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Ian Anderson interview with James Grant



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You really don't want to sit this one out

By James Grant for The News-Sentinel
Thursday, March 31, 2016 3:00 AM

Fans of the rock group Jethro Tull can rejoice next week as Ian Anderson takes to the Embassy Theatre stage April 7 to perform some of the best of that legendary group's music along with a sampling of his solo work.

Jethro Tull, formed in England in the late 1960s, is best known for its hit albums "Aqualung," "Thick as a Brick" (a Billboard Top 200 No. 1 album in 1972), "A Passion Play" (A Billboard Top 200 No.1 album in 1973), "Living in the Past" (a unique compilation album from 1972), "War Child," "Minstrel in the Gallery" and "Songs from the Wood" among others. The band also is known for the songs "Living in the Past," "Bungle in the Jungle" and the perennial rock radio favorite "Aqualung."

Jethro Tull's music is a mixture of folk and harder rock that features more complex thematic ideas and arrangements, which lends itself better to full albums as opposed to radio-friendly hit singles. For many rock fans, that places the band in the progressive rock category along with groups such as Yes, Emerson, Lake and Palmer, and Genesis.

Over a 40-year career, Jethro Tull and Ian Anderson



Ian Anderson brings his band Jethro Tull to the Embassy Theatre stage on April 7. (Courtesy photo by Nick Harrison)

More Information

Jethro Tull

(The Story)

WHAT: Ian Anderson brings his Jethro Tull concert to Fort Wayne.



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have released more than 30 albums and sold more than 50 million records worldwide (including several gold and platinum record awards), as well as being a popular live act especially in the 1970s during the era of big rock stadium tours.

Anderson, who plays the flute as well as guitar and is the lead singer of Jethro Tull, has been the front man of the group throughout the years. He is the main songwriter for the band and has steered Jethro Tull from its early blues rock sound to the multi-layered folk/rock sound of the band's most popular albums.

Touring currently as just Ian Anderson, Anderson says fans of Jethro Tull will have plenty of that group's music to look forward to if they come to see him perform.

"We look forward to presenting the story of Jethro Tull, Jethro Tull the original historical character brought into the present day," Anderson said of his show in a telephone interview.

"It's essentially a best of Jethro Tull tour so for the toe tappers who just want to hear a lot of the old favorite songs then that should do the trick.

"And those who want to get a little bit more into the story and what it's about then you can find all that if you go to jethrotull.com/synopsis," Anderson said.

"The synopsis is there not only in the English language but in many other languages as well for those people who want to read what the story is, what the song listing is about and how it joins together."

In this new show, entitled "Jethro Tull (The Story)", Ian Anderson celebrates the life of the band's namesake who was an English agriculture inventor who lived in the 18th century.

Anderson wrote a show with a quasi-operatic structure that tells the real Jethro Tull's story reimagined as if he existed in the near future.

The show features a lot of pre-recorded guests singing on video either solo or along with Anderson.

He's used video a lot in previous tours, but this new show uses more of it. "We've been using the video perhaps more extensively in the sense that it's telling a story," Anderson said.

"It's putting the songs into a narrative context so it's done a little bit more in theatrical detail on this tour. It's not just visual effects and accompanying elements, it's actually a part of the storytelling."

Anderson seems to thrive in taking on various roles in his work besides just being a performer.

Throughout his career both with Jethro Tull and as a solo artist, Anderson has been in charge of every detail of his musical life from writing and performing to producing the music as well.

Not only has Anderson produced Jethro Tull's music, he also occasionally has produced music for other artists as well.

Though he generally doesn't enjoy producing other artists, Anderson recalled an enjoyable recording session working as a producer with the late superstar David Bowie, who passed away in January.

"I remember being pleasantly surprised when I was producing a track for a band called Steeleye Span back in the '70s, around '76 or something like that," Anderson said of his memories of working in the recording studio as a producer.

"And they asked me to get David Bowie to play saxophone on one of the songs, which I was able to do, and he came into the studio very well prepared, very professionally, totally on the case, did his bit in a couple of takes and was a great pleasure to work with — smiley, friendly, cheerful and above all a professional and timely person."

"So sometimes doing those things can be quite rewarding," Anderson said of producing.

"Recording the song 'Locomotive Breath' on the 'Aqualung' album was really quite tricky and one that wasn't going well at all," Anderson added of working as producer for his own group Jethro Tull.

"But we kind of got there in the end in an unconventional way ... you've got to accept that you've got to perhaps modify the arrangement, modify your analysis and your approach to the whole song because of the input that others have to offer."

"Mostly I can look back on albums and think, 'well that wasn't too bad,'" Anderson said of his recorded output.

Anderson still looks after every detail of his career, and that now includes booking his own tours and creating the itineraries and budgets himself instead of relying on others.

These days Anderson enjoys being able to put together tours from his home without a large staff, due to the convenience of the Internet. Booking flights and hotels and planning other concert details is quicker and easier than in the pre-Internet days, and has eliminated the need for a large staff. He can put together tours from his home.

"I think that's much more fun and in a sense much less stressful when you come to do tours because you know everything is in place," he said.

"It's a bit of a hobby really," Anderson added. "It's parallel to the musical performance but it's something that I don't resent having to do."

WHEN: 8 p.m. April 7

WHERE: Embassy Theatre, 125 W. Jefferson Blvd.

COST: \$40-\$175 For more information contact the Embassy Theatre Box Office at 424-5665 or buy tickets online at Ticketmaster.com.

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