

Former Yes frontman Anderson to visit Shirley on solo tour

Show to cover songs from latest album, as well as many encompassing career

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SHIRLEY — When hearing the name Jon Anderson, millions of progressive rock fans across the country immediately recall his years as lead singer for the band Yes.

Since 2008, though, Anderson has been focused on a solo career that continues to open a variety of doors, many of which are even new to a musician who first started performing almost 50 years ago for the band, the Warriors, back in 1962.

His latest work is an album that was released “into the market three weeks ago,” noted Anderson, entitled, “Survival & Other Stories,” his first solo studio album in 12 years.

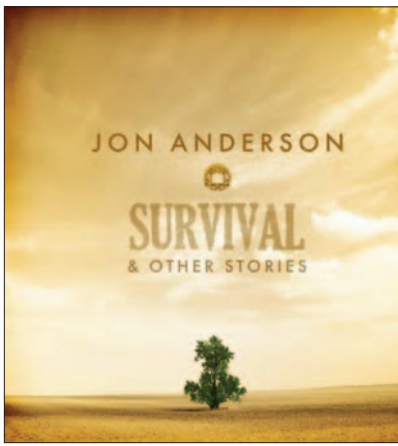
On Friday, Aug. 11, at 8 p.m., Anderson will visit Bull Run Restaurant in Shirley, as part of his east coast tour, “An Acoustic Evening With Jon Anderson,” offering an opportunity for fans to hear songs from that album, as well as songs stretching back throughout much of his career.

“Well, it’s a (night of) wonderful songs that I did with Yes, with Vangelis, from the new album and new songs, where I play the ukulele and piano,” said Anderson, speaking on the phone from his home in San Luis Obispo, Calif. on July 27. “I also tell funny stories, and people will have an entertaining evening.”

In figuring out how to balance what songs to play on tour, Anderson simply said, “You get a sense from the audience, a Yes song here, (another song there), you have to balance it out.”

Unlike his days as Yes’ lead singer, the stops on his solo tour have been in much more intimate venues, like Bull Run. Anderson, though, voiced a positive tone about such stops that have made up his nine-date summer tour, with Bull Run being the final one.

“Life is full of different experiences, as I enjoy getting in front of 200 or 500 people,” he said. “Even though it’s a different experience, it’s still where



Courtesy photo

Cover of Anderson's first studio solo album in 12 years, Survival & Other Stories.

I’m trying to give a good show, trying to be as good as I can be.”

Of the 11 songs on “Survival,” Anderson has quickly incorporated a couple of the album’s songs on the tour.

“I do ‘Unbroken Spirit’ and ‘Understanding Truth,’ and I’m practicing one other, ‘Love of Life,’” he said. “I am out there for two hours now (for each show), so I’d be out there forever (if I did many more from the album).”

And from that new album, the origin of what is included on it came from a rather unconventional process.

On his website more than four years ago, Anderson made a request to his fans that he was searching for musicians and, “I asked them to send a minute of music only. After 20 seconds you could tell very quickly if it’s compatible to your thinking,” said Anderson. From that single request, Anderson was inundated with samples, to where he openly admitted that the quantity, as well as quality, of those received could be turned into “about five albums worth of music.”

Helping to narrow down what to include on “Survival,” Anderson credited his wife, Jane, who co-produced the album.

“She used to work in the film world, having worked with (director) Ron Howard, and she is very critical,” said Anderson. “She helped me put the tracks

together. I really appreciated her input on the album. She knows a lot about music, and she wanted to have me put together a rather accessible album, (to where she would ask) ‘can you do less of this, can you re-sing that song,’ and you do it because you want it to be a really good album.”

The idea to make such a request directly to his fans grew out of “trying to get the guys from Yes to work with me by the Internet, by sending MP3s, and I couldn’t get them really interested to do that,” he said. “There were other people interested to work with me, many with great talents.”

While musicians are often expected to release albums on an annual basis, Anderson spelled out that the 12-year gap between solo studio albums first was in having spent much of that time as a member of Yes, followed by a lengthy period of illness, before work on “Survival” ensued.

“Most of the time I was on tour with Yes until 2005 and then I was pretty ill for a couple years,” he said. “It was around 2006, that I asked musicians to get in touch with me, and that opened a Pandora’s box to having musicians providing good music.”

From any of those original submissions that made their way onto the album, Anderson explained some modifications were typically necessary, from “taking out the drums, or keeping it simple,” but that usually the songs on the album were about “70 percent (of what it had been originally).”

When asked about the prospect of having some of those musicians who were responsible for the genesis of the songs on “Survival,” to possibly perform on stage with him, he said, “If the record does well, then people will want to hear the songs. At the moment, it’s just been released, so I’ll know by next year, and it would be beautiful if some of them could perform with me.”

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One such song, “New, New World,” Anderson noted “was a very positive song, and a great opening song for the album.” It had been a contribution from “Jamie Dunlap who makes music for South Park, and last year he sent me this track and the lyrics.” The collaboration extended to where “I let him mix it the way he felt, and I was very happy with (the result).”

To Anderson, the overriding themes that come from the album range from “survival, spiritual awareness, and that we shouldn’t let the politicians rule the world. The people run the government, and the people should be a little more open to help people all over the world, as we are all one.”

Of the songs on “Survival,” a frequent comment is that many of them have a notable “Yes” flavor, to which Anderson didn’t find unusual.

“I think people were invested in liking Yes music, so (many of those who submitted music) were leaning toward that, which I think is pretty natural,” he said. Even though the album has been out for less than a month, Anderson was encouraged by what he’s heard from the critics thus far.

“The reviews have been amazing and fantastic, and you know you can’t always please the critics,” he said. Regarding how it has been received by fans, he added, “I’ll check in a few weeks, so we’ll keep it going, even though I don’t think anyone is going to tell me that it’s terrible.”

In addition, Anderson voiced that he thought the songs on “Survival” had a strong personal connection, particularly in how “the songs are related to the time of 2008, when I was pretty sick and how you keep going.”

That was the year that Yes decided to go in another direction, replacing Anderson with Benoit David as its lead singer.

“I needed a long period of recuperation, and they wanted to get on the road ... That was frustrating,” said Anderson, who added that despite having had to endure at least three near-death experiences that year, he has come to “really realize that every day counts, as I feel like I have a lot of music that I want to put out there, that creativity doesn’t stop, and I’m very excited about the future.”

What that future will bring is anyone’s guess, but Anderson, while citing that his time with Yes “opened a lot of avenues,” noted that his departure allowed him to do “other things I wanted to do” that otherwise would likely not have been feasible.

“I am working with a lot of different people that I would not have, had I stayed in the band,” which he added has been “a freeing experience.”

Despite performing for so many years, Anderson voiced having no desire to slow down.

“I want to do some really great music in the future, and that is what drives me on,” he



Entertainment photo courtesy of ROBIN KAUFFMAN

Anderson sings and plays the guitar while on stage recently during his tour, “An Acoustic Evening With Jon Anderson.”

said. “I’m not ready to retire, maybe when I’m 90, and then I’ll say ‘Maybe I’ll be painting...,’ but it’s in my DNA to create.”

Even with “Survival” having just been released, Anderson already has his eyes on an array of other projects.

“I am working on a lot of types of music right now. (I’m hoping to be) working in dance and theatre, and have done a half dozen projects, working with orchestras, or where I’m doing two different musicals at the moment. I’m also working with a north African group from San Francisco, interested in ancient rhythms, slowly getting them together, such as finding a producer, hoping the doors will open,” he said. “I am still trying to make better music all the time, into the 21st century. My world is a constant flow of ideas, and nothing is stopping me from creating and moving forward. I think it’s only natural that you are getting better with age.”

For all his collaborations that are in the works, one with a former Yes bandmate will not be a part of the Bull Run show, one in which Rick Wakeman paired with Anderson last year on the album, “The Living Tree.”

To Anderson, though, the decision not to do songs from that album isn’t with the intent of disappointing fans, but out of respect for Wakeman, whom he touted for his talents on piano, and that he couldn’t replicate them by himself.

“It’s best that I do those songs with Rick, and we’ll do those songs together later in the year and that’s fine with me,” Anderson said, referencing a tour scheduled with Wakeman beginning in November. “We’re friends, and he got in touch with me quite a while ago to do a concert tour. Then it was to do (The Living Tree) for another tour. It’s really fun to work with people you know, and it’s a really musical and funny evening (when on tour with someone like Wakeman).”

But while his connections with the current touring members

of Yes may have diminished to where he recently admitted, “we are not in touch, simple as that,” his connections with former members go beyond just Wakeman.

A few weeks ago, Anderson met up with former bandmate Trevor Rabin with plans to reconnect on a project. Rabin resigned from the band in 1994, on his way to a renowned career producing movie soundtracks, having composed scores for more than three-dozen movies, including “Con Air,” “Armageddon,” “Remember the Titans,” or last year’s “The Sorcerer’s Apprentice,” to which Anderson said, “We were working on some ideas, including film scores with songs, as that’s what he’s good at, so we’ll see (what comes of that).”

Among all his collaborations, though, Anderson — while recognizing his accomplishments with Yes — found his time spent with Vangelis as the most rewarding experience, with regard to his growth as a musician.

“I was the musical director for the band Yes, but I was still the singer of the band,” noted Anderson. “With Vangelis, he gave me the direction, he opened up my musical heart or soul, and he helped me very much to believe in myself as a musician. Vangelis was very much like a mentor, and it’s good to have someone like that in your life.”

When looking back over his career, Anderson quickly pointed out that the greatest thing he’s learned over the years, is “Love is all you need. Love is everything,” while recognizing that “Music is a great gift,” before pausing, acknowledging his health issues from just a few years ago, that, “Health is very, very important too.”

For more information or for tickets for the Aug. 11 show at Bull Run, you can either visit the Bull Run website at www.bull-runrestaurant.com or call 978-425-4311 or 877-536-7190.

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Entertainment photo courtesy of ROBIN KAUFFMAN

Anderson performs recently during his tour, “An Acoustic Evening With Jon Anderson.”