



Your Town. Your Voice.

News~Sentinel.com

comments

REO Speedwagon is still rocking

Keyboardist recalls making 'Hi Infidelity'

By James Grant of The News-Sentinel
Thursday, June 19, 2014 - 9:57 am

Foellinger Outdoor Theatre's summer concert series kicks into high gear Tuesday night when legendary '70s and '80s arena rock superstars REO Speedwagon take to the stage for a night filled with music from their catalog of hook-filled, pop/rock nuggets.

REO Speedwagon is best known for its mega-selling 1980 album "Hi Infidelity," which spent 15 weeks atop the Billboard Hot 100 albums chart in 1981. The album sold more than 9 million copies and spawned such rock radio staples as "Keep on Loving You" (also a No. 1 smash hit), "Take It On the Run," "Don't Let Him Go" and "In Your Letter."

The group was formed in Illinois in the late 1960s and spent most of the 1970s touring extensively and recording.

While not a huge record-seller initially, REO Speedwagon began to gain a commercial foothold with the release of the live album "Live: You Get What You Play For" in 1977. It contained a blistering version of the song "Ridin' the Storm Out," which has become one of the group's signature songs.

More minor hits and radio staples followed, including "Roll with the Changes" and "Time for Me to Fly." But with the commercial juggernaut success of "Hi Infidelity," the group became the embodiment of arena rock and continued to score major hits throughout the 1980s, including "Keep the Fire Burnin'" and the No. 1 smash "Can't Fight This Feeling" from 1985.

Looking back on the making of "Hi Infidelity," Neal Doughty, who plays keyboards for REO and is one of the group's founding members, says that even though the band was about to reach sales heights that few bands get to experience, making that album came at a rough time for the group.

"It was kind of crazy," Doughty said in a telephone interview. "Because I personally was going through a terrible break-up."

"That record was written and recorded with about four-fifths of the band having relationship problems," he said. "And mine was bad enough that I wanted to take a few weeks off and get my head straightened out."

After taking a few weeks off while the band recorded demos for the album, Doughty rejoined the group to find that they liked the demos so much that they just needed him to add his keyboard parts to some of the demos they created — an experience he enjoyed.

"It was actually an advantage for me to hear a song finished except for the keyboard parts," Doughty said.

"There's quite a few songs on 'Hi Infidelity' that I got to hear almost the finished product and then have that in my mind when I developed the keyboard part. ... I think that's one reason we had some nice little keyboard stuff on 'Hi Infidelity.'"

"I love the record 'Hi Infidelity,'" Doughty added. "I knew when we did it that it was just better than anything we had ever done. ... Before it was even released, I listened to it constantly. It was my favorite record."

"So I thought that was a good indication that it might be accepted better by the public than anything we had done," he said. "And, of course, that was not only true, but beyond our wildest dream."

While not reaching the commercial heights it once did in the '80s, REO Speedwagon still tours regularly today to sold-out crowds

Doughty says the Midwest and Fort Wayne in particular have always been strong supporters of the band's music, which, as an Indiana native, he finds is heartening.

"I'm an Indiana boy (born and lived in Evansville until he was 12)," Doughty said. "Indiana was one of our first good markets outside of Illinois."

"Fort Wayne has been a stop on our tours from the beginning," he added. "We used to play clubs there all the time, so it's always fun to go there."



More Information

Rock legends

Audio interview w ith Neal Doughty



The News-Senti...
Neal Doughty



Cookie policy

What: REO Speedwagon will perform in concert.
When: 8 p.m. Tuesday
Where: Foellinger Outdoor Theatre, 3411 Sherman Blvd. in Franke Park
Cost: \$39, \$49, \$59, \$69 and \$99. For more information or to purchase tickets, call 427-6000 or 427-6715 (day of show), or visit www.fortwayneparks.org. Tickets also are available in advance 8 a.m.-5 p.m. weekdays at Fort Wayne Parks office, 705 E. State Blvd., and 6-10 p.m. on concert days at the Foellinger Theatre box office.

Doughty said the group still enjoys playing as much as ever, and fans who go see them live will be sure to get all the hits, along with some surprises — even for the band.

“You’re not going to get there and we try to force some obscure thing on you or something that we just wrote and haven’t even recorded yet,” Doughty said.

“Actually, our set list is liable to be changed in the middle of a show,” Doughty continued. “Usually by Kevin (Cronin, REO’s lead singer).

“He’s really good at reading an audience, and sometimes there’s a song he just feels that he could sing better than the one that happens to be on the list,” Doughty explained. “So we are always on our toes.”

Doughty said the most rewarding part of his career is the connection he and the band feel to their audience.

“It’s just really heartwarming that it’s been 30 years since we’ve had a big radio hit,” Doughty said of REO’s career. “And every place we play is usually sold out. We’re thinking, ‘Boy, what a life,’ to be able to still play to that many people all these years.

“And we appreciate it more every time it happens,” he said. “I walk out there, I just go, ‘You know, they’re still showing up, bless their hearts.’”