

RAY WILSON INTERVIEW

You're really busy in recent years. Two new studio albums came out in 2016 - your best studio albums to date in my opinion - and you are constantly touring playing far more than 100 gigs per year. How and when do you find the time to relax?

Well I did have a month off recently, but I don't really find it relaxing, to be honest. I don't have a situation where I can switch off, due to running a business and being responsible for other people and their lives. If I am not working, then the band and crew are also, mostly not working, so I guess it is a catch 22 situation. In order to really switch off, I would have to close everything down and take 1 or 2 years off, but I don't see that this is the right time to do this. I will be 50 in September and I enjoy touring. Sometimes the travelling can be tough, but that's life I guess. All in all, I am mostly happy with my life, so why change it!!

Looking at the songs on "Make me feel like home" you mix a lot of different music styles. There is Rock, Pop, Singer Songwriter tunes, Prog, Country-Pop and so much more to discover. Where do these varied influences come from?

I am influenced by all these genres, so I guess that's why it comes out in my music. I can happily listen to Neil Young one day, Pink Floyd the next, Live and Radiohead, Willie Nelson the next. I think most people enjoy many different musical styles, depending on their mood.

Describe the writing process of an album like "Makes Me Think Of Home". How much of the songs or musical ideas come from your collaborators?

The musical basis, for the songs, came from Peter Hoff, Scott Spence and Uwe Metzler. I then write lyrics and perhaps change the arrangement sometimes. Then I have the guys in my band play on the recordings and add their ideas to it. It is very much a team effort and then I use the parts I like and delete what I don't like. The important thing is that I feel good about the end product. Once it is completed, it becomes the property of whoever buys the music.

The Song "Makes Me Think Of Home" is one of your best and most complex songs in terms of structure and moods. Was it difficult to write? Whose idea was it to include stronger instrumental parts and the outstanding flute solo?

This was a song that started out as a different arrangement and it gradually developed into a more progressive piece. The sax solo comes from my love of Springsteen, songs like Jungleland, the flute I guess from Stairway To Heaven, although I know it was a recorder on that record and of course the Pink Floyd guitar feel from Ali Ferguson. All in all it takes you on a spiritual journey, which was my objective. The video for this song is a really great one. Worth checking out, if you haven't seen it already. Really captures the emotion.

You are currently based in Poland and mainly run your business from there. I know from my professional experiences over the last 20 years that Polish people are very nice and easy to work with. When and why did you decide to live in Poland?

I moved to Poznan ten years ago, after meeting Gosia Mielech, my girlfriend. She is a dancer, so the combination of artists works really well, for both of us. Polish people are nice to live with and the constant change that has taken place in the country is quite inspiring. The most important thing is to feel peaceful wherever you are and Poland does this for me. Whether I will live there forever or not, I don't know, but I am still very happy there, after 10 years.

You regularly do live shows in Poland and Germany. Are these the strongest markets and fan bases you have in Europe? Are the audiences different to playing in the UK for example?

Yes these are my strongest markets and I have many regular fans who come to the shows, year on year. I am doing this interview now, from Bern in Switzerland and people have travelled to this show from France, so I do have other markets, especially around Europe and South America, but Germany and Poland are visited most frequently.

As you are in the UK in Germany and Poland regularly, what do you think of the economical and political situation in EUROPE after the Brexit and past elections in the US, France and Germany?

This type of protectionist politics makes me very sad. Populism is inward looking, by definition and doesn't serve the life of a touring artist very well. I know there are people with these views all around the world. They have never not been there, they just have a louder voice right now. I think you can be Scottish and European and a citizen of the world all at the same time. Sure there can be sensible controls on immigration, but we must be careful not to spread hateful emotions in the process. That's what is most worrying for me. I have never found that giving help or opening your door to someone else, has been in any way detrimental to my own life. So we must work hard to get back to a degree of balance in the world. The world is far from being balanced right now. Financially and Spiritually. A degree of centre ground is what we need.

Did your time in Genesis open doors to a larger audience and better business as a solo artist?

In some ways, but I really had to work hard for my audience. I didn't just get one, simply because I sang with Genesis. It has taken many years to build. The good news is that my career now has a strong foundation, due to many years of touring and meeting the audience. I couldn't ask for a better situation than the one I have.

You play a varied mix of Genesis and Genesis solo related songs along with your own songs during a concert of about 2.5 hours. How much fun is it to still perform Genesis material?

Great songs are always fun to perform, but it's important that the song fits you as an artist. It has to feel authentic. The songs I play from the Genesis world are songs I love and feel I can perform well. Obviously I have a large catalogue of my own too, so this all allows me to keep the show changing and developing year on year. Keeps it interesting for me and the audience.

Looking back on "Calling All Stations" (CAS) I think it is a shame that the Tony and Mike decided not to work on a second album. CAS had some great songs like "CAS", "The Dividing Line"; "There Must Be Some Other Way", "Not About Us" and "Uncertain Weather" and it would have been interesting to see a further development in writing and performing together. How do you feel about this today?

I think those days are gone now. I don't have any desire to do this again. I agree that it would have been good to write another album or two, but they have never shared that opinion. However, it is quite nice to know that the last new songs written and recorded by Genesis, were with me.

How much could you contribute to the songs mentioned? Were you involved in the writing process or where the songs already completely written?

I co wrote "Not About Us" and "There Must Be Some Other Way". The other songs you mentioned I was purely the singer. I think songs like "Calling All Stations" were as much about the voice as the song. Other songs would be good, regardless of who sang them. Presuming the person could sing of course.

Your voice sounds unique and your vocal range is quite impressive. Hearing you sing, listeners do not have the impression that it is hard or difficult for you to perform 2.5 hours on stage. Do you have to work on your voice and singing a lot to stay at the top of your game or are you just lucky to have the voice you have?

Well I have a lot of experience with this. Staying hydrated and keeping the voice in good shape is important. It actually helps that I sing so much, as it keeps the muscles strong. I don't smoke or do drugs, which also helps. A voice needs exercise, just like the body.

When did you decide to become a professional musician and what were your major musical influences when you started to sing?

I became professional when I was 20. I had been in many bands before then, but I also had to do a job, in order to pay the bills. I started professionally, when I met a piano player, called Paul Holmes. Paul was performing in a Piano Bar circuit, at that time. Late night music bars across Europe. Then I met him and we decided to work together and started writing songs also. We were together for 3 years, before he decided to stop and I joined Stiltskin.

You run your own business in Poland, Germany and the UK and your brother is often part of your band. How much do strong values like independency and family mean to you?

Independence is very important. I would always advise a musician or artist to control their own destiny where possible. Of course you meet people along the way, who help you, but keep control where you can, is my advice. Steve has been touring with me for many many years. It's like any family relationship, I suppose.

His voice blends well with mine. That's what I love the most, musically speaking and it's good to have someone I can trust along side me.

What kind of dreams as a musician and human being do you still have? What's on your personal "bucket list"?

I can't say I have one. I am quite happy with the way things are. My bucket is pretty full :-)

You will be 50 in 2018 (as I will too). What does this mean to you? Is it more "stress" or "relief"?

Life has been better with age. I am not afraid of getting older. I guess good health is what really matters to us all. So as long as the voice is working, then all is good for me. I will perform a birthday concert in Poznan Castle. That will be fun.

Is there a particular band or musician you would like to work with in future?

Well Bowie would have been my first choice, but it's too late for that. I suppose Springsteen would be good. I also spend a lot of time listening to Tom Waits these days. Great talent too.

If you could only choose 5 albums to take with you on an island. Which ones would you choose?

They change every time I am asked this question, but here goes.

*Hunky Dory/David Bowie
Born to Run/Springsteen
Throwing Copper/Live
Grace/Jeff Buckley
Live Rust/Neil Young*

What are your plans for 2018 so far?

Gigs Gigs and more Gigs. Oh and a 50th Birthday Party!!