

Dream Theater

A band of the '90s

Five years ago, two of my friends invited me to a *Dream Theater* concert. Like most rock fans, I at least knew their song *Pull Me Under* which was as big of a hit as a progressive hard rock eight-minute song could be on the airwaves. Along with a couple thousand other fans, I was awestruck by the music I heard that night. There are few concerts that I have been to that I can say changed my perception of music, but this was one of them. Five years later (having purchased their six albums and seen ten concerts), I've certainly become quite the fan.

The band members are: John Myung, James LaBrie, John Petrucci, Mike Portnoy, and Derek Sherinian. Back in 1993, I was surprised that a band on its first major tour would have individual name recognition. But they all did. That's one of the things that set *Dream Theater* apart from all the other new bands of the day. *Dream Theater's* sound is a unique combination of '70s rock bands like *Yes*, and '80s metal like *Metallica*. It is this combination, never before so successfully attempted, that has made *Dream Theater* the best new band of the '90s.

The origins of the *Dream Theater* style go back to 1985, when bass player John Myung, guitarist John Petrucci, and drummer Mike Portnoy met up at the prestigious Berklee School of Music in Boston. As it turned out, they also all grew up in the same area of Long Island. John Myung, born to Korean American parents, had moved there from Chicago when he was young boy. After hooking up with their first keyboard player Kevin Moore and vocalist Charlie Dominici, they recorded their first album, *When Dream And Day Unite*, in 1989. *Dream Theater* failed to make much of an impact outside the New York/New England area, and the band soon parted company with Dominici.

When Dominici was replaced by Canadian-born James LaBrie, the band found their one missing ingredient and recorded the classic album *Images And Words*, released in 1992. With tracks like *Pull Me Under*, *Another Day*, *Take The Time*, and

Metropolis-Part I, the band took the world by storm. It was this release that introduced to a large audience *Dream Theater's* trademark song-writing—intricate time changes, extended songs, and inspirational lyrics. Four of the eight tracks on *Images And Words* clock in at over eight-minutes long. On the successful *Images And Words* tour they played throughout the United States, Japan, and Europe during '92 and '93. In January '94 they visited Korea for a promotional tour.

In March, the band returned to the studio and recorded the masterpiece album *Awake*, released in October 1994. The CD clocks in at 75 minutes, the maximum amount of music a disc can hold. Tracks like *Lie* and *The Silent Man* made waves on the radio and MTV, and *Awake* included other standout tracks such as *6:00*, *Caught In A Web*, *The Mirror*, and *Lifting Shadows Off A Dream*.

And speaking of dreams, they made their fans' dreams come true when they returned to the studio in April of '95 to record their 23-minute epic track, *A Change Of Seasons*. Rounded off by some cover songs recorded in London, the band released the *Change Of*



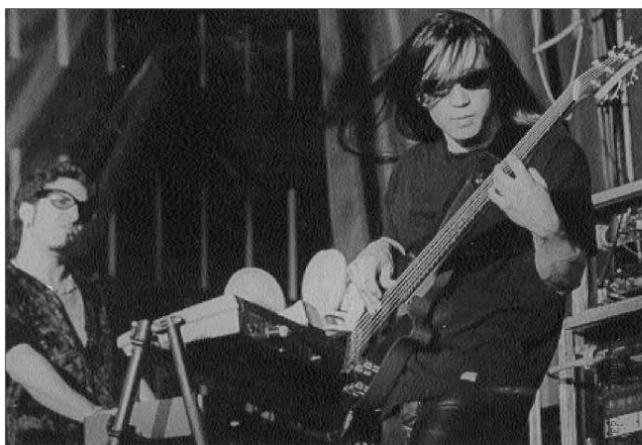
Dream Theater (left to right): John Petrucci, Derek Sherinian, James LaBrie, Mike Portnoy, John Myung.

impressive internet fan base, with a web ring made of the various fan-made sites. *A Change Of Seasons* also marked the recording debut of Derek Sherinian who replaced Kevin Moore on keyboards in time for the *Awake* tour.

Infinity, was released in September '97. This was the band's most mature album to date, including such songs as *New Millennium*, *Burning My Soul*, *Peruvian Skies*, and *Hollow Years*. The band embarked on another major tour

by all the band members. Accompanied by the video *5 Years In A Lifetime*, the two new releases are a perfect showcase of the bands accomplishments.

throughout the U.S. and Europe starting in late '97. In '98, the band decided to play its first shows as the opening slot on a major tour. They opted for the *Deep Purple*, *Emerson Lake & Palmer* tour which crossed the U.S. in August. The fact that the band was on the same bill as such legendary bands further indicates its impact on modern music and its place in the company of such bands.



Dream Theater's Derek Sherinian (keyboards) and John Myung with his six string bass.

Seasons EP in September of that year. The project was interesting because it was done as a gift to the fans who requested the song be recorded through an internet campaign after they had come to know it from concert recordings of early live shows. The band has an

The band prepared for their fourth full-length studio album, interspersing live shows in December of 1996 and April of 1997. *Dream Theater's* concerts by this time included an intricate medley of songs by the bands who influenced them. The new album, called *Falling Into*

In October, the band released a double live CD called *Once In A Lifetime*, recorded in Paris in June. The CD is further proof that the bands' virtuosity is not limited to the studio. The disc includes tracks from all of *Dream Theater's* albums and solo spots

Despite the band members' hectic schedule within the band, they have also found time to work on other projects. Mike Portnoy and John Petrucci have released a disc called *Liquid Tension Experiment*, while John Myung and Derek Sherinian, along with members of *Kings X* and the *Divie Dregs*, have formed an outside band *Platypus*, which recently released the disc *When Pus Comes To Shove*.

Whether collectively as *Dream Theater*, or on their "extracurricular activities," the *Dream Theater* members continue to push the envelope of music. So far, they do not seem to be slowing down. If anything, their creative efforts are accelerating. After a short break for the holidays, the band will be in the studio in early '99 to work on its next album.

More information on *Dream Theater* can be found at the following websites:
www.dreamtheater.net
www.dreamt.org ●

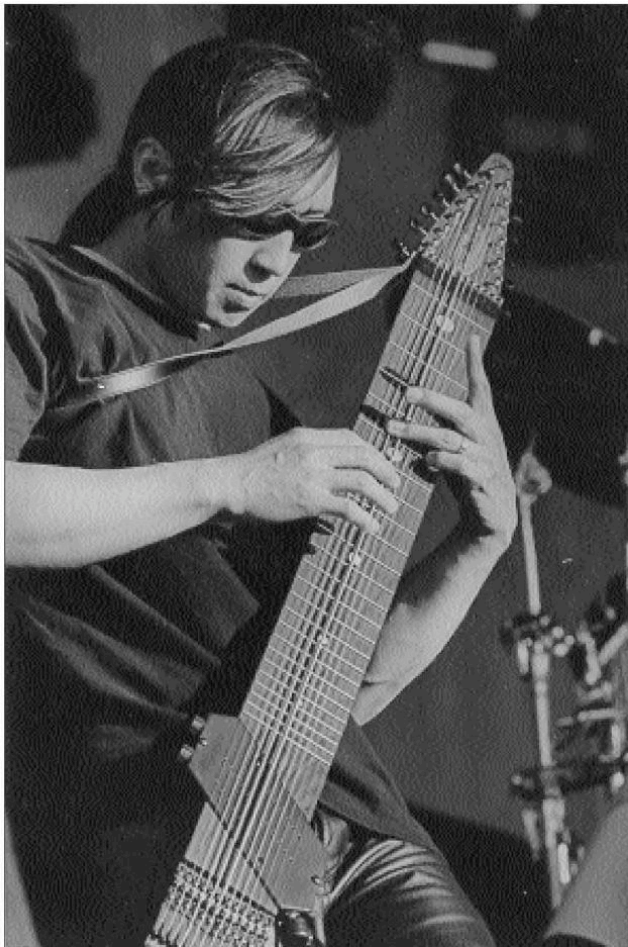
A few minutes with John Myung

Dream Theater's innovative bass guitarist

Born in Chicago and raised on Long Island, John Myung credits his classical music training, his interest in jazz bass, his own creativity and love of experimentation, and his determination to be a professional musician as reasons that launched him and *Dream Theater* into the world of rock music. His Korean heritage, he feels, had little to do with it.

"I didn't grow up in a Korean community. I've been part of the melting pot, more than anything else. I didn't get a lot of scripting from my heritage," he said. His parents, he recalled, "weren't crazy about me becoming a bass player. I had to really convince them that I was serious, and then, they supported me." At age 5, he was enrolled in classical violin lessons. At age 15, he started playing bass. *Dream Theater* is his first band.

Myung is well known for his unusual choice of instruments. He plays a six-string bass, which is less common than the more conventional four-string. In fact, he said, he just finished co-designing a new Yamaha six-string RBX model bass which will be a "signature" model, meaning it will have a replica of his signature on it. He also plays a 12-string instrument called a Chapman Stick, which he said "is like a guitar and bass in one." A relatively newly invented instrument, he also describes it as a "vertical piano." He has been incorporating the



John Myung with his Chapman Stick bass

sounds of the Chapman Stick into *Dream Theater* arrangements for about two years now. *Dream Theater* is also unusual

in its promotional techniques. It has a huge internet following on many sites set up and linked by fans. They engaged a 4000-seat

arena in Italy at one point as a last-minute opportunity, he said, and were able to sell it out in no time. The reason? Internet fan power. "Every fan club seems to be very organized, and many of our fans are into computers," he said.

There have been several firsts for the band this year, Myung said. A live album (*Once in a Lifetime*) was cut, and at the same time, a documentary film was made showing the creation of the live album, as well as some moments from band members' personal lives. "The video appeals more to the fans," Myung explained. "It shows a different part of our lives than people would not usually see.

Another first was touring with *Deep Purple*, which they did for much of 1998.

Myung was about three or four years old when *Smoke on the Water* was first a hit. As a fan, he said, it was "really cool to meet them and see what they are like as people," as well as to see how the rock business is run at the upper echelons. None of

the band members were particularly sociable, but he did get to talk at length to bass player Roger Glover, who he liked. "It was inspirational," he said, "to see a band that has really made a career of it."

A third "first" was the opportunity to cut a solo album with an ad hoc group that came together and made an album in a two-week time period. The group, which calls itself *Platypus*, is comprised of Myung, Ty Tabor from *King's X*, Rod Morgenstein from *The Dixie Dregs*, and Derek Sherinian, also from *Dream Theater*. It was a huge success in Myung's opinion, both creatively and personally. "It was one of the highlights of my whole life, to work with a new group and have it be so successful," he said. "I would like to see *Platypus* do more records and explore that chemistry some more." So far, *Platypus'* first CD release is available only as a European import.

Myung said that after nearly a year on the road, the band is taking the last three months of '98 as vacation, and then will be going into the studio in January to cut a new album, which will be released sometime in '99. After that, Myung said, he has hopes of doing another *Platypus* record, also to be released in '99. ●