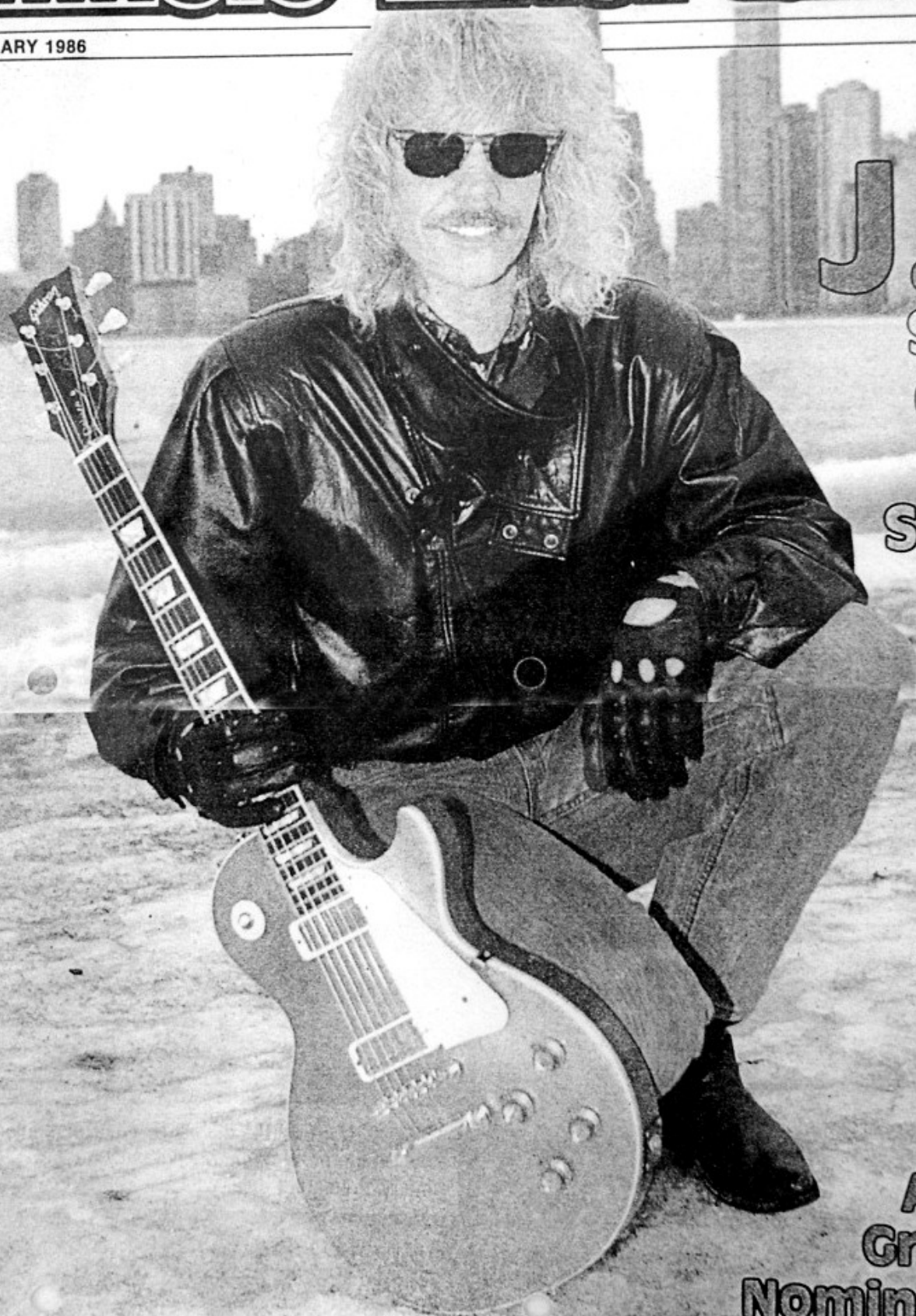


Midwest Studio Guide '86

# Illinois Entertainer

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J. Y.  
Styx's  
Gutsy  
City  
Slicker

28th  
Annual  
Grammy  
Nominations

# Y.

## Styx's Gutsy City Slicker

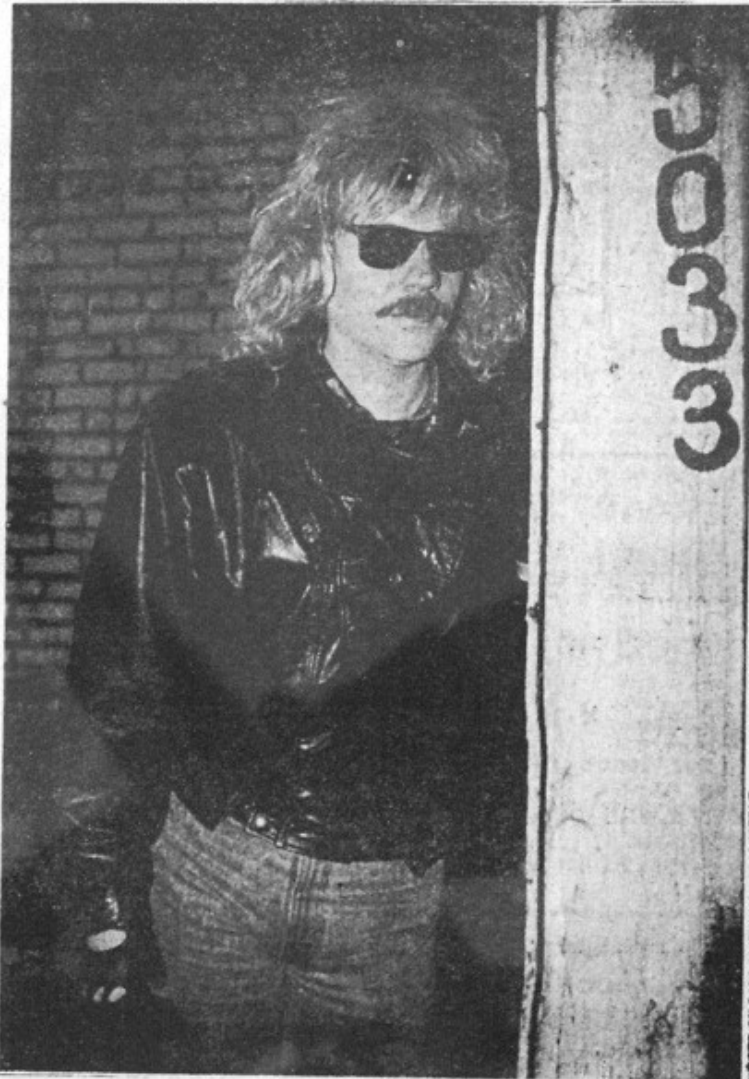


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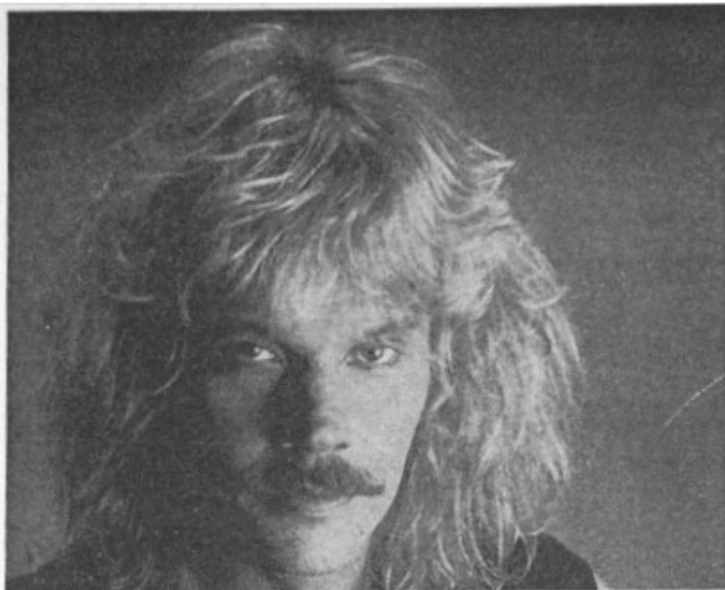
by Edward M. Bury

You can only hold a veteran rock 'n' roller down for so long. After a while, the urge comes along to lace up those rock 'n' roll shoes and get back in the groove. Strike some nasty guitar riffs, belt out some gutsy vocals, kick some ass. And do it your way, at your pace, with whomever you want.

For J.Y., the original axe grinder in Styx and the group's resident disciple of the Hendrix school of rock, now's the time to show what he could do on his own. His vehicle is *City Slicker*, a hard driving, down 'n' dirty LP just released by the New Jersey-based Passport Records. Punctuated with wild guitar parts and even wilder lyrics, this is the kind of stuff that comes naturally to the author of a song entitled "Heavy Metal Poisoning."

What may not appear natural to J.Y. fans is his choice of collaborators on this solo outing.

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No, he didn't choose some rising star from the metal circuit or someone who has worked with Deep Purple or Led Zeppelin. He sought keyboard guru Jan Hammer of "Miami Vice" soundtrack fame, and a dedicated hard rocker himself.

As J.Y. tells it, Hammer, who had a reputation in jazz fusion circles rather than the rock arena, really likes to rock out once in a while, and took the opportunity to work with the tall, lanky guitarist following the completion of the Styx *Kilroy* tour in 1983.

"I was in New York doing some advance promotion on something, and while talking to a friend I just happened to mention Jan Hammer and that I really liked his work and asked what he was doing," J.Y. said. "(My friend) said he

wasn't doing too much and that I should meet him. So I called up Jan and we chatted for an hour and I saw his studio.

"I think his impression of Styx at that time—even though he didn't say it—was what filtered to him through Dennis (DeYoung)'s melodic ballads, that kind of stuff. I don't think he was that sure of my rock 'n' roll playing, although he said, 'Hey, maybe we ought to get together and do a project.'"

A visit to a Styx performance at the Meadowlands in New Jersey convinced Hammer that J.Y. had the right rock 'n' roll stuff, and the duo, along with Hammer's bass playing sidekick Colin Hodgkinson, cut the tracks for *City Slicker* at Hammer's Redgate Studios and Tanglewood Studios in suburban Brookfield. From the

screamin' intro licks on the title cut to other rugged numbers like "Chain Me Down," "Wild Dogs In The Night" and "Empty Promises," the album is a first-rate rock barn burner—tuneful enough for old J.Y. fans, yet tough enough for the headbanging crowd.

An admitted collaborator as opposed to going the pure solo route, J.Y. welcomed Hammer's input (Hammer and Hodgkinson contributed three songs), but throughout the project he maintained whose name was going on the cover.

"Jan's influence is strong in the drumming, because he's a drummer—he's the drummer on the album, and he handles the keyboard playing," J.Y. offered. "In terms of the arrangements, though, it's pretty much a joint effort. A lot of the songs were ideas I've had before. It's not like Jan dominated the album or anything like that. If he heard things he liked, he'd say let's do those. So it was very much a collaboration."

One area in which J.Y. would not compromise was on the album's tone. Having performed in a vocal-oriented, melodic-based group for 13 years, he wanted *City Slicker* to reflect his brawling vocal style and searing guitar playing. In fact, the only ballad on the LP is a remake of a tune entitled "Still Feel Your Love," which was written years ago by Chicagoan Mick Fabus and rearranged by (who else) Hammer.

"We wanted this to be a guitar-dominated album, or at least a guitar-sounding album, so some of the guitar solos, well, half of the lead guitar-sounding solos are (Hammer) on synthesizer," J.Y. explained. "And that was really one of the main reasons I went to him in the first place. I think my songs are pretty good, but after five or six guitar solos on an album, I said, 'Wouldn't it be nice to have someone else who was a brilliant soloist on another instrument but who still had that guitar-like attitude, edge, finesse and emotion to his playing?'"

"It really was his soloing I was after first, but then I also got this incredible drummer and this incredible studio mind, so it was an incredible bonus," J.Y. continued. "I learned so much from this man. It was astounding."

*City Slicker* follows the release of solo works by Styx bandmates DeYoung and guitarist Tom-

my Shaw, both of whom reached moderate chart success with debut LP's in late 1984. Shaw's followup was released this past December, and DeYoung's is due at the end of this month. Judging from DeYoung's balladeering style and Shaw's harder, but more pop-oriented approach, it's apparent who had the muscle in Styx.

The material was cut in 1984 (prior to Hammer's heavy commitment to "Miami Vice" soundtrack work), and initial plans were to release the album sooner than early 1986. Plans, however, are made to be altered, especially in the record industry. Besides, with the future of Styx still uncertain (stay tuned for more on that subject) following the exhausting *Kilroy* project, J.Y. was in no big hurry.

"After Dennis and Tommy got their albums out, I wanted to make sure everyone in the band was feeling good about the long-term situation," he said. "I didn't want to leave the Panozzo brothers (drummer John and bassist Chuck) all by themselves with nothing going on, so in more of a relaxed way, I went about making my album. And, in my own way, I wanted to find someone who was newly excited about what I was doing."

"At A&M Records, as a member of Styx, we sold 20 million records there, and they clearly are a great record company," he continued. "Just for me, I thought with Dennis' and Tommy's albums coming out on A&M, I just wanted to go somewhere else. I wanted to go somewhere where they were newly excited about me as an artist instead of, 'Oh, here's the third one. Let's put it out there and let it die.'"

J.Y. found the niche he was looking for at Passport Records, although the looking didn't come easy. First he made the rounds at the major labels (including A&M) and some of the smaller indies, getting polite and cordial responses from the record company moguls, but not the right kinds of responses, the kind where, as he puts it, "they were ready to go out and kill" to get his product.

With Passport, J.Y. joins such good company as the Rolling Stones' Bill Wyman, who cut a solo album under the Willie and the Poor Boys moniker, and rock 'n' roll scientist/artist Todd Rundgren and Utopia. What's more, he got to

release the type of album he wanted—mainly a raucous collection of hard rock—and employ the sidemen he wanted, namely Hammer.

As far as the lengthy period between recording and the LP's release, J.Y. has a shrewd, but logical explanation: "When you're telling jokes in a comedy act, timing is everything, and in a rock 'n' roll career, timing is everything. A year ago, Jan, to the basic consumer, meant nothing. Now, he's a household word, so that doesn't hurt, either."

Now to the question—that-had-to-be-asked: Do all of these solo ventures and band inactivity mean Styx is history?

"There has been no formal break-up, and we still have a number of businesses that are ongoing, at least in terms of our publishing company and still getting record royalties," he said. "Really, I think the band will perform together again. It's not a matter of if, it's a matter of when. You look at Yes, you look at Deep Purple. It took those guys five, seven, eight, 10 years in some cases to get back together, but when they did, hey, it was great."

"We spent an awful lot of time together and there just wasn't enough room on one little 40-minute disc for all the creative output of everyone in this group every two years," he continued. "Everybody wants to try different things and new things and maybe they just didn't fit into the framework of Styx. You start to think that the public has a preconceived notion of what the band should be—so I think it's real good for all of us to go out and work with people. I call it separate creative vacations."

On this leg of the "vacation," J.Y., now 36 and still looking quite the classic rock star, was nabbed at Tanglewood Studios, where he spoke freely about his solo work and the band. It became sort of apparent that this dormant rocker clearly enjoys his trade, even doing interviews and other promotional duties that go along with the job.

Whether J.Y. will hit the stage in support of *City Slicker* still remains questionable. He said he would prefer to have Hammer perform at a live gig; however, the keyboard wizard currently is too involved with "Miami Vice" soundtracks to commit to a tour at this point. (Aside from his TV and film work, *City Slicker* is Hammer's only

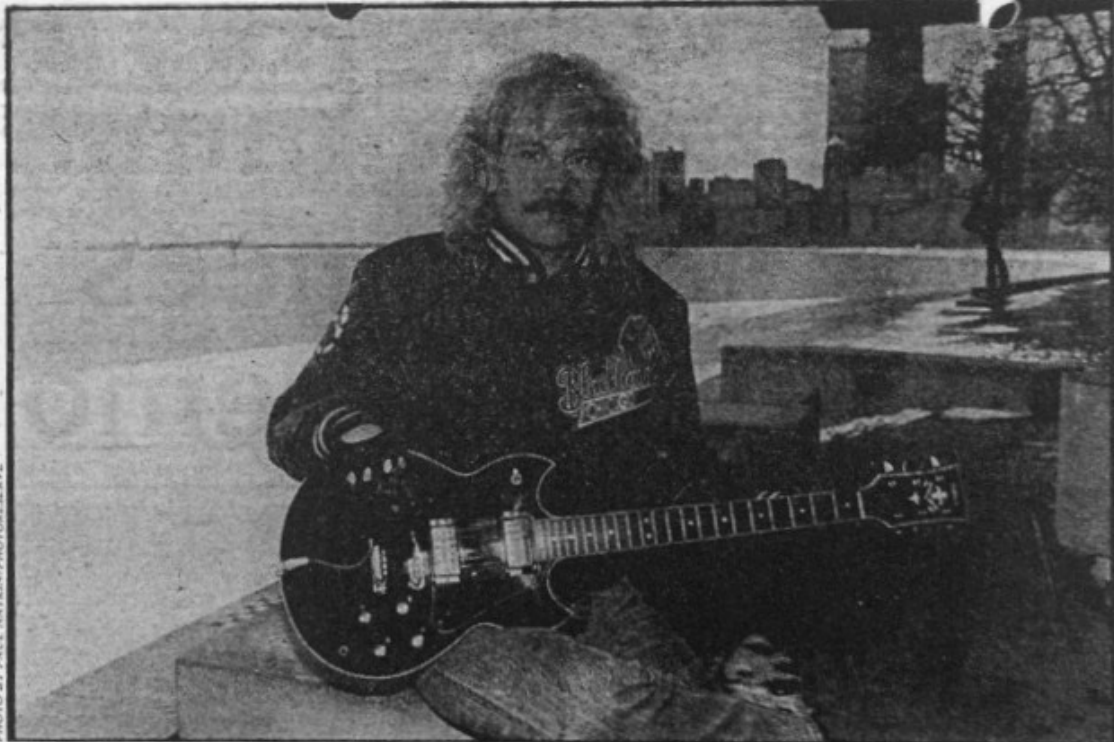


PHOTO BY PAUL NATEK/PHOTOESPERE

album project in several years.)

Another question remains regarding tour support: Is it really something that's necessary?

"Any tour would depend on the initial reaction to the album and what sort of vibes my national booking agent gets," he said. "For me to go out and headline clubs—it's not really what I'd like to do. I'd like to do a support act for maybe somebody like a Def Leppard, an AC/DC or a ZZ Top. A gig where people were into hard rock and I could go in and open the show. That would be great."

In town over the holidays, J.Y., who used to go by his full name of James Young, still considers himself a native, even though he spends a lot of time on the West Coast. He still keeps in contact with most of his bandmates, and reports that the Panozzo brothers are in the area "enjoying the good life. There will be no tag days for any of us...at least not in the near future," but they remain the lone Styx members who have not pursued any solo musical directions.

J.Y., on the other hand, has a clear idea as to what direction he'll be heading, through this pro-

ject and projects to come: "When I listen to rock 'n' roll, the things that move me the most are the powerful, visceral musical statements...for me hard rock 'n' roll is my favorite form of music."

Yours and a lot of other people's, J.Y. So keep the faith.