

Seventh time around Styx, finds Alysian Fields

By Casey McCabe

If it were just another in a long line of surfacing rock bands, Styx could easily be deposited in the already overflowing, "new breed," or "up and coming" categories in rock music.

However, the five-piece Chicago-based band has paid a lot of dues before reaching its semi-breakthrough.

Styx's first four albums, recorded between 1970 and 1974, were peddled imperceptibly by its local Wooden Nickel label. It was the late blooming hit "Lady" from its second album that kept the band from growing stagnant in the unencouraging atmosphere.

"The record company was not capable of promoting the concert rock-type groups, they never really broke anybody," according to guitarist Tommy Shaw.

"WIS (Chicago's most powerful radio station) started getting flooded with requests for "Lady," and the whole thing snowballed from there.

"The record companies became more dominant when the song surfaced as a hit. I mean the group had already recorded four albums without any recognition. It wasn't

the standard way to gain success."

Three albums

Now happily signed with A&M records, Styx has produced three albums for the label, with *Equinox* and its newest, *The Grand Illusion* going gold. But the band still is hanging on the verge of a more tangible commercial success.

Much of its hopes are pinned on *The Grand Illusion* and the ensuing tour. "Come Sail Away," the single release from the album, seems to embody the low-lying theme of the L.P., that of a wondrous disillusionment with life.

The single has already proved to be a fast chart climber and could be an important factor in establishing Styx in the ever important world of popular music. According to Shaw, the band was looking for a semi-hit single off the album, but wanted *The Grand Illusion* to be more FM oriented.

The group lets it be known that it thinks "Illusion" is its finest work, the epitome of what Styx has been about so far, and that if anything, the album will be the needed breakthrough in establishing the band.

"We're definitely aspiring to go higher than we are now," Shaw said. "In just this past year, we've gone from supporting not that great of groups, to headlining everywhere except for the Northeast. The concerts have been virtual sellouts and we're scheduled to do a tour of Europe. Things are starting to come together, but then it's been a long road."

Grandiose style

Styx has developed a grandiose style in its music, with sensitive lyrics and well thought melodic patterns. Often the band's songs open with mellow keyboards and vocals, quickly changing to a hard rocking guitar blitz, creating an interesting balance between its classical influences, and fundamental rock base. But in the line of achieving both critical and popular proficiency, the group had to make some artistic sacrifices. One of these was opening for Kiss four nights during a Texas stint.

"Yeah, we were definitely making a play for Kiss' audience," Shaw said. "It's sort of hard when the audience is coming just to see Kiss and the stage show. We depend more on our music, so it was an uphill battle, but it's nice to have a chance to convert a bunch of kids. We get 18,000 people a night who wouldn't necessarily come to see Styx in concert."

On stage, much of the sensitivity of Styx's music disappears in a clash of heavy metal, with guitarists Shaw and James Young cavorting on stage exchanging licks, spotlights, and occasionally jumping on an elevated platform where a nearby fan blows their hair, providing a classical rock star stance.

Lead singer/composer/keyboardist Dennis DeYoung is the self-styled leader of the group, his vocals having set the Styx trademark. But on stage it is the diminutive Tommy Shaw who provides the show's focal point. The boyish 24-year-old is never still while playing, his feverish guitar work evoking delighted screams from the young females in the audience.

Shaw was a latecomer to the group, joining in 1975 when John Curuleski left the band after *Equinox* had been recorded. He was soon to make his presence felt by collaborating on four tracks on *Crystal Ball* singing the title song, plus the mild hit "Mademoiselle."

On *The Grand Illusion* he can be heard in the lead vocals on "Fooling Yourself," slated for release as a possible single. But he does not plan on tampering with Styx's current formula.

Definite style

"We're lucky in that we have a vocalist that sets us apart from other groups," Shaw said. "There is a definite attachment between Dennis' style and us. Our songs are easy to recognize. I think that's our main identity right there."

But Styx has been earning a reputation in its own right for being a classical rocker, for throwing a certain amount of grandeur into its music. Reviews have called Styx's work "layers of musical brilliance," and *Billboard* Magazine said of *The Grand Illusion*: "its most mature creation, an existentialist commentary on the human condition."

Illusion proves to be the band's first bonafide concept album, though critics have likened to label Styx a concept group from their beginning.

"I don't believe in categorizing. I leave that up to the critics," Shaw said. "One thing that we like to do is have one idea run all the way through an album, a lyrical or musical theme. *The Grand Illusion* kind of ended up like that.

After the first song was written, it struck a nerve with the rest of us, and from there on, the album just flowed. But it wasn't intended to be a concept album. It simply deals with what the name implies, the illusions and fantasies of life."

The title song was the first to be written for the album. It was a DeYoung composition, and it seemed to say something the whole group felt strongly about:

"... Don't be fooled by the radio/ the TV or the magazines/ They'll show you photographs of how your life should be/ But they're just somebody else's fantasy ... Just remember that it's all a Grand Illusion/ And deep inside we're all the same."

Finally, with its goals in sight, Styx may well have the chance to turn its "Grand Illusion" into reality.



daytime

Ad lib

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MORNING

- 8:00 NOT FOR WOMEN ONLY
- PTL PROGRAM
- 700 CLUB
- VARIOUS PROGRAMMING
- ANSWER IS LOVE (WED.)
- CBS NEWS
- BOZO
- 8:05 FARM AND RANCH REPORT
- 8:10 NEWS
- 8:15 UNO SCENE (WED.)
- 8:30 BUNNY'S FUN CLUB
- LUCY SHOW

- SUNRISE SEMESTER
- VARIOUS PROGRAMMING
- ROMPER ROOM
- 7:00 ARCHES
- TODAY
- CBS NEWS
- GOOD MORNING AMERICA
- MORNING SHOW
- SESAME STREET
- 7:30 MICHAEL'S NAVY
- FLINTSTONES
- 8:00 FLINTSTONES
- GOOD MORNING AMERICA
- CAPTAIN KANGAROO
- IN-SCHOOL PROGRAMMING (UNTIL 3:30) Nova (FRI.)
- POPEYE
- 8:30 CARTOONS
- BULLWINKLE
- 9:00 I DREAM OF JEANIE
- BAHFORD AND SON
- ALL MY CHILDREN
- PRICE IS RIGHT
- PHIL DONAHUE SHOW
- 700 CLUB
- 9:30 BEWITCHED
- HOLLYWOOD SQUARES
- LOVE AMERICAN STYLE
- WHEEL OF FORTUNE
- HAPPY DAYS
- MATCH GAME
- HAPPY DAYS (EXC.FRI.) Martha's Kitchen (FRI.)
- ROMPER ROOM
- ELECTRIC COMPANY
- 10:30 NOT FOR WOMEN ONLY
- KNOCKOUT
- FAMILY FEUD
- LOVE OF LIFE
- IN-SCHOOL PROGRAMMING (UNTIL 3:30)
- RELIGIOUS PROGRAMMING
- 11:00 ONEDIN LINE
- TO BUY THE LEAST
- THE BETTER SEX

- YOUNG AND THE RESTLESS
- 11:30 NOT FOR WOMEN ONLY
- CONVERSATIONS
- RYAN'S HOPE
- SONG SHOW
- SEARCH FOR TOMORROW
- GOMER PYLE

AFTERNOON

- 12:00 FATHER KNOWS BEST
- NEWS
- NOON SHOW
- ALL MY CHILDREN
- SESAME STREET
- SONG SHOW
- 12:15 FARM ACTION
- 12:30 MARYBERRY R.F.D.
- DAYS OUR LIVES
- CROSS WITS
- DAYS OF OUR LIVES
- AS THE WORLD TURNS
- DICK VAN DYKE SHOW

- 1:00 MOVIE "The Setup" (THUR.), "Tale Of The Dead" (FRI.), "Charlie's Big Romance" (MON.), "Dance, Fools, Dance" (TUE.), "A Family Affair" (WED.)
- 1:30 \$50,000 PYRAMID
- IN-SCHOOL PROGRAMMING (UNTIL 3:30)
- LUCY SHOW
- 1:30 DOCTORS
- ONE LIFE TO LIVE
- GUIDING LIGHT
- BEVERLY HILLS 90210
- 2:00 ANOTHER WORLD
- MARCUS WELBY
- 2:15 GENERAL HOSPITAL

- 2:30 DENVER NOW
- ALL IN THE FAMILY
- FLINTSTONES
- 2:00 FOR RICHER, FOR POORER
- EDGE OF NIGHT
- TATTLETALES
- IN-SCHOOL PROGRAMMING (UNTIL 3:30)
- 3:30 MICKEY MOUSE CLUB
- GILLIGAN'S ISLAND
- FLINTSTONES
- MATCH GAME
- PHIL DONAHUE SHOW
- I LOVE LUCY
- THREE STOOGES
- KALAMITY - KATE'S CARTOONS
- ELECTRIC COMPANY
- TOM AND JERRY
- 4:00 SUPERMAN
- GILLIGAN'S ISLAND
- I DREAM OF JEANIE
- DIANA
- BRADY BUNCH
- MIKE DOUGLAS
- MISTER ROGERS
- 4:30 FAMILY AFFAIR
- MY THREE SONS
- BRADY BUNCH
- SONANZA
- ADAM 12
- SESAME STREET
- EMERGENCY ONE
- 5:00 I LOVE LUCY
- BEWITCHED
- 5:30 ABC NEWS
- ANDY GRIFFITH SHOW (EXC.WED.) Hockey (WED.)
- 5:30 NBC NEWS
- BEWITCHED
- CBS NEWS
- NEWS
- OVER EASY
- ROOKIES