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 had known 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 astounded 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 1985, 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 Led Zeppelin and ‘80s metal like Metallica. It’s not the combination, however, that makes it so successful – it’s the way they’ve combined it.

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. 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 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 Pt. 1," the band took the world by storm. It was this release that introduced a large audience to Dream Theater’s trademark songwriting – 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 1992 and 1993. In January 1994 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 on a 1-disc CD. Tracks like "Lie" and "The Silent Man" made waves on the radio. The band also included other standout tracks such as "Distant&quot; and "Caught In A Web," and "Awake" included new. And speaking of dreams, they make their fans’ dreams come true when they returned to the studio in April of 1999 to record their 19-minute epic track, "A Change Of Seasons." Recorded off by some cover songs recorded in London, the band released the Change Of 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. The band recorded it through an internet campaign and after they had come to know it from concert recordings of early live shows. The band has an 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 the studio for the Awake tour.

The band prepared for their fourth full-length studio album, Incantation, in December of 1996 and April 1997. Dream Theater’s concerts by this time included an intimate melody of songs by the bands who influenced them. The new album, called Falling Into Infinity, was released in September ‘97. This was the band’s most mature album to date, including such songs as "New Millenium," "Beyond The Walls," "Perpetual Slumber," and "Daylight Years." The band embarked on another major tour throughout the U.S. and Europe starting in late ‘97. In ’98, the band decided to play its first shows at 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 indicated its impact on modern music and its place in the company of such bands.

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 band’s virtuosity is not limited to the studio. The disc includes tracks from all of their first three albums and solo spots by all the band members. Accompanied by the video 3 Years In A Lifetime, the two new releases are a perfect showcase of the band’s accomplishments.

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 The Liquid Tension Experiment, while John Myung and Derek Sherinian, along with members of King’s X and the Dixie Dregs, have formed an outside band called Toad, which recently released the disc When Pigs Come To Shore.

Whether collectively as Dream Theater or as their extra-curricular activities, the band 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.dream.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, 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 scriptwriting 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 13, 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 RX1 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 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. “It’s our 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, Red 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.

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