

THREE'S COMPANY

Over the course of April and May this year, Deep Purple will take to the road once again to play ten UK dates. However, unlike most of Deep Purple's other tours, this one finds them bringing not one, but two big name bands with them to join them for a night of what will surely be unforgettable classic rock. Thin Lizzy and Styx join the current Purple lineup of Ian Gillan, Ian Paice, Roger Glover, Steve Morse and Don Airey for the shows, so James Gaden put in a call to longtime bass player, songwriter, occasional producer and all round Deep Purple stalwart Roger Glover to get the full story.

The first thing I ask Roger once pleasantries are exchanged, is how did a bill like this come about? No doubt all three are popular rock bands, but three very different styles on paper. I ask him about how the tour was put together, and how he thinks it will work.

"Personally it's not something I like," he states, "because it emphasises the era from which we come. We don't think of things like that - I don't think of myself as from an era. I just think of myself as a musician, in a band, working. These days it's all down to bums on seats, the agents put bills like this together, we don't think about things like that. As far as I'm concerned, I leave the business side to someone else, I can't stand that side of things. But that's a luxury I have, it allows me to just be a musician.

"It should be interesting though - I mean, we have never worked

with Styx before. They're obviously a good band, they're a group of survivors. Thin Lizzy we have worked with a few times, and they're really good, a good band, so I'm looking forward to that side of things."

I said that the last time Deep Purple undertook something like this was when they toured with Thunder and Peter Frampton supporting them. I attended the Manchester show, and found Thunder to be fun and entertaining as always, and Peter Frampton, who I was mostly unfamiliar with, was very good indeed. I tell Roger it's almost like a mini rock festival.

"Yes, I really enjoyed that tour," he agrees. "Both Thunder and Peter Frampton are superb acts. It is like a mini festival I suppose, but the one downside is your time gets a little curtailed. All three bands want to have as much time as possible, but there's only so much available, and something has got to give. Usually it ends up with us as the headliners, playing sort of ninety minutes, max. Sometimes

outside the band. One of the things that comes up is the solos - Don's solo and Steve's solo in particular. The question is do we cut solos out, or drop a song or two? I think that's a difficult one, because for me, watching the solos... they're both such good performers, as far as I'm concerned, watching them play something off the top of their heads, ad-libbing, spontaneous, I think that's a real joy to watch, as oppose to belting out 'Strange Kind Of Woman' again, which everybody knows. I prefer the solo aspect, and we sometimes say that - let's not compromise ourselves. It's all about compromise when you work with other bands.

"You have to try not to compromise your musical integrity," Roger adds, "because that is something we almost lost, twelve, thirteen years ago. We've worked really hard over the past decade to win back the credibility of being musicians who really care about the music, and don't want to become, well, museum pieces."

I say to Roger that with a band like Deep Purple, they've done that many classic songs, there will always be one song somebody says 'I can't believe they didn't play that'.

"Yeah, which is why we ignore what anyone else says!" he laughs.

I'm glad the subject of a setlist has come up, and as a fan of Purple who has seen them several times, I have my own opinion on what they should and shouldn't have played. I decide to ask Roger when it comes to the set list choice, is it down to him, Ian Paice and Ian Gillan as the long standing members, or is it a five way decision?

"It's a tricky subject," Roger replies. "Us longstanding members are always going to be seen

Wreck' from the In Rock album - a live rarity to say the least. I ask Roger if there is any chance of other old, lesser known but equally strong songs being dusted off for the new tour?

"Well, set list decisions tend to take place about half an hour before we go on stage!" he laughs. "The tour manager will come up to us and ask us what we're doing so he can let the lighting guy know, and we're still discussing it! Once we've started a tour though, we tend to settle with the set list we started with. People say things like 'Oh, why can't they do a different set every night', but they're not us! They don't have to actually do it!"

"Personally, I think we provide enough fun and games, and fireworks if you'll pardon the pun, onstage from seeing the musicians play the songs to give a good show. In that way, it shouldn't matter what the song is, be it an old one or a new one. In that respect, some of our younger fans may never have heard of 'Living Wreck', or 'Mary Long'. The albums we've done in the last decade of so, regardless of their strengths and weaknesses, haven't been as high profile as 'Made in Japan' or 'Machine Head'. So the bitter truth is with have to play some 'hits'.

"The debate goes on all the time within the band," he continues. "It's not just the fans who discuss it. And like I mentioned, when your time is limited, things get left by the wayside. I've no idea what we'll play. I'm sure we'll do some songs from 'Rapture Of The Deep'. They've fitted in very well and they've become firm favourites. But what the details will be, I can't say at this stage."

I acknowledge that it must be a 'Catch 22' situation - if Purple played a full set of Morse era material, fans would be livid that they didn't hear Blackmore era classics. If they play only stuff from the seventies, then people accuse them of being stuck in the past.

"That's right," Roger agrees. "It's a bit like when 'Black Night' first came out and entered the charts. I went in my local pub and met up with some friends. If you buy everybody a round of drinks, they think you're a flash bugger, and if you don't, they think you're aloof. It's all 'Oh, he's changed, he's a superstar now'. You can't win.

"So whatever happens, somebody isn't going to be happy, so all we do is try and please ourselves."

I point out that formula must be working, because Purple are on the road virtually every year, and people still come to see them, so they must be getting it right.

"Well, our profile in the UK is lower than anywhere else in the world," Roger states, which surprises me a little. "All across Europe, France especially in the last year, have come alive for us. Germany is always strong, as are Italy and Spain. Eastern Europe... Poland, Czechoslovakia, Russia, The Baltics... we're massive there. We do great tours and get great receptions. Then we come to England and... if you're not on the telly, nobody knows about you. Obviously, the rock fans know, but the general public don't see our presence anywhere, and yet, we've never gone away."

I reply that I think that's the UK in general. Rock music is virtually outlawed in Britain from a media point of view. All over Europe they still listen to rock, and they have fresh bands coming out that get real exposure.

"Oh, South America is great for hard rock," Roger says. "I guess it's a different culture - England does seem very trendy. You're in, and then you're out, in the space of a few weeks."

I explain to Roger that's what Fireworks prides itself on - we write about talented acts, regardless how long they've been working, and we don't bow to trends like he says.

"That trend thing started a long time ago," he tells me. "In the mid to late seventies, after I'd left Deep Purple, disco was coming on, and punk had arrived. I used to wonder why I was always depressed on a Thursday, and I realised later it was because that's when the music papers came out.



The NME, Melody Maker and Sounds... I used to avidly read them and know what was going on, and all of a sudden I found they were talking about bands that didn't mean anything. Bands like us were completely ignored, and you'd find all these upstart groups that had done nothing more than played one gig that a critic had gone to, he started raving about them and all of a sudden they're on the front page. It's a case of build 'em up, and then knock them down again. I got cynical about the business, and rock journalism in general."

I tell him Fireworks writers are more fans than journalists. We write because we love the music, we don't look at it with the attitude that 'Oh, they're over the age of thirty five, they can't be any good anymore'.

"Exactly!" Roger burst out laughing. "That wouldn't happen with a blues player, or an orchestral player... or even a singer! Look at Frank Sinatra. Or better still, Tony Bennett - eighty something and still doing great stuff. Rock music is perceived as a young person's music. It was once, but people have grown up with it, so what was then the underground is now the establishment. Rock music is a force to be reckoned with. But there were times when rock got confused with pop - pop music has always been there, and I have nothing against it. But basically rock to me is a bit more serious, a bit more real life than a confection."

While we're talking about shifting trends and bands career spans, I ask if Purple are like some bands who have a five year plan, or a ten year plan, of where they want to be. I ask if he ever sees himself, or Deep Purple, getting to a stage where you think 'We've done it all, it's time to call it a day', or is he content to just keep going down the road and see where he ends up?

"I personally have never thought about stopping - well, I won't stop. Purple will stop at some point, that's inevitable. But nobody wants that to happen yet. We're probably a better band now than we've been - ever. Maybe not as innovative or young," Roger chuckles, "but we're a group of musicians, not clotheshorses. The more you do something, the better you get at it, and as a unit, I think Deep Purple now plays together better and more consistently then ever before. That's something I'm very proud of, so I don't want to stop."

"Deep Purple is like a family," he adds. "There is a great feeling of togetherness. Being in a band offers a great feeling of security. I'd much rather be in a band than be a solo artist, or a session musician. That's the tough, being on your own. A band offers a safety net, it's a wonderful feeling and I don't want to lose that."

I point out that if it is such a tight unit, losing somebody like Ritchie Blackmore must have been very tough, and trying to find a replacement even harder. I mention what a hit Steve Morse has been with the band, and he does a fabulous job.

"Yes - an unenviable job, some might say," Roger says. "There will always be disagreements,

comparisons and discussions of merit and so on, but the simple truth is you can't replace someone like Ritchie Blackmore, because he's unique. Basically, all you can do then is change, and change is good. It brings in new blood, new approaches, a fresh outlook, new ideas, energy. It always creates a feeling of optimism.

"I first met Steve before the others, at a photoshoot. He had already agreed he would give Purple a go, for three gigs. We played two of them in Mexico I think. Anyway, I'd been a fan of his since the early eighties or so, and he said 'Well what do you want from me?' Because he's very good at all kinds of music. And I said 'Steve, all we want from you is you'. We didn't want him to be emulating anybody, he had to be himself. You can't give 100% to a band if you're pretending to be someone else. The same goes for Don Airey. They both came into the band with respect for the past, but also a determination to be themselves and make their own mark."

I reveal to Roger that Steve's introduction in the band spawned one of the best albums they ever made in my opinion - 'Purpendicular'. It sounded fresh, vibrant, interesting, and managed to be a superb album without sounding like Blackmore-era music. Roger is delighted at this comment.

"I thank you for the compliment - 'Purpendicular' was one of the happiest moments of my life. I always wanted to be in a band where everybody was equal and everybody contributed ideas. I got that from the Traveling Wilburys, the way they used to work. They'd be in a circle, and one of them would just say 'Hey, how about a rhythm like this?' and songs would just come tumbling out, effortlessly. That lack of fear was what I wanted, and I thought I would have to leave Deep Purple to find that. Deep Purple in the eighties was not a happy band, it was full of fear in many ways - nobody wanted to upset the apple cart by saying the wrong thing, and it was somewhat dysfunctional.

"Yet when Steve joined the band, we actually found ourselves in a physical circle and I really felt for the first time we'd achieved that - everyone was throwing in ideas, and it was just such a happy event. We couldn't stop writing."

I say that one of the reasons I liked it so much is I've got fairly eclectic tastes. If you ask most people what their favourite Deep Purple album is, usually the stock answers are 'Machine Head', 'In Rock' or 'Made In Japan'. Yet for me, for the ones I revisit the most, I'd pick 'Purpendicular', 'Perfect Strangers', 'Slaves And Masters' and 'Stormbringer' - selections some hardcore fans would balk at.

"Well, if you did the same album every time, it would be pretty boring wouldn't it?" Roger replies, and we both refrain from naming some bands who could be put in that bracket. "We were accused in the past of being formulaic. Maybe to an extent we were - we always used the same approach to writing songs, which was jamming, jamming, jamming. But as we got into the later period, Ritchie stopped wanting to play anybody else's ideas, so it became all Ritchie's ideas, so maybe that made us



you're lucky if you get that, sometimes it can be seventy five minutes. It's difficult for Deep Purple to do what we do in that time. Not just from the amount of material we have to choose from, but a Deep Purple show naturally seems to last about one and three quarter hours to two hours. That to me is the ideal show length. So when your set is cut down to more like ninety minutes, adjustments have to be made."

I note that Deep Purple are a band who like to improvise, and lengthen the songs with extended solos and the like, and a limited schedule will restrict that.

"Well, the setlist debate rages both within and

by the new guys in the band, or the relatively new guys, as the 'old school', and they're always be seen as the 'new guys'. We always take what Steve and Don say into consideration, but actually Paicey has the most authority. Everybody thinks it would be Ian Gillan, but Paicey has been there the longest. He's been in every incarnation of Deep Purple, and certainly since Jon Lord left, he's really come out of his shell and is much more in charge than he was ever perceived to be. He's really taken that mantle of really being the soul of the band. Everybody pays him respect for that."

One thing that really caught my eye about the set list on the last tour was the inclusion of 'Living

a little formulaic. I don't want to be like that, I like to surprise people, and for the next album I'd like to do something totally different to anything we've done before."

Hopefully that doesn't mean a hip hop or a reggae album. I ask Roger if it is difficult to get into the right frame of mind to write his solo material, if he's used to writing with a full band, jamming to see what happens.

"I've always been a songwriter," he explains, "which was usually just me sat with an acoustic guitar in the kitchen. You put together a couple of chords that sound good, work on a melody, and shape it to the way you want it. But in Purple, nobody writes songs, we just play them. Somebody gets an idea, somebody adds to that, we all throw in something and the songs come from the spontaneous combustion of playing together - your fingers are doing the writing, not your head. It's instinctive. You can't write Purple songs, you have to let them evolve.

"For my songs I write at home... I can't write rock music on an acoustic guitar, it wouldn't sound right. Especially with the songwriters I listen to, like Bob Dylan, John Hiatt, Randy Newman... it's more introverted stuff."

I mention to Roger that I recently interviewed Jimi Jamison, a man who very nearly became a long term colleague. I ask for Roger's version of events back when they were looking to replace Ian Gillan, and how Jimi fitted in.

"Jimi was certainly one of the more promising people we tried out," Roger replies. "At the time we were going through all kinds of horror stories. Ritchie was looking for a singer who could match him, and I remember Jimi with great affection. I thought he sang great, and he was a great bloke. If it hadn't have been for his contractual problems, things could have been different.

"I remember one story Jimi told us. He was playing a gig somewhere, and a guy asked him if he played requests. Jimi asked the guy what he

wanted to hear, and the guy replied 'Slow Motion Water'. Jimi said he had never heard of it, and the guy replied 'Sure you do!'. And he proceeded to sing to Jimi 'Slow motion water, a fireman in disguise!'

We both laugh, and there's no way to follow that, so I re-work a question asked by Mick Burgess last time Roger spoke to us, back in issue 25. Mick was talking to Roger about his work on his latest solo album, so I continue the questioning by asking how that's going.

"In between tours, I've actually managed to get at least ten minutes at home this year, so it's going great!" he laughs wryly. "When I'm free, over the last two or three years or so, I write the odd song or demo, and I've amassed about twenty of them. None of them would suit Purple, so I thought it was about time I did another solo album. I'm going into the studio in February in fact. I'm hoping to finish it in one sitting, because if I don't, the next time I have will be much later in the year. I'm really looking forward to that, because I enjoyed 'Snapshot' very much, and working with different musicians. We've always had that in Purple, we like to go off and do other things, and it's good for the band, because you come back refreshed, with new ideas.

"And I've just finished work on my daughter's album," he adds. "Gillian Glover is her name, and the album will be called 'Red Handed'. And she's not doing it because she's my daughter, she's doing it because she's good. So she's actually done most of the stuff on her own, I've just come in at the last minute to help with the finishing touches.

"So, with a bit of luck, that will be out this year. I shall have my own album out this year and probably a new Purple album later in the year. I'm also going to be mixing Dream Theater in a few weeks. They played 'Made In Japan' at one of their gigs. They'll take a classic album, and just perform it. It might be Yes, or Pink Floyd, but this time they did 'Made In Japan', and they called me up and asked if I wanted to mix it. I thought it was a nice idea so I said yes."

I note that everybody seems to think of Roger as a producer, but the bulk of that work he did after Purple in the seventies. He doesn't do that much now.

"No, I haven't the time - I'm lucky to do the laundry!" he replies. "To produce a band, you have to allow at least two months... more like three. You've got to rehearse with them, settle in, it takes a while, and that kind of luxury of time I don't have."

At this point, my questions are all asked, and coincidentally, I'm also out of time, so I wish Roger all the best for his work on his solo album and I hope the tour goes marvellously.

"Thanks, and thanks for the nice thoughts," he adds.

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