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## Rock band Kansas will play Saturday night at Foellinger Outdoor Theatre

### Guitarist Richard Williams reflects on 40 years with the group

By James Grant of The News-Sentinel  
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The rock group Kansas, appearing at 8 p.m. Saturday at Foellinger Outdoor Theatre, knows their fans expect to hear the hits they made famous in the '70s, such as "Carry on Wayward Son" and "Dust in the Wind," whenever they appear live in concert.

Richard Williams, guitarist for the group for the past 40 years, says the audience's emotional reaction to those songs, especially "Dust in the Wind," is something he hopes he never gets too jaded to appreciate.

"The lights go down and I grab my acoustic (guitar), and I start the song," Williams, speaking during a phone interview, says of playing "Dust in the Wind" live.

"Everybody in the building, through the first note, knows what that song is and has their own memory of that song. They all know the lyrics.

"That song has become so much bigger than we are," Williams continues. "To be a part of that, to actually start that moment is a very special thing."

Kansas first broke into the mainstream nearly 40 years ago in 1974 with the release of their debut album, "Kansas."

The group, known for a progressive sound that mixed symphonic elements with pounding rock, longer songs and sophisticated time signatures, toured incessantly and released two more albums in 1975 while trying to establish themselves and build their audience.

In 1976, Kansas' major commercial breakthrough came with the release of their fourth album, "Leftoverture," which contained the classic rock radio staple "Carry on Wayward Son" and fan favorites such as "The Wall" and "Miracles Out of Nowhere."

The album was a multimillion seller and is a mainstay on classic rock radio.

Their next album, "Point of Know Return," also a multimillion-selling success, followed in 1977 and featured their million-selling top-10 single "Dust in the Wind," which has become their signature song.

Produced the same year as the blockbuster movie "Star Wars," "Point of Know Return" and Kansas' music in general seemed to encapsulate the era of so-called arena rock, which ushered in the days of music acts generating huge profits from touring and record sales.

Along with groups such as Boston, Styx, Journey and REO Speedwagon, Kansas helped turn record companies into major money-making machines, which some saw as a far cry from the activism and idealism of music in the 1960s.

Quite a few music critics of the day took aim at these arena rock groups because of the profit-driven atmosphere and tried to disparage and marginalize them in the music press.

Though never critics' darlings, Kansas nonetheless produced an impressive body of work that includes eight gold albums, three sextuple-platinum albums, one platinum live album and a legion of loyal fans who have stayed with the group to this day.

Williams says touring has always been a major part of Kansas' career and that, nowadays, going out on the road is much more fun than in the group's heyday.

"The basics are always the same," Williams says of touring. "You pick a song list and work on the material and then you go out and hit the road and you do it. ... Since we manage ourselves, we want to keep this fun for us, too.

"A typical Kansas weekend is I leave on a Friday morning, and I come home on a Sunday night," he says. "We do that throughout the year.



#### More Information

##### Audio interview with Richard Williams of Kansas

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#### Music in the wind

**What:** Legendary rock group Kansas will perform in concert.

**When:** 8 p.m. Saturday

**Where:** Foellinger Outdoor Theatre, 3411 Sherman Blvd. in Franke Park

**Cost:** \$22 and \$32. Tickets are available at 427-6000 and the Fort Wayne Parks and Recreation Department main office, 705 E. State Blvd., 8 a.m.-5 p.m. weekdays; and at the Foellinger box office at 427-6715 beginning at 4 p.m. on the day of the show.

“That’s why we all have a home life. ... It keeps everybody fresh, it’s always fun, (and) there’s always another weekend to look forward to.

“Previous to that, you would spend a lot of time working on material,” Williams adds. “Maybe go to a recording studio and record it, wait for that to come out, (and) then a tour would get set up where you would just go and go and go and you’re never home. ... This way (the way they tour now), it’s a great balance.”

While Williams is proud to have sustained a nearly 40-year career with Kansas, he doesn’t see the 40th anniversary as anything out of the norm — just another year.

“It’s familiar after 40 years,” Williams says. “It’s a great thing, but don’t make too much out of it. This is what we do.

“It’s never been a struggle for me personally to continue doing this. It’s just another year.

“I think that the 30th year is when it kind of hit me that, wow, this is what I do,” Williams says of his long career with Kansas. “My foot is in the musical door and this is what I do, and don’t be looking around the corner at what else you’re going to be doing — you’ve got a job.”

Williams is most proud that, after so long in the music business, he still loves what he does more than ever and still enjoys being a part of the life he’s created as Kansas.

“It’s not just about getting up on a stage — that’s really such a small part of it all,” he says.