

**R!** You're going to be out there past the new year?

**Tommy:** Into the Spring.

**R!** Are you going to have any back-up vocalists or does everybody in the band sing?



**Tommy:** I'm probably going to have another keyboard player. The three of us here are definitely going.

**R!** And Peter Wood isn't?

**Tommy:** Peter might not be able to go out with us, but Richie's going to go out and another keyboard player and possibly another singer.

**R!** Richie—Billy Joel's Richie?

**Tommy:** Uh-huh.

**R!** Are you going to do a lot of talking in between numbers?

**Tommy:** Nah, I usually end up talking too much. I really like talking

to the crowd. I promise, no jokes though.

**R!** Why? Do you tell bad jokes?

**Tommy:** I'm the worst.

**R!** Are you afraid of what's going to happen in terms of the press and reviews? Do you think they're going to try to get you because you're doing something different?

**Tommy:** Not really, I'm doing what I want to do. I understand the odds and I'm happy that I'm doing as well as I'm doing. Cause I didn't do this to be more successful—I did it to do what I want to do. So, whatever happens is okay as long as I keep making my music and get another album project performing, I'm gonna go out there and play and if something good comes to me then I'll accept it.

**R!** Was doing a solo LP in the Styx contract, or did you have to go to A&M and say, "This is what I want to do?"

**Tommy:** When I first signed with A&M, I would have signed anything. I was 23 years old and became professional out of a bowling alley lounge. I didn't think it was the point of my life to start and refuse to sign, so I signed. And there was a clause in there that kept me as a solo.

**R!** So they had the first rights and obviously they liked what they heard. How did you meet your new manager?

**Tommy:** I met him doing the "Too Much Time" video, he produced that. "Too Much Time On My Hands" on *Paradise Theatre*. Our manager at the time left us during that period and so, all of a sudden, we were without any direction on the video. So, a friend of mine, Jim Cahill and I, wound up directing that video and "The Best of Times" and whatever the other one was—there was another one, I can't remember what it was. "Rockin In Paradise" and we wound up, especially in "Too Much Time," we did a conceptual piece, wrote it, produced it, edited the whole thing, so it was like, "Learn as you learn." So Kramer's company . . . that was the one who shot it and we got to be good friends and he's always been a sort of someone I could call on for advice and a friendly, educated ear. And when he decided to get into management, I was the first one to knock on his door.

**R!** Does this mean you're not involved with Frontline any more?

**Tommy:** Oh, we're still good friends.

**R!** What are your contractual obligations to Styx at this point or are there none?

**Tommy:** I'll probably be tied up for the rest of my life, but you know how contracts are. What are they going to do? Drag me in there and make me start singing? But really what that means is just some sort of agreement where at some point we'll get back together and make an album. But really, we owe it to them. Not that I just hate the business side of it. It's almost a contradiction in terms to be on contract to write a song. What if you can't think of anything?

**R!** That's right. What about JY? Do you think he's going to produce something on his own?

**Tommy:** I would imagine so. I know he's going to be recording something with Jan Hammer. Shh!

**R!** And what about John and Chuck? What are they doing?

**Tommy:** I'm sure they're just enjoying the time off.

**R!** I'd like to get into some of your songs and find out what inspired them. We talked about "Girls With Guns."

**Tommy:** "Girls With Guns" is sort of a salute to girls who think for themselves and stand up for themselves, yet still can be feminine.

**R!** What about "Come In And Explain?"

**Tommy:** It's about this out-of-control guy who's trying, at the 11th hour to put himself into control, but by not getting just what he wants, goes completely out of control again.

**R!** How about "Lonely School?"

**Tommy:** It's sort of an observation about a lot of guys out there who've really tried to make it and sacrificed everything trying to make it. And looking back, maybe they should have sacrificed a little bit less and . . .

**R!** Did what they wanted to do?

**Tommy:** Yeah, and not left somebody behind that they wished they hadn't. It's a lot easier to sing it than it is to say.

**R!** You were going with another woman for quite a bit of time, weren't you, Tommy?

**Tommy:** Uh-huh, about four years.

**R!** That must have hurt.

**Tommy:** We were more friends, though, than we were an item.

**R!** "Heads Up."

**Tommy:** Is sort of about, if you look for reasons not to do things, you'll always find them, and it describes a person who, at the first sign of resistance, runs away. And it's sort of saying, "Don't be afraid to walk into the unknown." "Walk into it and deal with it."

**R!** "Kiss Me Hello."

**Tommy:** It's . . . you guys will have to figure that one out yourself.

**R!** "Fading Away."

**Tommy:** I don't really know what inspired that. That was at a club in London and wishing that I had a song they could play on their speakers in between bands. Knowing that it was unlikely that they would play any of my songs that were on a Styx album. And on the way back to the hotel, "Fading Away" came into my head and I just wrote it and sang it. You know, I wasn't even thinking about it.

**R!** Are you a paper-bag writer? Can you write almost any place on anything?

**Tommy:** I wrote that in a cab on the way back to the hotel on an invitation to go to a lunch party.

**R!** You are a paper-bag writer. How long ago was that?

**Tommy:** About a year ago. I guess "Fading Away" just pokes a hole in the myth that some day Prince Charming will come along and sweep you off your feet and all your troubles will go away. I mean, you feel a lot better if you go and stand at the intersection where Prince Charming goes by every day with his horse.

**R!** There are messages there.

**Tommy:** I guess.

**R!** Does this have to do with what you have learned?

**Tommy:** You know, I still make mistakes. I don't know how well I've learned, but I've been through all these things, there's nothing like

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going out there and living to have fabric for songs. And that's where I tend to write a lot of my songs. Every time there's some sort of experience that causes me to come out there and sort of adjust myself to it, a lot of times a song comes out of it, and I think that's my way of really expressing my feelings. A lot of times I'm not real good at just explaining my songs, for one thing. I need the chance to just sit down and get with my guitar, because the guitar is like my dog, it always likes me for one thing, no matter what happens, it's always my friend.

**R!** That's a quality that music's always had.

**Tommy:** And music's always good to me. I can express myself in it, and I can take on other identities and I can be anonymous in my song.

**R!** Are you a pretty wild guy? Do you like to party a lot?

**Tommy:** I've done my share of destruction out there. I'd like to think that I've grown out of it, but occasionally I have lapses.

**R!** "Outside In The Rain."

**Tommy:** Is sort of this flip type of song where I felt compelled to write a song about John Lennon. I miss him very much. "Outside In The Rain" was very much trying to get to the other side. Like the guy standing out in the park. Until he pulls the trigger, he's just another bum out there. It's trying to tell whoever these people are who are out there on the edge, "Don't do it." And it's sort of a comical way of doing that, not comical, but satirical, I suppose. If it's just a girl, go talk to the girl. Don't blow somebody away to get their attention. Until you commit the act, you can always turn around. I guess I'm just trying to dissuade anyone who would try to do anything like that. But I decided not to write a memorial song, maybe some day I will, but to me it's kind of personal and I just don't feel up to it right now.

**R!** "Free To Love You."

**Tommy:** Is sort of an escapism song?? I want all the goods without any of the problems.

**R!** And what about "The Race Is On?"

**Tommy:** I suppose it talks about,



at some point, if you want to get up there, you've got to hop on a moving train and look forward and not look behind.

**R!** Know what this sounds like?

Like you needed to reinforce that energy that was taking you out on your own. Almost like Tommy talking to Tommy, saying, "It's all right, give it a try, you never know unless you try."

**Tommy:** It's quite possible.

**R!** It's interesting. You said you've been writing this LP for quite a while. Sounds like you must have been thinking for quite a while longer about soloing.

**Tommy:** I've been an angry young man for three years.

**R!** Are you still angry?

**Tommy:** If I could ever express myself without being emotional I'd probably never be angry or frustrated, but I still have to learn how to do that yet. Especially being out there with Styx, because those guys are older than me, more mature in a lot of ways, and I really tried to conform into being a team player as long as I could. But I'm just different, I grew up in a different part of the country, I'm a college graduate. It was said that I've played in most colleges, but I'm just different and can only conform so much and rather than being patient and trying to get everything through due process, sometimes I'd just start throwing things and stamping my feet if I didn't get my way.

**R!** But you don't have to do that any more.

**Tommy:** No, I don't.

**R!** Now you're the boss.

**Tommy:** Yeah, it's amazing. I'm so used to banging my head against the wall and stamping my feet that every once in a while, I just

slip into it as a reflex action and I realize, "Wait a second, I don't have to do this anymore."

**R!** When you finally took the risk to get out there on your own, you discovered you *can* do it on your own.

**Tommy:** I used to, the later it got into Styx, I used to dread going into a writing project, and so I would wait until the last minute and sometimes I'd be lucky and sometimes I wouldn't. What did I have to write? Three songs every year and a half, so I could put it off for 15 months. Now, all of a sudden, with no rules and no restrictions, I started writing like a non-stop writing machine.

**R!** It's very inspiring to hear you talk, because it is a risky thing to leave a successful group. Whether the press likes you or not, you know you've got the fans out there and you want to go it on your own and see how those people are going to respond to you.

**Tommy:** Unfortunately, my sub-conscious drove me into that. I think that really in a lot of ways, I started doing it with "Fading Away," but I didn't look at it like that. I said, "Oh, I'm just going to do a demo on the side." But I think part of me was just testing the waters to see first of all, "Can I really do it?" and by the time I had eight or 10 songs, I said, "There's a ways to go, but I can do this."

**R!** What one goal do you have for this album and this tour? What would you like to see as the main result?

**Tommy:** I'd like to see it get listened to all over the world, because it's the type of record that you can listen to over and over.

**R!** Are you going to tour Europe and Japan?

**Tommy:** I would like to. At this point it's at the mercy of whoever is the headliner; wherever they go. But yeah, I'd love to.

**R!** Are you going to stick with that headliner all the way through; is that what you're trying to do.

**Tommy:** It depends if they stop and I haven't gotten everywhere I wanted to go. Then we'd try to round up another one.

**R!** Thanks for sharing all this with your RockLine! friends.

**Tommy:** My pleasure.