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Legendary rock group Styx shares its large library of hits this Saturday at Foellinger Outdoor Theatre

By James Grant of The News-Sentinel
Thursday, August 14, 2014 - 10:46 am

The rock group Styx, which will perform Saturday at Foellinger Outdoor Theatre, has been responsible for some of the most well-loved and well-played rock radio hits of the past 40 years.

Songs such as “Lady,” “Come Sail Away,” “Babe,” “The Best of Times,” “Renegade,” “Blue Collar Man (Long Nights),” “Too Much Time on My Hands,” “Mr. Roboto” and “Fooling Yourself (The Angry Young Man)” have become a permanent part of the pop culture landscape and have endeared themselves to millions of fans.

Formed in Illinois in the 1960s, Styx became one of the more successful of the arena rock headliners, which include bands such as REO Speedwagon, Foreigner and Kansas. It dominated popular music throughout the '70s and '80s.

Styx's commercial breakthrough came in 1977 with the multiplatinum-selling album “The Grand Illusion,” the first of four consecutive multiplatinum albums the group would generate. “The Grand Illusion” included the hits “Come Sail Away” and “Fooling Yourself (The Angry Young Man)” as well as the majestic title track.

Though Styx's commercial peak only lasted from 1977's “The Grand Illusion” to 1983's “Kilroy Was Here,” the group remains a staple of rock radio.

Though the band has gone through several breakups and reunions and endured the loss of founding group members John Panozzo (who died in 1996) and Dennis DeYoung (who left the group permanently in 1999), Styx continues to record and remains a viable touring act.

With 16 Top 40 hits to choose from as well as many popular album tracks, Styx has a lot of familiar music to cram into its live show.

Ricky Phillips, bass player for Styx, says the group knows how to pace a show so fans get their dose of hits as well as some favorites they might not expect.

“We pretty much start off strong, and we have the luxury of being able to play songs that people know, and we just have to kind of put them in order in a fashion that makes it an enjoyable ride for them (the audience),” Phillips said in a telephone interview.

“Right now, we're doing a song that the band kind of ignored for over 20 years, a song called 'Light Up,'” he said. “I have always loved that song, and the intro to that song is about as heavy as it gets. ... It starts off like a prog rock band and then goes into this pop tune. It's a crazy dynamic but it's just a fun, fun song to play

“We throw in 'Castle Walls' or 'Queen of Spades' or something that's really obscure; those are the ones I really like to do,” Phillips added.

Although Phillips has been a member of Styx only since 2003, he's no stranger to how successful bands work.

Phillips was formerly a member of the Babys (“Isn't it Time,” “Every Time I Think of You”) and Bad English (“When I See You Smile,” “Price of Love”) and has played with such legendary musicians as Mick Jagger, Jimmy Page, Roger Daltrey, Sammy Hagar and Jeff Beck.

With all of his experience in rock bands and performing, Phillips feels that his current place in Styx is one of the best fits in his long musical career.

“We met in 1978,” Phillips said of himself and the members of Styx. “I was in the Babys at the time. We toured together quite extensively. Tommy Shaw (guitarist of Styx) and I have been friends ever since.

“It's a killer band,” Phillips said of Styx. “Everybody gets along. Everybody hangs. Everybody knows what it's like to be in a band, and they know when to shut up as well as speak up.

“I've never really experienced so many parts of the puzzle that were already complete when I came in (to a band), and have hopefully been able to help add to that,” he said.

Having experienced the ups and downs of being a part of the music industry, Phillips says he is grateful to be able to make a living making music.

While not always a part of the “top rung of the ladder,” as he put it, in the music industry, Phillips spent quite a lot of years struggling and doesn't take playing with



More Information

'Come Sail Away'

WHAT: Legendary rock group Styx will perform live in concert.

WHEN: 8 p.m. Saturday; doors open at 6:30 p.m.

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

COST: \$39, \$49, \$59, \$69 and \$99. For more information or to order tickets, call the Fort Wayne Parks and Recreation Department at 427-6000 or the Foellinger box office the day of the show at 427-6715.

a group like Styx for granted.

“I think to still be here, to still be viable and still be known speaks volumes,” Phillips said of the most satisfying part of his career.

“I’ve had a lot of bands that I put together that were amazing, gifted, talented guys, but all of a sudden we weren’t the flavor of the month and it just wasn’t what the record companies were signing.

“I knew this is what I was here for — this is the reason I breath the air on this planet — is to play and create music,” he said. “To be able to do that to this day ... seems impossible, but I’m ever so grateful and I don’t take a single day for granted.”