


TOMMY SHAW

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Tommy Shaw’s fans know that he is a member of STYX, he used to be in DAMN YANKEES, he recorded four solo albums and two with his DY colleague Jack Blades. They also know that he sings, plays the guitar and writes his own music. In short, they discovered his many talents years ago. But for those who are visiting this page for the first time, here is an overview of Tommy Shaw’s career.

Born on September 11, 1953 in Montgomery, Alabama, Tommy Roland Shaw is the youngest of four children. An early interest in music is developed when his grandfather asks him to sing on the porch in exchange for a nickel. Tommy jokingly refers to this as his first paying gig. He is five years old. He is 10 when his parents give him the gift that is going to play a determining role in his life: a guitar.

He starts his professional career as a band member at the tender age of 14 years old when he and four friends form a band called The Vagabonds. His only ambition is to play and be the best at it, which is still something he values today.

After high school, Tommy joins a band named M.S. Funk and stays with them for a little over three years. Unfortunately the disco era does not spare M.S. Funk and for lack of money and work the band breaks up.

Tommy moves back to Montgomery in 1975 where he joins another band with old friends called Harvest. There he continues writing his own songs, like “Crystal Ball,” which is a rock music classic in many parts of America, but especially in the French province of Canada, Quebec. That same year, Tommy gets a phone call from STYX. Guitarist John Curelewski has just left the band as they are getting ready to go on tour to support the “Equinox” album. Tommy flies to Chicago, auditions and is hired on the spot. He has no idea at the time that he is going to become one of STYX’s key elements. With Dennis DeYoung, James Young and the Panozzo brothers Chuck and John, Tommy embarks on a great adventure with STYX.

The band goes to Montreal as the opening act for Bad Company. The crowd goes wild! Montrealers fall in love with the song “Suite Madame Blue” and like STYX better than Bad Company. This is the beginning of a beautiful love story between STYX and “Quebecois.”

The “Crystal Ball” album, named after the first STYX song written by Tommy, is released in 1976, and the band goes on tour. They come back to Montreal but as the main attraction this time. It is with the album THE GRAND ILLUSION that STYX finally makes it big in the United States and then the rest of the planet.

Tommy enjoys great success with STYX, notably because of his own songs that have become great classics in the world of rock music, e.g., “Fooling Yourself,” “Blue Collar Man” and “Too Much Time On My Hands,” just to name a few. Between 1976 and 1983, he has recorded 7 albums with the band: CRYSTAL BALL, THE GRAND ILLUSION, PIECES OF EIGHT, CORNERSTONE, PARADISE THEATRE, KILROY WAS HERE and CAUGHT IN THE ACT, a LIVE album. In 1981, he takes part in the biggest world tour in STYX’s history, “Paradise Theatre.” The band travels around the world and manages to attract more people and sell more records than ever. “Paradise Theatre” is also STYX’s only album to reach number one of the music charts.

The release of “Kilroy Was Here” in 1983 is somewhat of a disappointment. Tommy is not very pleased with this entirely conceptual album because he is asked to write songs on specific topics.

After the tour, he decides to leave the band and try it on his own. In 1984 he releases his first solo album, “Girls With Guns,” which is well received by critics. The album even makes it to the Top 20 of the music charts in Quebec. The albums “What If” and “Ambition” follow, but do not get much recognition in general. Nevertheless, the fans do not forget about STYX and are hoping for a reunion, which is not possible at the time. In 1989, Tommy attends a meeting with the members of STYX to see if a reunion would be possible. Unfortunately, Dennis DeYoung is not available at that time because he is working on a solo album.

Wanting to remain musically productive while awaiting such a time when Styx could feasibly reunite, Tommy hooks up with his friend Ted Nugent. He is already working with Michael Cartellone, touring with him in his solo band. They decide to play some music and write songs together. In March 1989, the members of the American band Night Ranger decide to go their separate ways, and bassist Jack Blades joins Ted and Tommy. With that, DAMN YANKEES is born. This will be a completely different musical style for Tommy, and it only proves once again, his ability to adapt to all kinds of music. In 1990, they release a first album. Judging from songs like “Coming Of Age,” the band definitely has a hard rock sound, but you can still recognize Tommy’s excellent musical style, especially on “Come Again” and “High Enough.” A second album, “Don’t Tread,” follows in 1991.

Later in 1995, Tommy gets together with his friend Jack Blades and releases a wonderful album called “Hallucination” which has a much more acoustic sound. Again, fans are amazed by yet another side of Tommy’s diverse musical skills and vocal harmonies that are simply a match made in heaven. The Shaw/Blades album, although it never gets the recognition from the media and the radio, remains one of Tommy’s finest works.

Then one day, Tommy gets a phone call from James “JY” Young. STYX’s record company is planning to release a compilation and wants to include a new version of the song “Lady,” the band’s very first hit in 1972. Dennis asks Tommy to come and record the song with the band, which he agrees to do. The band has not played together in 13 years. When Tommy joins them, they start playing old STYX songs, those that conquered the hearts of millions of people all around the world. They realize that they are having a ball. This reunion results in a great gift for the fans: two compilations on compact disk, a 1996 tour across the United States and in Canada in addition to two new songs, “Little Suzie” and “It Takes Love,” which appear on the second compilation. In 1997, the fans are treated with a new LIVE album, “Return To Paradise,” including three new songs, notably the wonderful ballad “Dear John” that Tommy writes as a tribute to Styx’s drummer who passes away in 1996. The members of Styx hit the road again to mark the 20th anniversary of “The Grand Illusion” album. Moreover, that same year, a videocassette of the band’s last concert of the 1996 tour recorded in Chicago is launched on the market.

In July 1998, Tommy comes back with a new solo effort “7Deadly Zens.” We find collaborations by Ted Nugent, Jack Blades, Alison Krauss, Ed Roland, just to name a few. Tommy shows again his versatility by offering an album that doesn’t resemble to the music of Styx nor Damn Yankees. It is yet another masterpiece. He even calls it his “work of love” and when you listen to it, you can feel all the love and energy of the artist. He utilized an innovative technique by creating an enhanced CD which means when you put the CD in the CD-ROM driver, it all becomes interactive with videos, pictures, sounds and lyrics.

1999 is a year of changes and new beginnings for Tommy. He joins Styx once again to record a brand new studio album, the first since “Kilroy Was Here” in 1983. As the band is preparing for a world tour, Dennis DeYoung, decided not to join them. Chuck Panozzo, struggling with serious health problems, was also unable to take part. Determined as ever to promote the new album “Brave New World,” guitarist James Young and Tommy agree, with Chucks’ blessing, to do what STYX has always done, and that is to “carry on.” Glen Burtnik, who had replaced Tommy in 1991 on the album “Edge Of The Century” rejoins the band but as the bass player this time. Canadian keyboardist singer/songwriter Lawrence Gowan is hired to permanently replace DeYoung.

September also brings new music on the market on which Tommy participated. He does a medley with Alice Cooper on which you can hear him sing parts of “A Hard Day’s Night” by the Beatles, and also, “See Me, Feel Me” by The Who on the “British Rock Symphony” album. Moreover, Tommy and Jack Blades sing “Sweet Emotion” on the tribute album to Aerosmith. Tommy also gives a magnificent vocal performance on the Queen’s tribute album with the song “Spread Your Wings.”

Fans are also waiting for a new Damn Yankees CD that was supposed to be released in year 2000, but because of commitments of the band members to other projects, and also because the band feel the quality of the product does not live up to expectations, the project is put aside.

Tommy continues to tour with Styx. By the end of 2000, the band will have visited the United States with REO Speedwagon, Japan, Canada and Germany. A new live album will also have been released by both Styx and REO Speedwagon entitled “Arch Allies.” The only shadow at this point in Tommy’s career is a lawsuit brought against STYX by former member DeYoung. As a true professional, Tommy and his STYX bandmates continue to give performances on stage that are out of this world, and the fans never notice a thing.

2001 is a year spent on the road for Tommy Shaw. The Styx tour ends in November in Canada. The band members also come to an agreement with DeYoung to settle the lawsuit before it went to trial.

The events of September 11th leave their mark in the history of the world, but for Tommy, it is also an occasion to do something concrete, something that will once again show his deep generosity. He organizes two benefit concerts in order to raise money to support the Port Authority Police Department of New York and New Jersey, who lost over 3 per cent of their force in the World Trade Center attack. With the help of scores of friends who participate, a check for \$500,000.00 is presented to the Port Authority Police Department Benevolent Fund in time to be distributed to the families of fallen officers in time for the Christmas holidays. The remainder of the net proceeds goes to other victims’ families who are known personally by participants in the benefits.

2002 is another year on the road for the band but also one to prepare a new album which they will be able to record together with Glen Burtnik and Lawrence Gowan. Thousands of fans are eager to hear the result of this lineup. And to help raise more money for September 11, STYX records Tommy’s Christmas song, “To Be With You on Christmas Day” that appears on a compilation of Christmas songs.

The brand new STYX album is released in 2003. “Cyclorama” is the first STYX album without the contribution of Dennis Deyoung. And what a great surprise! The songs are excellent and once again, Tommy takes our breath away with his songs and performances. A tour with REO Speedwagon and Journey keeps him busy for summertime. He also contributed to other projects such as singing and playing guitar on Warren Zevon’s latest CD, The Wind.

From 2004 to 2006, Tommy worked even more with STYX. In 2004, fans were able to get their hands on a compilation on songs that included material from the Wooden Nickel era (before Tommy joined the band). The double CD is entitled “Come Sail Away : The Styx Anthology”. In 2005, the band also released an album with their version of their favorite songs called “Big Bang Theory”.

On May 25, 2006, Tommy said he experienced something he had never done before. STYX associated themselves with the Contemporary Youth Orchestra of Cleveland for a concert. This orchestra of teenagers under 18 years old, worked for months under the direction of Lisa Grossman to prepare this event. A CD and a DVD was released the same year in order to immortalize this moment.

In 2007, the long-awaited CD from Shaw-Blades was finally released. A compilation of songs that have influenced the two artists, “Influence” did not get one bad review as soon as it hit the market. The duo went on tour in smaller venues which was truly appreciated from their fans.

Styx’ tours continue to take Tommy on the road. During this time, he also takes every opportunity to write new songs and make new projects. In 2010, it was a delight for Styx fans to enjoy the entire albums of “The Grand Illusion” and “Pieces Of Eight” live for the very first time.

2011 will be the celebration of Tommy’s new musical talents, this time in the field of blue grass. “The Great Divide” will again show another side of Tommy Shaw and may be the beginning of a whole new musical career for him.

Today, Tommy Shaw continues his musical adventure by doing what he loves the most: writing, recording music and touring. Tommy Shaw is a great artist, an endearing person who despite his fame is very easy going and generous. His music is a delight to discover and to listen to again and again.